

How to Become a Roman Catholic Convert



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It's that time of year. If you're a Protestant or non-Christian who fell in love with the mass you attended with friends or relatives this Christmas or New Year's, you have plenty of company.

The beauty and the sincerity of the literature celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25 and honoring the solemnity of Mary on January 1 create a longing in many non-Catholics to become part of the Church.

But joining the Catholic Church is not easy. For many Protestant churches, you just contact [the office](#) after a few visits, fill out some paperwork, and maybe provide a baptismal certificate.

If you're interested in investigating the process to become part of the world's largest Christian religion, start by telephoning the office of the parish nearest your home and make an appointment to visit with one of the priests on staff. While you might have been in awe of the parish you visited across town, one of the peculiarities of the Catholic Church is that some parishes strictly observe the geographic boundaries they were set up to serve. Try to join a parish over the line on the map, and you might need a letter of permission from the parish closest to your home.

Another great source of information for would-be converts is the [Coming Home Network](#), founded by a former Protestant minister now a Catholic convert.

The basic process for converting to [Catholicism](#) involves going through a period of investigation and training before being allowed to come into the Church. Some individuals who have been [studying](#) privately might be offered the opportunity to make a profession of faith and be received into the faith privately. However, most converts go through the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA). Classes typically start in September, and candidates who are still interested and who have completed the required training come into the Church as part of a group at the vigil the evening before Easter Sunday.

At the outset, the priest in charge of RCIA will take an inventory of your status by asking you a number of questions about your family background and marital history. If you have never been married, have divorced without remarrying, or have only one marriage that left you a widow or widower, you should be eligible to convert.

However, if you have divorced and already remarried, you will have to obtain an annulment before you can become Catholic. Although in the minority, some parishes require that your first union be declared invalid before you will be allowed to even start RCIA classes.

Your circumstances might also require you to submit a ligamen case to your local diocese. When granted, a ligamen decision says there was something canonically obvious about a marriage that would prevent its ever being valid. For example, after I obtained an annulment of my first marriage, my second marriage was presumed valid unless proven otherwise. I submitted a ligamen case to prove that my second husband, divorced before our marriage, had previously entered into a valid Lutheran first marriage prior to our ceremony.

If you are already married when you start the conversion process, will you have to be remarried in the Catholic Church? It depends on your circumstances. Marriages in other Christian religions are presumed valid. However, if your spouse was Catholic when you married and the ceremony was performed outside the Church without obtaining the bishop's permission first, you will probably have to be remarried in the Catholic Church. For those going through the RCIA process, this brief ceremony typically occurs at the end of the Easter Vigil. For those doing a private profession of faith, the marriage in the Church is accomplished by appointment.

Coming into the Catholic Church will require baptized Christians to be received into the faith. For those who have never been baptized, the priest first conducts the baptism, then confirms the adult or older teen in the faith. If there is any doubt that you have been baptized a Christian at some point in your life, the priest will probably baptize you conditionally since baptism is considered indelible and not be repeated.

At a minimum, at the start of the conversion process, you will need to provide a copy of your baptismal record and marriage certificate and license if already married. You will also need a sponsor. If you don't have an adult Catholic relative or acquaintance in good standing with the Church, the parish will provide you with one.

One of the more baffling parts of the conversion process for Protestants is being denied Catholic sacraments until they reach the end of the process. As my husband and I approached the end of our RCIA classes, we came to accept that this is the Church's way of making sure converts are fully educated before becoming being permitted to partake of the sacraments.

Ref.: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/514521/how_to_become_a_roman_catholic_convert_pg3.html?cat=7