OCIA: Our Journey Begins

Faith Seeking Understanding

Welcome. You have already been on this journey for a long time.

Your journey toward this room did not begin tonight. In many ways, it began the day you were born.

Each of us has experienced love and loss, joy and disappointment, relationships and loneliness, questions and discoveries. Somewhere along the way, we begin asking deeper questions:

Why am I here? What gives my life meaning? Is there a God? Who is Jesus? Why is there suffering? What happens when we die? What does it mean to love? Where is God in my life?

Your journey will have much in common with the journeys of the people sitting around you. It will also be uniquely yours.

And that's okay.

You Are Welcome Where You Are

The Catholic Church is big enough, welcoming enough, caring enough, and loving enough to meet you **wherever you are on your journey**.

You don't need to have the right answers.

You don't need to pretend you don't have doubts.

And you certainly don't need to become Catholic simply because you are participating in OCIA.

Our OCIA team is here to **walk with you**.

Ask questions. Lots of them.

If there is something you would rather not discuss with the entire group, tell one of us. We will gladly meet with you individually.

Questions aren't obstacles to faith. Questions can help us recognize what God is already doing in our lives.

We Already Live by Faith

There are very few guarantees in life.

We get out of bed without knowing everything that will happen that day. We enter relationships without knowing exactly where they will lead. We trust people. We make commitments. We hope. We love.

In that broad human sense, **we already live by faith.**

For some people, that faith becomes connected with a higher power.

For others, it becomes faith in **God**.

And for Christians, that faith becomes increasingly centered upon **Jesus Christ** and the community he established, the **Church**.

So our starting point isn't:

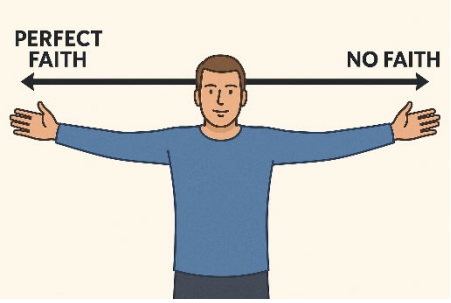
“Do I have faith or not?”

A better question might be:

“Where am I placing my faith—and where might it be leading me?”

Faith Begins Asking Questions

Once we recognize faith, something very human happens.



We start thinking about it.

We try to make sense of what we believe, what we've experienced, what we've been taught, and what we're feeling.

When faith begins asking questions and seeking understanding, we enter the world of **theology**.

More than 1,000 years ago, **St. Anselm of Canterbury** described theology with a wonderful phrase:

“Faith seeking understanding.”

That's much of what we're going to do in OCIA.

We aren't leaving our questions at the door.

We're bringing them with us.

Faith → Theology → Belief

Imagine that you find yourself believing:

God is good.

Then you begin thinking:

If God is good, why isn't everything that happens good?

You learn that Christianity teaches that God created human beings with **free will**.

Another question follows:

Why didn't God simply create us so that we would always choose what is good?

Catholic Christianity responds that genuine love requires freedom. God loves us rather than controls us. Therefore, God gives us the freedom to respond to that love—even the freedom to reject it.

And another question might follow:

What does Catholicism believe about our ability to choose what is good?

Now you're going deeper.

You're discovering how Catholic Christianity understands the human person, grace, sin, freedom, responsibility, and God's action in our lives.

And you might eventually find yourself saying:

"That helps me make sense of something. I want to know more."

That's part of the OCIA journey.

FAITH

What do I trust?

↓

THEOLOGY

How do I understand it?

↓

BELIEF

What am I coming to believe?

↓

DISCIPLESHIP

How might this change the way I live?

Tonight's Catholic Field Trip

The Crucifix

Each week, we'll try to leave our chairs for a few minutes and encounter something in the Catholic Church that expresses what we've been discussing.

Tonight we go into the church and stand before the **crucifix**.

Today, September 14, the Church celebrates the **Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**.

Look at the crucifix.

Catholics don't ordinarily display an empty cross alone. We frequently place the **body of Jesus** upon it.

Why?

Because Christianity makes an extraordinary claim:

God became flesh.

Jesus had a human body.

He touched people with it.

He healed with it.

He ate with it.

He suffered in it.

He died in it.

And Christians proclaim that **he rose bodily from the dead.**

That tells us something important about Catholicism:

The body matters.

Creation matters.

The physical world matters.

God can use ordinary, physical things to communicate extraordinary grace.

Water.

Bread.

Wine.

Oil.

Hands placed upon another person.

And ultimately, **the Body of Christ.**

The crucifix doesn't tell us that the human body is bad.

It tells us something almost exactly opposite:

God considered our humanity worth taking on himself.

Something to Think About

As you stand before the crucifix tonight, consider:

What has brought me here?

Where have I already experienced God on my journey—even if I didn't recognize God at the time?

What is one question about God, Jesus, or the Catholic Church that I hope to explore during OCIA?

You don't need an answer tonight.

That's why it's called a **journey**.

Ending Our First Night

We will conclude together in the church with **Night Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours**, joining our prayer to the prayer of Catholics throughout the world.

And then we'll listen to **"Come As You Are" by Crowder.**

Its invitation is also our invitation to you as we begin OCIA:

Come as you are.

Bring your faith.

Bring your doubts.

Bring your experiences.

Bring your questions.

Bring your story.

And let's see where God takes us.