

Inquiry



Snapshot of Inquiry ●

A time when the church invites all who would listen to come and consider the joyous possibility of living the Christian life. Participants are known as inquirers.

STAGE QUESTIONS: Are you feeling drawn to participate more deeply in the Christian journey of faith? What questions do you have about the faith?

ISSUE: Whether or not to enter into an intentional process of exploring the Christian faith through the guidance and support of a sponsor, a disciple making team, and a congregation.

TIMELINE: This stage may be entered at any time. Its duration is dependent on the inquirer's readiness to move to the next stage, as discerned by the candidate and the community. For those congregations that follow a liturgical year timeline, having the inquiry stage in the fall works well.

PROCESS: This is an open and hospitable time, mostly informal, which allows inquirers to ask questions about the Christian faith, share stories, and come to understand the general outlines of the disciple making process.

TEAM'S AND CONGREGATION'S ROLES: Offering opportunities for gatherings of inquirers to ask questions in order to come to a sense of whether to proceed to the rite of welcome and to the next stage of exploration (usually lengthier). Inquiry may be offered at different times and locations and is led by catechists, small group leaders, and other members of the disciple making team.

Leads to readiness to explore the possibility of baptism and the Christian way of life.

Welcome



Welcome is at the heart of making disciples. The word *welcome* implies there is a meeting between people, an acceptance to be one's self, and a receiving of another with kindness. Also at work, in a word or gesture of welcome, is curiosity and mystery. The present and the future of our time together is both known and unknown. Making disciples embodies welcome through reflection and action, in word and ritual. The first stage of making disciples is simply to create a space for welcome. Welcome happens in many forms and places. Some churches call such an inquiry stage, "Come and See," and have their gatherings in the church. One congregation decided to meet in a pub with the intention to bring in others who might be searching, even purchasing an ad inviting people in the neighborhood to come and see.

There is a sense of welcome when we are called by name. In a liturgical rite of welcome used by many congregations, people are actually called by name and invited to come into God's house in order to be in relationship with God's people and to dwell in the word of God. One of the most moving and profound aspects often included in a rite of welcome is the marking of the cross on different parts of an inquirer's body while proclaiming these words: "Receive the sign of the cross on your ears that you may hear the voice of the Lord, receive the sign of the cross on your lips that you may respond to the word of God, receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ." In these words and actions, intimacy and vulnerability are intertwined with a deeper sense of belonging.

Welcome happens when the scriptures are broken open and read. As inquirers read and hear God's word, they tell stories, ask questions, and begin forming relationships in a Christian community. In these times acceptance of one another grows as we practice deep listening together. So often in life we are quick to respond to one another with answers and suggestions, but as we listen more deeply to one another there is a unique opportunity to receive one another with compassion and grace, wonder and love. With the notion of welcome, there is the intention to be in relationship with others and to deepen those relationships in the context of a community.

Actions of the Inquiry Stage

- The duration of this stage varies. It could be days, weeks, or possibly even years. It depends on the needs of the seeker.
- In lieu of formal sessions, inquiry may take the form of personal conversations.
- Sessions held are open-ended without a script. They are generally informal and conversational in tone.
- Questions and needs of the inquirers set the agenda.
- Inquirers may be invited to share their life stories or what brought them to a particular faith community.
- Longtime members of the congregation might be invited to share their faith stories.
- Stories from the Bible may be told and discussed.
- The congregation's story may be shared.
- The story of the particular tradition (Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed, United Church, and so on) could be shared.
- Each inquirer is matched with a particular sponsor.

HELP INQUIRERS CONSIDER:

- Do the stories of the Bible and this particular community bring meaning to my life?
- Do I want to go further with this faith community?
- Do I want to embark on a Christian journey?
- Am I prepared to make a formal commitment to explore the possibility of baptism or affirmation of baptism?

The congregation's posture toward inquirers is always one of welcome and hospitality. Create an open space. Listen to inquirers' questions and stories. God has placed these people in your midst. Let them guide the way.

Gathering Inquirers



Identifying Potential Inquirers

As a congregation plans to engage in the work of making disciples, offer specific invitations to upcoming inquirer sessions with a number of non-members who may already have a connection with the congregation:

- Parents who have recently enrolled their children in Sunday school, vacation Bible school, or other children's programs that the congregation provides.
- People who have returned to church participation after a period of absence.
- People who have been visitors at worship in recent months.
- People who have sought out the church in a time of crisis or specific need.
- People who participate in one or more ministries of the church, such as musical ensembles or educational programs.
- People who attend a concert series or other cultural offerings by the congregation.
- People who attend programs offered by outside organizations using the church's facilities.
- People who are friends or relatives of current members.

Whether it happens during an initial group meeting with other inquirers or even in advance of such a meeting, a disciple making team needs to assess how best to support each individual. Many congregations will identify three basic types of inquirers: adults (or older youth) who may be interested in baptism, adults who have already been baptized but still need instruction and formation in Christian faith prior to affirmation of baptism, and people who are already active in another congregation (or who have recently been) and are interested in transferring their membership. Let us deal with the last type of inquirer first.

RECEIVING ADULT NEWCOMERS BY TRANSFER

Adult newcomers who have recently been active members of another congregation (or perhaps they still are considered as such) may not be interested in or even need an extended process of faith formation. They are simply in need of transferring their membership from another congregation, whether it is of the same denomination, another denomination with which there is a full communion agreement, or another