

“Ready for Lent” – “The Ministry of Discernment”:

How do we know when the goals of the Catechumenate Period have been accomplished?

Before celebrating the Rite of Election (celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent) and after having spent a year or more of formation in the Catechumenate Period, the catechumens are expected:

- to have undergone a *conversion in mind and action*
- to have developed a *sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching*
- to have developed a *spirit of faith and charity*. (RCIA 120)

The discernment which takes place before the Rite of Election is concerned with all three aspects of the catechumen’s readiness:

- Reorienting their life according to the Gospel,
- Understanding Christian teaching,
- Appropriate spiritual development.

“With deliberate will and enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church” the rite explains in summary form (RCIA 120).

The discernment before Election, like the one carried out before the Rite of Acceptance, looks for outward indications that these interior changes have taken place (conversion, adequate understanding, spiritual development). The Affirmation by the Godparents in the Rite of Election itself summarizes these outward signs of readiness:

- they have *faithfully listened to God’s word proclaimed by the Church*;
- they have *responded to that word and begun to walk in God’s presence*; and
- they have *shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer* (RCIA 131B).

“The deliberation may take various forms, depending on local conditions and pastoral needs,” the rite tells us (RCIA 122). Interviews, retreats, and discussions including the catechumens themselves are all helpful means of arriving at this discernment.

Admission to Election belongs to the bishop (RCIA 121). The discernment, which is the basis for the bishop’s admission, however, is carried out in the parish. The following people are involved in this discernment, each in a way that is proper to them:

- priests
- deacons
- catechists
- godparents
- the entire community
- the catechumens themselves. (RCIA 121, 122)

By participating in this discernment, the whole local community takes responsibility for those who are coming to the Easter sacraments. They “surround the elect with prayer, so that the entire Church will accompany and lead them to encounter Christ” (RCIA 121). For the Baptized Candidates, the criteria for discernment are stated differently. The Affirmation by the Sponsors in the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion summarizes the candidates’ signs of readiness as follows:

- they have *faithfully listened to the apostles’ instruction proclaimed by the Church*
- they have *come to a deeper appreciation of their baptism*; and
- they have *reflected sufficiently on the tradition of the Church, which is their heritage, and joined their brothers and sisters in prayer* (RCIA 452B).

The fundamental issues of conversion and Christian living that were part of the catechumens’ discernment also need to be discerned for candidates. The additional concerns of coming to appreciate their own baptism and reflecting on Church tradition as their own heritage, however, give the discernment for candidates its particular character.