

# **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults** **The RCIA Process**

*--by Vickie Shepherd*

## **The Discernment Process** **The RCIA Process**

***“Christians are made, not born.”***

Tertullian~ 2nd century

What is the discernment process and why do you need it? I hope to answer these questions for you in this article.

The discernment process is to determine if you are ready to move forward into the next RCIA period. I feel if the team, co-ordinator and sponsor are on top of things this decision can be made because they have been participating weekly in the gatherings, where you have been sharing your faith and experiences with them.

Discernment for the first time is done before you go through the first rite, the Rite of Acceptance. If for some reason “you “ do not feel ready to move on, you may stay with the pre-catechumenate or the catechumenate process as long as you like. Discernment before the Rite of Acceptance would be to determine readiness for the Catechumenate period. This is the means by which we evaluate visible spiritual growth or conversion in your life. These are some of the questions I ask myself as I reflect on the time that we have shared in our experiences together each week.

- Has their lifestyle changed? (Repentance, through exposure to the gospel and living accordingly?)
- Has this person turned to God in prayer?
- Does this person embrace all that Jesus demands of us?
- Has this person become a part of parish life?

The Catechumenate period can be intense. It is a time of study, growth and faith he/she practices

daily. You will be learning the catholic faith through this person's ability to express their experiences and feelings as they lead you down the questioning. Your sponsor should be taking an active role and being a model of the road on your journey in faith.

The next time you will go through discernment will be during Lent, right before the Rite of Sending and Election. The questions are similar but more involved and intense in their purpose. As we enter the Lenten time of purification and enlightenment which includes the scrutinies, your parish priest, co-ordinator and maybe some team members will make an appointment to speak with you about your decision to move on to participate in the Easter sacraments. Some of the questions we ask might include these:

- **Conversion in mind and action Has this person experienced conversion in mind and action?**  
Meaning that you are open to the Gospel teaching by responding both in prayer and service.
- **Has this person had an acquaintance with Christian teaching?**  
By this time you should have been exposed to the Catholic community and customs, and continue to practice the fundamentals of Christianity based on these (Catholic) customs and traditions.
- **Does this person show a spirit of faith and charity?**  
Do you pray with confidence and trust? Also, have you grown in your personal relationship with God? Have you become a more loving person, being able to give as well as receive love?
- **Does this person with deliberate will and enlightened faith have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church?**  
Meaning you find this a welcoming and supportive community in which you desire to contribute to it's growth and development. Is there a desire to receive salvation and all that this demands of you in the name of Jesus Christ? (For the baptized people- do you desire to deepen the freedom that this salvation promises you?).

If after going through this process you feel confident that you are ready to move on, you will journey forth to receive the sacraments at the Easter Vigil mass.

If you have determined that you need more time to experience these gifts from God and the Catholic tradition, you are more than welcome to remain in the Catechumenate for as long as needed. Just because you have been through a year or more of the RCIA does not mean "you" have gotten all you need from this process. Many people take longer to make this experience more complete, to meet their individual needs. (RCIA Rite book #119-121).

It has been my experience that no one wants the "let down" of the realization that you do need more time. I have talked to several people who would not continue to come to our gatherings if we delayed their initiation. Here is the problem I have with letting these people continue on with

the Easter Vigil and the sacraments.

**First** of all, they look at the Easter Vigil as graduation night and do not continue to gather with us to share our sacramental experiences. To learn more about our parish and community as we near the celebration of Pentecost.

**Secondly**, these people stop coming to Mass. They have chosen to stop coming to the gatherings in which have formed a bond with the others, and then feel like we have abandoned them. That we have “dropped” them into a life that is unfamiliar to them. Therefore losing interest and leaving the church.

I feel strongly that our “neophytes” (the people who have come through the Easter Vigil) need to worship together, continue to pray together, and continue as a group within the parish community. They have shared a life with one another for the past year or more on a weekly basis. No other group within the parish shares the same bonds that this group does. They belong together and need to invite others into this group to know and learn more about the other people in the parish.

In the end the decision is basically up to you and in your heart you know if you are ready to embark upon this Catholic tradition and Christian lifestyle of living. Your community is continually praying for you, as well as all Catholics all over the world.

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