

What Is Discernment?

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* speaks of the spiritual journey of adults as a gradual process that takes place in the midst of the community of the faithful. Throughout the faith journey, and especially throughout the RCIA process, it is important to engage in discernment. Discernment is the skill and art by which a person, with or without another's help, becomes more aware of the Holy Spirit moving within them and within the circumstances of their life.

Discernment in the RCIA Process

Discernment happens throughout the RCIA process for both the individual and the community. In the beginning, discernment is used by the RCIA team to help better understand the person who is inquiring about the Catholic faith. It involves listening to the inquirer's story, their search for God, their questions, concerns, and perhaps fears of what is being asked of them by God.

Throughout the RCIA process discernment supports the journey of the person to a deeper and fuller relationship with Jesus Christ as lived in the Catholic Tradition. At times, discernment is formal, such as at the beginning of the process and prior to the major Rites of Acceptance and Election. At other times, it is more informal.

Listening and Looking

So what is discernment? The word *discern* literally means "to sift through or to separate." In the initiation process discernment is the process of looking at and determining what is of God and what is not of God. It is listening to and becoming aware of a person's movement toward a life of discipleship as well as readiness to be initiated into the Catholic way of life through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Listening and looking for the movement of the Holy Spirit involves attentiveness. One way this can be

accomplished is through listening to the verbal expressions and noting one's actions. Some statements that could indicate positive movement toward growth and readiness might include:

- "I can't wait to be baptized."
- "I really want to receive Jesus."
- "Prayer has become an important part of my day."
- "I find myself talking about Jesus at work."
- "My family tells me I've changed."

Some external actions that are good indications of growth and readiness might include:

- regular attendance at Sunday Mass and at the RCIA sessions;
- participation in outreach events within the parish or the wider community;
- participation in parish activities;
- a willingness to share personal faith stories and to explore questions.

The Sponsor or Godparent

In addition to each individual's discernment, the ritual text calls for the involvement of priests, deacons, catechists, and sponsors or godparents. Yet, while the whole team has some input into the process of discernment for a particular person, the primary person responsible for this process is the sponsor or godparent. It is this person the bishop addresses concerning the readiness of the catechumen for the Rite of Election. Based on the testimony of the sponsor or godparent, the bishop admits the catechumen to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment and calls the catechumen to receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the next Easter Vigil.