

## WHAT DOES THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION SAY CONCERNING SPONSORS?

### *General comments:*

10. A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention. It may happen that it is not the sponsor for the Rite of Acceptance and the period of the Catechumenate but another person who serves as godparent for the periods of Purification and Enlightenment and of Mystagogy.
11. Their godparents (for each a godmother or godfather, or both) accompany the catechumens on the day of election, at the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, and during the Period of Mystagogy. Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest. It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates' progress in the baptismal life. Chosen before the candidates' election, godparents fulfill this office publicly from the day of the Rite of Election, when they give testimony to the community about the candidates. They continue to be important during the time after reception of the Sacraments when the neophytes need to be assisted so that they remain true to their baptismal promises.

### *Regarding the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens:*

42. The prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. Thus there must be evidence of first faith that was conceived during the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ. Consequently there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the community. The candidate should also be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical Rite of Acceptance.
43. Before the rite is celebrated, therefore, sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions. With the help of the sponsors (see no.10), catechists, and deacons, parish priests (pastors) have the responsibility for judging the outward indications of such dispositions...
45. It is desirable that the entire Christian community or some part of it, consisting of friends and acquaintances, catechists and priests, take an active part in the

celebration. The presiding celebrant is a priest or deacon. The sponsors should also attend in order to present to the Church the candidates they have brought.

46. After the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance, the names of the catechumens are to be duly inscribed in the register of catechumens, along with the names of the sponsors and the minister and the date and place of the celebration.

*Regarding the Period of the Catechumenate:*

75. The Catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity. This is achieved in four ways.
1. A suitable catechesis is provided by priests or deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogma and precepts, but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.
  2. As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation...
  3. The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing. Celebrations of the Word of God are arranged for their benefit, and at Mass they may also take part in the Liturgy of the Word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Ordinarily, however, when they are present in the assembly of the faithful they should be kindly dismissed before the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins...
  4. Since the Church's life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.
80. During the Period of the Catechumenate, the catechumens should give thought to choosing the godparents who will present them to the Church on the day of their election.

Provision should also be made for the entire community involved in the formation of catechumens— priests, deacons, catechists, sponsors, godparents, friends and neighbours— to participate in some of the celebrations belonging to the

catechumenate, including any of the optional “rites of passage” (nos. 98-104).

*Regarding the Rite of Election:*

105. The second step in Christian Initiation is the liturgical rite called both Election and Enrolment of Names, which closes the period of the Catechumenate proper, that is, the lengthy period of formation of the catechumens’ minds and hearts. The celebration of the Rite of Election, which usually coincides with the opening of Lent, also marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, during which the Elect will be encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity.
106. At this second step, on the basis of the testimony of godparents and catechists and of the catechumens’ reaffirmation of their intention, the Church judges their state of readiness and decides on their advancement toward the Sacraments of Initiation...
107. Before the Rite of Election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. With deliberate will and enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the Sacraments of the Church, a resolve they will express publicly in the actual celebration of the rite.
108. ... Before the Rite of Election, the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, godparents, and the entire community, in accord with their respective responsibilities and in their own way, after considering the matter carefully, arrive at a judgment about the catechumens’ state of formation and progress. After the election, they should surround the elect with prayer, so that the entire Church will accompany and lead them to encounter Christ.
110. Before the Rite of Election godparents are chosen by the catechumens; the choice should be made with the consent of the priest, and the persons chosen should, as far as possible, be approved for their role by the local community (see no.11). In the Rite of Election, the godparents exercise their ministry publicly for the first time. They are called by name at the beginning of the rite to come forward with the catechumens (no.117); they give testimony on behalf of the catechumens before the community (no.118); they may also write their names along with the catechumens in the Book of the Elect (no.119).

*Regarding the Period of Purification and Enlightenment:*

125. ... For both the Elect and the local community, therefore, the Lenten Season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

*Regarding the Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy:*

234. The third step of Christian Initiation, the celebration of the Sacraments, is followed by the final period, the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy. This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery, and in making it a part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priests (pastors) should give them thoughtful and friendly help.
236. ... The period of postbaptismal catechesis is of great significance for both the neophytes and the rest of the faithful. Through it the neophytes, with the help of their godparents, should experience a full and joyful welcome into the community and enter into closer ties with the other faithful. The faithful, in turn, should derive from it a renewal of inspiration and of outlook.
238. All the neophytes and their godparents should make an effort to take part in the Masses for the neophytes and the entire local community should be invited to participate with them. Special places in the congregation are to be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents. The homily and, as circumstances suggest, the General Intercessions should take into account the presence and needs of the neophytes.