

C. 50 Duration of the Novitiate

The novitiate lasts two years. For pastoral reasons the abess can prolong it for a further six months. For the novitiate to be valid a novice must spend twelve months in the novitiate. For absences from the monastery during this time can. 649.1 CIC is applicable. First profession can be anticipated but not by more than fifteen days.

ST 50.A

The Abbot General, having consulted his council, can dispense from the second year of novitiate.

I think that nowadays the tendency in the Order is to prolong the novitiate than to shorten it for a year as allowed by ST. 50.A. The reason for this is obviously the fact that most of the candidates have no deep experience and knowledge of the faith. The postulancy period sometimes is prolonged for one year or two years, yet the process of maturation of a novice often requires as long as allowed by the Constitution, that is, two and a half years.

This is stated also in the last sentence of the Ratio n. 29

29. The novitiate is a time for a personal integrating of the Cistercian way of life. Through prayer, ascesis, growth in self-knowledge and participation in the life of the community, the novices are led to a more intense personal experience of what is involved in the living out of the Cistercian conversatio. They should continue to develop humanly and spiritually, growing in a personal relationship with Christ.

The novice personal relationship with Christ, which will not only be based on feeling but on a loving knowledge of his person and of his deeds; the open and confident relationship with the novice director and the superior which obviously requires the capacity to trust and the development of a realistic acceptance of and love for all the sisters especially her peers in the novitiate which also requires patience and time.

The program of monastic studies, which is begun in the novitiate is normally spaced over three years.

The Novitiate curriculum of Studies (Ratio 32)

The Ratio enumerates the topics to be presented: Sacred Scripture, in particular the Psalms; the Liturgy, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, with practical instruction in singing and public reading; the Rule of St. Benedict; Monastic History and Spirituality, especially the Cistercian Patrimony; instruction in Prayer and Lectio, on the Vows and the meaning of Religious Life; an introduction to the Christian Mystery and Christian Doctrine, and to the Constitutions and the Statutes of the Order.

These courses are fundamental and we might need to add Catechesis and Philosophy, even though the latter can also be a topic for the juniors curriculum since they have to study Patrology.

However, forming to acquire the “thought of Christ” is the greatest challenge.

For these themes, that are particularly related to our monastic way of life it is sometimes difficult to find teachers so it is advisable that we prepare members of our communities to teach.

I appreciate the work of Sr. Marie of la Val d'Igny in circulating news and documents related to formation in our Order.

Could it be possible to prepare teachers that can visit our monasteries to help with the formation program?