

Preparing to Celebrate the Rite of Election

by Gael Gensler, OSF

The Rite of Election and the Parish Rite of Sending

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, paragraph 277, indicates that the Rite of Election is an optional rite. The text does not include The Rite of Sending the Catechumens for Election (RCIA 106 ff). It is important to read the introductions to both of these rites (found in Part I of the RCIA) in order to understand their significance for the catechumens. The children often take part in these rites with the adult catechumens of the parish, in which case the rites found in Part I are used but adapted to include the children.

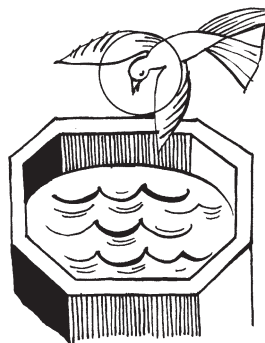
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the place of the Rite of Election in the RCIA process?

The Rite of Election celebrates all that has happened in the catechumenate period from the Rite of Acceptance onward. It ordinarily coincides with the season of Lent, which is the immediate period of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation.

What does the Rite of Election celebrate?

The Rite of Election celebrates God's choice. It celebrates that God does not give up on any one of us. It celebrates our response to God's invitation to become part of the family of God, the Body of Christ, through entrance into the waters of Baptism at the next Easter Vigil.



What are the key elements of the Rite of Election?

- It is the testimony of the godparents, sponsors, and the whole community that these catechumens have demonstrated their desire to be initiated by participating in the Sunday Liturgy of the Word, faithfully listening to the Word of God, participating in the life of the community, and by joining the community in its works of charity and service to all God's people.
- It is the calling of each person by name and their entering their name in the Book of the Elect.
- It is the bishop giving voice to God's choice of each catechumen and calling them to the Sacraments of Initiation at the next Easter Vigil.

What occurs at the Rite of Election?

The catechumens now become the *elect*. The period of catechetical instruction is over, and they enter into the period of purification and enlightenment consisting more of interior preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

The Rite of Election usually happens at the cathedral with the bishop as the celebrant, and the optional Rite of Sending the Catechumens for Election is normally celebrated in the parish. The testimony is often given at the parish, since the parish community hopefully knows the catechumens. The signing of the Book of the Elect is often done at the parish and—if it is the custom of the diocese—the Book of the Elect is taken to the cathedral and presented to the bishop. The bishop is the one who calls the elect to the Sacraments of Initiation at the next Easter Vigil.

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Preparing Children and Youth to Celebrate the Rite of Election

Prior to the celebration of the Rite of Election, it is important to provide a time for spiritual preparation for the children and their parents, their godparents and their sponsors, and some members of the team, if possible. This outline is merely a suggestion for how to facilitate the preparation time.

At this point in the RCIA process, the children (with the help of their parents) are free to choose someone to be their godparent—to accompany them from this point forward in the process. The role of godparent is a lifetime commitment (see RCIA 10,11). Parents cannot be godparents for their children, nor can they be sponsors for the Sacrament of Confirmation.



SETTING

Option 1 Arrange the chairs in a circle. Place a small table in the middle with a cloth (the color of the liturgical season), a Bible, the Book of the Elect, and a candle.

Option 2 In the front of the church, place a small table with a cloth (the color of the liturgical season), a Bible, the Book of the Elect and a candle.

GATHERING

1. Welcome everyone. If this is the first time for godparents to be present, invite them to introduce themselves to the others in the group.
2. Ask someone to light the candle, and invite everyone to a moment of silence. Then pray in these or similar words:

*God of all life and goodness,
thank you for the many blessings we have received
on our journey in this RCIA process.*

*As we prepare for the Rite of Election,
send your Spirit to open our minds and hearts
to the Good News of Salvation.*

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

3. Briefly explain that the Rite of Election has several different parts to it, and the godparent/sponsors will rehearse these parts and guide the children and youth through the ritual.
4. Emphasize that the purpose of this gathering is to prepare us spiritually for the ritual. (If the godparent/sponsors are to offer personal testimony on behalf of their catechumen, set a time to meet with each one to review the prepared testimony. The focus of the testimony is on God and what God has accomplished in the life of the child or young person; not on what the child or young person has done to earn God's favor.)

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5. Invite the godparent/sponsors, parents, and children and youth to reflect on their journey of faith that has led them to this time and place. After a few minutes of quiet, ask them to choose one aspect of this journey – an activity, something shared in one of the sessions, and/or a person – that has helped them to grow in their understanding of God’s love and why they want to be baptized. Invite them to share their thoughts with one another, and then with the larger group.
6. Invite the children and youth to reflect on these questions with their godparent/sponsors and parents:
 - In what ways have you learned more about God and God’s love for you?
 - In what ways have you learned more about Jesus and what Jesus did for all of us?
 - Why do you want to be baptized?
 - What does it mean to be baptized? What are you saying yes to by saying you want to be baptized?
 - Are you ready to be initiated at the Easter Vigil? Why?
7. Gather responses from the large group.
8. Conclude by singing a song about being called and chosen, such as “God Has Chosen Me” (B. Farrell/OCP Publications) or “Called By Name” (D. Haas/GIA Publications), or by praying a prayer such as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).