

Q In Christian initiation, what is the Rite of Election, and what happens during this liturgy?

A Catechumens move to the next stage of their formation by taking part in the Rite of Election and the Enrollment of Names. Having spent a generous period of time in formation and instruction in the Catechumenate, catechumens, with the help of pastor, catechists, and sponsor, have discerned that they are ready for sacraments of initiation at the forthcoming Easter Vigil. At the Rite of Election they will be pronounced “the elect” and then will move into the last period of preparation.

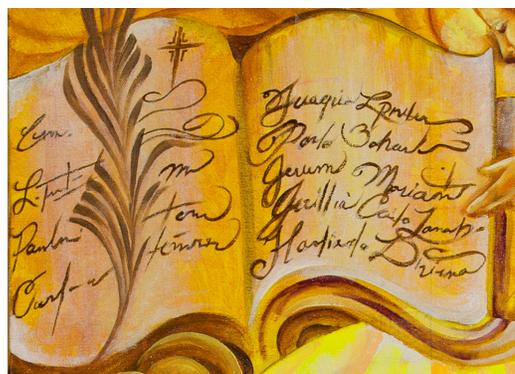
Up to this point catechumens have been nurtured in their own parish. Now they will be introduced to the larger Church at the diocesan cathedral. Their parish may celebrate a Rite of Sending in which the catechumens are presented to the assembly to be blessed for the next step. The celebrant asks the godparents if the catechumens are ready to be presented to the bishop. Hearing that they are, the celebrant says that the community gladly recommends them to the bishop for the Rite of Election. They may sign their names in the parish’s Book of the Elect, which will be taken to the cathedral and presented at the Rite of Election. Or the signing takes place as part of the Rite of Election.

In the first part of the initiation process the companion to each catechumen has been the sponsor. From now on that person will be the godparent—one with whom the person seeking initiation will have a lifelong relationship. Often the catechumen asks the sponsor to continue in the role of the godparent.

Catechumens and their godparents and catechists travel to the diocesan cathedral for the Rite of Election. The rite itself takes place after the homily, in which the bishop helps the catechumens understand what the rite means for them, and to reflect on Christ’s ongoing call to each of them. They are then presented to the bishop, coming forward with their godparents as their names are called. This experience of the larger Church along with the personal greeting from the bishop can be a thrilling experience for catechumens. Next the bishop asks the godparents if their catechumen is ready to prepare for Christian initiation. He may ask specifically if they have “faithfully listened to God’s word proclaimed by the Church,” “responded to that word and begun to walk in God’s presence,” and “shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined

with them in prayer” (RCIA, 131B). He may also ask the assembly for their testimony. Finally the catechumens are asked if they desire to enter the Church’s life more fully.

After these questions and responses the catechumens are invited to enroll their names in the Book of the Elect. If names were inscribed earlier, the parish Book of the Elect may be presented at this time and the names read aloud. (The image of a book filled with the names of those who have been chosen is found throughout the Scriptures.)



After the enrollment the bishop declares the catechumens to be “members of the elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil” (RCIA, 133). The newly elected respond, “Thanks be to God.”

The Church then prays for them and promises to walk with them as they continue their preparations for Easter. The Rite of Election is a decisive step for people preparing for initiation since it confirms their call to Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist on behalf of the wider Church.

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