

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

Parish Resource Packet I

Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion

Purification and Enlightenment

Mystagogia

INTRODUCTION

Within the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, we celebrate a time of intense preparation before reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. The Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion are important steps in the process, and should be given the proper attention and preparation.

This Resource Packet has been created to help parishes in their preparation for these Rites, as well as some tips for the period of Purification and Enlightenment and Mystagogia. Each parish situation is different; therefore it is up to the pastor/administrator and the initiation team to discern the best practice for the people of the parish. Keep in mind, however, where a direction is quoted from the ritual text, it is coming directly from the Rite and should not be deviated from unless stated.

In all stages of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, it is important to maintain the dignity of the baptized, and honor the special place of the unbaptized. Although many times it is easier to mix the group and celebrate the Rites in the same way for both, the ritual text specifically states that the two roles are to be distinguished.

In preparing the catechumens and candidates for the rites, explanations should be given as to why there are two rites, the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion, and why we celebrate them as one combined celebration. In this way we can distinguish the two roles, while still celebrating as one parish community.

PARISH PREPARATION FOR THE RITES

As with any parish celebration, preparation is key to a smooth, meaningful rite. Time must be taken by the pastor/administrator and the team to determine the date and time of the celebration as well as those who should be involved in the planning process. Below are some suggestions for parish preparation for both the Rite of Sending, the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion.

- Planning should include the pastor/administrator, the RCIA team, and any musicians or liturgists who will participate in the Mass where the rites are celebrated. It is unfair to simply hand a musician a script and expect him/her to be prepared with meaningful music to accompany the rite. Once the musician understands the purpose of the rite, he/she will be able to choose musical accompaniment that will be participatory for the people and properly highlight the themes of the rites.
- The purpose of the rites should be explained to the catechumens and candidates at least the week before the rite is celebrated. They should know what the theme and reason for the rites are, and be given some time and resources to prepare in a prayerful way. Often, leaving at least 30 minutes at the catechetical session prior to the rite is sufficient to give an overview of what will happen, and perhaps a scripture passage to read or reflection questions to review at home can be helpful.
- Rehearsal should be scheduled for rites taking place at the parish. At these rehearsals should be the RCIA director/coordinator, presider (when possible), musician, team members, and sponsors. The catechumens and/or candidates do not need to be present—in fact it is preferable that they not be present. It is best to have the sponsors well prepared, so they can guide the catechumen and/or candidate, thus leaving the catechumens and /or candidates to live the rite and not be concerned with the logistics.
- The parish community should be prepared in advance for the rites taking place at the parish. A bulletin announcement a week or two before the rite is a great way to alert the community, along with a pulpit announcement the week before, if possible. There are free bulletin inserts also available if the parish desires to send out catechetical information on these rites the week before as well. One example can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/upload/Parish-Bulletins.pdf> .

DISCERNING READINESS OF CATECHUMENS

There is a definite responsibility by the RCIA team prior to the Rites of Sending and Election. A time of discernment before the Rite is called for to assess the readiness of the catechumens. Moving to the next period of Purification and Enlightenment is not an automatic move, rather it is a decision made after prayer and reflection by both the catechumen and the RCIA team. It calls for prayerful deliberation to decide if the catechumens are suitably ready for election [RCIA 122].

The term “suitably ready” is explained in the ritual text, which calls for “*formation of the catechumens’ minds and hearts,*” “*conversion in mind and action,*” and “*sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity.*” “*With deliberate will and an enlightened faith, they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church*” [RCIA 118-120].

The goals of the catechumenate are stated very clearly in the ritual text as well and part of the discernment is assessing that the four dimensions of catechesis have been realized:

- 1) “*Suitable catechesis...gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the Word*”...(leading) “*to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts...and a profound sense of the mystery of salvation.*” [RCIA 75.1]
- 2) Familiarity with the Christian way of life, with the help and example of their sponsors, godparents and parish community, which helps them to “*turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, and in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation.*” [RCIA 75.2]
- 3) Celebrations of the Word and other liturgical rites, including participation in the Sunday Liturgy and breaking open the Word to help them prepare for their participation in the Eucharist. [RCIA 75.3]
- 4) Active involvement in the life of the community, especially in works of service and spreading the Good News, so they can see the faith in action and become true disciples. [RCIA 75.4]

Suitability for the Rite can be accessed through conversation with the catechumen as well as testimony of the sponsor and/or godparent. It is hoped that the RCIA team, in facilitating the catechumenate sessions, has also provided the above elements and interacts with the catechumens in a way that enables them to act as witness to their conversion as well.

THE RITE OF SENDING

The Rite of Sending is a parish celebration where the community formally and prayerfully sends the catechumens to the Rite of Election and/or the candidates to the Call to Continuing Conversion.

The assembly should be properly prepared so they understand the intention of this rite and their role. This rite reinforces the place of the assembly as part of the initiation team, and allows them to celebrate the decision of the catechumens and candidates to move forward in their spiritual journey. Just like the Rite of Acceptance, the Rite of Sending includes the assembly voicing their support of the catechumens and candidates and participating in the prayer for them as part of the parish community.

Although the ritual text does not state a specific time, it does state that this rite should take place at a “suitable” time prior to the rites [RCIA 108, 436, 533]. For reception of sacraments at the Easter Vigil, the ideal time is the Sunday before the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion are to take place, however if there is a conflict in the parish calendar, it can be celebrated earlier. It can take place within the Mass or a Celebration of the Word. In either case, there should be representation of the parish assembly present; it is not meant to be a private celebration.

There are three options for the Rite of Sending:

- 1) **Combined Rite of Sending for Election and Recognition** [RCIA 530-546]: to be used when there are both catechumens and candidates who are ready for the final stage of preparation.
- 2) **Rite of Sending Catechumens for the Rite of Election** [RCIA 106-117]: to be used when there are only catechumens (unbaptized) who will be sent to the Rite of Election.
- 3) **Rite for Sending the Candidates for Recognition and the Call to Continuing Conversion** [RCIA 434-445]: to be used when there are only baptized candidates who will be sent to the Call to Continuing Conversion.

An integral part of the Rite of Sending is the signing of the Book of the Elect. Since the Book of the Elect will be presented to the Bishop at the Rite of Election, the catechumens should sign the Book of the Elect either before or during the Rite of Sending. This symbol is an important part of the ritual, and the signing should be done solemnly.

If there are no catechumens who are ready for the Rite of Election, then no Book of the Elect is to be used.

THE RITE OF ELECTION

The Rite of Election celebrates a step forward in the journey towards the Sacraments of Initiation. It symbolizes God's election of them for the reception of the Sacraments at Easter.

The participants in this Rite are the catechumens (unbaptized) and their godparents or sponsors. The godparents accompany the catechumens and present them to the Bishop, who then gives them the blessing and pronounces them "elect", or chosen. The assembly gathered is usually comprised of other catechumens and godparents of the diocese, along with RCIA team members and sponsors. Those gathered should know in advance the purpose of the rite and what the different parts of the rite mean.

The Rite of Election contains the following elements:

- Liturgy of the Word: Scriptures focus on the theme of being God's chosen ones, and the honor and dignity of Baptism.
- Celebration of Election: The Catechumens and godparents are presented to the Bishop and the godparents give **testimony** to the readiness of the catechumens. The **Enrollment of Names** is symbolized by the solemn presentation of the Book of the Elect, which all the catechumens have signed. The Bishop accepts the names in an **Act of Election**, by signing and blessing the book.
- Intercessions for the Elect: Intercessions are prayed by the community for the continued conversion and spiritual growth of the Elect, who are now in their final stage of preparation.
- Prayer Over the Elect: The Bishop offers his blessing on the Elect, assuring them of their place in the Church community.

The Rite of Election takes place on a day designated by the Bishop. In the Diocese of Fresno, there are four locations, usually during the first week of Lent.

RITE OF CALLING THE CANDIDATES TO CONTINUING CONVERSION

The Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion is to be used with the baptized, uncatechized candidates who have been in preparation to be fully received into the Catholic Church. They and their sponsors come forward to be recognized by the Bishop as entering their final journey to full initiation.

Throughout the process, the ritual text makes it clear that though the candidates and catechumens may receive their preparation together and share in community, during the celebration of the rites, it is important to honor the dignity of the baptized as already part of the Christian community. For this reason, the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion is an important step for the candidates, as they receive the support and prayers from the community and are recognized by the Bishop.

The Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion contains the following elements:

- Liturgy of the Word: Scriptures focus on the theme of being God's chosen ones, and the honor and dignity of Baptism.
- Presentation of the Candidates and Affirmation by the Sponsors: The sponsors give **testimony** to the readiness of the candidates to proceed with their reception into the Catholic Church.
- Act of Recognition: The Bishop accepts and recognizes the desire of the candidates to complete their initiation.
- Intercessions for the Candidates: Intercessions are prayed by the community for the continued conversion and spiritual growth of the candidates, who are now in their final stage of preparation.
- Prayer Over the Candidates: The Bishop offers his blessing on the candidates, assuring them of their place in the Church community.

The Call to Continuing Conversion takes place on a day designated by the Bishop. In the Diocese of Fresno, there are four locations, usually during the first week of Lent.

MYSTAGOGICAL REFLECTION OF THE RITE OF ELECTION AND CALL TO CONTINUING CONVERSION

No matter which of the celebrations the parish is preparing for, reflecting on the rites should be an automatic next step after the celebration. The session following the rite, perhaps the first session of Purification and Enlightenment, it is valuable to spend some time allowing the elect and candidates to recall what happened at the rite, and what it means for them at this stage of their preparation.

Some suggestions on how to facilitate this reflection are:

- Use a recording of a song used at the rite for the group, giving them time to listen to the words of the song.
- Proclaim one of the Scripture readings from the Rite and break open the Word, much like what is done at a dismissal session. Allow the elect and candidates to share what they hear in the Word, now that they have a better understanding of the rite.
- Pose a few questions and allow elect and candidates to respond as they feel comfortable, either in small groups, in pairs with their sponsors or godparents, or in the large group. Some questions might be:
 - What part of the rite stands out in your mind?
 - What was your favorite part of the rite?
 - How did you feel at the end of the rite, while the Bishop was praying over you?
 - What does it mean to you to enter this final stage of preparation?
 - How do you best see/feel the support of the community at this stage of your preparation?

Be sure that the elect and candidates know that there are no right or wrong answers; this is a time for them to reflect and discuss the rite. Allow them to share whatever they wish about the experience, not limited to the questions prepared by the team or facilitator. If there is time, after the elect and candidates have responded, ask the team or the sponsors and godparents if they would like to share as well, however take care not to let them take over the discussion in their enthusiasm!

PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The final preparation period is Purification and Enlightenment, a time of intense spiritual preparation for elect and candidates, *“consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own conscience and do penance”* [RCIA 139]. This time is filled with rites and sessions should be planned so that they properly prepare the elect for their rites, while making sure the candidates have suitable discernment and reflection as well.

There are three different types of rites for the Elect:

- 1) **Scrutinies:** The Scrutinies are celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent during the Mass, using the lectionary readings from Cycle A. They are times for the elect to reflect on sin and the hope of new life with Baptism, as they seek Christ, who is the living water (gospel of the Samaritan Woman), the light of the world (gospel of the Man Born Blind), and the resurrection (gospel of the Rising of Lazarus). The rite of exorcism also takes place, that they receive new strength against sin and open their hearts to Christ. Elect should participate in all three scrutinies, with the exception of an adaptation for children, who may participate in only one, according to pastoral decision [RCIA 141, 291].
- 2) **Presentations:** The two presentations, the first of the Creed and the second of the Lord’s Prayer, take place after the first and third scrutiny respectively. These are celebrations for the community, who present these prayers to the elect who can now call them their own. They can take place during the week, but should be in the presence of a gathering of the community of the faithful and during the Mass.
- 3) **Preparation Rites:** A final source of preparation is the rite for Holy Saturday. Traditionally, Holy Saturday is a day for the Elect to spend in prayer. When possible, a time of reflection should be planned to include this rite. The format is more informal, as there is no Mass celebrated, however the rites of Recitation of the Creed, Ephphetha, and choosing a baptismal name should not be overlooked. A morning of prayer with the elect and their godparents is an excellent way to conclude this time of intense prayer, and helps keep the focus of their day on what they will experience at the Vigil. The Elect should be told ahead of time that this is not the day to plan other activities; the day should be spent in prayer and anticipation.

For the candidates, only one rite is used. In the place of the Scrutinies is the Penitential Rite, which is intended to offer the candidates a time of reflection and purification to ready them for reception of the sacraments. This rite is to be used for the baptized, uncatechized

candidates and can include the participation of the assembly. It can also be used to help prepare the candidates for the sacrament of Penance.

This rite is usually held on the Second Sunday of Advent, or preceding the First Scrutiny. It is not combined with the First Scrutiny, as the focus is very different: where the scrutinies , this rite is specifically for those who are already baptized.

CELEBRATION OF THE EASTER VIGIL

It is the sincere hope that all the elect and their godparents will be adequately prepared for the celebration of the Easter Vigil. Like the other rites, care must be taken to prepare them not with a rehearsal of the Mass, rather with prayer and an explanation of the symbols and rituals they are about to partake in. If the godparents are prepared well with the logistics, then they can help guide the elect through the Mass. Instruction can also be given briefly during the Mass (“Elect of God, please come forward...”) as needed, to enable the elect to experience the Mass without the worry of where to stand and sit. Worship aids can be created to help guide them as well.

There are many symbols on this night, so when possible it is good to have reviewed them at some point during the period of Purification and Enlightenment. The most obvious symbols being:

- **Fire:** The tradition of beginning with the blessing of the fire, then the lighting of the Easter Candle should be explained in advance so the elect understand its importance. Remember that only the baptized receive candles for the procession; the Elect receive their candle after they are baptized, to show that they now receive the light of Christ.
- **Water:** The blessing of the water is an important part of the Vigil ceremony and needs much attention. This is the living water in which they will be baptized, and the movement of dipping the candle into the water is a beautiful and meaningful one.
- **Oil:** Since were ideally sealed with the Oil of the Catechumens during the catechumenate stage, it is vital that they understand the difference with being anointed with the Holy Chrism at Confirmation. The symbol of oil is one that is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, and made more meaningful when understood.
- **Bread and Wine:** Point out to the elect that as the bread and wine are brought forward at the Presentation of Gifts, they will soon become the Body and Blood of Christ. As this will be the first time for them receiving at the Table of the Lord, help them to understand the difference, and realize that after consecration, the bread and wine are not a symbol but the true presence of Christ.

MYSTAGOGIA

It is vital that throughout the process, beginning with Inquiry, the impression is not given that it “ends” with the Easter Vigil. Elect and candidates alike must be advised well in advance that this final period of the process is important and should not be missed. The purpose of this final stage is to enable the neophytes and newly received to grow in deepening their grasp on the faith and to understand how to make it a reality in their everyday lives.

Examples of how to live as a Catholic Christian were presumably given to them at earlier stages; now is the time to help them bring it to life!

One of the most heard complaints from RCIA teams is, “they don’t come back after Easter Vigil!” Here are some ways to help encourage your neophytes and newly received to continue the process:

- From the beginning, speak about the process as continuing through Pentecost, and then for the rest of their lives. Don’t talk about when it “ends”, rather keep encouraging them to continue to the next stage. Sometimes our language gives the impression that Easter Vigil is the end...let us work to change that!
- Practice mystagogical reflection throughout the process, and use that wording. If you have a mystagogy of the Rite of Acceptance, then of all the other rites, even if just a half hour of reflection, then they become more used to the term and understand better what this period is about. Emphasize to them the importance of prayerful reflection after a rite.
- Plan interesting sessions that involve the neophytes and newly received. Let them plan the prayer for the sessions, or ask them to bring something to the session, such as a sacramental that was gifted to them by their godparent (rosary, medal, crucifix, Bible...), and let them lead the sessions.
- Do not plan these to be the “Introducing the Ministries of the Church” sessions. Although a nice idea, this can be done throughout the process, and not all reserved for this stage. It often ends up feeling like a long, five week commercial for joining a ministry; one long Ministry Fair! Invite ministers of the church throughout, and then during this stage they can return to share on an aspect of one of the sacraments (a Eucharistic Minister can share on the Eucharist; an Usher can share on the welcome of Baptism).
- Plan a Pentecost Party! For the final session of Mystagogia, have members of the community (some familiar, some new) join in for prayer and potluck. Let the neophytes and newly received invite their own families as well and celebrate!

- Make sure to give them information on the Neophyte Mass, and hang on to their emails and phone numbers. There is nothing like a reunion a month later, bringing them back together to celebrate Mass with the Bishop!
- Be excited! As a team, make sure you all also attend the mystagogia sessions, and be as excited to be there as during any other time of the process!

CONCLUSION

The seasons of Lent and Easter are central to the RCIA process, and the correct use of the rites and preparation of those involved is very important. There are many elements to be considered, and so this resource packet was arranged to offer guidance to pastors/administrators and RCIA teams. You are encouraged to read through the suggestions early on, so that proper planning can take place.

For more information or to pose questions on this or any other matter related to RCIA, please contact the Office of Formation and Evangelization or the Office of Worship and Initiation. Our staff is always here to help.

IMPORTANT DATES for 2018:

- February 11 or 18: Rite of Sending Celebrated in the Parish
- February 18: Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at St. Mary's Parish, Visalia, at 3:30 pm
- February 20: Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at St. Philip's Parish, Bakersfield, at 7:00 pm
- February 21: Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at St. Patrick's Parish, Merced, at 7:00 pm
- February 22: Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Fresno, at 7:00 pm
- February 25: Second Sunday of Lent, Penitential Rite for Candidates
- March 4: Third Sunday of Lent, First Scrutiny
- March 11: Fourth Sunday of Lent, Second Scrutiny
- March 18: Fifth Sunday of Lent, Third Scrutiny
- March 31: Easter Vigil, Reception of Sacraments for Elect
- June 23: Neophyte Mass