

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR CELEBRATING THE PARISH RITE OF SENDING
CATECHUMENS FOR ELECTION
AND CANDIDATES FOR RECOGNITION
BY THE BISHOP**

INTRODUCTION

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Rite of Election is an archdiocesan celebration, with the archbishop or auxiliary bishops presiding. As a general rule, this rite will be celebrated at the beginning of Lent (the Period of Purification and Enlightenment) with several celebrations throughout the diocese, to accommodate the various regions. The Rite of Election is not to be celebrated in individual parishes without explicit delegation by the bishop.¹

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the celebration of the Rite of Election of Catechumens will be combined with a celebration of the Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates Who are Preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist or Reception Into Full Communion of the Catholic Church. This will change in 2012.

Before the Rite of Election, each parish should celebrate the **Rite of Sending** as provided for in the adaptations available for use in the United States, ideally at a Sunday Mass. This rite will include the testimony on behalf of the catechumens and candidates, as well as the enrollment of names in the Book of the Elect *by the catechumens only*.

In the celebration of all of these rites, every effort should be made to make a clear distinction between **catechumens** (unbaptized persons who are seeking full Christian initiation, usually at the Easter Vigil) and **candidates** (persons already baptized – usually in another Christian faith tradition -- who are seeking full communion in the Roman Catholic Church (through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist)).²

One way to make this distinction clear in parishes which celebrate multiple Masses on Sunday is to celebrate the Rite of Sending of Catechumens at one Mass, and the Rite of Sending of Candidates for Recognition at another Mass or Masses. For this reason, the templates provided offer three options for the Rite of Sending:

- A: Parish Rite of Sending Catechumens for Election
- B: Parish Rite of Sending Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop
- C: Combined Parish Rite of Sending Catechumens for Election and Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop

¹ See RCIA, 121, See also the National Statutes for the Catechumenate, 11

² Ibid, 535. See also the National Statutes, 2-3

In all regards, these rites and policies apply to the Christian initiation of adults, as well as to the Christian initiation of children of catechetical age.³

THE RITE OF SENDING

INTRODUCTION

Since the Rite of Election “is the focal point of the Church’s concern for the catechumens,”⁴ there is great value to celebrating it in the context of a diocesan celebration with the bishop. At the same time, especially in a diocese of the geographic span of ours, there are challenges to achieving the intent of the rite effectively. For example, with many catechumens traveling great distances, it may be difficult to achieve a genuine witness of the catechumen’s local parish as to the “conversion of mind and in action” which the rite assumes to have happened before the rite is celebrated.⁵ Space and travel limitations can also restrict the number of the faithful who can actually witness and participate in the rite.

The Rite of Sending is a rite devised to complement the Rite of Election, compensating for those elements that might be weak or absent in the diocesan celebration. This rite, which exists only in the U.S. version of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, offers the “local community the opportunity to express its approval of the catechumens, and to send them forth to the celebration of election, assured of the parish’s care and support.”⁶ The subsequent diocesan celebration of the Rite of Election, then, is designed with the assumption that this approval of the catechumens and the candidates has occurred on the local level.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE RITE

The structure of the rite, which should be followed as closely as possible, follows that of the Rite of Election, from which it is designed. The structure is:

1. The Calling of the Catechumens by Name

This essential part of the Rite of Election is also included in the Rite of Sending.

2. Affirmation by the Godparents and the Assembly

As noted above, the *RCIA* makes it clear that “before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind

³ See National Statutes, 18-19.

⁴ *RCIA*, 121

⁵ *RCIA*, 120

⁶ *RCIA*, 107

and action, and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity.”⁷

The godparents’ testimony represents the discernment of the whole community. It is the basis on which the Church acts in electing these catechumens. The **role of the godparent**, therefore, cannot be overemphasized; godparents are central to the rite. In the Rite of Election, their affirmation will be quite formal, but in this Rite of Sending, it can be greatly expanded. Consider how this can be done in your parish in your circumstances. If there are a small number of catechumens, for example, each godparent could speak briefly in her or his own words about the grace of God active in the life of each catechumen. Another option would be to have one person speak about all the catechumens.⁸

3. Signing of the Book of the Elect by the Catechumens

“As a pledge of fidelity, the [catechumens] inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for initiation.”⁹ The catechumens do this in response to God, who has called them to become part of the chosen people. Again, the assumption is that much has taken place beforehand as part of that call. Godparents may sign the book as well, as the witnesses held accountable for the catechumens.

If it is a combined rite, we continue with:

4. Naming of Candidates for Reception Into Full Communion

The candidates are called by name, and they stand.

5. Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly

In the combined rite, the affirmation by the sponsors does not include the expanded affirmation noted above for the catechumens. If the candidates are sent at a separate Mass, however, consideration could be given to designing an expanded affirmation. Keep in mind, however, that most parishes will have many more candidates than catechumens.

⁷ RCIA, 120

⁸ These testimonies should be carefully constructed and reviewed. Remember, what is being spoken to is *evidence of conversion*, not what they’ve learned, or what great people they are. By this point, we should have been praying with these folks, rubbing elbows with them in soup kitchens and other service opportunities, and sharing our lives with them. This is powerful stuff, and should not be done “off the cuff.”

⁹ RCIA, 119. It cannot be emphasized enough that the signing of the Book of the Elect is reserved to Catechumens (*unbaptized* candidates) only. The baptized candidates do not sign the book, and the rites make specific mention of their baptism. This distinction acknowledges that the candidates are already part of the faithful (albeit not in full communion yet). For more on this, see the National Statutes for the Catechumenate (NSC), 2-3, and RCIA, 400.

Note that the signing is not repeated at the Rite of Election; the rite assumes that your parish brings your Book of the Elect already signed by your catechumens.

Then, we conclude with:

6. Intercessions for the Catechumens [and the Candidates]

Ideally, these intercessions should be sung. They name the various people who have participated in the initiation journey.

7. Prayer Over the Catechumens [and Candidates]

The presider (and, if desired, the assembly) extend hands over the catechumens and candidates.

8. DISMISSAL OF THE CATECHUMENS

The catechumens (only) are dismissed, and the assembly (including the candidates) continues with the Creed and the Prayers of the Faithful, and the Mass continues as usual.¹⁰

N.B. While the script suggests possible placement of catechumens and/or candidates, please adapt to suit your worship space.

¹⁰ NSC makes it clear that “those who have already been baptized in another Church or ecclesial community should not be treated as catechumens or so designated’ (30). As baptized persons, they have the right to participate in most of that which follows the dismissal, notably the Creed, the prayers of the faithful, and the collection. Although lack of preparation precludes participation in Communion, they should definitely pray the Eucharistic prayer with the assembly. Even baptized but uncatechized persons, who “may participate in the elements of catechumenal formation so far as necessary and appropriate,” (NSC, 31) should at this point in their formation be ready to join the faithful.