

The Rite of Election

The Rite of Election, what is it? The word *rite* has several meanings, here it refers to the specific order of a liturgical celebration. The word *election* has nothing to do with our common understanding of casting votes in our political system and electing the candidate by popular vote. However, it is a process of choosing - it is God's choosing. We are chosen by God to experience God's love embodied in the sacraments. The election is a discernment that God is present in the life of the catechumens and is inviting them into a fuller life of the sacraments of the Church. This discernment process does not happen overnight. Over the course of weeks leading up to the scheduled Rite of Election, the catechumens, the RCIA team, the sponsors, parish staff and (to the extent possible) the whole community will discern the readiness of the catechumens to proceed to a time of *purification and enlightenment*. This process has its focus on what God has done and is doing in the life of the catechumens. Those found ready are invited to record their name in the *Book of the Elect*

The celebration of the *Rite of Election* has two parts. There is a sending and a receiving. First the catechumens are sent by the parish, generally on the First Sunday of Lent. This sending is a public pronouncement that the catechumens are ready to enter a covenant relationship through participation in the sacramental life of the Church. This public pronouncement is done through their presentation to the Bishop. The Gospels tell us that the disciples were sent to do tasks (prepare the Passover room), to visit the towns (without sandals or staff), to spread the good news. We are sent every Sunday to "love and serve the Lord." This is the first of many sendings these catechumens will receive throughout their journey of faith.

Those who are sent can then be received. The Bishop accepts the judgement of the parish community and receives the catechumens. He invites the catechumens to record their names in the *Book of the Elect*, (Latin *electi*, "those who have been chosen"). The role of the diocesan Bishop becomes especially prominent in the *Rite of Election*. He is the leader of the local church and is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the entire initiation process. The announcement of the Church's decision to call catechumens to the sacraments of initiation falls to him.

There are also those who wish to join the Catholic Church who have already experienced the sacrament of baptism through another Christian Church. These candidates are also called forth to demonstrate their response to a call of continuing conversion. The candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church are asked to present a record of their baptism to the Bishop. Through their presentation of their prior experience of the first of the sacraments of initiation, they publicly embrace the Catholic Church and demonstrate their commitment to a process of growth in faith and solidarity with the Catholic community.

The richness of this Rite of Election can only be experienced through participation in both the sending and the receiving. As part of the parish community, we join with the staff, RCIA team and fellow parishioners to send forth our candidates and catechumens expressing our approval of their choice to be one among us. By being present at the Rite of Election, we join with Bishop Campbell welcoming, not just our candidates and catechumens, but all candidates and catechumens throughout the diocese to become one with us.