



Liturgical Directives for Preparing CATECHUMENS for the Rite of Election in the Diocese of Birmingham

Revised for 2021

I. Introduction

This packet applies exclusively to catechumens. A catechumen is a person who has not yet received the Sacrament of Baptism and who, following the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate, has been admitted into the Order of Catechumens through the parish celebration of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens [cf. *RCIA*, nos. 41-74 and 260-276].

Catechumens participate in the lengthy period of the catechumenate which, for the dioceses of the United States, is normatively at least one year long [cf. *NSCUSA*, no. 6]. This period for formation, instruction, and probation ends with the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election and the Rite of Election. Permission is needed from the diocesan Bishop for a period shorter than one year.

Unbaptized children who have reached the age of reason, also called “catechetical age,” are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults [cf. canon 852:1; *RCIA*, nos. 252-259]. They, too, are called catechumens and, when deemed ready, receive the three Sacraments of Initiation in proper order at an Easter Vigil with the older catechumens. If they are deemed ready and are prepared to be initiated at Easter, these children should take part in the Rite of Sending and the Rite of Election.

After the Rite of Election, catechumens are also called “the Elect;” after the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, they are called “neophytes.”

II. The Rite of Election

Please read through this packet carefully to find answers to questions you may have concerning the preparation of your catechumens. If your question is not answered in this packet, please contact the Office of Sacred Liturgy.

The following universal and particular norms apply, to which diocesan and parish ministers have the duty to attend:

1. The **Rite of Election** is *not* optional but is a necessary and required step in the catechumen’s journey to the Easter Vigil, the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, and, afterwards, living the Christian life as a member of the faithful.

2. The Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama continues the practice of celebrating the Rite of Election on the weekend of the First Sunday of Lent.
3. The Rite of Election takes place within a Liturgy of the Word outside Mass. Hence, there are no concelebrants.
4. Parishes are assigned seating in the Cathedral, according to numbers which should be registered with the Office of Sacred Liturgy. Members of parish delegations who will present the catechumens also have a reserved space near the lectern.
5. From the beginning of the entrance song through the end of the final song, please do not take still or moving pictures either from the pews or by moving about the church. This respects the nature of liturgical prayer and minimizes distractions during this act of worship.
6. **Bring the parish *Book of the Elect* with you.** The RCIA coordinator, pastor, or other minister will carry it forward in the entrance procession and bring it with them when the catechumens are presented. **The *Book of the Elect* should not be held high; it simply should be carried in a reverent manner** (not above the head); it should *not* be carried in the same manner as the *Book of the Gospels*.

III. Parish Preparation for the Rite

It cannot be assumed that every catechumen is ready for election and, consequently, the Easter celebration of the Sacraments. If election is fundamentally God's work through the Church, then steps must be taken to foster adequate listening to God.

A. *Discernment of Progress*

This is done in an attitude of prayer. It is also a mutual process that involves the testimony of sponsors, godparents, and catechists, the wisdom of pastors and pastoral staff and parish catechumenate team members, as well as the reaffirmation of intention by the catechumens. It is a mutual listening to God who is the one who elects and calls [cf. *RCIA*, no. 119].

Before the Rite of Election is celebrated, the catechumens who will be a part of that rite are expected to have:

- a conversion in mind and in action;
- a sufficient acquaintance with Catholic teaching;
- a spirit of faith and charity; and,
- the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church [cf. *RCIA*, no. 120].

B. *Godparents*

The sponsors, temporary ministers assigned by the Church, "hand on" the catechumens to those who will exercise a permanent ministry. The godparent accompanies each catechumen at the Rite of Sending, on the day of Election, at the celebrations in Lent, at the celebrations of

Initiation, and throughout the period of mystagogy.

The godparent is chosen by the catechumen “on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest” [cf. *RCIA*, no. 11]. Each godparent must meet the qualifications outlined in canon 874 to carry out this office. The sponsor who has journeyed with the catechumen during the period of the catechumenate may be chosen by the catechumen to assume this role of godparent. That is to be encouraged. However, someone else can be chosen as godparent who then is present for all the rites and sessions of Lent and Easter [cf. *RCIA*, no. 10].

Everyone gets a sponsor for the period of the catechumenate, and each catechumen has the right to choose the person who will continue the journey through Lent, Easter, and beyond. Clearly, for the catechumen, that is the godparent [see section above].

IV. Parish Rite of Sending

Since the Rite of Election belongs to the diocesan Church, it is normative that the diocesan Bishop presides. However, catechumens are properly sent forth from their respective communities to the Bishop.

A. Parish Rite of Sending

This rite concerns the sending of catechumens (and candidates) to the diocesan Bishop and the gathered diocesan Church. Only catechumens are sent for Election. The Rite of Sending affords the parish the opportunity to hear the testimony, to express its approval, to rejoice at decisions made for the Sacraments of Initiation, and to assure the catechumens and candidates of the parish’s care and support.

B. Which Rite Should Be Used?

Having two rites from which to choose does not mean any one of them can be used interchangeably.

- a) Sending of the Catechumens for Election [cf. *RCIA*, nos. 106-117] is used if there are *only* catechumens preparing for all three Sacraments of Initiation at this coming Easter Vigil. *Only the unbaptized are properly called “catechumens.” Only their names are inscribed in the parish Book of the Elect.*
- b) Parish Celebration for Sending Catechumens for Election and Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop [cf. *RCIA*, nos. 530-546] is used when there are *both* catechumens *and* candidates who will be ready for sacraments this Easter Vigil. Though the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion are celebrated separately in the diocese, the combined Rite of Sending may be used in the parish. This will almost always be the choice that parishes should use.

c) *When to Celebrate the Rite of Sending*

The ritual text states the Rite of Sending is celebrated at a suitable time prior to the Rite of Election [cf. *RCIA*, nos. 108, 436, 533].

It may take place within a Celebration of the Word of God or within Mass.

The anticipated or morning Masses of the First Sunday of Lent make excellent sense since many of the faithful will be able to participate in the rite. However, the Sunday before Lent begins or a day in that week are alternatives, especially if travel time to the cathedral is a factor.

Ash Wednesday does not seem a suitable day since the receiving of ashes imprints a strong penitential character on the liturgy.

C. The Book of the Elect

Within the Diocese of Birmingham, the official ritual *Book of the Elect* is a diocesan book and not a parish one.

a) **Who signs this book at the Diocesan Rite of Election?** *Only catechumens sign, or have their names inscribed in, the Book of the Elect because only they will be elected for Baptism.*

Parishes should have their own Books of the Elect and should have been signed ahead of time in the parish. At the appointed time in the Rite of Election, parish representatives will read the roster from their parish and the catechumens will come forward to sign the diocesan book.

At the conclusion of the presentation of names, the parish book will be presented to the Bishop which should have space for him to sign the page. Candidates, because they are already baptized, do not sign this book nor have their names inscribed in it.

A logistical review of the liturgical rite will take place with a Master of Ceremonies 30 minutes prior to the Rite of Election. Please be in place 30 minutes prior to the start of the Rite.

b) **When does the signing take place at the Parish?** The book is signed in the parish after the affirmation by the godparents and assembly [cf. *RCIA*, nos. 113 and 539] during the parish rite of sending.

Because the altar is set apart for the celebration of the Eucharist, the signing of the *Book of the Elect* should take place on a separate table where the assembly may witness each catechumen sign or have their name inscribed.

General Notes on the Rite of Christian Initiation

A. Marriages

We must be certain nothing stands in the way of initiation. If a declaration of nullity of Marriage is needed, it must be granted prior to the First Sunday of Lent in order to participate in the Rite of Sending and the Rite of Election and the other rites of Lent and Easter.

If a declaration of nullity has not yet been granted, they are *not* to proceed to the Rite of Election.

If the declaration of nullity of marriage is granted later in Lent, contact the Office of Sacred Liturgy to request a dispensation from The Rite of Election.

If a convalidation of Marriage is required, it is best to celebrate it as soon as permitted by law, even before Lent and Easter. It *cannot* be celebrated during the Paschal Triduum.

B. Confirmation

The same priest who baptizes one who is over the age of 7 *must* also administer the Sacrament of Confirmation within the same sacramental celebration [cf. canon 883]. Priests *cannot* withhold Confirmation, nor can they separate Confirmation from Baptism or reception. No “pastoral” reason permits an exception to this universal norm and no dispensation is possible.

C. Children of Catechetical Age

Children of catechetical age (*i.e.*, those aged 6-7 and older) belong at the Rite of Sending and the Rite of Election.

These children are to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, in the proper order, and during the same liturgy [cf. canon 852.1; National Statutes on the Catechumenate, nos. 18-19].

D. Those Who Cannot Participate in the Rite of Election

When catechumens are legitimately prevented from taking part in the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, contact the Office of Sacred Liturgy to receive guidance and to request a dispensation.