



Enable parishioner testimony for the elect

Objective: Once you have completed this session, you will have everything you need to maximize the community's testimony about the readiness of the catechumens to become elect.

The election of the catechumens is a huge event. It really ought to be second only to the Easter Vigil in your parish. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults insists that there be a true discernment process to listen for the voice of God calling particular catechumens to initiation.

Before the rite is celebrated, therefore, sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate, and if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions. With the help of the sponsors (see no. 10), catechists, and deacons, parish priests (pastors) have the responsibility for judging the outward indications of such dispositions. (RCIA, 43)

Before the rite of election, the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, godparents and the entire community, in accord with their respective responsibilities and in their own way, should, after considering the matter carefully, arrive at a judgment about the catechumens' state of formation and progress. (RCIA, 121)

Enable the assembly early

Obviously, if the faithful have not been involved in the lives of the catechumens during the inquiry and catechumenate stages, they won't be able to evaluate the progress of the catechumens. So for the parish to be able to do this important task, you will have to have enabled their significant involvement in the previous stages of the process.

Okay, let's say you've done that. The parish community has been significantly involved throughout the catechumenate journey, and now they must be called upon to give their evaluation of the catechumens' readiness. How do you enable them to do that? The rite says they do it by "testifying":

On the day of election, because it is a day of growth for the community, the faithful, when called upon, should be sure to give honest and carefully considered testimony about the

Where do we give testimony?

This testimony is formally given in two places.

Rite of Sending

The first instance is in the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election. This is an optional rite that is celebrated in the local parish, usually on the First Sunday of Lent. Within the ritual, the presider asks the godparents three questions:

- Have these catechumens taken their formation in the Gospel and in the Catholic way of life seriously?
- Have they given evidence of their conversion by the example of their lives?
- Do you judge them to be ready to be presented to the bishop for the rite of election? (RCIA, 112)

The godparents answer “They have” or “We do.” At that point, the presider has the option of asking the entire assembly to express its approval.

Rite of Election

The second instance for formally giving testimony is at the Rite of Election itself, when the bishop asks the godparents a set of similar questions. He then has a similar option to ask for the approval of the entire assembly.

10 ways to enable parishioner testimonies

In both instances, the actual testimony is limited to ritual responses such as “They have.” How can we make the testimony more substantial? Here are some suggestions. Remember, we are presuming that the parishioners actually know the catechumens and have been significantly involved in the previous stages of the process.

1. Invite parishioners to write a letter to the pastor about a catechumen. The testimony about the catechumen should begin with, “God has....” (A testimony is about the action of God and not about the good works of the candidate.)
2. Before the Rite of Election, publish a description of what testimony is and isn’t.
3. Place a drop box in the gathering space or vestibule of the church. Provide parishioners with 3 x 5 cards on which they can write testimonies for the catechumens.
4. Create a private e-mail address that parishioners can use to testify about a catechumen. Each testimony should begin with, “God has....”
5. Encourage sponsors or godparents to keep a journal that tracks the times they have seen God act in the life of the catechumen.
6. Encourage spouses and other family and catechumenate team members to do the same.

7. Schedule a retreat day well before the Rite of Election to discern who will be chosen for baptism. Make testimonies part of the retreat experience.
8. Write your own testimony for each catechumen, and give it to him or her on fine stationery.
9. In the weeks before the Rite of Election, provide a “question of the week” for parish households to reflect upon based on the journey of the catechumens. For example, “How have we seen God’s Spirit active in the catechumens?”
10. During the parish Rite of Sending, invite the assembly to testify for the catechumens. Have a wireless mike available.

If you start with this list, and then add your own ideas for involving parishioners in testifying for the elect, you will have a strong plan for involving the community in this crucial moment in the initiation process.

As you know, this is the beginning of the period of purification and enlightenment for the elect. The purpose of this period is to “purify the minds and hearts of the elect” and to “enlighten the minds and heart of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior” (RCIA, 139). In the next session, we will look at how to get your parish on board to help with this goal.

Please go to <http://tinyurl.com/wpeval6> to evaluate this session.
