



Intensify your parish's lenten renewal

Objective: Enable your parishioners to be effective models for the elect during Lent with the techniques you will discover in this session.

The period of purification and enlightenment, which begins with the Rite of Election, usually coincides with Lent. 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).

Focus on what you already do

You are going to need everyone in your parish community to help accomplish this goal. So how will you get them on board? You're going to do that by enabling the community to refocus their usual lenten practices so that they will not only be engaging in their own renewal and preparation for Easter, but also serving as mentors, models, and spiritual supports for the elect.

For example, most parishes provide a lot of material for people to help them enter more fully into Lent. In everything you publish or hand out, be sure to include a comment about or a prayer for the elect. When you provide a list of suggestions of what to give up in Lent, add an introduction to the list that says something like:

“As you decide what you will fast from this Lent, offer your sacrifice as a prayer for those who will be initiated this Easter Vigil.”

In all of the prayer resources you provide, include a sentence similar to this:

“As you pray this prayer, keep those who will be initiated this Easter Vigil in your heart.”

Corporal Works of Mercy

Lent is also a good time to focus on the Corporal Works of Mercy. These are:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked

4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit those in prison
7. Bury the dead

Ask your parishioners to choose one or two of these to practice more diligently during Lent. And then ask the elect to also choose one of the works to focus on. Tell them that the entire parish is taking on this discipline in a focused way for the 40 days of Lent.

The scrutinies

The major liturgies for the elect during Lent are the scrutinies. Unfortunately, many parishioners (and some parish teams) are still confused about the scrutinies and their purpose. If your parishioners are going to help you celebrate the scrutinies well, they have to understand their role. For a great description of the scrutinies and their purpose, see RCIA 141-146.

The first task is to make sure they know about them. So tell them often and early. Start shortly after the Christmas season ends, and ask parishioners to be sure they have the scrutiny dates and times on their calendars. Encourage people to adjust their schedules to be sure they are at each of the three scrutiny liturgies.

Then, about three weeks before Lent begins, include a brief explanation of the scrutinies in the parish bulletin. Post a longer explanation on your parish website. Around the same time, have the parish school and the parish religious education program teach the children about the meaning and importance of the scrutinies. When appropriate, give the children a homework assignment to attend the scrutinies with their parents and then write a short reflection about the liturgies. If they are willing, ask permission to share some of their reflections with the elect.

The presentations

Lent is also the time when the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are formally presented to the elect. These presentations are done during the third week of Lent (Creed) and fifth week of Lent (Lord's Prayer) at a weekday Mass or another liturgy. If you would like to celebrate the presentations at a Sunday Mass, they can be scheduled during Ordinary Time, just before Lent.

The elect are to memorize both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer before the Easter Vigil. Encourage parishioners to also memorize these prayers if they have not done so already. Note that after Advent 2011, we will have a slightly new text for the Creed (both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed). So even those who have already memorized it will have to do some brushing up.

You might also encourage parishioners to pray the Lord's Prayer at least once a day during Lent as one more act of solidarity with the elect. For the truly dedicated, it is an ancient tradition to pray the Lord's Prayer *three* times a day—morning, noon, and evening.

You may not be immediately successful in getting all of your parishioners to participate in all of these lenten activities in support of the elect. However, if you can start to provide a variety of options, over

time parishioners will grow in their awareness that Lent is not only a time of renewal for themselves, but also a central moment in the life of the parish for preparing new initiates. That awareness will propel them into the Easter season, ready to accompany the newly baptized in their first steps as Christians. That's what we'll look at next.

(For a bonus session on celebrating the scrutinies, see the menu for this session online.)

Please go to <http://tinyurl.com/wpeval7> to evaluate this session.
