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The Church celebrates the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion

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The Rite of Election is one of several liturgical rites celebrated in the process of Christian Initiation. For many people, this process is known as the RCIA, or Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The journey of growth in faith is the Catechumenate. In the early Church, small communities took individuals into their company and introduced them to their way of life. Religious persecution prevailed, so a strong faith was demanded in the face of possible martyrdom. The 1st and 2nd centuries saw the beginnings of a “Catechumenate” as we know it. In the 3rd & 4th centuries, the structure of the Catechumenate was the most developed, and was at least a 3-year process. Because Constantine declared Christianity legal in 315 AD, the Catechumenate began to vary widely from community to community. In the 5th century, the Catechumenate began to disintegrate, and infant Baptism became normative. Confirmation and Eucharist were separated from Baptism. By the 12th century, the catechumenate no longer existed. In the 20th century, there was a revival of the Catechumenate of sorts in Africa and in France. When the Second Vatican Council took place from 1962-



1965, the Bishops of the world voted to reinstate the Catechumenate. This was first spelled out in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Dec. 4, 1963. In 1988, the US Bishops mandate the implementation of the final English translation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

This year, in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, 99 parishes were represented in the nine celebrations of the Rite of Christian Initiation. There were 907 catechumens (people who have never been baptized) who celebrated the Rite of Election, and there were 882 candidates (people previously baptized, either as Catholics as infants, or in another Christian faith tradition) who celebrated the Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion.

Eight San Antonio churches hosted these celebrations, and Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Uvalde hosted the rural deaneries on the western end of the Archdiocese.

The Rite of Election concludes the period of the Catechumenate proper (which can be as long as a year or more), and usually takes place on or near the first Sunday of Lent. It also marks the beginning of the final period of preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, that is, the period of Purification and Enlightenment: Baptism (for the unbaptized – now called the Elect), Confirmation, and Eucharist for those who are completing the Sacraments of Initiation. Those who choose to live their Christian lives as Roman Catholics, having been baptized in another Christian tradition, also make a profession of faith.

The Rite of Election has several key elements: Each catechumen is called by name – a significant part of the rite. This reflects the verse from the prophet Isaiah 43:1: *But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine."* These catechumens are now going to be counted among God's chosen people. Another key element is the testimony given by their Godparents or Sponsors, by the entire assembly, including their formators. The church wishes to know if they have listened to God's word proclaimed by the church and responded to that word and begun to walk in God's presence, as well as sharing the company of their Christian

brothers and sisters (in worship, in catechesis, in the missionary activity of the church through apostolic works). Another element is the catechumens' own expression of their desire to enter fully into the life of the church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. They have signed the Book of the Elect, another key element, in their parishes, as a pledge of fidelity to God, striving courageously to reach the fullness of truth, which their election opens up before them. The presiding Bishop declares them to be the Elect moving toward initiation into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil.

The Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion is similar to the Rite of Election. This portion of the same liturgy may be celebrated with baptized but previously uncatechized adults, who wish to complete their Christian Initiation through the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist or who wish to be received into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church. In a similar way, they are called by name. The sponsors and the community are asked to express their testimony about their readiness for the celebration of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Because they are already baptized, they spent time reflecting on the mystery of their Baptism and appreciating more deeply the presence of Christ in their lives. The presiding Bishop recognizes their desire for Confirmation and Eucharist and invites them to repentance during this period of Lent, calling them to be faithful to their baptismal covenant.

During the season of Lent, the Elect will celebrate three Scrutinies on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. Let us hold our Elect and our Candidates in prayer during the remaining weeks of Lent as they make this journey toward the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. May they open their hearts to the promptings of God's Holy Spirit.