

TIMELY TOPICS



DIocese of Columbus, Office of Religious Education and Catechesis

Mystagogy for Everyone

Initiation is not graduation. Graduation implies an end; initiation clearly refers to a beginning. It is true of all sacraments, that they are not an end, but the *beginning* of a new way of being. This is most clearly seen, however, in the Sacraments of Initiation -- Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist -- as they are celebrated at the Easter Vigil.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter Sunday are soon over; but the *season* of Easter is celebrated for 50 full days, ending with the feast of Pentecost. These fifty days comprise another phase in the ongoing formation of the “neophytes,” those “newly-born” in faith, who receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The formal name of this period is **mystagogy**.

Those baptized and received at Easter embark on a distinctively new way of life. As neophytes in our faith, they need support, example, explanation, incorporation – and the “savoring of the mysteries” that is *mystagogy*. In fact, one could say that **mystagogy is life-long, as all of us are called to continual growth**. We all can support each other in “savoring the mysteries” and in life-long deepening of our faith and understanding.

There is a record of mystagogical catechesis as early as 350 AD in the work of St. Cyril of Jerusalem. The daily teachings were meant to last just one week; they were designed to “break open” the rites of the Easter Vigil and to encourage the neophytes to live the reality of what they had experienced in these rites. Opening up the symbols of the rites was aimed at

- ⌘ Eliciting a sense of wonder at what God has done in the person
- ⌘ Calling forth a sense of responsibility to live out the gifts received

St. Ambrose, who was elected Bishop of Milan in 373 while he was still a catechumen, followed a similar pattern in his post-Easter catecheses. He believed that the *experience* of the sacraments leads to *faith*, and only then comes *understanding*. Like St. Cyril, he had a two-pronged approach:

- ⌘ Open up the experience of the sacraments
- ⌘ Share the meaning

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Some 1500 years later, the Second Vatican Council returned to and restored these ancient rites which had become obscured over the centuries. Our contemporary understanding of mystagogy has grown out of the Vatican II documents and post-conciliar documents such as the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*. While time for formal instruction is important,

- ⌘ Experience is restored as a valuable source of learning
- ⌘ Conversion and faith consist of much more than intellectual knowledge
- ⌘ The entire season from Easter to Pentecost is now the time of mystagogy
- ⌘ The entire community of the faithful plays a role in faith-formation

Beyond the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost, all of us – not just the neophytes -- are called to the **ongoing mystagogy of life-long growth and formation in our faith.** ✨

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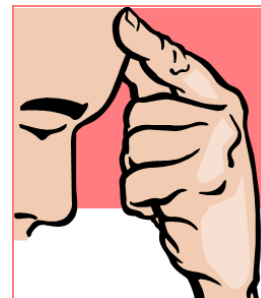
Ideas for Various Ages

Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded

Resources

Ideas for Various Ages

- ✎ Research: What is a **symbol**? How is it different from a **sign**? Give (or make) examples.
- ✎ For each of the seven sacraments, make a list of, or draw/paint, all the symbols. Check the book of the [Rites of the Catholic Church](#) if you are not sure of all of them; also see the recent "[Timely Topics](#)" on the [symbols of Easter](#). (For older students and adults, reflect on how these express the "mysteries" of the sacraments.)
- ✎ Reflect on the statement: **Every sacrament is the beginning of a new way of life.** How is this true for each of the seven sacraments?
- ✎ Discuss: What does it mean to say that "**Mystagogy is life-long, for everyone**"?



Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study

National Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Standard I, Personal and Spiritual Maturity: 1.1 -- 1.7, 1.9PCL, 1.10PCL

Standard II, Lay Ecclesial Ministry Identity: 2.3 -- 2.5, 2.6PCL, 2.9PCL

Standard III, Catholic Theology: 3.1.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.4, 3.4.1, 3.5, 3.7.2, 3.8.2, 3.10PCL, 3.13PCL, 3.15PCL, 3.19PCL

Standard IV, Pastoral Praxis:

4.1.2 Listening with empathy and solidarity in the spirit of Gospel values

4.6 Empower others to develop and articulate their own personal faith and to identify and utilize their unique gifts.

4.17PCL Promote faith formation as a lifelong process for all parishioners

Standard V, Professional Practice: 5.6, 5.9PCL

Standards of the Graded Course of Study

Standard I-A-F, Discover, recognize and use God's revelation in **Sacred Scripture** as a resource in one's life

Standard II- A-G, Discover, recognize and use God's revelation in the **Sacred Tradition** of the Roman Catholic Church

Standard III- A-E, Discover, recognize and participate in the **life of the Church** through prayer, liturgy and sacraments

The Six Tasks of Catechesis

1. Promoting knowledge of the faith
2. Liturgical education
3. Teaching to pray

Resources

International Commission on English in the Liturgy and Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, study edition*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988.

Birmingham, Mary. *Word and Worship Workbook for Year A*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998. (Years B and Year C also available)

Chriszt, Dennis, CPpS. *Creating an Effective Mystagogy: A Handbook for Catechumenate Leaders*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 2001.

