

# TIMELY TOPICS



DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

## Mystagogy "Savoring the Mysteries"

**I**nitiation 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, Eucharist -- as they are celebrated at the Easter Vigil.

Lent, Holy Week, Easter Sunday are over. But the season of Easter, celebrated for 50 days, has only begun. These 50 days comprise yet another phase in the ongoing formation of the "neophytes," those "newly-born" in faith, who received the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The formal name of this period is "**mystagogy**."

### Savoring the Mysteries

Those baptized and received at Easter are embarking 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 were 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

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 actual Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Building on the formal instruction of the Catechumenate, the time of Mystagogy emphasizes that:

- ☞ Experience is 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 for new and old members alike.

### Faith formation for life

Mystagogy does not just stop with Pentecost. We are all called to the **ongoing mystagogy of life-long growth and formation in our faith**.

The next few issues of *Timely Topics* will help us "savor some of the mysteries" of the Triduum including:

- ☞ Fire/light, the Paschal candle
- ☞ Word and story
- ☞ The community (Litany of Saints)
- ☞ Clothed in Christ -- the white garment
- ☞ Baptismal promises -- the Creed

We also will include resources that are helpful in the process of mystagogy -- **for 50 days, and beyond**. Join us in this journey.✧

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## Ideas for every age

- ✂ 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. (*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 Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

<b>Standard I</b> , Personal and Spiritual Maturity:	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9PCL, 1.10PCL, 1.11PCL, 1.12PCVL
<b>Standard II</b> , Lay Ecclesial Ministry Identity:	2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6PCL, 2.9PCL
<b>Standard III</b> , Catholic Theology:	3.1.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.4, 3.4.1, 3.5 (3.5.1, 3.5.2), 3.7.2, 3.8.2, 3.10PCL, 3.13PCL, 3.15PCL, 3.19PCL
<b>Standard IV</b> , Pastoral Praxis:	
<b>4.1.2</b> Listening with empathy and solidarity in the spirit of Gospel values	
<b>4.6</b> Empower others to develop and articulate their own personal faith and to identify and utilize their unique gifts.	
<b>4.9PCL</b> Contribute to developing the parish as an evangelizing and catechizing community	
<b>4.10PCL</b> Involve the family as an essential partner in the faith formation process	
<b>4.15PCL</b> Serve as a resource regarding the catechetical dimension of initiation into the church	
<b>4.17PCL</b> Promote faith formation as a lifelong process for all parishioners	
<b>Standard V</b> , Professional Practice: 5.6, 5.9PCL	

### Religion Graded Course of Study

<b>Standard I-A,B,C,D,E,F,</b>	Discover, recognize and use God’s revelation in Sacred Scripture as a resource in one’s life
<b>Standard II- A,B,C,D,E,F,G,</b>	Discover, recognize and use God’s revelation in the Sacred Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church
<b>Standard III- A,B,C,D,E,</b>	Discover, recognize and participate in the life of the Church through prayer, liturgy and sacraments
<b>Standard IV- A,B,C,D,E,F,</b>	Discover and recognize the development of the Christian person and experience the baptismal call to dignity, relationship, moral decision making and service

## 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 C. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998  
 (Year A and Year B also available)  
 Chriszt, Dennis, CPPS. Creating an Effective Mystagogy: A Handbook for Catechumenate Leaders.  
 San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 2001