



Walk the talk: living the baptismal life

Objective: Enable parishioners to deepen the neophytes' faith through participation in the sacramental life of the community.

Many of us think of mystagogy as the final period of the Christian initiation process, occurring in the 50 days after the Easter Triduum. It is, however, a much broader reality. We need to shift our thinking a bit. Mystagogy is not only for the 50 days, but for all our days. From the very beginning, our encounters with the inquirers and with the catechumens should be mystagogical.

Defining mystagogy

It might help to break apart the word a little. The root of "mystagogy" is "agogy," which comes from the Greek word "agogos." That means "leader." So pedagogy, for example is about leading (or teaching) children. A synagogue is a gathering place (*syn*—"together") to which people are led. Mystagogy is a process of leading (or training) into the mystery. Or, perhaps a better way to say that is that mystagogy is initiation into that which is not yet fully revealed.

Even more specifically, mystagogy is an initiation into God's self revelation. We've all experienced God's revelation. If you think about it, you can probably recall something that happened to you just a moment ago that you'd identify as God acting in your life. Certainly, you've experienced an act of God within the last 24 hours. God is acting all the time. God is in every breath we take and every blink of our eyes. It's not as though God chooses some obscure moment to break into our lives with thunderbolts or floods. Just the opposite. God is *so* present that we sometimes take the ongoing, constant revelation of God for granted. We have to actively *remember* how God has been acting in our lives to fully see.

What the rite says

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults identifies the formal mystagogical period as the final period of the initiation process. This final phase is called "mystagogy" because it is through baptism that the catechumens are given the insight of the royal priesthood of Christ. With that grace, they are brought to the table to eat and drink the full presence of Christ in a way they have not yet fully encountered. The Easter season (Easter Sunday to Pentecost) is a time to focus specifically on remembering that

initiation into the Banquet in a systematic way. However, this is not similar to the catechumenate process. This formal mystagogical period is primarily a liturgical experience that takes place in the midst of the Sunday assembly. The rite says:

Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community, its main setting is the so-called Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season. (247)

Involving the whole parish

The primary way your parishioners will be involved with the postbaptismal catechesis of the neophytes will be to participate fully, actively, and consciously in the liturgies of the Easter season—starting with the Mass of the Lord's Supper and continuing through Pentecost Sunday. These liturgies usually happen in April and May, and these can be very busy times for many people. So it is important to give parishioners a lot of advance notice of the liturgical schedule. Help them realize the importance of these liturgies to the neophytes, and encourage them to make sure they are present as much as possible. Some people will have unavoidable scheduling conflicts. However, if you make clear to everyone the central importance of these liturgies and their role in them, people will begin to adjust their schedules to meet their responsibilities.

More strategies for parish-wide involvement

In addition to asking parishioners to commit to participating in the liturgies of the Easter season, you can also ask them to do some of these things:

- Ask the children, teens, and seniors to write notes of congratulations to the neophytes.
- Schedule a day of reflection shortly after the Vigil. Invite the parishioners and the neophytes to recall and rejoice in their experience of the initiation rites.
- Ask some of the neophytes to testify at the Masses of Easter about their experience of the Easter Vigil.
- Start a small faith sharing group—with the homilists and a few parishioners or catechumenate team members—to form mystagogical homilies for Easter.
- Ask some of the parish organizations (youth group, school, religious education, Knights of Columbus, etc.) to invite the neophytes to come to one of their meetings or classes to have the neophytes reflect on their experience of the Easter Vigil.
- Provide a weekly faith sharing question in the Sunday bulletin based on the Gospels of Easter. Ask parishioners and the neophytes to discuss the questions with their families during the fifty days of Easter.
- Ask parishioners to invite the neophytes to their homes for barbecues or dinners during the Easter season.
- Schedule an evening of reflection on the one-month anniversary of the neophytes' initiation. Invite a diverse group of parishioners to speak about what they like best about being

Catholic.

- Be sure the godparents are bringing the neophytes to the parish festival and other spring events and introducing them to parishioners they don't know. If the godparents are not present in the parish, assign a parish companion to fill in.
- Take the neophytes to the diocesan Mass for the newly initiated. If your diocese doesn't have one, host a Mass at your parish, and invite all the neophytes from the other parishes to come.
- On the one-year anniversary of their initiation, schedule a party for the neophytes.

What's next?

This is the end of your eight-session class on getting the entire parish onto your catechumenate team. You can use these eight lessons to enable your parishioners to truly take on their responsibility for initiation. By focusing on the natural rhythm of the parish—and challenging folks to step up their commitment just a bit—you will create a wonderful sense of community and renewal in your parish.

If you want more, I'm putting together another course on the liturgies of the catechumenate. These sessions will be geared particularly for those who think they have little influence over liturgy in their parishes.

The liturgies we will cover include:

- The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens
- The Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election
- The Scrutinies
- The Presentations
- Minor Exorcisms and Blessings of the Catechumens
- Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

We will also be discussing how to combine these rites with the rites for the baptized candidates. If you want to get onto the early-bird list for this course when it's ready, go ahead and sign up for the notification list. Early-birds will be able to opt in for a discounted tuition price. You can sign up here:

[E-mail](#)

[First Name](#)

[Last Name](#)

Thanks so much for participating in this course. Take care, and please stay in touch!