The Easter Vigil marks the celebration of the sacraments of initiation for those journeying in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Through this final step, the elect are admitted into the people of God and enter into the community of the Church. The entire RCIA, its pastoral notes, prayers and actions, signals incorporation and beginning; in practice however, the celebration of the sacraments seems to signal the end for new members. These endings show themselves in a variety of ways: new members recently initiated cease being a visible presence; new members terminate their participation in the life of the parish; new members stray from the sacramental life of the Church.

In addition, parish RCIA coordinators are reluctant to enter this post-baptismal period because they are unsure of what a post-sacramental catechesis looks like or simply because they have expended all their energy journeying to the celebration of Easter and find themselves too exhausted to go beyond the Easter event.

In the Church’s restoration of the ancient catechumenate, it is the post-sacramental period of mystagogy that is usually short lived and/or often eliminated.
Christian experience as something that increases as it is lived.

Mystagogical reflection is anamnetic; it probes the memory of the body of Christ and makes present the event and the graces necessary to increase our participation in it. Mystagogical catechesis is the invitation into deeper meaning, a sacramental adventure. It is a reminder that sacraments are not graduations but inductions into a communion. The difficulty of mystagogical reflection comes in poor celebrations of the rites of the catechumenate, especially the sacraments of initiation. The distinctive spirit and power of the post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy is derived from the new, personal experience of the sacraments, especially the Sunday Eucharist. Because the sustaining rites of the ongoing post-baptismal state of life are the Sunday Masses and mystagogical catechesis is dependent on the experience of the rite, Sunday must be celebrated well. The symbols, gestures, actions and words of the liturgy have to be unleashed. Sunday must be worth remembering.

- **Sharing Scripture**
  During the catechumenal experience, the celebrations of the word of God in both ritual and catechetical settings “are foremost.”
  Hearing the word of God proclaimed well arouses faith and moves the heart to conversion. Proclamation, evangelization, and conversion are always a part of the dynamism of faith in every stage of life. For the neophytes and for all gathered Christians, the experience of the Church assembled to listen to the proclaimed word of God “increases and sustains them.” The Church needs the liturgy of the word celebrated well and mystagogy depends on it.

- **Remembering, Reflecting, Discussing**
  The RCIA reminds us that this post-baptismal time is a period of catechesis that is mystagogical, that is of a paschal nature, gradual and dependent on the experience of the rite. Acatechesis dependent on the rite denotes a dynamic not immediate to the actual sacramental experience – that is “(W) hat is unseen is much greater than what is seen.” Simply feeling good about a sacramental moment is not enough. Sacraments not only celebrate the presence of the risen Lord; they cause that presence. Indeed Christians themselves become sacraments of the divine presence to one another and the world. Thus the rite can speak of the
**Beyond Fifty Days? Why? What?**

The deepening of one’s grasp on the Paschal Mystery continues beyond fifty days. Incorporation continues beyond fifty days. Forming disciples takes a lifetime. While mystagogy is a formal period of the RCIA with its gatherings of the neophytes for the duration of the Easter season it is also named the final period, not signaling the end but rather naming the post-initiation season of life.

Mystagogical catechesis needs to continue beyond Easter’s fifty days. Spiritual development is at risk if formal faith formation is seemingly terminated. This ongoing, beyond the fifty days, faith formation requires a catechesis inspired and based on the principles derived from the baptismal catechumenate.¹⁴ Some of the fundamental tasks of this catechesis are as follows:¹⁵

- To enable an ongoing participation in the sacramental life of the Church. There should be RCIA team members that are responsible for not only the fifty days of post-baptismal catechesis but also responsible for preparing the neophytes for post-baptismal sacraments. For example, since baptism forgives all sin, the celebration of the sacrament of penance is celebrated with the neophytes some time after baptism. The sacrament of reconciliation needs to have a systematic catechesis, that is “planned to be gradual and complete in coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word.”¹⁶ There should be time before hand to review and explain the theology and the rite and afterward a time of mystagogical reflection.

Neophytes should never be simply told when the next parish communal celebration of reconciliation is taking place and asked to attend. The initial experience of reconciliation should be according to the first form, individual penance, and eventually the neophyte participates in the parish’s communal celebration. The neophytes should also be prepared and have the chance to participate in the other post-baptismal sacraments, – marriage, orders, anointing of the sick, in the same way.

- To promote knowledge of the faith based on the various aspects of the Paschal Mystery as it unfolds in the celebrations of the liturgical year, as it is proclaimed at the table of the word and professed in the creed. It should be remembered that the neophytes’ experience of catechesis is a ministry of the Word in an ecclesial context. It would be detrimental to faith development if the neophytes’ ongoing catechesis was solely an informational experience and not integrated and comprehensive.

- To promote faith development that leads to ongoing conversion. Opportunities for promoting this would included parish missions, retreats, and spiritual direction.

- To have all activity permeated with a spirit of prayer. The newly-initiated need to be introduced to the Church’s rich tradition of other forms of prayer, such as Morning and Evening Prayer, stations of the cross, the rosary, devotion to Mary and the saints. This formation must also include patterns of family prayer, popular devotional practices, the family’s seasonal customs and the way Sunday is celebrated in the domestic church.

- To form genuine Christian communities. Such catechesis directs neophytes to a deepening of their baptismal identity and to the realization that in gathering for the liturgy they stand as the Church, the people of God! Involving newly received members in parish ministries and incorporating them into small faith communities are some of the ways used to achieve this deepening and incorporation. It should

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**Witness and Mission**

The RCIA is a process of gradual conversion to Christ that leads to an involvement in his missionary spirit. The newly initiated have been clothed in Christ and now share in his mission. An empowerment for witness and mission is a gift of initiation. Those in our initiation process should be introduced to the community’s works as an ongoing dimension of the RCIA, but it is especially during mystagogy that the neophytes are invited to grow in their grasp of the Paschal Mystery by doing works of charity. Mystagogical catechesis arouses a living faith that is expressed in action. To know and be part of the works of the local community and the Church leads to a deepening of knowledge and greater experience of the communal nature and spirit of the Church. This should never take the shape of a requirement for the reception of the sacraments, but rather the neophytes should be led to understand that the fullness of the Holy Saturday “reddito” (giving back) of the faith is charitable works. Faith without works is lifeless.¹³
be remembered that incorporation into parish liturgical ministries should be initially focused on the ministry of the assembly. Participation in and incorporation into the worship of the assembly takes time. Inviting the newly baptized to be special ministers of the eucharist or readers should be reserved for a later time. In the same way to invite the newly initiated to be catechists for any age group would be premature because their own need for catechesis is great.

- To educate to a missionary dimension. Catechesis arouses a living faith that is expressed Sunday after Sunday in the dismissal mandate of the Eucharist: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**THE CHURCH NEEDS MYSTAGOGY?**

The Church needs to do mystagogy not only because the neophytes need it but because the Church needs it. Our catechesis needs mystagogy. The restoration of the practice of mystagogy offers the Church an opportunity in making post-baptismal catechesis an ongoing enterprise for adults. The catechesis of adults is the “principal kind of catechesis.”

Maintaining the mystagogical principle will birth catechesis for adults as a means of pastoral care. This will eliminate our previous practice of scheduling optional parish adult education to inform people about various areas of theology.

The Church’s system of sacramental preparation needs mystagogy. Because the mystagogical principle belongs not only to the post-baptismal catechesis of the RCIA but the entire sacramental life of the Church, exploring mystagogy is a means of unleashing our sacraments from graduations to thresholds, a means of giving sacramental preparation programs the dimension of process. To omit a mystagogical reflection on the experience of the sacred mysteries as ritualized in the sacrament of first communion, confirmation, marriage, reconciliation or orders is to omit the opportunity for the transmuting of the sacramental moment to every day life. To omit post-sacramental catechesis perpetuates the notion that sacraments are a moment in time and that sacraments are ends and not beginnings!

Mystagogy rekindles an ancient role of the bishop. The RCIACalls for a comprehensive participation of all levels of the parish and the Church. The rite calls for priests and deacons, catechists, the assembly, the entire parish community to a responsibility and participation in initiation. But in the tradition of mystagogical catechesis it is the bishops who were and are the “principal dispensers of the mysteries of God… those who lead others to holiness.”

The fourth century golden age of the catechumenate saw an engagement of bishops in the catechumenal process that has never been surpassed. Their participation in the faith journey of the whole people of God is of extreme importance. Episcopal shepherds must interpret the sacramental experience empowering all for mission.

The more the Church becomes reacquainted with mystagogy the more we will understand faith formation as ongoing, as belonging to cradle Catholics and those who are initiated during later seasons of their lives. The more the Church does mystagogy the more we deepen our grasp of our participation in the paschal mysteries of Christ. Mystagogy is the time that the newly initiated and all the baptized derive new perceptions of faith, of the Church, and of the world. It is vital to the ongoing faith formation of the newly initiated and it is vital to all the baptized people of God. Mystagogy is about life after baptism.

Sister Sandra DeMasi, SSJ
Director Worship Office

2 Introduction to Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 4.
3 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 151.
4 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 237.
6 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 79.
7 Lectionary for Mass, 44.
8 RCIA, 244: This is a time for the community and the neophytes to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery.
9 Saint Ambrose S1,10
10 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 247.
11 Introduction to Dies Domini, Pope John Paul II.
12 See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 229.
13 James 3:26
14 See General Directory of Catechesis, 68,91.
15 These fundamental tasks are based on the directives of the General Directory of Catechesis and the concluded findings of “Journey to the Fullness of Life: AReport on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.”
16 See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 75.
17 See General Catechetical Directory, 20. The GCD stated that catechesis for adults “must be considered the chief form of catechesis” to which all other forms are oriented. The 1997 General Directory for Catechesis emphasizes that adult catechesis is the reference point for all catechesis by treating it first, even before catechesis for infants and children.
18 Christus Dominus; “Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishop”, 15.
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