

Practising Mystagogy

As we worship, so we believe, so we live
Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi

Mystagogy

a way of love:
an ancient way of reflection,
bound to the mystery of God in Christ
to the abiding presence of God in:
the scripture proclaimed;
the liturgy of the Church celebrated;
the living tradition of the faith articulated;
the life and mission of the Christian community.

A process that begins where we are,
inviting a disciplined attentiveness
to the mystery of God in Christ
present in our experience and our world.

A process that continues our initiation into Christ,
deepening our insight
into the meaning of our experience
and the faith of the Church,
in order that we

live from Christ,

participating in and renewed by
the paschal dying – rising pattern of Christian life,
so we become
living words of God,
a sacramental people
always and everywhere
guided by the Holy Spirit.

The object is always
the one mystery of God,
proclaimed, celebrated, named, lived.

The one God in Christ
who is love longing
to be known and loved intimately.

Mystagogy is the central dynamic at the heart of the ministry of Christian initiation - with children and adults. The vision and nature of this ministry is found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. It can be articulated as follows -

Christian Initiation

a journey into the mystery of God's love
within the Church's tender care (RCIA a.95).

It begins in response to God's presence and prompting
in the life of a person.

It takes place within the parish community,
understood as 100% of Catholics.

The journey takes time and varies,
according to personal circumstance,
the grace of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The community of faith meets people where they are,
and accompanies them
on a journey that seeks to encounter the mystery of Christ,
in life, prayer, scripture, liturgy,
and the life and mission of the parish community.

Encounters with Christ are the focus of reflection,
searching for what God is revealing,
reflecting on its meaning for discipleship
lived within the Catholic Tradition,
and discerning readiness
to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation.

Christian Initiation is a journey marked by conversion,
conversion of both the seeker and the community of faith.

Those initiated continue to hold a place of honour in the community
as accompaniment continues in the first year after Initiation.

And so let us practise Mystagogy!

Revealing the mystery of faith: The role of the mystagogue aka the Christian Initiation Minister

2 March 2023 / [Mystagogy](#) / [Nick Wagner](#)

I just finished another novel by Earl Stanley Gardner. Gardner is the creator of Perry Mason, and he wrote more than 80 stories featuring the brilliant lawyer-detective. Gardner is really good at drawing the reader into the mystery and making you think you've solved the crime before the end of the book. But then there is a twist, and you realize you had no idea what the solution was.



As Christian Initiation Ministers, we're also supposed to draw people into a mystery—the mystery of faith (see Directory of Catechesis 114b). But we are not doing what Gardner does. Mystery writers hide the solution until the very end, continually trying to keep us guessing.

God is *already* at work

What Christian Initiation Ministers do is *reveal* the heart of the mystery—not at the very end but at the very beginning. And that makes us *mystagogues*.

As mystagogues, we accompany the catechumens and candidates into the mystery of the faith and to prepare them for the sacraments.

To achieve this, we balance the content of the faith with the profound mystery of faith (see RCIA 75.1). However, we do not have all the answers. As mystagogues, we recognize that God is *already* at work in the lives of seekers, and our job is to help them see the miraculous ways in which God has been showing up in their lives. We walk alongside them, accompanying them as we explore the mystery of faith together.

Our job as mystagogues is to help them see the miraculous ways in which God has been showing up in the lives of seekers. We walk alongside them, accompanying them as we explore the mystery of faith together.

A new paradigm

This was a new paradigm for me when I began working in the catechumenate. I used to think I had all the answers, but being a Christian is not about what we learn in school or from books. It's about encountering a person, Jesus Christ, who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction (see Pope Benedict XVI, [God Is Love](#), 1).

Unlike a mystery writer, I don't know all the twists and turns that are going to happen as we journey together. But I trust that, led by the Holy Spirit, the mystery of faith will be revealed to us more and more.

Can you help me out?

I'd love to know how this is landing. Can you share a word or a phrase about how this article resonates with you? Does it speak to your experience? Share your thoughts in the comments box below. Thanks for being part of the conversion!

With thanks to [Team RCIA](#) for permission to reprint this resource.

For more information about Mystagogy go to the [diocesan website](#) and click on the Mystagogy drop down menu '+'.

Introducing Mystagogical Reflection

Leaning into the Mystery of God

with RCIA Inquirers/Seekers and the faithful ...

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Mystagogical Reflection

At its heart Mystagogical Reflection is about helping people to open their eyes, their minds and their hearts to the presence of God who is already with them every moment of every day in all of creation and in every human experience.

Mystagogical questions lean into our experience and the mystery of God.

First step

When we first encounter seekers and members of the faithful who are new to Mystagogical Reflection, we introduce them to it gently with the most fundamental mystagogical question:

Where have you encountered God this week?

On occasion, a broader question may provide a more accessible starting point, pending the context something like:

Where have you experienced love this week?

or forgiveness or forgiving, mercy, compassion, truth, pain, sorrow ...

The companion's response is firstly to listen, and having listened, to gently prompt the person to explore the experience being attentive to all its detail.

As appropriate the companion helps the person to open their eyes, ears and heart to God's presence in their experience and with them always.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Second step

Once seekers and members of the faithful have become comfortable with reflecting on fundamental mystagogical questions, invite them to the next step of introducing them to the more systematic process based on the same fundamental question:

1. **Ask:** Where have you encountered God this week/ in your life?
This question can be asked in various ways. The response of the person sets the agenda and direction for the conversation that flows.
2. **Explore:** The companion helps the person explore the detail of the experience.
An invitation to recall what happened in as much detail as possible.

3. **Reflection:** What did you notice: What captured your attention? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice.
4. **Connect:** With the help of the Holy Spirit, the companion connects the person's experiences with the stories and tradition of the Church.
An invitation into our Catholic faith and life.

This process is spontaneous and unstructured. You may like to prepare for Mystagogical Reflection using one of the prayers in the following outlines.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

A simple process always available

Often, even with people experienced with Mystagogical Reflection a simple process is most appropriate to the context.

1. What did you notice? What stood out for you?
2. What is God revealing to us?
3. What are we learning about our Catholic faith and life?
4. How is God inviting us to change and/or respond?

Examples of Mystagogical questions

Note the focus of mystagogical questions is: the person's experience; God's presence in that experience; connecting this to our catholic faith and story.

- What was your most memorable moment?
- What was your favourite part?
- What did you see/hear/do/feel?
- What did it mean to you?
- What does it remind you of from the Bible?
- What does it remind you of from our Catholic traditions?
- What does it remind you of from Church teaching?
- What does it tell you about God?
- What does it say about Christ?
- How did the symbol or action communicate that?
- If that symbol could speak, what would it say to you?
- What would it say about our faith?
- How does this encounter with Christ change you?
- What are you being called by the Spirit to do now?

In this way we begin to guide people to become more attentive to the presence of God in their lives and to identify what God is revealing to us in our everyday experience.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Mystagogical Reflection on Scripture with Catechumens or members of the faithful ...

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Prepare

Play [Sacred Silence](#) by Tom Booth. (This version runs for 3.57 minutes and can be used as an audio file or with YouTube visuals).

OR

Listen to God say to you ... *Be still and know that I am God (Ps 46:10)*

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our minds to the wisdom of God ...

Free us to be present to our God who calls us friends ...

Let us listen for the words of everlasting life ...

Mystagogical Reflection

- Encounter:** The Word is proclaimed without referencing the source of the text or using the introduction and conclusion we use in the liturgy.
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the Word proclaimed ... to listen rather than read ...
- Recollection:** What happened? OR What did it say? (The latter question is more relevant to passages that talk about something rather than tell a narrative.)
An Invitation to recall what happened in the text. The detail is important – characters, scenery, actions. No interpretation, just what happened.
- Reflection:** What word or phrase captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice and what is revealed.
- Catechesis:** What aspect of our Catholic faith does our encounter with Christ invite us to reflect on more deeply – about God, Christ, Church, liturgy and Christian life?
An invitation to connect your experience with the living tradition of our Catholic faith and reflect on how our insight into both is being deepened.
- Connection:** Why does what Christ is revealing matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood that this speaks to?
An invitation to explore the essential connection between liturgy, faith and life.
- Conversion:** How is your encounter with Christ inviting you to change – to become more and more Christ like?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32))*

Mystagogical Reflection on Liturgy with Catechumens or members of the faithful ...

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Prepare

Play [Sacred Silence](#) by Tom Booth. (This version runs for 3.57 minutes and can be used as an audio file or with YouTube visuals).

OR

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our minds to the wisdom of God ...

Free us to be present to our God who calls us friends ...

Let us be attentive to the presence of God ...

Mystagogical Reflection

1. **Encounter:** A recent experience of prayer or liturgy is recalled.
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the liturgy...
2. **Recollection:** What happened?
An Invitation to recall what happened in the liturgy or the part of the liturgy chosen. The detail is important. What was said? By whom? Where were they? What symbols and gestures were involved? What was everyone doing? etc. No interpretation, just what happened.
3. **Reflection:** What word or phrase, action or symbol captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice and what is revealed.
4. **Catechesis:** What is this (element of the) liturgy leading us to know more deeply about our Catholic faith - about God, Christ, Church, liturgy, and Christian life and faith?
An invitation to connect your experience with the living tradition of our Catholic faith and reflect on how our insight into both is being deepened.
5. **Connection:** Why does what Christ is revealing in the liturgy matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood that this speaks to?
An invitation to consider how the liturgy shapes us for discipleship today.
6. **Conversion:** How is your encounter with Christ in the liturgy inviting you to change, to live the mystery?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Mystagogical Reflection on parish and other life and ministry experiences with Catechumens or members of the faithful ...

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Prepare

Play [Sacred Silence](#) by Tom Booth. (This version runs for 3.57 minutes and can be used as an audio file or with YouTube visuals).

OR

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our minds to the wisdom of God ...

Free us to be present to our God who calls us friends ...

Let us be attentive to the presence of God ...

Mystagogical Reflection

1. **Encounter:** A recent experience of parish life is recalled or ask a Mystagogical question such as: How have you encountered Christ in parish life recently?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the parish ...
2. **Recollection:** What happened?
An Invitation to recall what happened in the experience of parish life. The detail is important. No interpretation.
3. **Reflection:** What was most significant in the experience? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice and what is revealed.
4. **Catechesis:** How is this aspect of parish life an expression of our Catholic faith: of our belief in and about God, Christ, Church – communion (Community), and mission, discipleship? What are we learning about what it means to love the mystery of God's love – the Paschal Mystery?
An invitation to connect your experience with the living tradition of our Catholic faith and reflect on how our insight into both is being deepened.
5. **Connection:** Why does this aspect of parish life matter? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood right now that this speaks to or address?
An invitation to consider how parish life is relevant and makes a difference.
6. **Conversion:** How is your encounter with Christ in the life of the parish inviting you to change – to become more and more Christ like?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)

Mystagogical Reflection on the arts – creative and performing with Catechumens or members of the faithful ...

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Prepare

Play [Sacred Silence](#) by Tom Booth. (This version runs for 3.57 minutes and can be used as an audio file or with YouTube visuals).

OR

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our minds to the wisdom of God ...

Free us to be present to our God who calls us friends ...

Let us be attentive to the presence of God ...

Mystagogical Reflection

1. **Encounter** with Christ in the beauty of art ...
Invite participants to look or listen or observe, as appropriate the nature of the work.
2. **Recollection:** What do you see?
An invitation to focus on the work and notice the detail. What story is the work telling? What elements have been used to create the work, colour, line, shapes, tones, textures or dynamics, harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, and tones? What symbols or gestures might there be within the elements? What is happening?
3. **Reflection:** What captured your attention? What moved your heart? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice.
4. **Catechesis:** How is this work leading us into the Mystery and teaching us about God, Christ, Church, liturgy, and Christian life?
An invitation to explore the essential connection between liturgy, faith and life.
5. **Connection:** Why does what Christ is revealing in the work matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood right now?
An invitation to consider how the work can encourage us in our faith.
6. **Conversion:** How is your encounter with Christ in the work inviting you to change, to live the mystery?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Mystagogical Reflection for formation *including on church documents and the rites with members of the faithful ...*

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Mystagogical Reflection is an excellent process for a range of formation opportunities. It is grounded in what draws the attention of the participants and engages in catechesis in response to participants insights, questions and at times, what they did not notice. It respects the foundational principle that all formation seeks to facilitate an encounter with God, an attitude of deep listening, deeper faith and an opening to ongoing conversation for the sake of the life and mission of the church.

Formation grounded in Mystagogical Reflection requires that participants read the required material before gathering for formation. At times, the reading may be part of the formation gathering. Either way participants need to engage with the material ahead of the group formation.

The following process can be adapted to suit the material being studied, the purpose of the study and the group who gathers.

From your reading:

1. **Reflection:**

What drew your attention? What did you find most engaging, unsettling, perplexing?
What is God revealing?

2. **Catechesis:**

What are we learning about our Catholic faith: about God, the Church community, discipleship, mission and ministry, liturgy ...

*This primary question will be shaped by the nature and purpose of the gathering.
This is where formation facilitators focus participants link participant insights and questions to the key insights presented in the document or the rites.*

3. **Connection:**

Why does this matter to us now?

4. **Conversion:**

To what action or change is the Holy Spirit inviting us – individually and as a community?

At the conclusion of the formation invite participants to be still and quiet, and to reflect on:

What have you received from our gathering?

What will you continue to ponder?

What implications are emerging for you and for our community?

To what change are you feeling called?

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Document Clubs

Another less formal way to use Mystagogical Reflection for formation focused on church documents is to apply it to the popular book club model.

In our case we would be forming *Document Clubs*. The facilitator or host would devise a reading plan that is shared with participants. **Participants are invited to read the set chapter ahead of each gathering.** The facilitator guides the sharing by inviting participants to engage in conversation as follows:

1. What was a key idea that drew your attention?
2. What is the document revealing to us today about our Catholic faith: about God, the Church community ...?
3. Why is this aspect of our faith important here and now?
4. To what action or change is the Holy Spirit inviting us to – individually and as church?

The questions can be tweaked according to the nature of the document being explored.

The focus of the conversation is the document itself, not secondary sources.

Like any good book club, some food and drinks are an important element of such gatherings.

Prayer

The following prayers are suggestions for concluding your time of Mystagogical Refection. They focus on our participation in the Paschal Mystery.

Lord Jesus,
we hold your dying and your rising close to our hearts.
May we sense that we are part of this mystery.
May we have the courage and the grace
to trust that, even in hardship,
your transforming love never fails.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen

OR

Gracious God,
you have shown us that paschal dying is not the end,
but the entryway into vibrant, Spirit-filled life.
Help us to
 mourn what must die,
 wait for the passing of all we must release,
 and rest in joyful anticipation
of the new life you will send for us to receive.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen

Prayer: adapted from *Longing for the Holy: Spirituality for Everyday Life*. Based on insights of Ronald Rolheiser. © 2009 by Renew International.

Part II: Mystagogical Reflection for children

It is recommended that children be introduced to the process of Mystagogical Reflection slowly, similar to the process outlined on p 3 of this document. Begin with one simple mystagogical question.

We know from experience that children and young people have a natural aptitude and ease with the process of Mystagogical Reflection.

Once children are comfortable with simple mystagogical questions, move on to using the following processes introducing each step slowly. For example, the first time you might just do steps one and two, the next time extend it to include step three and so on until children are engaged in the whole process.

This time of mystagogy is an opportunity for encounter. It is not a teaching moment in the more traditional sense. Rather it is a chance to listen to how each person is moved by the Spirit and 'teach' as appropriate in response to that.

Adults leading the process for children in our Catholic schools will recognise the affinity between Mystagogical Reflection and the schools' 'Pedagogy of Encounter'.

In the following process, the blue italics are prompts for adults, not to be read out to the children. The process invites facilitator, to consider, based on the text, how they reference the Trinitarian God – as God, Jesus or Holy Spirit. It is important to maintain consistent language throughout.

The following process is focused on scripture. We have not replicated each of the processes in the first section of the document. The adults leading the children and young people can modify the other processes based on the scripture example.



Mystagogical Reflection on Scripture with Children

Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)

Prepare

Light a candle, allow a brief silence, then pray ...

God we know you are with us and around us:

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our minds to the wisdom of God ...

Let us listen to what God is saying to us ...

Mystagogical Reflection

1. **Experience:** Read the text – Listen

The text is read without any of the references, introduction or conclusion that we use in the liturgy. Invite participants to listen to the reading rather than follow the text. The copy is for reference during the rest of the process.

2. **Remember:** What happened in the reading?

Let's recount what happened.

An invitation to recall a step-by-step recount sequentially. What happened next...?

Then what happened...? Stay focused on the events of the text in order. The detail is important – characters, scenery, actions. No interpretation, just what happened.

3. **Reflect:** What word or phrase jumped out at you?

Was there something that particularly stood out for you?

What do you think God/Jesus is saying to you?

An invitation to a time of reflection which leads to sharing as individuals are comfortable.

4. **Learning:** What is God/Jesus teaching us about our Catholic faith and life?

An invitation to connect our experience of God with our Catholic faith.

5. **Connection:** Why is God/Jesus' message important today?

This text was written a long time ago. What is it about it, that still makes sense today?

An invitation to reflect on what is happening in the world right now. Can we make a connection between the text and the world?

6. **Action:** How is God/Jesus asking you to live differently?

An invitation to appreciate that God always calls us to live like Jesus.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road
and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

Prayers for Children

The following prayers are suggestions for concluding your time of Mystagogical Refection. They focus on our participation in the Paschal Mystery.

Lord Jesus,
we remember the way you died and rose from the dead.
we know that sometimes things do not make sense to us.
In this mystery, may we continue to trust in the hope that you give.
May we have the courage and the grace
to know that, even during hard times,
your ever-lasting love never fails.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen

OR

Loving God,
Jesus shows us that even when things seem to end,
you promise the start of something new.
Hold us close:
 when we are sad about things that change,
 and as we wait patiently for something new to come.
Help us to become our very best selves.
We ask this through Jesus, our friend.
Amen.



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