



Encountering the mystery of God. **Living from Christ.**

MYSTAGOGICAL REFLECTION



Mystagogy

A way of love
an ancient way of reflection
bound to the mystery of God in Christ
to the abiding presence of God
revealed in
the scripture proclaimed
the liturgy of the Church celebrated
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
continuing our initiation into Christ
deepening our insight
into the meaning of our experience
and the faith of the Church
in order that we will

live from Christ

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

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

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



Introducing Mystagogical Reflection

Within the reflection on the previous page, what words or phrases caught your attention?

What understanding of mystagogical reflection does it reveal to you?

What questions does it lead you to ponder?

In the process of contemplative dialogue involved in the Plenary Council and our Diocesan Synod, people expressed a longing for a deeper relationship with God and more varied and less structured opportunities for prayer that included faith sharing. This longing echoes in the Plenary Council call for us to become a more Christ-centred Church.

Through its study of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) the Diocesan Liturgy Council's Christian Initiation Forum discovered and fell in love with mystagogical reflection. We hope this resource introduces you to mystagogical reflection as a unique form of prayer and encourages you to have a go.

As a Catholic community, we love a good conversation about God, scripture, church, liturgy, morality and many other Catholic things. We don't find it so easy to engage in dialogue about our personal relationship with God, about being loved by God, or about the joys and challenges of living the paschal mystery every day.

Mystagogical reflection invites us into a personal encounter with Christ in the gospel we have heard, the liturgy we have celebrated, or an experience of life or ministry. It invites us to pay attention to what Christ reveals to us, both in that encounter and the living tradition of our faith and to connect it to life now. It invites us to dialogue and transformation.

As such, with the exception of the liturgy itself, mystagogical reflection is the Catholic way of faith formation par excellence. It acknowledges that Christ is the ultimate formator, forming us through word, liturgy and life. With its emphasis on encounter with Christ, mystagogical reflection levels the formation playing field and nullifies the common excuse for not participating – I don't know enough! As people of faith, we share life in Christ and are filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. This is everyone's domain and requires attentiveness rather than knowledge or expertise. In mystagogical reflection, knowledge and understanding take their proper place, emerging from reflection on the experience of encounter with Christ.

Because it invites us into a personal encounter with Christ, mystagogical reflection may be challenging. When we started, we often strayed from the encounter with Christ and slipped into our more natural conversation mode, talking **about** the text or the liturgy. When this happens, the



one guiding the process needs to gently pull us back to the experience where Christ waits to meet us personally. This encounter is the foundation of mystagogical reflection. To avoid it is to miss the grace of shared faith, insight and conversion that flow from it.

As the central dynamic of the whole RCIA journey, mystagogical reflection has a natural home in the parish and school community, and in the life of all who long to deepen their relationship with God and to live from Christ. It belongs to you!

We hope that what we share in this document will help you to take hold of mystagogical reflection with meaning and practice it as a form of faith-sharing prayer that deepens your relationship with God.

- **Page 5** outlines in detail the full six-step process of mystagogical reflection for those who will be guides. It accommodates both RCIA seekers and the faith community.
- We have discovered a need for slightly different versions of this process to suit different contexts. Variations are available on the [diocesan website](#).
- **Page 7** offers:
 - a basic outline of the process for participants
 - an outline for a typical gathering for mystagogical reflection
- **Page 8** summarises the essentials.
- **Pages 9-11** provides practical information for those who will guide the process.
- **Pages 12- 13** offers examples of mystagogical reflection from the RCIA.
- Other resources are available on the diocesan website including a [conversation](#) about mystagogical reflection.

We hope you find mystagogical reflection as nourishing and enjoyable as we do. May your encounter with Christ in this process, and the meaning Christ reveals to you, fill you with hope and empower you to live from Christ every day.

Louise Gannon rsj

with the Diocesan Liturgy Council's Christian Initiation Forum.

Natasha Brotherton, Amber Carter, Mary-Anne de Luca, Fiona Duque, Rose McAllister, and Lucy Sneesby-Tooth.



Understanding the process of Mystagogical Reflection

A basic pattern for RCIA seekers and the faith community ...

The blue text assists the guide to lead the process.

Invitation

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 mind(s) to the wisdom of God ...

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

Mystagogical Reflection

Allow a brief silence between each step.

- 1. Encounter** with Christ in: the Word proclaimed, or the celebration of the liturgy, or the experience of life and the faith community ... Listen ...
- 2. Recollection:** What happened?
An invitation to recall what happened in the text, the liturgy or the life experience being reflected upon. No interpretation, just what happened. The detail is important.
- 3. Reflection:** What did you notice – what word or phrase in the scripture; what prayer, symbol, action in the liturgy; what aspect of your experience captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? How does this relate to your life experience? What meaning is God revealing to you?
*An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter.
Meaning is found in being attentive to what the Holy Spirit is revealing to you about the dying – rising mystery of God's saving love.*
- 4. Catechesis/Faith Sharing:** What does the living tradition of our Catholic faith add to our understanding of the meaning you found in your encounter with Christ?
*An invitation to reflect on your experience through the lens of our Catholic faith.
How do insights of our Catholic faith help us deepen our understanding of our experience? And vice versa?*
- 5. Connection:** How does Christ's revelation to us matter now?
*An invitation to connect what Christ is revealing to the needs of our neighbourhood.
How is this revelation/learning inviting us to participate in the Paschal Mystery and become more authentic missionary disciples?*
- 6. Conversion:** How will you live differently as a result of what you heard?
What is dying? What is being raised up?



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Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered
but a journey inside ourselves
to become one with what already is.”

– *Daniel O’Leary*



Participant version

1. **Encounter** with Christ in the Word proclaimed ... listen ...
2. **Recollection**: What happened?
3. **Reflection**: What did you notice? What did you experience/feel? What moved your heart?
How does this relate to your life experience? What does it mean for you?
4. **Faith sharing**: What does the living tradition of our Catholic faith add to our understanding of the meaning you found in your encounter with Christ?
5. **Connection**: How does Christ's revelation to us matter now?
6. **Conversion**: How will you live differently as a result of what you heard?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

Pattern for a typical Gathering

Whether gathering online or physically:

1. Gather people
2. Invitation
3. **Encounter** via proclamation of the reading or recall of a liturgical or life experience.
4. **Mystagogical Reflection** finishing in silent contemplation
5. Final Prayer
6. Thank you and a **reminder** of the arrangements for the next gathering.



Understanding the essentials

Mystagogical reflection:

- Meets you where you are and as you are. No study is required ...
- Can be done individually, with one companion, or in a group ...
- Takes time: it is a reflective and meditative process ...
- Is attentive to Christ present in scripture, liturgy, life. In the context of RCIA, particularly an experience of parish life ...
- Cannot be done as preparation for an upcoming experience ...
- Seeks meaning for personal and ecclesial (faith community) life and conversion ...
- In its fullness involves six sequential steps, which focus reflection on our encounter with Christ and the meaning Christ reveals personally and communally in that encounter ...
- Uses personal language appropriate to encounter, for example 'I' and 'me' ...
- Enables faith sharing and catechesis in response to what Christ reveals in our experience ...
- Connects what Christ reveals to our life and mission, and our personal and communal conversion.
- Needs a guide to keep reflection focused on the mystery of Christ. The 'facilitator' or 'leader' is the Holy Spirit.
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- Trust the process! **Come as you are** ... Pay attention ... Be present ... Welcome what comes.





Becoming a Mystagogical Guide

The real facilitator or leader of mystagogical reflection is the Holy Spirit. Thus, the name 'guide'. The role of the guide – the mystagogue – cannot be overemphasised. At the same time, the guide is present in the background, shepherding the group through the process, and gently encouraging and leading participants into the mystery of Christ when necessary.

We've learnt a great deal from our experience over recent months and offer the following insights for those who are called to guide the process outlined on p. 5

A **group** of about 5-8 people, including the guide, works well. This allows time for people to share while ensuring enough reflection for the group to proceed through the process when some participants choose not to share.

Reflection on the mystery of God takes **time**. Allowing **an hour and a half** for the process is recommended. Groups may not use all this time, particularly at first.

Prepare ahead: familiarise yourself with the process and the object of the reflection, usually the gospel from the previous Sunday or some part of the liturgy.

Listen attentively to what participants share. This enables you to create the necessary **links** between the steps, particularly between steps 3, 4 and 5. It is helpful to note the part of the text or experience people are drawn to so you can return to it when needed.

As you begin each step clarify the task. Keep people **focused on the task**, gently pulling them back to it when they jump ahead. Catholics have a natural tendency to jump to interpretation and theological meaning without attending to the presence of Christ and what Christ is revealing.

Issue **general invitations** to share, rather than inviting individuals by name. Not everyone will be comfortable sharing, particularly at first. **Thank by name** those who do share.



Guiding the process:

When gathering the group, identify someone who will proclaim the scripture when that is the focus of the reflection.

Lead people into the process with an **Invitation** as suggested on p. 5.

Silence and gentle linking between steps are important.

Step 1: If scripture is the focus, it is **proclaimed** without the normal introduction and concluding dialogue. Invite people to listen to the reading rather than follow the text.

If the celebration of the liturgy is the focus, the guide would simply invite people to recall the liturgy.

If a person's life experience is the focus, a simple explanation of the context of this would be given.

Step 2 invites people to recall what happened in the reading, or the part of the liturgy being reflected on. It is important to notice the detail and to ensure people refrain from interpretation and extrapolation.

If reflecting on a life experience, for example, if a catechumen has been to a meeting of the parish Bereavement Team, then that person recalls the detail of the experience, encouraged if needed by the guide.

Steps 3 and 4 are the crux of mystagogical reflection. This is where gentle guidance might be needed to lead people to an encounter with Christ and for meaning to be revealed.

In Step 3 participants are invited to share – a word or phrase in the scripture; a symbol, phrase or action in the liturgy – that has 'grabbed' their attention. This step is not about sharing one's overarching response but focusing on what captures your attention. This is where Christ is present for us to encounter.

Once a participant shares what grabs them, the guide leads the person to reflect on how this relates to their life experience and what Christ is revealing? This forms the essential link to Step 4.

When one participant has completed their reflection, the guide invites someone else to share what grabbed them, and so the process is repeated.

When the reflection is focused on a person recalling a life experience, that person shares what aspect of the experience they found most engaging.

Keep an eye on the time. Not everyone needs to share in Step 3. It is important to ensure there is enough time to complete the whole process. Two or three people sharing is enough to move to Step 4.



Step 4 allows for broader **faith sharing or catechesis for RCIA seekers**. This involves attentive listening.

This step begins with the experiences shared in Step 3. The guide's role is to help participants identify and then nurture links between the personal experience with Christ and the meaning found in it, AND the wisdom our faith brings to our understanding and sense of meaning.

It is appropriate to start by inviting those who shared in step 3 to begin. This can lead others to recall some aspect of our faith related to the sharing.

The guide needs to ensure there is enough time for Steps 5 and 6. Allowing 15 minutes for step 4 is a good guide.

Steps 5 and 6 are where the rubber hits the road. What Christ reveals in our experience and the living tradition of the faith community is about conversion for life, community, and mission now.

Ideally, there will be time at the end for people to rest in the presence of God before concluding with a prayer. (See versions of the process on the website)



Mystagogical Reflection in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults



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After being drenched in the five-foot-deep waters of baptism, Michael emerged from the font, into the waiting arms of the assembly. Dripping, exultant and with arms raised in the air, Michael shouted "Thirty-five years of sin washed away!"



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Mary said, "When I tried to rub in and rub off the globs of oil running down my cheeks and on my body, I realised what I had just done. I can't rub it off, but I can rub it in. I can't even wash it off – that really is what this is about isn't it? I belong to God, signed, sealed and delivered!"



Michael, who exclaimed, ‘Thirty-five years of sin washed away!’ was not presented with a teaching about baptism. ... His experience of going down into the waters of death and resurrection was so powerful that the baptismal water communicated and revealed the liberation and washing that we teach baptism affords.

The task of mystagogical catechesis for Michael was to affirm his experience and connect it with what Catholics believe about baptism. All we had to say to Michael was, ‘Wow, you just named a powerful truth we believe about baptism – the sacrament of baptism forgives sins. It is a person’s first sacramental experience of having sins forgiven.’

Michael already knew that from his experience. The mystagogue, the person who leads the neophytes ‘into the divine mysteries,’ helps them open their eyes to their experience so they can name it and appropriate meaning for their lives.



When liturgy is celebrated well, with robust symbols and proper preparation, it has the power to communicate divine reality. God is present and revealed in our symbols.

Mary Birmingham, *Year-Round Catechumenate* p. 129

The liturgy is a life that forms, not an idea to be learned.

Pope Francis, [Address to Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. 14 February, 2019](#)



Mystagogical Journal

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Acknowledgements

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