

What Is the Period of Mystagogy?

One of the titles of this final period in the process of Christian initiation is *mystagogy*, which means “instruction on the mysteries.” The other title of this final period, Postbaptismal Catechesis, alludes to the focus of the period. Now that the elect are fully-initiated neophytes—from the Greek meaning “new plant” or “beginner”—it is time for catechesis and reflection not only on the experience of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation but also on the whole initiation process from the Precatechumenate until the present.

The entire process is initiation into a way of life, and it has only just begun. It is a journey of discipleship for the rest of one’s life. This final period truly never ends. All who have celebrated the Sacraments of Christian Initiation are continually invited to deepen their understanding of what it means to be a disciple and to grow in their relationship with Christ and the Church. Although this is a continual process, Postbaptismal Catechesis during the Easter season deserves special focus. In the United States the bishops also ask that the process be extended by monthly gatherings until the anniversary of the neophytes’ initiation.

To grasp the flavor of this period, compare it to other similar situations such as:

- Newlyweds. This term refers to a newly married couple for the entire first year of their marriage. The couple lives the whole year as an experience of firsts: first holidays as a married couple, first anniversary, and so on.
- The experience of the birth of a child. This affects not only the immediate family but the extended family. There is no going back to the way life was before as everything has changed. As the child grows and develops, the entire family is affected.

Similarly, with any heightened or intense experience, there is a need to debrief by relating the experience to others and reflecting on the experience. Such is the case with the experience of Christian initiation. It redefines every relationship of the neophytes, who are now fully initiated Catholics.

Mystagogy happens in the midst of the community, and the community is expected to join the neophytes

by offering “thoughtful and friendly help” (RCIA 244) by words of support and by example. The ritual states that it is a time for both the community and the neophytes to deepen their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and to consciously make it more a part of daily life. They are to do this in three ways: meditate on the Gospel, share in the Eucharist, and do works of charity.

The new aspect of this period is that the neophytes share in the Eucharist. They are no longer dismissed after the proclamation of the Word. They are members of the community and participate until together all are sent forth to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” By meditating on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing works of charity, the neophytes will continue to grow in faith and a deeper commitment to the Church and its mission of evangelization in the world.

Since the experience is so new and the neophytes are eager to reflect on the initiation process, they, along with sponsors, godparents, and their entire family, are to have special places in the assembly. The Homily and the General Intercessions are a means to offer insights, support, and prayer for the neophytes in their new state in life.

The U.S. bishops recommend monthly gatherings for the neophytes for the first year after their initiation. They also encourage a celebration to mark their first anniversary of their initiation. To show his pastoral concern for the neophytes of his diocese, the local Ordinary is encouraged to preside at a Mass with the neophytes within the first year of their initiation.

The community continues to walk with the neophyte in their new life as a child of God. The role of godparent does not end. It is a lifelong commitment to walk with the neophyte and to continue to offer support as together they continue to live the life of discipleship.

See the following paragraphs in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for more insights regarding this fourth period of the initiation process: time of the period (7.4), role of the community (9.5), rituals belonging to this period (25, 247, 248, 251), and national statutes (22, 23, 24).