

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Mystagogy isn't an everyday word. It is a word that means "the study of the mysteries." In the catechumenate process, mystagogy is a method of spiritual formation allowing persons to reflect upon their experience of the sacraments and discover what that means for ministry in daily life.

Mystagogy is traditionally reserved for the fifty days of Easter. This approach has precedence in the preaching practices of the ancient church. Ambrose of Milan, for example, did not speak of the sacraments to the newly initiated until after their baptism. In preaching to the newly initiated, he said: "I shall begin now

to speak of the sacraments which you have received. It was not proper for me to do so before this, because the Christian faith must come first." For Ambrose, faith came through the sacraments. Understanding came only after faith. Meaning follows experience.

This approach to Christian formation has great promise. By first honoring people's experience, preachers and teachers stand firm in the belief that God is truly at work in people's lives. Secondly, the sacraments are honored as events with layers and layers of meaning. Such an approach saves us from reducing sacraments to "right belief" or simple definition.

Mystagogy will be the focus of the 2007 Gathering. We are excited to have Dr. Craig Satterlee as our keynote speaker, who will enlighten our understanding and practice of mystagogy. Dr. Satterlee has written extensively on the subject and is himself a gifted mystagogical preacher and teacher. *Mystagogy* isn't an everyday word but a method of connecting the mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist to everyday life and discovering the presence of the living God. Come to Niagara Falls and make the connections.

Peace,

Bryon Hansen, NAAC President

CONNECTING WORSHIP, EXPERIENCE AND SACRAMENT

Mark your calendars for July 19 through 21, 2007. Once again, we meet at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. Located in a beautiful place, the retreat centre includes both an interior and exterior labyrinth and is in walking distance of the Falls.

Scholar, author, and teacher, Dr. Craig Satterlee, professor of homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (ELCA) will be the featured speaker at the Gathering of NAAC this summer. He will demonstrate – from the

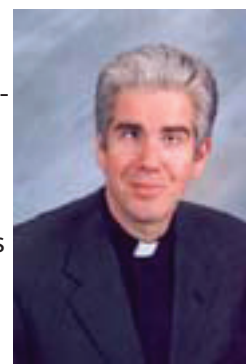
vantage point of preaching – how to move the sacraments to the center of spirituality by making the Bible, personal experience, and worship intersect in such a way that a wealth of meanings surface.

Satterlee is author of *Ambrose of Milan's Mystagogical Preaching* and, with Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*.

A variety of workshop offerings will be provided. A celebration banquet will take place on Saturday evening. There will also be ample opportunity to connect

with other catechumenate practitioners and enjoy Niagara Falls.

For registration details contact Bev Piro, bpairo@prlc.org or 206-783-2350. Questions about the Gathering? Contact Shirley Griffin, shirleyg3@sympatico.ca or 416-259-9069. You may also access information at the website below.



REVIEWS

Creating an Effective Mystagogy by Dennis Chriszt, CPPS
Resource Publications, 2000

This book is a wonderful resource for understanding and practicing mystagogy in the catechumenal process. While written for Roman Catholics, this book is certainly applicable to all Christians engaged in catechumenal ministry and formation.

The author proposes a method of mystagogy anchored in the preaching of early church fathers, such as Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopsuetia, and Augustine. He writes: "The fourth-century mystagogues used a method of preaching that took the liturgical experience of what today we call the Easter Vigil as its starting point. As they preached during the week after Easter, the mystagogues remind the neophytes and all who gathered for mystagogy of that experience of symbols, gestures, and words that were part of the experience of initiation. By their preaching, they helped the assembly reflect on the experience and shared with them parts of the Christian tradition, especially as found in the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of the apostles."

Chriszt develops a method of mystagogy applicable for contemporary practice by both probing the ancient tradition and analyzing

current practice. Analyzing three congregations used as a kind of case study, the author shows how contemporary seekers have a deep need to belong to community that results in a new way of life. Such a sense of belonging and meaning, he concludes, requires careful discernment. He proposes mystagogy as an effective tool to meet the needs of both seekers and disciples.

Three basic questions form the core of the methodology proposed in this book. Reflecting on the rites, catechumens are asked: "What did you experience? What does it mean? What are you going to do about it?" These questions are asked after each rite, beginning with the welcome rite. Thus, mystagogy is not only reserved for Easter. It is used throughout the entire process of formation.

Chriszt offers many useful suggestions. He suggests, for example, that catechumenate sessions take place in the place where the public rite was actually celebrated as a way to re-engage the senses. He also suggests that several sessions during Easter be devoted to "unpacking" the experience of the Easter Vigil.

For Chriszt, mystagogy is a process effective for all areas of parish life besides the catechumenate. The questions of experience, meaning, and commitment arising out of reflection upon worship

and sacraments are questions to be asked throughout one's entire life. This book is a most helpful resource.

Water Washed and Spirit Born: A Baptism Manual for Youth and Adults by Daniel W. Erlander, 2006.

Writer, artist, pastor, theologian, and mystic Dan Erlander has produced a wonderful little manual for youth and adults preparing to "take the plunge." Besides a useful instruction for catechumens, this book is ideal for classes about Baptism or to use for those reaffirming the promises of Baptism.

In a very readable format, complete with original drawings by the author, we are given a picture of the "roots" of Baptism as well as the development of baptismal practices in the New Testament, the early church, and Reformation. The final chapters are devoted to understanding one's own baptismal calling in the world. A particularly helpful piece is called "Baptism and Salvation," where Erlander does a nice job of presenting what the church means when it asserts, "Baptism Saves."

This is a superb resource for catechumens, sponsors, catechists, and pastors.

Reviews by Bryon Hansen

In his recent book, *The Pastor: A Spirituality*, Gordon Lathrop speaks of "the pastor's lifelong catechumenate," that the Christian leader is called to a lifelong mystagogy. "All Christians might continually relearn these texts, continually receive again their gifts, surprises, and questions, and that this might happen especially in the midst of the actual circumstances of people in their vocations."

ON RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

At the 2004 Gathering the presenter, Rev. Canon John Hill, spoke on the work of Rene Girard. John and some other NAAC-ers in Toronto have formed a Centre for Dialogue on Religion and Violence. John's inaugural address on Jan. 25, 2007, is available on the website at www.religionandviolence.org.

The Center aims:

- to bring together ordinary peo-

ple of faith who are concerned about our reliance on violence, • to explore the mimetic scapegoating theory and its implications for our different religious traditions, and • to foster a culture of peace and reconciliation.

Elements of the Centre include study groups, public lectures, interfaith prayer for reconciliation, and an on-line forum.

The founder-sponsor is the Anglican Parish of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Toronto, and the coordinator is its priest, John Hill. John is a member of NAAC and has pursued an interest in the thought of Rene Girard, finding in Girard profound implications for Christian self-understanding. He is also a member of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. john.w.b.hill@sympatico.ca

MAX JOHNSON ARTICLE

Last summer Maxwell Johnson spoke of an article he had submitted on "Christian Initiation at Easter: For 'Joiners,' Not 'Switchers.'" In the article in *Celebrate!* (Jan./Feb. 2007), he urges that the already baptized be received at any time

they are prepared so as to avoid confusion by their being part of the Easter Vigil. He cites Paul Turner: "Current pastoral practice sadly initiates such candidates in much the same way as catechumens. . . . The rites which prepare

baptized Christians for full communion" should be avoided.



ON NAAC GATHERINGS

As a lay practitioner of the catechumenate who is now headed for ordination in the Anglican Church, the annual NAAC conference has worked for me on at least three levels. The speakers and the workshops give me fresh material each year to take home and use in my ministry with seekers. Sometimes, it's very practical and technical material, and sometimes it's more about a new understanding of the philosophy that drives the ministry of the catechumenate – a fresh look at how we think about what we do.

The social aspect of this gathering is also a great attraction for me. I guess it's similar to what a florist would feel at a convention of florists – whoever they might sit next to at lunch is going to be keen to talk about flowers. Similarly, at NAAC gatherings I find myself surrounded by people who are committed to the thing that is closest to my heart – finding ways to share the Way of Christ with seekers. The one-to-one conversations can be very encouraging teaching moments as we share very different stories from our diverse experiences.

Finally, the ecumenical component of our worship at NAAC is uncommonly spectacular. Forms of liturgy and choices of music are widely varied as clergy from a number of denominations take turns leading worship. But even more breathtaking is the sense of unity in the Spirit that prevails when we pray together in hope, seeking direction and vision for the future.

Come and see.

Susanne McKim

■ *"Though individuals journey together, these people should be treated as individuals. This means that any arbitrary definitions of needs and readiness — the framework of September-to-June school year, grade levels achieved, topics covered — are to be set aside in favour of individual needs, readiness, and discernment."* — Margaret Bick

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