

# Easter Vigil: Symbols and Ritual

## Learning Objectives

The Easter Vigil learning session guides learners of all ages to...

- Explore the meaning of the symbols of the Easter fire and the Easter candle as they are celebrated in the opening of the Easter Vigil liturgy.
- Experience a deeper appreciation for the opening rituals of the Easter Vigil liturgy, especially the preparation of the Easter candle.
- Understand and explain why the Church uses a rich diversity of symbolism to express the Paschal Mystery in the context of the Easter Vigil, and explore the relevance and power of that symbolism in daily Christian living.

## Session Overview

**Part 1. (15 minutes)      Gathering & Opening Prayer Service**

**Part 2. (20 minutes)      All Ages Learning**

**Part 3. (90 minutes)      In Depth Learning Experience: Exploring Holy Week**

- Option 1. Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Group Format: Participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

**Part 4. (15 minutes)      Sharing Learning Experiences**

**Part 5. (10 minutes)      Closing Prayer Service**

## Design Options for In-Depth Learning

### Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

### **Facilitation Tips for this Format:**

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

## **Option 2. Age Group Format**

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

### **Facilitation Tips for This Format**

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there's a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while small group leaders move from table to table assisting.

## **Materials Needed**

### **Gathering**

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Handout: *Opening Prayer Service* (four copies)

### **All Ages Opening Learning Experience**

- Handouts: *Cheer Pages*
- Poster board and markers (some groups may want to write their cheers on a cue card)

### **In-Depth Learning Experience**

- Handout: *Mural Items* (one copy per person)
- Handout: *Fire—Symbol of the Paschal Mystery Discussion Questions* (for each teen/adult table)
- Crayons
- Glitter
- Scissors
- Newsprint and marker
- Poster board (at least one per family/adolescent table group)
- Duct tape (one roll for every two tables of families)
- Markers
- Handout: *Easter Candle Symbols I* (one per family/adolescent table group)
- Handout: *Easter Candle Flame* (one per family/adolescent table group)
- One roll of white butcher paper
- Glue sticks (one per family/adolescent table group)
- Handout: *Easter Candle Symbols II* (one for each adult without children)
- Pencils (one per person)
- Bibles for participants (adults without children)
- Handout: *Easter Candle—White (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Cross (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Alpha and Omega (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Five Wounds of Christ (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Blue crepe paper streamers (at least two rolls)
- Blank paper
- Costume material (various colors of fabric that can be draped over the actors' shoulders, belts, ropes, towels for head coverings, etc.; swords and helmets for the Egyptian army can be made from poster board)
- Handout *Easter Vigil Reading—Exodus*
- Staff/stick for Moses
- Handout: *Easter Candle—White (Age Group Format)*
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Cross (Age Group Format)*
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Alpha and Omega (Age Group Format)*
- Handout: *Easter Candle—Five Wounds of Christ (Age Group Format)*

### **Closing**

- Handout: *Closing Prayer Service*

# Session Plan

## Part 1. Gathering (45 minutes)

### Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Ask people to make a nametag.(see below for instructions).
- Distribute the Home Kit for the session, including any handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

### Welcome

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session.

## 1. Group Formation

In the Whole Group Format, organize people into intergenerational groups of approximately eight people OR organize table groups of families with children, adolescents, or adults. If you organize into intergenerational groups, participants will remain with their group for the entire program. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

## 2. Opening Prayer Service

### Preparation

Light a large candle in the front of the room where everyone is gathered. Assign reading parts to people who will be seated in different parts of the room.

Invite everyone into a moment of silent reflection before you begin the prayer.

### Leader: Opening Prayer

Lord of light and goodness, you give us fire as a symbol of your constant presence among us. Guide us with the light of faith as we explore the mysteries of Easter.

Our response to the reading will be: Christ, be our light.

### Reader One

The first words out of the mouth of God in the Bible are, “Let there be light.” Light is the beginning of creation. It dispels darkness and chaos. Christ is the light.

### All

Christ, be our light.

**Reader Two**

Lord of light and goodness, you sent Abraham to the mountain with his beloved and only son, Isaac. Abraham carried a torch that tormented his soul for its purpose was to light a fire that would destroy his son. This fire of destruction became a fire of mercy when you enlightened Abraham's mind and spared his son. May the light of Christ's mercy burn in our hearts.

**All**

Christ, be our light.

**Reader Three**

Lord of light and goodness, you revealed yourself to Moses in a burning bush and inspired him to lead the Israelite slaves out of Egypt. You guided them through the desert darkness by showing your presence in a pillar of fire. Christ, be our guiding light.

**All**

Christ, be our light.

**Leader**

Listen to this closing prayer, which comes from the Liturgy of the Word at the Easter Vigil.

**Closing Prayer**

Lord God, you have brightened this night with the radiance of the risen Christ. Quicken the spirit of sonship in your Church; renew us in mind and body to give you whole-hearted service. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

## Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Easter Candle Cheers (20 minutes)

### Materials

- *Cheer Page* handouts
- Poster board and markers (some groups may want to write their cheers on a cue card)

### Preparation

- Divide the group into smaller intergenerational groups of 10-15 people.
- Make enough copies of the *Cheer Page* handouts so that each group will have a copy of one of the handouts.

### Activity

Use these or similar words to introduce this activity: *What is the name of the largest candle we have in our church?* (Gather responses.)

Summarize:

We call this the Easter candle. We light it during the fifty- day season of Easter, and we also light it outside of the Easter season as a resurrection symbol for baptisms and funerals. Much of today's session will focus on the symbols that are found on the Easter candle: the color white, the cross, the Alpha and Omega, and the five wounds of Christ. It's important for us to show our appreciation for the Easter candle, so we are all going to become cheerleaders today and develop and perform cheers that will help us express *our appreciation for the great symbols of the Easter candle.*

Distribute the *Cheer Page* handouts evenly among the groups. If you have eight groups, you will end up with two groups per symbol. Catechists/table leaders can move among the groups, helping where needed.

Give groups enough time to create and rehearse their cheers.

Invite groups to perform their cheers for the whole group. If you have large numbers of groups, you may want to perform some of the cheers now, and then scatter performances throughout the session for a little comic relief here and there.

## Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experiences (90 minutes)

### Whole Group Format Outline

#### **Learning Experience One (50 Minutes). Fire–Symbol of the Paschal Mystery (All Ages)**

If possible, it is recommended that the adolescents do the *Pillar of Fire* learning experience while the families and adults do the *Fire - Symbol of the Paschal Mystery* learning experience. If this is not possible due to space restrictions, then you will read Exodus 14:15-15:1 for the closing prayer without the drama and the adolescents can be included in the *Fire--Symbol of the Paschal Mystery* learning experience with everyone else.

#### **Learning Experience Two (40 Minutes). Symbols of the Easter Candle (Families with Children, Adolescents, and Adults)**

### Age Group Format Outline

#### **Families with Children**

You can organize the learning activities in two ways. The lesson plan is designed for table groups of two or more families (you can organize individual family groups). Make sure each table has the supplies, instructions, and learning materials necessary to do the activities. A facilitator guides the families through each activity. Leaders move from table to table, assisting families.

**Learning Experience One (50 Minutes). Fire–Symbol of the Paschal Mystery**  
**Learning Experience Two (40 Minutes). Symbols of the Easter Candle**

#### **Adolescents**

**Learning Experience One (40 Minutes). Symbols of the Easter Candle**  
**Learning Experience Two (50 Minutes). Pillar of Fire**

#### **Adults**

**Learning Experience One (90 Minutes). Easter Candle Learning Stations**

# Learning Experience: Fire – Symbol of the Paschal Mystery (50 Minutes)

**Whole Group:** Families with children, adolescents (unless they are on their own doing the Pillar of Fire Learning Experience), adults

**Age Group:** Families with children

## Materials

- Handout Mural Items (one copy per person)
- Handout Fire–Symbol of the Paschal Mystery Discussion Questions (one for each teen/adult table)
- Crayons
- Glue sticks and glitter
- Scissors
- Newsprint and marker

## Preparation

You will need to prepare a space large enough to create a mural that will have tongues of fire, leaves, and flowers representing each participant. You may need to make more than one mural if you have a large group. The mural pieces can be glued to a piece of butcher paper (four yards long will be sufficient in most cases).

## Activity

1. Use these or similar words to introduce this learning experience:

Does anyone know what we mean when we say the words Paschal Mystery? (Gather some responses.)

The Paschal Mystery refers to the great Easter mysteries, that is, the events of Christ's passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Like all mysteries, it is helpful to use symbols to gain a better understanding of the Paschal mystery. Fire is one of the primary symbols we use to help us understand the Paschal mystery, and our Easter Vigil celebration always begins with a fire.

2. Pass out materials for coloring the tongues of fire. Give everyone time to cut out a tongue of fire.

3. Say these or similar words:

Fire can destroy many things; therefore, fire can be considered a symbol of death. Fire is also a symbol of how the Holy Spirit can peacefully destroy or transform sin in our lives. (Note: It is important to distinguish between real fire and the symbolic fire of the Holy Spirit. Real fire destroys things in a physical way, but the fire of the Holy Spirit destroys or transforms sin without physical destruction.)

Ask: What kinds of sin are present in the world today? (Families can address sin in the home, teens can address how sin is present in their schools, and adults can address how sin is present in the



community—local, national, or international.) What kinds of things need to be peacefully destroyed or transformed in families (schools/community) with the fire of the Holy Spirit? Make a list of the responses on a piece of newsprint.

4. Invite each family or table group to select one kind of sin from the list and decide one way in which they can help to address that particular sin. They can each write the sin on their flame as a sign that the fire of God's love can peacefully destroy this sin in the hearts of people.

5. Give the participants time to color their flames and decorate the edges with glitter.

6. Glue or tape all of the tongues of fire to the left side of the mural to create what looks like a bonfire.

7. Draw a tree trunk to the right of the bonfire on the mural.

8. Pass out the leaves from the Mural Items handout (one per person for the families with children tables). Give the families time to color and cut out their leaves. Then add the leaves to the tree trunk on the mural.

9. While the families are working on the tree, the adolescents and adults can discuss the following questions:

- How is the sin that your table decided to address a sign of death in your school/community? In other words, what kinds of things have died or have been pushed aside as a result of this sin being present?
- Who has been hurt as a result of this sin being present?
- What, if anything, is being done about this problem?
- What are some simple things that everyone can do to make the problem better?

10 After the adolescents and adults are finished discussing, and after the families have finished the tree, ask: What would happen if the fire got too close to the tree? (Gather some responses.)

11. Draw a pile of ashes to the right of the tree. Say: If we were to let this pile of ashes remain here for a long time, it would eventually become part of the soil.

12. Draw the sun at the top of the mural above the pile of ashes. Ask: What is the sun made out of? (Responses) The sun is a big ball of fire. It provides us with the energy we need to live on Earth. Before we talked about fire as a symbol of death and destruction, but fire is also a symbol of life. We cannot live without fire. The fire of the sun gives the soil energy to produce life.

13. Pass out the flower from the Mural Items handout (one per person).

14. Invite participants to write on the flower one way in which they will try to address the sin that their group discussed, and then color the flower, cut it out, and tape or glue it on top of the pile of ashes on the mural.

15. When the mural is finished say these or similar words: See how the death of the tree from the bonfire leads to the beautiful new life of the flowers with the help of fire. Fire has both death and life in it. We also have death and the potential for new life in our families, schools, and communities. New life

cannot happen, however, without the power of the Paschal Mystery. It is Christ, dying and rising, who makes sin die in the world and makes goodness come to life in the world.

16. Write the words Christ has died by the bonfire on the mural. Write the words Christ is Risen by the flowers on the mural.

17. Say these or similar words: This is our Easter mystery of faith. This is the Paschal Mystery of faith. The final words of this phrase, "Christ will come again," are a different mystery that is possible because of our Easter mystery.

18. Let us close by praying the Paschal mystery together:

- Christ has died. (Point to the bonfire.)
- Christ is risen. (Point to the flowers.)
- Christ will come again. (Point to everyone in the room.)

# Learning Experience: Symbols of the Easter Candle (40 Minutes)

**Whole Group:** Families with children, adolescents, adults

**Age Group:** Families with children, adolescents

## Materials

- Poster board (one per family/adolescent table group)
- Duct tape (one roll for every two tables of families)
- Markers or crayons
- Handout *Easter Candle Symbols I* (one per family/adolescent table group)
- Handout *Easter Candle Flame* (one per family/adolescent table group)
- One roll of white butcher paper
- Glue sticks (one per family/adolescent table group)

## Preparation

- Roll the poster board with the top and bottom ends of the cylinder being the short side of the poster board. You should end up with a long tube that is about 6" in diameter.
- Tape the seam with duct tape, and put a ring of duct tape around the top, middle, and bottom of the cylinder for extra strength.
- Cut butcher paper so that each piece will wrap around the poster board cylinder. The families or table groups will wrap and tape the butcher paper during the session.
- Prepare table leaders to facilitate discussions at the tables.

## Activity

1. Use these or similar words to introduce the activity:

All Easter candles do not look exactly alike, but they do have certain things in common. There are particular symbols that you can find on every Easter candle. We will take some time to explore the meaning of those symbols as each family or table group makes a model of an Easter candle.

2. Distribute Easter candle-making supplies.
3. Suggest to the families or table groups that they wrap the butcher paper around the poster board cylinder using glue to hold the paper to the cylinder.
4. Say to the group:

The color white is an important symbol on the Easter candle. All Easter candles are white. White is a symbol of victory. Kings in Biblical times often rode white horses after they were victorious in battle. What victory do you think we celebrate at Easter?

Gather some responses and summarize, using the following text if necessary.

We celebrate Christ's resurrection victory over sin and death. Our white candle is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. White symbolizes many other things. Can you think of other things related to Easter that white symbolizes? (There can be many responses such as joy, purity, glory, freedom, cleanliness, etc.)

5. Give the table groups time to cut out and to color the other symbols for the candle.

6. Use the following material to facilitate a discussion of the symbols, and give participants time to add each to their candle:

- The Cross: Ask, What happened to Jesus on the cross? (He died.) What happened next? (He was buried and God raised him from the dead.) The cross is a symbol of Christ's power over death and sin. It reminds us that no matter what happens in our lives, nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God and from life with God. The cross represents our hope in times of trouble. It reminds us that bad things in life will never be able to totally conquer good things. Good is more powerful than evil.
- Alpha and Omega: Alpha means beginning and Omega means end. Jesus Christ existed with God before time began and he lives at the end of time calling all of history to come toward his promise of love and eternal life with God. Jesus will be with you personally in a special way at the end of your life and will be with all of us at the end of the world.
- The Current Year: If we have already shown that Christ is at the beginning and the end of time, why do you think we put the number of the current year on our Easter candle? (Gather some responses and summarize with the text provided if necessary.)
- Not only is Jesus present at the beginning and the end, he is also present with us now. Jesus is the Lord of all time. Every moment is an opportunity to encounter him and find joy and meaning in life. We glorify God every time we acknowledge the unwavering presence of Christ in our daily lives.
- The Five Wounds: The five wounds of Christ are a symbol of God's protection. Christ entered suffering and death in order to guard and protect us from despair. We all must face suffering and death in our lives. The wounds of Christ remind us that our God has been there, in the midst of great suffering and horrible death, before us. No Christian suffers or dies alone. Christ is there to be with us and protect us from evil.

7. Invite families or table groups to complete their Easter candle by coloring and attaching the flame to the top of the candle.

8. Ask if anyone recalls the meaning of fire from the earlier fire learning experience.

9. When the candles are complete, lead your table group through the process that they will see at the Easter Vigil liturgy when the priest prepares the Easter candle. You will find the instructions in the Sacramentary at the beginning of the Easter Vigil liturgy under the section entitled *Solemn Beginning of the Vigil: the Service of Light*.

# Learning Experience: Symbols of Easter—Adults (40 Minutes)

**Whole Group:** Adults

## Materials

- Handout *Easter Candle Symbols* (one per person)
- Pencils (one per person)
- Bibles for participants
- Handout *Easter Candle—White (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle—Cross (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle—Alpha and Omega (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle—Five Wounds of Christ (Whole Group Format)* (for table leader)

## Preparation

- Prepare the table leaders to facilitate the discussions at their tables. (IMPORTANT: Make sure you are using the Whole Group Format handouts.)
- Divide the adults into four or eight table groups depending upon the number of participants. There are four different handouts, one for each grouping. For example, one table will read and discuss the significance of white, another the cross, and so on. Then they will form new groups with three or more other people who have studied a different aspect of the Easter candle.
- Assign each table a number starting with one and proceeding in numerical order.
- Assign each participant at each table a letter. If there are six participants at a table, they will be lettered a-b-c-d-e-f.

## Activity

1. Use these or similar words to introduce this learning experience:

Each year at the Easter Vigil liturgy, we prepare and light our Easter candle, also known as the paschal candle. We light the Easter candle during the Easter season and outside of the Easter season when we have baptisms and funerals. The Easter candle is the most prominent candle in the church and it is filled with rich symbolism. During this learning experience, we will explore the four primary symbols on the Easter candle: the color white, the cross, the Alpha and Omega, and the five wounds of Christ. Each table group will explore one symbol in detail, and then we will mix up the table groups so that each person has an opportunity to hear the results of each group's discussion. Each person will receive a handout with a drawing of the Easter candle on it. Feel free to take notes on this paper as you learn about each symbol.

2. Pass out the *Easter Candle Symbols (Adults)* handout and a Bible to each participant. Invite the tables to begin their discussions.
3. When discussions are complete, reorganize the tables so that there is a representative from each group at each new table group. You can accomplish this by asking all of the people who were assigned the letter "a" to go to a certain table or tables. Do the same with all the other letters that were assigned.
4. Invite each new table group to share with each other what they heard and learned at their original table group. Use the instructions on the handouts to bring this learning experience to its conclusion.

# Learning Experience: Pillar of Fire (50 Minutes)

**Age Group:** Adolescents

## Materials

- Crayons (black, red, orange, and yellow)
- Poster board
- Scissors
- Blue crepe paper streamers (at least two rolls)
- Blank paper
- Pencils
- Easter candles from previous learning experience (in Whole Group Format, candles will be made after this learning experience)
- Costume material (various colors of fabric that can be draped over the actors' shoulders, belts, ropes, towels for head coverings, etc.; swords and helmets for the Egyptian army can be made from poster board)
- Handout *Easter Vigil Reading—Exodus*
- Staff/stick for Moses

## Preparation

- Draw flame cutouts on pieces of poster board. You can fit four flames on each piece of poster board. You may draw them freehand or you may use the flame template from the *Mural Items* handout. If you use the template, you will have to enlarge it by using a photocopy machine or by copying it to a transparency and using an overhead projector to trace the flame onto the poster board.

## Activity

1. Introduce this activity using these or similar words:

Our task is to prepare a dramatic reading of Exodus 14:15-15:1 for the closing prayer today. This reading is one of the Old Testament readings that we will hear at the Easter Vigil liturgy. It is the story of Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea while the Egyptian army is pursuing them. The Israelites, a nation of slaves, are following God through the desert to freedom in the Promised Land. God is represented by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. First we will create the representation of God and the Red Sea.

2. Pass out the poster boards, the scissors, and the crayons.

3. Invite each participant to cut out one flame and color it black on one side and red, orange, or yellow on the other side.

4. Divide your group in half. Half of the group will play the role of God. Give each person two flame cutouts and have them huddle together in a group. Instruct them to hold the cutouts close to each other to create the effect of one flame or one cloud. When they hold the cutouts black side out, they are representing God in the pillar of cloud. When they hold the cutouts colored side out, they are

representing God in the pillar of fire. The fire effect is better if they wiggle the cutouts when they have the colored side facing out.

5. Cut strips of blue crepe paper about 10 feet long for the Red Sea. Several people can hold the strips (some at one end while others hold the opposite ends). They can shake the strips to make a wave effect. When Moses holds his staff out over the sea, part of the group can move to one side and the other part can move in the opposite direction to make a path for the Israelites to pass through. When the Egyptian army is in the path, they can tangle up the army members in the strips of crepe paper as they close in on the path.

6. Use the handout *Easter Vigil Reading—Exodus* to develop a dramatic reading of this story. You will need the following characters:

- Narrator
- Moses
- God’s voice (comes from the pillar of cloud or fire)
- The Red Sea
- The Egyptian army
- The Israelites.

7. Give the participants enough time to develop and rehearse the reading.

8. At the end of the play, the actors will drop all of their props and some of them will pick up the Easter candles that they made during the previous learning experience. They will then lead a procession of the participants around the room while they chant the words of the Easter Vigil procession with the Easter candle:

Candle bearers: *Christ our light.*

All others: *Thanks be to God.*

9. It is important to rehearse the procession as well as the dramatic reading, so that the candle bearers know exactly what is expected of them.

# Learning Experience: Easter Candle Learning Stations (90 Minutes)

**Age Group:** Adults

## Materials

- Handout *Easter Candle Symbols (Adults)* (one per person)
- Pencils (one per person)
- Bibles for participants
- Handout *Easter Candle–White (Age Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle–Cross (Age Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle–Alpha and Omega (Age Group Format)* (for table leader)
- Handout *Easter Candle–Five Wounds of Christ (Age Group Format)* (for table leader)

## Preparation

- Prepare the table leaders to facilitate the discussions at their tables. (IMPORTANT: Make sure you are using the Age Group Format handouts.)
- Divide the adults into four or eight groups depending upon the number of participants.
- Develop a plan to rotate the participant groups through the four stations. You may have to have eight stations (two for each symbol) if you have large numbers of participants.

## Activity

1. Use these or similar words to introduce this learning experience:

Each year at the Easter Vigil liturgy, we prepare and light our Easter candle. We light the Easter candle during the Easter season and outside of the Easter season when we have baptisms and funerals. The Easter candle is the most prominent candle in the church and it is filled with rich symbolism. During this learning experience, we will explore the four primary symbols on the Easter candle: the color white, the cross, the Alpha and Omega, and the five wounds of Christ. Each table group will explore one symbol in detail, and then move to another station to explore the next symbol. Each person will receive a handout with a drawing of the Easter candle on it. Feel free to take notes on this paper as you learn about each symbol.

2. Pass out the *Easter Candle Symbols* handout and a Bible to each participant.
3. Invite the table leaders to begin their discussions.
4. Call time at twenty minutes and move participant groups from station to station until all participants have been to all four learning stations.
5. After the four rotations are complete, walk the participants through the Preparation of the Candle. You can find this ritual in the Sacramentary under Part One of the Easter Vigil section. You may want to do the motions of the priest as you recite the prayer of the Preparation of the Candle.



## Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections \*15 minutes)

### Advanced Preparation

- Determine what each group will bring back to the large group or to their small group to share as a result of their learning.
- Determine how each group will share their reports or projects so that they “teach” the other groups about the event and theme.

### Whole Group Sharing and Reflection

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. If the session has been conducted in intergenerational groups ask participants to remain with their group. If the session was conducted in the age group format, ask people to rejoin their intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience OR ask family members to rejoin their own family and individual adolescent and adult participants to stay with their age groups from the In-Depth Learning Experience.

Ask the participants to share what they learned in a small group setting or by inviting participants or groups, representing families, teens, and adults, to share projects or reflections with the entire group.

Then present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to learn about the Easter Vigil. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned in this session:

- What is one thing you learned about the Easter Vigil that you did not know before?
- What do you look forward to experiencing during the Easter Vigil this year?
- Why do you think the Easter Vigil is so important for us as Catholics?

## Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

### Preparation

Prepare a space in your all-ages gathering room for the adolescents' dramatic reading of Exodus 14:15-15:1.

### Leader

Lord God, you give us the gift of fire as a symbol of your guiding presence. We will follow our pillar of fire, the Easter candle, in procession when we begin our Easter Vigil celebration. Give us the purity of heart that will allow us to see you dying and rising in that fire as we die to our own sin and rise to new life with you this Easter.

### Dramatic Reading of Exodus 14:15-15:1

#### Introduction

Moses and the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt and are on their way to the Promised Land, but things have gone sour and their past is catching up to them. They are now caught between a rock and a hard place; they can drown in the Red Sea before them, or they can get destroyed by the Egyptian army behind them. Let us pause, watch, and listen as the drama of the Easter reading unfolds before us.

#### Dramatic Reading

### Easter Litany

**Reader:** Lord Jesus, we celebrate your glory with the Easter color of white. May the radiant joy and purity of your resurrection save us from the darkness of sin.

**All:** Save us, Lord Jesus.

**Reader:** Lord Jesus, your empty cross reminds us that you have conquered death and the power of sin. We rejoice in the hope of a life on Earth filled with grace and the promise of eternal life.

**All:** Save us, Lord Jesus.

**Reader:** Lord Jesus, you are the beginning of everything we think, say, and do. You are the end toward which we strive. May we be creative in our beginnings so that we will taste glory at our end.

**All:** Save us, Lord Jesus.

**Reader:** Lord Jesus, you endured the wounds of crucifixion as a testimony to your commitment to the power of love. May we endure in our loving commitments and fill the world with peace.

**All:** Save us, Lord Jesus.

### Closing

Close with the blessing that the priest does during the preparation of the Easter candle at the Easter Vigil liturgy. You can find this ritual in the Sacramentary under Part One of the Easter Vigil section. You may want to do the motions of the priest on one of the poster board Easter candles as you recite the prayer of the Preparation of the Candle.