

SESSION 14

Be Sealed

The Mystagogy of the Rite • Every Thread Resolves

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Fourteen weeks ago, candidates sealed a guess about what the bishop will actually say and do, and parents sealed a memory of their own Confirmation. Tonight the pages open, and then the Rite itself opens, walked element by element with the study's whole map in hand: the presentation of the candidates, the renewal of baptismal promises, the bishop's outstretched hands and the prayer for the sevenfold gift, the sponsor's hand on the shoulder, the sacred chrism, the words "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit," and the exchange of peace. Nothing in the Rite is arbitrary; every gesture and word gathers threads this group has been holding for months, read in the light the Church's tradition has always read them. The session ends where the study began: with the breath of God, now about to be given to them.

Catholic Touchstone

The bishop extends his hands over the candidates and prays for the outpouring of the Spirit with his sevenfold gift (CCC 1299). The essential rite follows: the anointing with sacred chrism on the forehead, done by the laying on of the hand, with the words "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1300). The chrism itself, perfumed oil consecrated by the bishop, ordinarily at the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, carries the whole meaning of anointing the study has traced from Samuel's horn to tonight (CCC 1297).

What You Need to Know

This session runs differently. The sealed pages replace the Win questions; the Rite walkthrough replaces the usual Build scenes; and your job is mostly traffic control while fourteen weeks of planted connections fire on their own. Bring the Order of Confirmation and read the actual liturgical texts from it at the marked moments; hearing the real words, tonight, before the day itself, is the mystagogy. Prepare more than usual and plan to say less than usual.

The opening ceremony, exactly. Collect nothing in advance. Parents first: invite volunteers to read their sealed memory aloud; expect thin memories, funny details, and one or two unexpectedly moving ones, and receive every kind with equal honor, especially "almost nothing," which you promised in week one would matter, and tonight it does: it is about to be impossible for their child, who will know exactly what happened and why. Then candidates: every candidate reads their sealed guess aloud, quickly, around the room, no commentary yet. Write the guesses' common elements on a board if you have one. THEN walk the Rite, and let each candidate discover in real time how close they came. Score-keeping is allowed and fun; the guess that lands closest gets applause.

Chrism, precisely, because tonight the oil thread resolves. Sacred chrism is perfumed oil, commonly olive oil mixed with balsam (current discipline permits another plant oil with perfume), consecrated by the bishop, ordinarily at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, and used in only three sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, plus the consecration of churches and altars. The Church's tradition hears in it the fulfillment of Exodus 30's sacred anointing oil, reserved and never for

ordinary use, exactly as the group learned in Session 3. The word chrism and the word Christ are the same root, and St. Cyril's sentence from Session 3 comes due tonight: having received the anointing, you have become christs. If your parish can arrange for the group to SEE the chrism in the ambry after the session, do it; fourteen weeks of oil deserves a look at the actual oil.

The formula's own story. The words "N., be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit" come from St. Paul VI's 1971 revision, which chose a formula corresponding in meaning to the ancient words of the Byzantine Rite, so that West and East now seal with substantially one meaning. The word "Gift" is capitalized on purpose: the Gift IS the Holy Spirit himself, the promise of the Father, Acts 2:38's "gift of the Holy Spirit" placed on each forehead by name. Every word of the formula is a session of this study: the NAME (Session 13), BE SEALED (Session 10), the GIFT (Session 7), the HOLY SPIRIT (all of it).

The peace is the locked room. After the anointing, the bishop says: Peace be with you. Do not let this pass as liturgical filler. "Peace be with you" is the first sentence of the risen Christ behind the shut doors of Easter evening (John 20:19), the greeting of the scene in which he breathed the Spirit on the apostles (20:21-22). The Rite ends the anointing by putting the newly sealed in that room, on Easter evening, receiving the risen Lord's own greeting. When the group catches this one, and they will, the study's first night and its last night close like a ring.

For the parents in the room. Tonight many parents discover, in detail, the sacrament they received but never had explained. Expect real emotion, and expect the quiet grief of "nobody ever showed me this." The answer to that grief is standing next to them: they just spent fourteen weeks making sure their child will never say it. Name that plainly at the close; it is the truest thing you can send them home with. The steelman tonight, Confirmation as graduation, is also chiefly for parents; give it full strength, because they have watched it happen.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Exodus 30 (the sacred anointing oil, reserved and never ordinary) is heard by the Church's tradition as fulfilled in sacred chrism; 1 Samuel 16 (oil poured, Spirit given, one event) finds its echo on each forehead.
- Ezekiel 9 (the mark set on the foreheads of the faithful, the tav St. Jerome saw as cross-shaped) has traditionally been read as foreshadowing the chrismed cross traced on each candidate's forehead.
- Numbers 11:29 and Joel 2:28, Moses' wish and Joel's promise, fulfilled in Christ's gift of the Spirit to his whole people, reach one candidate at a time, by name, in your parish, on a date already on the calendar.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Mystagogical Catecheses, Lecture 3*)

The group heard St. Cyril in Session 3; tonight they hear the rest of him. Teaching the newly anointed of Jerusalem, he told them that as Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit at the Jordan, so they, coming up from the sacred waters, were given the anointing, the figure of that very Spirit, and thereby became christs, anointed ones, sharers in the Anointed One himself. Everything Cyril said sixteen centuries ago about candidates like yours, the Rite will say over yours, with the same oil family and the same Gift.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Paul VI (*Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 1971)

St. Paul VI, revising the Rite for the whole Latin Church in *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, gave the Latin Church the formula "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit," explaining that it aptly expresses the sacrament's effect and corresponds in meaning to the ancient formula of the Byzantine Rite. The essential words spoken over a candidate in Nebraska thus carry substantially the meaning spoken over Eastern candidates for well over a millennium: one seal, confessed by East and West together.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolycus*, around AD 180)

When pagans mocked the very name "Christian," St. Theophilus of Antioch answered the mockery by owning the word's root: we are called Christians, he wrote, because we are anointed with the oil of God. Within a century and a half of the Resurrection, the family name of the whole Church was being explained by the anointing. Your candidates are about to receive, on their own skin, the thing their name has meant all along.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1297.** The consecration of sacred chrism, ordinarily by the bishop at the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, is an important action that precedes the celebration.
- **CCC 1299.** The bishop extends his hands over the candidates and prays for the outpouring of the Spirit with his sevenfold gift (the Catechism's wording names wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord; the English Order of Confirmation renders the last pair "reverence" and "wonder and awe in God's presence").
- **CCC 1300.** The essential rite: the anointing with sacred chrism on the forehead, done by the laying on of the hand, with the words: Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thread Watch: Final Accounting

Every thread resolves tonight; know the ledger. Thread A, the Breath: resolved at Pentecost, echoed tonight in the bishop's epicletic outstretched hands and in "Peace be with you," the locked room's greeting. Thread B, few to all: resolved by Peter's sermon, enacted tonight one name at a time. Thread C, the Oil: RESOLVES TONIGHT in sacred chrism; the thread you have guarded since Samuel's horn in Session 2 ends at the ambry. The two-stage pattern: the candidates, baptized long ago, complete the pattern of the dry bones, the locked room, Samaria, and Ephesus in their own bodies. The sealed pages: opened tonight, by design, at the start. Your only discipline left is to let the group say the connections before you do. They can. You built it that way.

Session Goals

1. Every sealed page has been opened and honored, and the best guess has gotten its applause.
2. The group has walked the entire Rite with the actual liturgical texts read aloud, and can explain every element from the study's own material.

3. Thread C has resolved at the chrism, and the John 20 "Peace be with you" connection has been caught, preferably not by you.
4. The group has faced the "Confirmation is graduation" objection at full strength and knows why this study is itself the answer.
5. Every household has chosen its one permanent practice, and knows the study's last assignment.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 90 minutes, and tonight is worth it; warn households in advance. If you absolutely must land at 75: trim the parent-memory readings to three volunteers, skip the Dig Deeper box, and compress the steelman to your own five-minute presentation. Never cut the candidate guesses, the full Rite walkthrough with real texts, or the closing blessing; those ARE the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit. Fourteen weeks ago we sealed our guesses and our memories, and You have been unsealing Yourself to us ever since: breath and oil, wind and fire, hands and promises. Tonight we open everything. Open the pages, open the Rite, open our eyes, and get us ready, because the next scene is not in this room. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Opening of the Pages

In place of Win questions. Take Take-Home 1 in hand; sealed boxes only now.

Parents first. Volunteers read their sealed memory aloud: what they wrote, fourteen weeks ago, about their own Confirmation. Receive every kind with equal honor, the vivid, the funny, and especially the "almost nothing," which was promised in week one to matter tonight. When the readings finish, say why it matters: whatever was or was not explained to the parents of this room, their candidates will walk to the bishop knowing exactly what is happening and why, because these parents sat here for fourteen weeks to make it so.

Candidates next. Around the room, every candidate reads their sealed guess: what will the bishop actually say and do? No commentary, no corrections; collect the common elements out loud or on a board. Then say: in about an hour, you will know exactly how close you came, and the best guess in this room gets applause. Now we open the Rite.

Build: Walking the Rite

Read the actual texts from the Order of Confirmation at each step. After each element, ask the room the same question: "Where have we seen this?" and let them answer before you do. The notes below are your net, not your script.

Element One: The Presentation and the Promises

Question 1. The candidates are presented, ordinarily by the pastor or another minister according to the Order of Confirmation, with parents and sponsors close at hand, and then the bishop asks them to stand and renew, in their own voices, the baptismal promises that first marked their Christian life, for most, promises once made for them by others: the renunciations, and the Creed, asked and answered. Why does the Rite have them say out loud, as their own, what for many was once said for them? Where have we seen the shape of this?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because tonight the faith changes voices. At most of their baptisms, parents and godparents answered for infants who could not speak (candidates baptized as adults spoke for themselves, and renew what they once professed); now the Church puts the same questions to the candidates and waits for their own "I do." This is the hinge of the whole intergenerational study: the parents, whose formation carried the candidates from the font to this night, watch their work change voices, and the candidates answer, the first act of the adult faith the sacrament equips. The Ephesian twelve heard and answered before Paul's hands came down; the Samaritans believed before Peter and John arrived; faith spoken precedes the Spirit's completing gift, in Acts and in your parish alike. And note the parents' place in the Rite's own vision: canon law and the Order treat the parents' formation of their candidates as primary and irreplaceable, whatever local practice assigns for the presenting

itself. Fourteen weeks ago we said parents never lose their role. The Church's law agrees in writing.

Element Two: The Outstretched Hands and the Sevenfold Prayer

Read the bishop's prayer over the candidates from the Order of Confirmation, in full, slowly. Then:

Question 2. The bishop, with any concelebrating priests, extends his hands over ALL the candidates together and prays. You just heard the prayer. Inventory it: what gesture is being made, and what, exactly, is being asked for, item by item? Where have we seen every single piece of this?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The gesture is the laying on of hands, extended over the whole group: Moses over Joshua, Peter and John over Samaria, Paul over the Ephesian twelve, the sign the apostles chose and the Church never put down (Sessions 8 and 9, paid again in front of them). And the asking is the sevenfold gift, by name: wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and reverence, wonder and awe in God's presence, Isaiah 11's portrait of the Spirit resting on the shoot of Jesse (Session 3), the Messiah's own equipment claimed as the candidates' inheritance (Session 11), prayed over them by a successor of the apostles. Some candidate will notice the list is the one they memorized and prayed over their house, seven gifts in seven days. When they say so, the answer is: yes. It was always this prayer you were practicing.

Element Three: The Anointing

Walk it in order, slowly, reading the formula from the Order of Confirmation: the sponsor's hand on the candidate's shoulder; the name given; the bishop's thumb in sacred chrism tracing the cross on the forehead; the words: "N., be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit"; the answer: "Amen."

Question 3. First, the oil, because a thread fourteen weeks long ends here. Sacred chrism: olive oil mixed with fragrant balsam, consecrated by the bishop at the Chrism Mass, used only for Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders and the consecration of churches and altars. Where have we seen this oil, and what does its very name confess?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

This is Exodus 30's "most holy" anointing oil arrived at its destination: set apart, consecrated, never for ordinary use, marking what it touches as claimed for God (Session 3, where the leader's notes have been holding this connection under seal since week three; you may now say so, and enjoy their faces). It is Samuel's horn, poured now not on one shepherd but on every candidate, and as in 1 Samuel 16:13, sign and Gift arrive as one event. Its name is its confession: chrism, christos, Christ, one root; St. Theophilus told mocking pagans that Christians are so called because we are anointed with the oil of God, and St. Cyril told his candidates the sentence this study has owed your group since Session 3: having received the anointing, you have become christs. The candidates asked in week three why Peter could say Jesus was anointed when no oil appears in the Gospels; tonight the question completes its orbit: the Anointed One was anointed with the Spirit Himself, and at Confirmation the anointing with chrism gives what it signifies, the same Spirit, to each of His christs. If the parish can show the group the actual chrism in the ambry tonight, this is the moment it pays for.

Question 4. Now the words and the mark. A cross, traced in chrism, on the FOREHEAD, with the candidate's chosen NAME, and the formula: "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." Take it apart, word by word and gesture by gesture: where has this study seen every piece? And candidates: check your guesses.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The forehead: Ezekiel's man with the writing case, marking the foreheads of the faithful, with St. Jerome's typological observation that the ancient tav was written in a cross-like shape; Revelation's servants of God sealed on their foreheads. In the Church's traditional reading, the chrismed cross on the forehead answers the mark Ezekiel saw (Session 10), a foreshadowing arriving home rather than a proof-text. The name: spoken aloud, possibly a new one, chosen with a patron attached (Session 13, and Revelation 2:17's white stone). "Be sealed": the sphragis of Session 10, ownership, authentication, protection, permanence, the indelible character that is why this moment happens once in a lifetime. "The GIFT of the Holy Spirit": Peter's own phrase from Pentecost afternoon, Acts 2:38, the promise "to you and to your children" now landing on a particular child whose parent is watching from the pew; and Simon Magus's corrective built in, for a Gift, by definition, is never bought or earned (Session 8). And St. Paul VI's decision means these words are the ancient East's words too: one formula, both lungs. Then the shortest word in the exchange, and the candidate's personal answer to the sacramental words: Amen. (They will also have renewed their baptismal promises aloud, and will answer the greeting of peace; but at the anointing itself, their whole speaking part is the Bible's word for "yes, truly, let it be so," which is, if you think about it, the whole job.) Now: whose guess came closest? Applause as promised.

Element Four: The Peace

Question 5. The bishop concludes: "Peace be with you." And the newly confirmed answers: "And with your spirit." Last question of the study, and it should be answered by anyone but you: where is the FIRST place in this study, and in the Gospel, that a room full of Jesus' people heard "Peace be with you," and what happened next in that room?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The locked room, Easter evening, John 20:19: "Peace be with you" is the first sentence of the risen Christ to his gathered Church; he showed them his hands and side, said it again, and then, in that same scene, breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Rite's final exchange places every newly sealed candidate inside that room: greeted by the risen Lord's own words, on the far side of receiving the Spirit, commissioned like the Ten. Which means the study has closed its ring: night one began with the breath of God over the waters and ended with a glimpse of that locked room; night fourteen ends with your candidates standing in it. When someone lands this connection, and in a group that has come this far someone will, let there be a moment of quiet, and then say the only thing left to say: the next scene is not in this room. It is in a church, with a bishop, on a date already on the calendar, and everyone here knows exactly what will happen there, and Who.

The Push-Back: The Sacrament of Goodbye

The last steelman, and mostly for the parents. Build it at full strength; they have watched it happen.

The objection. Look at the actual results. In parish after parish, Confirmation functions as graduation: the retention numbers are grim, the pews thin out the Sunday after, and everyone in this room can name confirmed Catholics, some in their own families, for whom the sacrament visibly changed nothing. If Confirmation truly conferred power from on high, the data would show it. It does not. Whatever the theology says, the sociology says this is a rite of passage that operates, in practice, as an exit ritual, and preparing teenagers for it with fourteen weeks of study is elaborate staging for a goodbye.

Question 6. Concede the data first; pretending otherwise insults everyone's intelligence. Then bring the whole study to bear: what have fourteen weeks taught this room about how God's gifts relate to human freedom, unopened cargo, and growing seasons, and what, concretely, is the answer to the exit-ritual pattern? Look around the table before answering.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Concede it whole: the retention pattern is real, the grief behind the objection is real, and several people at your tables are carrying a name while it is discussed; handle it like the pastoral live wire it is. But the study has spent fourteen weeks building the categories that answer it. A sacrament is not a spell; grace is real AND resistible, which is Session 10 verbatim: the seal is indelible, and the sealed can still grieve the Spirit, and Augustine's deserter still carries the brand, which is precisely why he can come home without being re-sealed; the door the data mourns is the same door that never closes. Gifts can ride unopened for decades, which is Session 9: the Ephesian twelve ran sincerely on an unfinished formation until someone asked them one question, and Timothy himself had to be told to REKINDLE a gift gone banked; unopened is not empty. Fruit grows in seasons, not weekends, which is Session 12: auditing a sixteen-year-old's faith the autumn after Confirmation is inspecting an orchard in week one. And enlistment is not annulled by desertion: soldiers walking away does not prove the commissioning empty; it proves the war real. Then the concrete answer, and deliver it looking at them: the exit-ritual pattern feeds on candidates who were sacramentalized without being evangelized, sealed without ever once reading Samaria, anointed without knowing what oil means, and the counter-practice is not a program; it is what this room has been DOING: fourteen weeks, Scripture open, parents beside candidates, every objection faced at full strength, every question answered or honestly held. The honest remainder, because this study ends as it lived: no preparation compels a free heart, and some of these candidates will still drift, and if they do, everything tonight remains true about them, the seal, the brand, the open door, the Father on the porch. But nobody leaves this study able to say they were never told. That was the point of it. Look around the table: you were the answer to this objection, and you have been for three and a half months.

DIG DEEPER

1 Peter 2:9. If time allows, one hidden discovery remains: the fisherman from the charcoal fire, writing to scattered ordinary Christians, calls them "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people... that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness." Set it beside Session 3, and beside the Church's teaching that the baptized share in Christ's offices of priest, prophet, and king (CCC 783-786): royal priesthood, prophetic declaring, a people belonging to the King. The verse names its own titles; the threefold-office reading is the

Church's, and it was hiding in plain sight.

Send: The Last Questions

1. You now know exactly what will be said and done over you, and what every word and gesture means. What do you want to be true of you as you walk back down the aisle that day, one sentence?
2. Parents: you have watched your candidate for fourteen weeks. Tell them, right now, at this table, one way you have seen the Spirit already at work in them. Do not generalize. Candidates: your only job is to hear it.

Live It: From Here to the Day, and After

Three assignments, and the study is complete. First: as a household, choose tonight the ONE practice from these fourteen weeks, the morning breath prayer, the hand blessing, the gift-spotting, the Come Holy Spirit, any of them, that becomes permanent in your house, and say your choice out loud at the table before you leave. Second: from tonight until the day, candidates and parents pray daily for the candidate's Confirmation day and for the bishop by name; the prayer you learned in Session 7 is built for exactly this. Third: candidates, sometime before the day, write a letter to yourself to be opened in five years, and put one thing in it: what you knew, tonight, that you never want to forget. Seal it. You have practice.

Closing Blessing

Do this exactly. *Have every parent (or, for adult candidates, whoever accompanied them here) stand behind their candidate and place a hand on the candidate's shoulder, the sponsor's posture, borrowed for one night by the ones who started it all at the font. Then the leader prays, slowly, over every bowed head:*

Leader: *All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You freed these Your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life in Baptism. Send Your Holy Spirit upon them: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, and fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in Your presence. Keep every promise You have made them, and bring us all together to the day when every seal is opened. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 14, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **The Order of Confirmation** (the liturgical texts, read at each element; obtain from your pastor)
- **Acts 8:14-17; Acts 19:5-6** (recalled: the hands, Elements One and Two)
- **Isaiah 11:1-3** (recalled: the sevenfold prayer, Element Two)
- **Exodus 30:25-32; 1 Samuel 16:13** (recalled: the chrism, Element Three)
- **Ezekiel 9:4; Acts 2:38-39; Revelation 2:17** (recalled: forehead, Gift, name, Element Three)
- **John 20:19-22** (recalled: Peace be with you, Element Four)
- **2 Timothy 1:6-7; Galatians 5:22-23** (Push-Back answer: rekindle; seasons)
- **1 Peter 2:9** (Dig Deeper: the royal priesthood)
- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** (memory verse: anointed, sealed, guaranteed, finally in full)

Catechism: CCC 1297, 1299, 1300.

Voices: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Mystagogical Catecheses, 3); St. Paul VI (Divinae Consortium Naturae); St. Theophilus of Antioch (To Autolycus).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 14, one per household. The study is complete. Well done, good and faithful leader.