



# A SYNODAL DISCERNMENT ON A CATECHETICAL DRAMA CALLED “SERVICE OF LIGHT,” ITS IMPACT ON THE INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND EDIFICATION OF FAITH OF THE LAITY

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*Synodality is a vital characteristic of the Catholic Church's life and mission, highlighting joint revitalization through listening, discernment, and active participation. Inspired by this concept, researchers started a study exploring the impact of the "Service of Light," a catechetical drama observed during Easter vigil, on local parishioners within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in the Philippines. Employing an exploratory and qualitative approach, the researchers examined the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in images and narratives surrounding this ritual, using Roland Barthes' semiotic model for analysis. The study involved visiting five local Catholic parishes within the archdiocese, conducting purposive sampling for survey interviews, and gathering visuals. Results uncovered meaningful impacts of the Service of Light on the integral Christian education and spiritual edification of the parishioners. The catechetical drama served as a powerful teaching tool that deepened the parishioners' understanding of Christian doctrine. It helped develop a sense of belonging within their faith community. Moreover, the Service of Light generated spiritual renewal and strengthened individual faith. The ritual's symbolism aroused a deeper connection with God, empowering parishioners to live out their faith more fully in daily life. The Service of Light was acknowledged as a tool of faith that continues to inspire the parishioners to bear fruit for years to come. In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of the Service of Light in parishioners' Christian education and spiritual journey, emphasizing its role in fostering community, deepening understanding of faith, and inspiring personal and communal growth. As a recommendation, the researchers are suggesting future research to explore the perspectives of ordained clergy for a comprehensive understanding of its impact on Christian communities.*

**Keywords:** Service of Light, Easter Vigil, Semiosis, Resurrection, Christ as Light of the world

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When [Pope Francis](#) convened a synod of bishops in Rome on October 10, 2021, he brought the theme of synodality to the forefront of the Church. His Holiness has invited all the members of the universal Church to take the path of synodality, which is decisive for the Church's life and mission, as it is what God expects of the Church of the third millennium to be according to him. In a global sense, taking the path of synodality denotes moving towards a Church that is more fruitful at the service of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. It calls for the members of the Church at all levels to journey together to renew mindsets and ecclesial structures amid the present signs of the times. The path of synodality involves a spiritual process of listening, discernment, and participation. The process of listening leads us to listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times to discern what God is saying to all of us (Synod of Bishops, 2021). Discernment involves reflection and engages both the heart and head in making decisions in our concrete lives to look for and find the will of God. Fostering participation leads us to involve others who hold different views than we do (Synod of Bishops, 2021). According to Pope Francis, the purpose of the Synod is to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands (*Preparatory Document*, #32). This purpose could only be achieved upon grounding on the lived experiences of the members of the Church, and being given the chance to be listened to, reflected on, and discerned.

Taking inspiration from the path of synodality, its spiritual process, and its purpose, the researchers considered doing a study on one of the catechetical dramas seen and participated in by the members of the local churches in the country. The life of the Church is animated by various liturgical celebrations. These are public acts of worship of the universal Church for the people or members of the local churches. They are what Catholics usually take part in. And in those liturgical celebrations, are found catechetical dramas (Santander, 2023). Catechetical drama is a creative religious ritual that is done on purpose to imply certain catechetical principles for people to know, reflect on, or simply be reminded about. The researchers had chosen the service of light or liturgy of light held during Easter vigil in the Catholic Christian community. Traditionally, the Easter Vigil ceremony is celebrated on Saturday evening, wherein the ritual of light begins outside the church with the lighting of the Paschal fire, then transferred into the church via the Paschal Candle. So, as the priest manages through the darkened church with the candle, he sings "Christ our Light" three times to which the congregation responds, "Thanks be to God." The celebration of light at the easter vigil is such a dramatic and meaningful rite to behold. How peculiarly it is celebrated in the local parishes in the Philippines is what this research would like to explore, and more importantly, to discern how the faithful understand its meaning and impact on their faith-life as Catholic Christians in the country. Also, from these lived experiences of the faithful, the researchers would like to look for those essential elements that can help contribute to the integral education on and edification of the faith of the people and to help achieve their well-being as well.





## Statement of Research Problem

The proponents of this research would like to answer the relevant question, “*How is the service of light, a catechetical drama, impactful on the education and edification of the Catholic parishioners’ faith within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in Ilocos Sur Region?*”

## STATEMENT OF SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

This research has the following specific aims:

1. Explore the colorful celebration of the service of light in some local churches within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in Ilocos Sur Region.
2. Discover the denotative and connotative meaning of the service of light ritual using different images taken by the members of the local parishes of the said archdiocese and by listening to their shared lived experiences.
3. Discern the meaning and impact of the service of light on the integral education of the faith of Catholic Christians in the said archdiocese.
4. Show critical elements from the shared lived experiences of the faithful that can help edify the Christian faith of the people, leading to the attainment of their well-being.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In pursuing the research problem and the specific objectives mentioned above, several principles are found relevant to this study.

## ON GLOBAL FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

The words *Lēoht*, *liht*, *lihtan*, *licht*, *leukos*, and *lux*, mean only one thing. It means light. Regardless

of how diverse it is uniquely spelled out and pronounced, one thing is certain about it, the word light has become powerful. It becomes a word of mouth. It appears in most works of literature human beings have ever written. Light is a universal symbol that occupies a certain degree of relevance and importance in every culture. It is evident usually in religious festivities. Many ancient and modern religions give special usage and meaning to their respective religious rituals, the symbol of light.

From the Asian religions, one of the popularly known religious festivals of light is Diwali, from the Sanskrit term *Deepavali*, meaning “row of lights.” it is a major religious festival of lights that is celebrated in India by the Hindus and even shared by Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists, the Vajrayana Buddhist minority of Newar, Nepal. It is a five-day long celebration that starts from the 13th day of the Hindu lunar month *Ashvina* to the second day of the lunar month *Karttika* (late October and November). The festival means a lot of things. For Hindus, it symbolizes the victory of light over darkness. The Jain community commemorates the enlightenment and liberation (*moksha*) of Mahavira, the most recent of the Jain Tirthankaras, from the cycle of life and death (*samsara*). In Sikhism, it celebrates the time of Guru Har Gobind’s return to Amritsar from captivity in Gwalior—an echo of Rama’s return to Ayodhya. While for the Buddhists, it is a commemoration of the day when Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism in the third century BCE. Aside from lighting lamps, decorating temples and monasteries, and worshipping the sacred, Diwali is a time for visiting relatives, exchanging gifts, wearing new clothes, feasting, feeding the poor, and setting off fireworks (Duignan, 2022).

The *Tazaungdaing* Festival of Myanmar and the *Shangyuan* Festival of China shared recognition





as the festival of lights. In the Tazaungdaing festival, hot air balloons lit with candles are released as an offering of lights to the legendary Sulamani Pagoda, which is in *Tavitisma*, the Heaven of the 33 Gods in Buddhist cosmology to drive away evil spirits (Than, 2009). Almsgiving and charity, including the *Satuditha* feasts, are also commonly undertaken during this festival as a means of merit-making (Aung, 2011). The *Shangyuan* Festival, a Chinese cultural tradition, is typically observed in February or early March according to the Gregorian calendar. As part of the Lantern Festival festivities, children venture out at night, bearing paper lanterns and engaging in the tradition of deciphering riddles attached to the lanterns (The Economic Times, 2023). It is acknowledged as more of a cultural practice, but some believe it has a religious orientation. The lantern festival asserted by scholars took on a religious connotation from the Taoist concept of three worlds but is deeply rooted in Buddhist thought, the heavenly, earth, and human realms. It is also celebrated in honor of *Ti Yin*, the embodiment of two opposing principles of yin and yang. The lantern is a way of asserting authority over darkness and public creativity (Melton, 2011).

In Jewish tradition, they have a religious festival of lights that is known as *Hannukah* (Hebrew word for dedication). It is the festival that commemorates the purification and rededication of the Temple after the Greek occupation and desecration of the most holy place for the Jews. The festival reminds Jews to rededicate themselves to keeping alive the flame of Jewish religion, culture, and peoplehood so that it may be passed on to the next generation. It is no ordinary festival of lights. It evokes strings of some socio-political and cultural upheaval. A million thanks to Judah Maccabee, who led a small army and defeated the Syrian armies of King Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jewish people

will not have a festival of light to be celebrated. Hanukkah reminds us of Jewish valor against overwhelming odds, non-submission to the religious demands of a Syrian empire practicing idolatry, the struggle against total assimilation into Greek culture, loss of Jewish identity, and the fight for Jewish political autonomy and self-determination (Union for Reform Judaism, 2022). Hanukkah is an eight-day festival of light that has a Talmudic story origin. Nowadays, this festival, done by lighting a jar of oil or lighting a menorah or *hanukkiyah*, has been regarded as the Jewish version of Christmas.

For the Christian community, Light as an element (fire) and as a symbol occupied a significant role in faith life. Liturgical or sacramental celebrations are usually associated with light. They provide light and an important role to play. In the Advent celebration, light is a meaningful symbol. The celebration is marked by the lighting of the five candles one every Sunday, the final one being lit on Christmas Day representing Christ as the light of the world. At first, it was a preparation time for Christmas, recalling the first coming of Christ in his earthly incarnation. Second, it is also about preparation for the second coming of Christ at the end time (Raas Vol. 1, 1999). Christmas is an important celebration of light. Christmas is the feast of the birth of our Lord, who came as light into the darkness of the world. According to the prologue of St. John, "He is the light that shines in darkness, a light that darkness could not overpower" (Jn. 1, 4). Christmas is celebrated by the believers in the form of the Holy Eucharist (Raas Vol.1, 1999). Pentecost Sunday is another celebration that emphasizes light (the fire symbol of the Holy Spirit). It celebrates the anniversary of the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples at the time of the Jewish festival Shavuot and falls on the Sunday 50 days after Easter. The disciples experienced the Holy







Spirit like fire and strong wind and afterward felt bold enough to tell others about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (Acts of the Apostles 2). The festival is usually seen as the birthday of the Christian church. But it must be seen also as a commemoration of the apostles that were changed, the conversion of the people, the spirit of the Christian community, and the missionary work of Christ that was continued (Raas Vol. 2, 1999).

### ON THE SERVICE OF LIGHT OF EASTER VIGIL CELEBRATION

Easter Vigil, also called the Paschal Vigil, is a liturgy held in traditional Catholic churches celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It closes the Lenten season and begins the week of celebrating Christ's resurrection. It is the completion of a 40-day-long Lenten observance. Traditionally, the vigil begins between sunset on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter Sunday. The Rubrics of the *Missale Romanum* reminds us that this "mother of all vigils" is the "greatest and the most noble of all solemnities, and it is to be unique in every single Church" (*Missale Romanum*, "Rubrics for Easter Vigil" (EV)).

The Easter Vigil is composed of four major liturgical components: the service of light, the liturgy of the word, the rites of initiation, and the liturgy of the Eucharist. It is a liturgy replete with symbols such as fire, words, nakedness, water, oil, white garments, perfume, bread, wine, and gestures of peace. The movement from the lighting of the new fire to the final dismissal is the symbolic enactment of the passing over into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Komonchak, Joseph, Collins, Mary, and Lane, Dermot., 1991). The dark church represents the darkness of the world before the coming of

Christ. The Paschal Candle represents Christ, who is the Light of the World. The gradual illuminating of the church from total darkness to fully lit offers an image of what happens when Christians-baptized men and women submit their lives to Christ: the world is gradually set ablaze with the light and the glory of Christ. This is a beautiful image. It is also a challenge to each one of us, Jesus has chosen us to use us, the members of His Body, which is the Church, as His instruments. He calls us to be the light of the world:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father (Matthew 5:14-16).

Then the Church prays: "May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." Christ is the light of the world: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12) (Dongni, 2009).

### ON THE FORMATION AND EDIFICATION OF FAITH OF THE LAITY

We are called to be Church. As a Church, one of our responsibilities is to participate in her evangelizing mission. All baptized, ordained or not, including the laity, must know that we are empowered to proclaim the Gospel, to give witness of what God has done in our lives, and to be instruments of God's reign in the here and now of our shared history (Ospino, 2023). Such is the enormous calling on the part of the laity to evangelize that the universal Church had emphasized so much and focused on the formation and edification of their faith. The



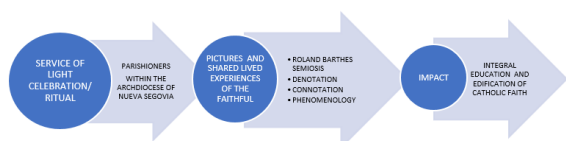


leaders of the Church tried their best to perform the *tria munera* of Jesus Christ: Priest, Prophet, and King, to deepen the faith of the laity and, therefore, prepare and equip them with the essentials needed in the Church's evangelizing mission.

The laity must realize that they are ecclesial and ministerial co-responsible along with the ordained and the consecrated in continuing Christ's mission. *Ad Gentes* states that the pilgrim Church, which includes the laity, should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world and they should spend their forces in the work of evangelization (AG 36). Accordingly, the missionary commitment is the culmination of the long process of Christian formation. Aside from missionary participation, catechetical formation helps the laity of all ages to grow in both human and Christian maturity, enriching the whole of life with the leaven of the Gospel. Thus, the laity is perceived to grow in understanding and communicating the faith, acquire skills needed for personal growth, enrich the experience of family life, relationships, and public service, and have concern for the common good (USCCB, 2023).

## OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The entire research endeavor was guided by the operational framework presented below:



The research endeavor shall begin with the lived experiences of some of the members of the local parishes within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia on the service of light ritual during the

easter vigil. All these lived experiences will be listened to and gathered for analysis, along with some pictures of the ritual being treated with Roland Barthes' semiosis. This process must be done to discern the impact of the ritual on the faith and lives of the people and to identify certain critical elements that can contribute to the integral education and edification of the faith.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This research embraced an exploratory and qualitative research design. The researchers used dual approaches in securing data, archival, and survey interviews. They used Roland Barthes' Semiosis as a method of data analysis on the collected data in the form of images taken on the service of light celebration and shared lived experiences of the people of the same celebration. Roland Barthes follows up on the school of semiotics established by Ferdinand de Saussure, for whom the building blocks of semiotics are found in a dyadic model of the signified (which is meant by the person about the sign) and the signifier (that which is used to infer the signified) (Hammouri, 2020). According to Barthes, there is order in signification, the first order is the denotation, and the second order is connotation. For Barthes, Saussure's model of semiosis belongs to the first order. This research design hopes to help the researchers answer the research problem and its specific objectives.

### RESEARCH APPROACHES

This research used an inductive research approach. This approach, working from the "bottom-up, using the participants' captured



experiences in the form of images and shared lived experiences, hopefully, helps build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Then, the researchers specifically used Roland Barthes’ semiosis, which focuses on the denotative and connotative levels of meaning embedded in images and shared narratives about the object of research, for this research, it is the service of light.

### RESEARCH PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTIONS

The researchers visited five local Catholic parishes within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in the Ilocos Sur Region: Conversion of St. Augustine Parish, Tagudin, Ilocos Sur; San Juan de Sahagun Parish, Candon City; St. Christopher Parish, Bangar, La Union; Archdiocesan shrine of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Narvacan, Ilocos Sur; and St. John the Baptist Parish, San Juan, Ilocos Sur. The five local Catholic parishes were chosen to explore how the faithful from the said region celebrate the service of light, and because one of the proponents is a local faithful of the region. After the participants received proper orientation, ensuring no conflicts of interest, informed them of their right to withdraw at any point, assured of citation recognition, and given the option for anonymity upon request, the researchers obtained their voluntary consent to participate in the study. Subsequently, the researchers collected the necessary data for analysis. They gathered from the parishes pictures of how they celebrate the service of light during the easter vigil. They used purposive sampling for their interview of the local faithful to secure the necessary data needed for the analysis. The researchers gathered at least ten (10) pictures of the said celebration and had thirty (30) respondents for the recorded interview. The basic qualifications considered for the respondents of this research were as

follows: A.) Male or female, with age 18 years and above; B.) Baptized Roman Catholic; C.) Members of the laity; and D.) Parishioners of any of the local churches within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia. All the data gathered from the recorded interview were transcribed and checked for clarity. In the case of unclear entries, they were validated by asking the concerned participants for clarification. The data gathered have backup files and saved by the researchers to avoid loss of materials to be analyzed. The data were kept confidential. Only the proponents of this research had access to the data to secure its safety and integrity.

### MEASUREMENT AND INSTRUMENTATION

So that the collected images become dependable or valid data for analysis, the pictures must depict clear images of the service of light celebrated in one of the local parishes of the archdiocese. The pictures may be in black and white or colored, tangible or digital pictures, old or recent. For the survey interviews, the researchers were guided with the following questions: A.) How do you observe the service of light during the easter vigil? B.) What do you understand about the celebration? and C.) What is the impact of the celebration on your faith life? With these questions, the intended data for analysis were achieved, and the researchers then were able to answer the research problem and attain its specific objectives.

### DATA ANALYSIS / ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Using the semiological model of analysis of Roland Barthes, the proponents of this research investigated the denotative and connotative meanings that were present in the collected data, which were in the forms of pictures and



oral narratives. The denotative layer of meaning refers to the primary signification or reference – the definitional, literal, obvious meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what the dictionary tries to provide. The connotative layer of meaning refers to a range of associated significations, socio-cultural and ‘personal’ implications of the signs. These meanings are typically related to the interpreter’s class, age, gender, ethnicity, and factors (Mambrol, 2016).

Out from these layers of denotative and connotative meanings, the researchers then formed and presented a descriptive impact of the service of light to the formation and edification of the catholic faith among the parishioners of the selected local parishes in the archdiocese of Nueva Segovia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers attempted to apply the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes to several images depicting the service of light observance in local parishes within the archdiocese of Nueva Segovia. The researchers also performed denotation and connotation process of semiosis with the narratives gathered from the parishioners that focused on three areas: the observance of the service of light by the parishioners during the Easter vigil, their understanding of the said liturgical celebration, and its impact on their faith life.

Denotation according to Roland Barthes is a literal framing of a term or sign. Denotations have no subjective, symbolic, or otherwise non-literal meaning. Connotation is a non-literal framing of a term that intends to add an association beyond its literal meaning.

## SEMIOSIS OF IMAGES

The images below were photos taken during the actual observance of the service of light during the Easter Vigil of 2024 in different four parishes within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia.

### Image 1.

*Service of Light Outside the Church  
Conversion of St. Augustine Parish, Tagudin, Ilocos  
Sur*



*(Courtesy of the parishioners)*

**Denotation:** The picture consisted of a series of continuous pictures that showed opposite worlds such as dark and light being manifested as a dim ray from the top of the church front falling on and igniting a heap of wooden sticks lying on the ground. It also showed some individuals who had small candles in their hands.

**Connotation:** The images are components of the service of light that began outside the church at the beginning of the Holy Saturday Easter observance. The small fire that gave light to the dark surrounding signified the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, becoming the light of the world, awaited by the believers. The light emerging from the darkness of the night signified Christ has conquered sin and death.





**Image 2.**

*Blessing and Lighting of Paschal and Other Candles  
San Juan de Sabagun Parish, Candon City*



*(Courtesy of the parishioners)*

**Denotation:** Depicted in the image was an assembly of people in the dark outside the church lighted only by a small cauldron, blessing and lighting the big easter candle held by the priest and other small candles of the people.

**Connotation:** The large candle is a sign of Christ's presence in the world and His victory over death. It is also utilized to bless other candles and objects during Easter services. The paschal candle is ignited throughout the entire fifty-day Easter season. The fire is the mark of Christ's light and Christ in the world.

**Image 3.**

*Procession from Outside to Inside the Church  
St. Christopher Parish, Bangar, La Union*



*(Courtesy of the parishioners)*

**Denotation:** The two photos depicted what was inside the church. People are processioning from outside to inside the dark church carrying lighted small candles and slowly lighting the dark church.

**Connotation:** The parishioners walk through the church as it remains dark, and the light of the Paschal Candle becomes a wave of lights. It speaks to us of Christ as the true morning star that never sets – the risen Lord in whom light has the victory over darkness. As the procession makes its way through the church, shrouded in the darkness of the night, the light of the Paschal Candle becomes a wave of lights, and it speaks to us of Christ as the true morning star that never sets – the Risen Lord in whom light has conquered darkness.

**Image 4.**

*Exultet Proclamation and Liturgy of the Word  
Archdiocesan Shrine of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel,  
Narvacan, Ilocos Sur*



*(Courtesy of the parishioners)*

**Denotation:** The Easter candle arrives in the sanctuary, and the deacon chants the “Easter Proclamation,” the “*Exultet*” or “rejoice,” an ancient hymn that speaks of the many mysteries of this night. Several readings were made, still in the darkness of the church. From Genesis through the New Testament, God's marvelous plan is unfolded. The readings are often interspersed with chanted passages or hymns.

**Connotation:** The lighted candle is a call to people to be incorporated into the community of the Church and to let the light of Christ shine all over the world. The readings present the whole panorama of the course of salvation history – creation, election, and liberation of Israel, as well as the final revelation given by the prophets, and



finally, they consciously lead everything to Jesus Christ.

**Image 5.**

*The Baptismal Liturgy and Eucharistic Celebration  
Parishes of Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia, Ilocos Sur*



*(Courtesy of the parishioners)*

**Denotation:** There was a Eucharistic celebration inside the church to culminate the Easter Vigil. The Churches were filled with parishioners. Some even stayed at the entrance just to attend the celebration. A baptismal liturgy was participated in by the people before the Mass.

**Connotation:** A baptismal liturgy or liturgy of initiation is the celebration of Baptism, renewal of baptismal vows, or a Profession of Faith, and sometimes confirmation of people at that time. Baptism is a purification. It is more than becoming part of a community. It is a new birth. A new beginning in life. In Baptism people give themselves over to Christ – he takes us unto himself so that we no longer live for ourselves, but through him, with him and in him; so that we live with him and thus for others. The Easter vigil celebration culminates with the liturgy of Eucharistic, an intimate encounter with God through Jesus Christ who as the Risen Lord encountered his followers on the first day, Sunday.

### SEMIOSIS OF NARRATIVES

The researchers applied semiosis to the narratives of the parishioners who had experienced

attending the service of light during the Easter vigil in their respective parishes within the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia.

**Table 1.**

*How the Local Parishioners Observed the Service of Light During the Easter Vigil*

Significant Narratives of the Parishioners
<i>Acknowledge that I am weak and ask guidance from the lord to overcome it</i>
<i>Attending the Holy Mass</i>
<i>Avoid playing music and do hard labor</i>
<i>Being truthful and conversion hearts for a good life and fortify our dignity as persons</i>
<i>Celebrate it wholeheartedly, fully well, and humbly</i>
<i>Ensuring that I am clean of my sins</i>
<i>Fasting and doing acts following the holy event</i>
<i>Following the prescribed liturgy</i>
<i>Going to the sea or river to take a bath, spending time with family</i>
<i>Helping others</i>
<i>Join in the celebration of the Service of Light outside of the church in darkness</i>
<i>Listening to the parish priest who leads the prayer service, explains, and gives importance to the service of light to the parishioners</i>
<i>Meditation on the symbolism and message of the Easter story</i>
<i>Offering prayers by lighting candles in silence</i>
<i>Participate in the lighting of the paschal candle</i>
<i>Participating in church activities such as processions and prayer of the holy rosary, stations of the cross, and confession</i>
<i>Praying with the family and doing the family get-together</i>
<i>Reading the Bible</i>
<i>Reflect and wait patiently and reflectively outside the Church</i>
<i>Reflect on the significance of the resurrection</i>
<i>Reflect on the different readings</i>
<i>Renewal of baptismal vows</i>
<i>Singing of hymns</i>

### DENOTATION:

**Internal Observance (Personal).** When the parishioners were gathering to illuminate the service, their emotions seemed to remain in a sacred silence. Each person appeared to be in a prayerful mood. The parishioners meditated in the silence to comprehend the meaning and





sense of the feast. It helped them feel cleansed from their sins, and as they reflected on the readings from the Bible. In their silence and humility, they seemed to seek divine advice and open their hearts to follow the way of renovation.

**External Observance (Communitarian).** The parishioners were communitarian in observing the service of light. These members engaged in the usual liturgy of the service of light, such as blessing the light, the Easter candle, and the lighting of the smaller candles with loud voices of praise. The families listened politely to biblical reading and responded in one voice to the renewal of their baptismal vows consequently renewing their religious commitment to another and God. They also prayed with their family to live in faith, and finally participate in the Mass.

**Movement Observance (Ritual Passage).** Movement within the ritual passage from darkness to light reflected the journey of the parishioners' souls. They walked in reverence from outside to inside the church, leaving behind the silence of introspection for the jubilant celebration within. They slowly embraced the transition from silence to celebration, welcoming the joyous revelation of God's presence among them.

**Extra Observance (Beyond Liturgy).** The parishioners engaged in extra observances beyond the confines of the prescribed liturgy, deepening their spiritual journey. They prayed the holy rosary, walked the stations of the cross, and sought reconciliation through confession. Embracing the Lenten method of fasting, abstinence, prayer, and acts of charity, they strengthened their devotion to spiritual growth. Some chose to spend time with their families in a different setting, fostering bonds of love and connection. Others adhered to cultural traditions, such as bathing in the sea on Black

Saturday, intertwining their faith with local customs and beliefs. Together, these additional practices enabled the parishioners to experience the service of light, enhancing their journey toward spiritual enlightenment.

#### CONNOTATION:

**Internal Observance (Personal).** Individuals engage in a silent mode, creating a space for introspection and meditation. This silence connotes a profound inward journey, a turning away from the discordance of the world towards a deeper spiritual connection. Their prayerful disposition carries signs of humility and reverence, signaling a willingness to engage with the divine. As they meditate on the symbolism and meaning of the celebration, each gesture and thought carries connotations of introspection, seeking to uncover hidden truths and insights. The desire to purify oneself from sins carries connotations of purification and renewal, a shedding of the old self in preparation for the transformation. Reflecting on biblical readings fills their thoughts with layers of religious symbolism and moral teachings, inviting them to delve into the timeless wisdom of sacred texts. Their humble manner, characterized by the willingness to ask forgiveness and forgive others, carries connotations of reconciliation and redemption, fostering a sense of communal harmony and spiritual development. The act of helping others is laden with meanings of compassion and solidarity, embodying the ethos of selflessness and service. Additionally, asking for divine guidance carries connotations of trust and surrender, acknowledging a greater power at work in their lives. The pursuit of truth and life conversion is characterized by connotations of authenticity and profound personal transformation, indicating a commitment to living in harmony with one's deepest beliefs and beliefs.





**External Observance (Communitarian).** The communal observance of the Service of Light is steeped in rich connotations of tradition and collective identity. Participation in the prescribed liturgy of light carries connotations of sacred ritual and symbolic illumination, evoking the timeless mysteries of faith. The presence of the paschal candle symbolizes the eternal light of Christ, carrying connotations of divine presence and guidance. The singing of hymns altogether connotes a communal expression of praise and devotion, indeed a harmonious celebration. Listening to biblical readings carries connotations of shared wisdom and communal reflection, inviting believers to journey together through the sacred narrative. The renewal of baptismal vows carries connotations of spiritual rebirth and reaffirmation, marking a collective commitment to the norms of faith. Praying with family signifies a bond of love and solidarity that enhances the connections binding the community together. Additionally, attending Mass carries connotations of communal worship and shared communion, demonstrating the collective longing for divine grace and redemption.

**Movement Observance (Ritual Passage).** The Service of Light is imbued with connotations of symbolic passage and transformative journey. The transition from darkness to light signifies spiritual awakening and enlightenment. It symbolized the emergence from ignorance into truth. The movement from outside to inside the church symbolizes an inward movement towards sacred space and divine presence. The shift from silence to celebration carries connotations of joy and exaltation, indicating the culmination of the spiritual journey in communal celebration.

**Extra Observance (Beyond Liturgy).** In addition to the prescribed liturgy, additional observances have connotations of personal

devotion and cultural significance. The recitation of the Rosary brings a rhythmic meditation on the mysteries of faith, highlighting the timeless devotion of generations. Participating in the stations of the cross signifies solemn reflection and penitential practice, allowing believers to walk in the footsteps of Christ. Confessions done by the parishioners lead to spiritual cleansing and renewal, offering believers the opportunity to reconcile with themselves and their community. The Lenten method of fasting, abstinence, praying, and doing suitable actions carries connotations of self-discipline and spiritual discipline, demonstrating the transformative power of sacrifice and devotion. Spending time with family in a different location signifies a break from the routine and a reconnection with shared roots and traditions. Superstitious beliefs such as taking a bath in the sea during Black Saturday have connotations of cultural heritage and folk wisdom, connecting individuals to the rhythms of nature and the cycles of life and death.

For parishioners, the observance of the Service of Light is a cherished fabric of personal, communal, and cultural significance, woven together by layers of meaning and symbolism that transcend the boundaries of time and space.

*Table 2.*  
*Understanding of the Parishioners on the Service of Light*

Significant Narratives from the Parishioners
<i>A celebration of the victory of light over darkness, life over death, and hope over defeat</i>
<i>A testament to our faith</i>
<i>A tradition that was passed on generations ago</i>
<i>All given the chance to renew our baptism in the Lord and renew our faith in the Lord</i>
<i>Bring God's presence alive in the life of the Church and place Him as the light that never stops</i>
<i>Deeply symbolic and richly meaningful in the Christian tradition</i>







<i>Given humanity a new life and new hope in our pilgrimage toward everlasting life with the Lord</i>
<i>He is the Life, and he has overcome all the evils in the world</i>
<i>Highlights the passion, hardships death, and resurrection of Jesus who is our new hope</i>
<i>I will be resurrected from my sins and renew the promises made during my baptism</i>
<i>Jesus has resurrected and indeed become the Light of the world</i>
<i>Jesus has risen and He has saved us</i>
<i>Lord Jesus serves as the true light in the whole world</i>
<i>Love and Sacrifice</i>
<i>Marks the culmination of the Triduum, which includes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday</i>
<i>The most solemn and joyful liturgical event in the Christian calendar</i>
<i>New beginning/ life</i>
<i>Oneness in the passion and death of our Lord which reflects the Love of God for humanity</i>
<i>Purify ourselves and ask forgiveness for our sins</i>
<i>Realize the importance of his sacrifices and reflect on our acts</i>
<i>Recollection and Reflection and further understanding of the Mystery of Resurrection</i>
<i>Reminds us of the profound truth that Christ has conquered sin and death and offers the promise of eternal life to all who believe in him</i>
<i>Shows us that Christ is the true Light of the world that gives us direction and focus on Life</i>
<i>The waiting and anticipation of the resurrection of Christ who will defeat all evil and sinfulness in the world</i>
<i>Time of great joy and significance for Christians around the world, symbolizing new life, hope, and victory over death</i>
<i>Time to reflect on the significance of Christ's resurrection</i>

**DENOTATION:**

**Solemn and Joyful Liturgical Event.** The parishioners embraced the Service of Light as a momentous and profound liturgical event, marking the culmination of the triduum with both solemnity and joy. It holds profound symbolic meaning, representing the period of waiting and anticipation for the resurrection of Christ. The ritual of renewing baptismal vows is a powerful testament of faith and a reaffirmation of one's commitment to the Christian journey. The service of light provides a sacred space for recollection and reflection. It offers the parishioners an opportunity to delve deeper into the mysteries of Jesus' paschal mystery, thus enhancing their understanding and connection

to the core tenets of their faith. It also serves as a welcome moment for new members of the Christian Faith Community, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among believers.

**Doctrinal Assertions.** The parishioners acknowledge the doctrinal assertions of Jesus' resurrection, acknowledging him as the true light in the world and the ultimate conqueror of sin and death, offering salvation to humanity. They find comfort in the victory of light over darkness, life over death, goodness over evil, and hope over defeat, embracing the promise of eternal life as a guiding beacon of their faith.

**Value System.** Within the liturgy of light, the parishioners find a profound value system that reflects the boundless love of God for humanity, offering the gifts of new life, hope, and victory over death. Parishioners recognize the sacrificial nature of Christ's journey, which inspires a renewal of faith and a commitment to living life characterized by purity and forgiveness of sins. The Service of Light is embraced by parishioners as a revered and transformative experience, based on the Christian core teachings and values, enabling them to deepen their spiritual connection to God and one another within the community of faith.

**CONNOTATION:**

**Solemn and Joyful Liturgical Event.** The act of lighting the Paschal candle symbolizes the literal act of bringing light into the darkened church. It evokes the culmination of the triduum, the three holiest days in Christianity. The light becomes a witness to the parishioners' faith, a beacon indicating the long-awaited resurrection of Christ. It is a moment of resoluteness, following the anticipation that began throughout the preceding days. This act also signifies a time





of recollection and reflection, a chance for parishioners to gain a deeper understanding of Jesus' paschal mystery – his suffering, death, and glorious return. The service further highlights a moment of joy, as the flames illuminate the path for new members entering the Christian Faith Community.

**Doctrinal Assertions.** The light strongly signifies the core belief in Jesus' resurrection from death. It becomes a tangible symbol of Jesus himself, "the true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9). The darkness dissipated represents the power of Christ's victory over sin and death. It is a testament to the promise of eternal life, a triumph of light over darkness, life over death, goodness over evil, and hope over defeat. The service of light reflects the core value system of Christianity. It embodies God's immense love for humanity, offering the gift of new life, hope, and the opportunity to overcome death. The light transforms into a powerful reminder of Christ's sacrifice, a renewal of faith, the promise of eternal life, and the cleansing power of God's mercy.

**Value System.** The service of light is deeply rooted in spiritual and moral ideals, transforming mere numerical or material measures. It captures the profound essence of divine love towards humanity, evoking sentiments of compassion and grace. Each element, from the depiction of new life and hope to the triumph over death, echoes the themes of redemption and resurrection. Sacrifice has become a cornerstone, symbolizing selflessness, and devotion. The renewal of faith embodies a journey of spiritual growth and enlightenment. Symbols of eternal life convey notions of transcendence and continuity beyond the realm of the temporal realm. Purity and forgiveness of sins reflect themes of moral purity and redemption. It emphasizes the transformative power of grace and forgiveness

within this intricate web of values. Collectively, these connotations form a rich narrative of beliefs and ideals, guiding individuals to a deeper understanding of their purpose and relationship with the divine.

**Table 3.**

*Impact of the Service of Light Celebration on Parishioners*

Significant Narratives from the Parishioners
<i>A transformative and enriching experience that deeper and revitalizes the faith of life of Christians</i>
<i>Also becomes a small light for other</i>
<i>Appreciate that God is divine and merciful. Jesus chose to die for our salvation from sins</i>
<i>Appreciate traditions from our culture</i>
<i>Be a good Christian</i>
<i>Christian faith requires fervent prayers and giving glory to God</i>
<i>Continue to do good and acts of kindness to all people</i>
<i>Deepen and encourage others to be grateful to our Lord</i>
<i>Encouraged to live a life of a true Christian in the eyes of men and the mercy and love of God</i>
<i>Felt the love and mercy of God for all of us</i>
<i>Given a reason to hope and to be sure in faith</i>
<i>It helps us to be victorious against the challenges of life as Christians</i>
<i>Learn to obey the Will of God.</i>
<i>Now stronger to face the challenges of temptations and sins of the world and my fellow humans to give justice to the poor.</i>
<i>Now zealous, committed, and passionate to evangelize the good news of the Lord to all people Christian and Non-Christians as well</i>
<i>Powerful reminder of the core beliefs particularly the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>Realize our sins and shortcomings and mend our wicked ways to follow the commandments of God</i>
<i>Reminds me of the unconditional love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus who paid for our sins</i>
<i>Reminds me that even if there is a time of darkness and doubt. The light of Jesus is always there to shine and show the way.</i>
<i>Reminds of the love, mercy, and blessings of the Lord</i>
<i>Renewal of my promises to live a righteous life as a Catholic Christian</i>
<i>Renewed and reaffirms my faith</i>
<i>Source of great hope, joy, and inspiration It depends on one's sense of connection to our God</i>
<i>Strengthen and fortify my faith as a Christian and will serve as my steadfast guide in my life journey</i>



**DENOTATION:**

**Well-Being Impact.** The parishioners feel the consuming love and mercy of God. It leads them to develop a deep sense of gratitude for His blessings. Furthermore, they appreciate the rich traditions embedded in their culture, finding renewed zeal and passion to share the good news of the Lord with both Christians and non-Christians alike. The celebration serves as a source of great hope and joy, inspiring individuals to deepen their connection to God and fortify their faith, enabling them to face life's challenges with strength and resilience.

**Moral Impact.** Ultimately, parishioners were motivated to embody the teachings of Christianity, recognizing their sins and shortcomings, and striving to live righteous lives following God's commands. They become beacons of light for others, renewing their commitment to be faithful followers of Christ and spreading His message of love and compassion.

**Doctrinal Impact.** The Service of Light is a powerful reminder of God's unconditional love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, particularly His resurrection, which symbolizes everlasting happiness and life. It bolsters the importance of fervent prayer and glorifying God, guiding parishioners to live lives aligned with Christian faith and values. The Service of Light celebration transforms individual experiences, fostering a collective sense of renewal, devotion, and spiritual enlightenment among believers.

**CONNOTATION:**

**Well-Being Impact.** The service of light for the parishioners has become a powerful symbol that connects with their emotional and spiritual well-being. The darkness dispelled evokes a sense of

God's infinite love and mercy. Parishioners feel a surge of gratitude for this unwavering love, a renewed appreciation for their cultural traditions, and a zeal to spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection. The liturgy of light ignites a flame of hope and joy, a source of inspiration that deepens the parishioners' connection to God. They are confident in their faith and ready to face the challenges of life with renewed purpose. This newfound inner strength can be attributed to a commitment to social justice, a desire to help the less fortunate, and a desire to resist temptation.

**Moral Impact.** The service also carries a strong moral impact, influencing parishioners' values and behavior. The meaning of the light acts as a mirror, reflecting parishioners' shortcomings. The parishioners were reminded about their sins and failings, prompting a desire to mend their ways and follow God's commandments. The service of light fosters a sense of responsibility, encouraging them to live a righteous life and be a source of light for others. It serves as a powerful call to action, urging them to live according to Christian principles, that is, to love their neighbor, practice forgiveness, and obey God's will. The renewal of baptismal vows becomes a strong symbol of this commitment to live a life worthy of God's love and grace.

**Doctrinal Impact.** The personal meanings enhance the service's influence on parishioners' understanding of their faith. The service of light for some strengthens their connection to family and tradition, or a personal revelation, having a deeper understanding of the significance of Christ's sacrifice and the promise of eternal life. The service becomes a profound experience, prompting individual reflection and a renewed commitment to their faith journey. Ultimately, the effect of the service of light transcends the moment, leaving an impression on parishioners'





lives, guiding their actions, and strengthening their connection with God.

### COMPOSITE IMPACT OF THE SERVICE OF LIGHT TO THE LAITY

Considering the results of the application of semiosis to gathered images on the observance of the service of light during the Easter vigil and on the shared narratives of the parishioners on their experiences of the service of light or liturgy of light or "*Lucernarium*," the researchers were led towards appreciation of the remarkable impacts of the liturgical event to the parishioners. They were as follows:

#### ON THE INTEGRAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Easter Vigil is a very important part of parishioners' education in Christianity. While the sacred space is filled with darkness, lighting the Paschal Candle represents that light has triumphed over darkness as it reflects the Resurrection narrative. This visual representation becomes a powerful teaching tool for sharing Christian hope and rebirth. Through this symbolic action, people are encouraged not only to think about their faith's basic principles but also to realize how Jesus Christ saved them from eternal death.

Also, the movement of lights during vigil can be seen as an analogy for spiritual illumination and development. When the flame passes from one person's candle to another's it shows that they are sharing Christ's light among themselves. Such communal experience fosters unity and solidarity among worshipers thus reminding them that the Church should be like a mother who takes care of all her children without discrimination or favoritism. Moreover, the

step-by-step enlightening of sanctuary imitates a faith journey where believers shift from spiritual blindness towards radiant truth about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such kind of learning enables participants to comprehend Christian teachings in different ways and depths.

The light service also gives a chance for the followers to interact with sacred texts and traditions. People are asked to think about the deeper meanings of Easter stories considering liturgical readings and prayers. The Easter message touches different senses using biblical images and rituals thus making it easier for people with different learning styles to connect with this Christian narrative. It is through music that believers can express their faith most deeply while participating in hymns and chants which foster emotional attachment to the Easter message even more strongly than other forms of worship. This transformative educational moment should teach those who attend how they can live by Christian principles every day once they have accepted themselves as part of God's kingdom.

#### ON THE EDIFICATION OF FAITH

The Easter vigil light service has a deep meaning for the spiritual journey of church members; it represents Jesus' resurrection and victory over darkness. When Holy Saturday's darkness covers the sanctuary, hope and expectation are lit among believers by the Paschal candle. This candle is then used to light other candles held by worshippers which indicates that the Gospel should be taken to every nation enlightening people's minds about Christ's triumph over death. The reason why this is called symbolism lies in its ability to create unity among all Christians where they become carriers of Christ's illumination and sharing faith.







However, this act does not only serve as a symbol but also affects individuals' lives profoundly thereby strengthening their faiths even more. Sudden warmth from candle lights slowly filling up the altar area can make one feel amazed and humble before God; such an experience cannot leave anyone indifferent or untouched within the crowd present at that time. It is here when everything becomes so holy — hearts open wide while souls soar high above because parishioners start realizing how much personal change can take place after Jesus rises from the dead. The flickering flames serve as a reminder of the enduring presence of God's love, casting out fear and doubt, and renewing hope in the hearts of believers.

Moreover, the service of light works as a catalyst for spiritual revival and fostering faith long after the Easter vigil is over. The power of being a part of such a substantial and ancient ritual means that the participants cannot help but deepen their faith in God and try to live their lives by following it. The memory of standing in the hall with nothing while the candle was flickering would serve as a reminder of faith and solidity during struggles and doubts. To this end, the service of light during the Easter vigil develops the faith of the parishioners in various ways including planting a seed that will be developing in years.

## CONCLUSION

The observance of the service of light during the Easter Vigil celebration was truly a catechetical drama to behold. On very few occasions this liturgical ritual was given special attention to further reflect on as experienced by the parishioners of some of the parishes within the archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in Ilocos Sur region. This led the researchers to study this

catechetical drama, especially its impact on the education and edification of the faith of the parishioners. They have concluded:

The Easter Vigil's service of light is a significant event in parishioners' Christian education. It serves as a reminder of the Christian faith's core tenets. It fosters a sense of community and reflects the parishioners' journey of faith. The whole liturgical event provides a multisensory learning experience that strengthens understanding of Christian doctrine and fosters a sense of belonging. The service of light empowers parishioners to embrace their Christian identity.

The Easter Vigil's service of light is a powerful symbol of Christ's resurrection. But beyond this great symbolism, the service evokes awe and strengthens the faith of the parishioners. The experience leaves an impression, inspiring a deeper connection with God and a stronger faith in daily life. The Easter Vigil's light service is not just a temporary moment of inspiration, but a seed that cultivates faith for years to come.

The service of light is just part of the entire liturgical celebration observed during the Easter vigil. The others are the liturgy of the Word, the baptismal liturgy, and the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist. Isolating the study on the service of light from the other liturgies within the Easter vigil observance would demean and shortchange the meaning of the entire celebration. The researchers would like to recommend studying the same issue, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of the ordained to yield a wider and deeper understanding of the celebration and its impact on Christian communities.





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