

OPENING ADDRESS TO THE  
FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS  
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I welcome you to the forty-seventh annual meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Our sincere thanks to Region Two of the Federation, the Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, and in particular the Diocese of Albany, New York for preparing this time for our consideration: *Open Wide the Gates of Justice: Praise God Within Them*. We are privileged to consider this invitation to praise God through doing justice, knowing that as we worship, so we believe, and so we live.

The Federation is grateful to have our unique partnership with the Bishop's Committee on Divine Worship, which is the touchstone of our common work: to be a laboratory for our shared expertise in the art of ritual, collaborators in the vision of Catholic Worship in the Dioceses of the United States, and colleagues dedicated to the principles of Catholic worship as given in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. We affirm worship and justice as co-contributors to the common good; and we will be the better for our having considered this fruitfulness of our liturgical work for the life of the world.

Our gathering marks the third year under the excellent leadership of Mrs. Rita Thiron, Executive Director, and the restructured Board of Directors. Together we hold in trust the Mission of the Federation for the sake of the membership. We exist because the Board continues to look to the horizon in promoting the liturgical life of the Church in the United States. While each of the representatives of the 14 Regions who make up the Board of Director have their own preoccupations with their own Bishops and diocesan duties, the Board wants to look broadly, act collaboratively, and think wisely for the good of the Federation. I am grateful to each of the Board members for imparting their expertise and their time to the Federation.

WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSE TO BE DOING?

Our work is simple: We are to promote the liturgy as the heart of Christian life—especially in the parish community. We keep our eye on this target. We do this work in the following ways:

1. Fostering and coordinating the work of Diocesan liturgical personnel. One of the greatest benefits for being in the Federation is the network created within the 14 regions of professional and volunteer colleagues who collaborate and inform.

2. Our work is liturgical formation: we are to create pathways to aid diocesan liturgical personnel. This may be in creating materials, hard copy or virtual. It may be providing expert personnel. We have to be flexible, creative, and generous.
3. We work collaboratively with the BCDW on matters proposed by the USCCB. Our mission as a Federation is based on relationships: the relationship between the Executive Director and the Board of Directors; the relationship between the member dioceses in the Regions; the relationship between the members and their Bishops; the relationship the Federation has with the Bishop's Committee on Divine Worship. In each of these relationships, respect and compassion are needed qualities. We may not all agree about every "thing" on the agenda, but we can all find our common place in acceptance with compassion for what is. All of us suffer, while none of us want to. We must deal with what is. Instead of criticizing, we find the common place in which each of us lives and we do our best.

If we don't do this work collaboratively, we disappoint the legacy of the men and women who came before us in the field, and who handed on to us this Mission: Virgil Michael, Godfrey Diekmann, Martin Hellriegel, Michael Mathis, Reynold Hillenbrand, Gerard Ellard, HA Reinhold, Martin Hellriegel, Aemeliana Lohr, Ade Bethune, Nina Polcyn Moore, Mary Perkins Ryan, the Women of the Grail, Mary Collins.

4. We are the medium in which diocesan liturgical personnel can contribute responsibly and effectively in articulating the voice of the laity, the clergy and the religious in the promotion and development of the liturgy. I take note that no issues of concern were filed before this National Meeting about liturgical issues. During the last few years the work of the Federation has moved away from the battles-royal on the floor about liturgical topics. Can it be that there are no liturgical issues that need study, need promoting, need re-examining? We want to inform the conversation, remain true to the Tradition, and dialogue. We cannot be afraid to speak. What shall we do?
5. Finally, we are to sponsor with the BCDW and the local host diocese the National Meeting. This is our yearly opportunity to meet and work. We want you to work. Be active in the Committee meetings gatherings on Friday, attend the Banquet, go to the Regional Caucuses, add your voice. Help the Federation do our work.

#### WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE OUR LAST NOVEMBER MEETING?

1. A great deal of work has been done by the Federation on the Order of Celebrating Matrimony national workshops. This was a combined effort with the BCDW, with many FDLC members offering their talents to produce good work. A special thanks to Dr. Judy Bullock for overseeing this project, and Mrs. Rita Thiron for the diligent

work in assisting the presenters to hone their craft. Materials published by the Federation as a result have sold well.

2. The Board of Directors has approved our budget. We are currently operating in the black. Are we financially sound??? YES. Is the budget tight? YES. Would we like one of your relatives to leave the Federation money? YES. We will speak later about how we all can help.
3. The project on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, a fruit of the National Meeting in Lombard, Illinois, is close to becoming a reality. We are collaborating with our friends at *Liturgy Training Publications* to create a usable, accessible platform to train people who work in the parishes in this ministry. We want to be a voice in initiation formation, to have our members recognized as experts in this area, and to generate some income for the Federation. On a side note, the BCDW has asked Rita and I to present to the Bishops on the Committee an overview on the process of Christian Initiation at their next meeting in November. Rita will present and I will hold her books....
4. The USCCB has asked the Federation to be a lead agent in creating multi-platform formation opportunities for Spanish-speaking Catholics as they welcome the *Misal Romano* for use in the United States. The Federation embraces this challenge and opportunity.

### FINALLY,

I am a priest of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. On July 5, we in the city of Baton Rouge were shaken at the shooting and death of Mr. Alton Sterling, an African American man who was being arrested by two white police officers. Multiple videos of the shooting were released online and led to public outcries over potential police brutality. The Gospel the Sunday after this shooting was John 6: A scholar of the Law asks Jesus, "*And who is my neighbor?*".

A week of intense scrutiny and tense emotions followed that shooting, and gave way the following Sunday morning, July 17<sup>th</sup>, as two police officers and one sheriff were ambushed and shot dead, less than two miles from my church building. The parents of the sheriff who died were members of my parish and thus his funeral was celebrated at St. Jean Vianney later that week. The Responsorial Psalm for that Sunday was, "*He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.*"

On the weekend of August 13-14, 31 inches of rain fell on Baton Rouge creating widespread destruction, flooding over 62,000 homes and businesses in the city; and on my parish campus, the waters flooded our brand new parish gymnasium, the entire newly-renovated preschool, the parish hall, three school classrooms, the school library and the parish rectory. Those of you

who have been through such traumatic events know that after such events people tend to lose their footing. The second reading for that Sunday said, *“Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet that what is lame may be healed...”*

On each of these separate Sundays, my parish community gathered to hear what God could possibly be saying in the midst of these tragedies.

- Who is the neighbor?
- How does our gathering express a hopeful outcome for our future?
- How is God’s justice different from revenge?
- Who is a just God in the midst of such losses?
- Who can make us whole again?
- What can I expect from God now that I have lost my footing?
- What will be the words of my prayer?

Whether these questions are about flooding or murders or economic havoc or social upheaval or warfare bombings, exposing the right questions in word, music, silence, gesture and ritual is part of the work of a liturgist. Worship is the experience that most deeply interprets meaning into these events so that we might better understand our place in the universe.

We are never far from the consequences of a flawed creation, and even within our worship experience we embody that same flawed beauty in our humanness before the presence of the Holy One.

In [A Monk’s Tale](#), a biography of Godfrey Diekmann, Kathleen Hughes reminds us that:

*A primary passion for Godfrey was the relationship of liturgy and justice. In this he simply reiterated a central concern of many of the early liturgical leaders who believed that there was an intrinsic affinity between liturgy and just living and that one cannot, with integrity, worship different gods on Sunday and during the week. The liturgy itself, they believed, was the preeminent school of justice.*

That was so then; it is so now.

As the Church prays:

*Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters;  
Inspire in us word and deeds  
to comfort those who labor and are burdened.  
Make us serve them truly,  
after the example of Christ and at his command*

*that your Church may stand as a living witness  
to truth and freedom,  
to peace and justice;  
that all peoples may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.*

Social justice divorced from the liturgy too easily can become ideology. Liturgy that does not pass over into social action can become narrowly focused on ritualism or antiquarian preferences.

As we go about these days, we will examine liturgy and life through the lens of the Paschal Mystery. What then will God have to say to us, about our living from Sunday to Sunday through the familiar words and actions of the liturgy of the Church? How we answer will literally define our ability *to live and act like Jesus*.

So welcome, and have a good week.

Engage your colleagues, do the work, enter the prayer, expect to be surprised.

TR/October 5, 2016