

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### LITURGY AND CATECHETICAL LEADERS GATHER TO DISCUSS

#### THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

Over two hundred twenty leaders from one hundred three dioceses gathered in Lombard, Illinois, October 1-3, for the annual national meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC). Their focus was "The RCIA: Ever Ancient, Ever New." Specifically, they would examine the National Statutes on the Catechumenate (1988) which have served as particular law for the dioceses of the United States for the implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

At the heart of their discussions were the results of a recent study on pastoral practice commissioned by the FDLC, the USCCB's Committee on Divine Worship, and the USCCB's Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis. The survey was conducted in the spring and summer of 2014 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). The one-hundred-question instrument was sent to a random sampling of 5000 parishes in the USA. Dr. Mary Gautier of CARA presented a summary of the results, analyzing such data as the length of the formation process, the number of catechumens and candidates, the celebration of the rites which mark their journey, proper ministers of the rites, catechetical resources used, the specific needs of children of catechetical age, and the proper celebration of the rites of initiation and reception into full communion.

Father Ron Lewinski, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago and a pioneer in the implementation of the RCIA in the USA, offered a pastoral response to the findings. While he acknowledged that this rite of the Church has gained great acceptance in the dioceses of the USA, he lamented that the richness of the RCIA has not been uniformly implemented in parishes. He cautioned, "We tend to become slaves to our systems instead of developing systems that reflect our values and beliefs." On the one finding that "64% of the children of catechetical age are being prepared for baptism in less than one year" he noted that "we cannot arbitrarily plan to foster conversion, catechize, teach prayer, and form young people as missionary disciples in nine months."

Father Paul Turner, a priest of the Diocese of Kansas City and a noted scholar on Christian Initiation, offered a theological response to the survey's findings, citing six theological principles. Among them

were “adaptation strengthens worship, catechetical formation accompanies liturgical practice, ministries are diversified, uncatechized adults need pastoral care, and the sequence of initiation rites reveals the Paschal Mystery.” He offered particularly passionate rhetoric on the topic of respecting the valid baptisms of those candidates coming into full communion with the Catholic Church, recalling the historical development of the rite of reception, its publication in the 1972 *editio typica* (typical edition) and its intended use at Sunday Mass.

On Friday afternoon, FDLC members, former team members from the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, and catechetical leaders brought their considerable experience and expertise to bear in a consultation on the National Statutes on the Catechumenate. They methodically read each statute within table discussions and analyzed what should be affirmed, what pastoral difficulties had been encountered, and what might be added to the statutes. The findings will be submitted to the relevant committees of the USCCB. Bishop Mark Seitz of the Diocese of El Paso and member of the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship was present throughout the meeting. All the Bishops of the USA will consider a revision to the National Statutes as well as the proposed translation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* in the next two to three years.

The celebration of daily Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours was integral to the meeting. The attendees also participated in a Eucharistic liturgy at the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus. Bishop R. Daniel Conlon of the Diocese of Joliet served as principal celebrant.

Mass was followed by a banquet at the cathedral center. Retiring board members were honored and Mr. Daniel Demski of the Diocese of Toledo, a graduate student in liturgical studies at St. Mary on the Lake, was awarded the Tabat Scholarship, given in honor of Sr. Joan Tabat who died in a car accident in 2000. Msgr. John Burton was honored for his twenty-one years of service on the Board of Directors.

The FDLC’s highest honor, the prestigious Frederick R. McManus Award was presented to Msgr. Kevin Irwin of the Catholic University of America in recognition of his outstanding contributions to liturgical scholarship and ministerial formation. In his typically eloquent remarks, Msgr. Irwin urged all to recover the essential link between liturgy and justice – a renewed concern for the poor, a recommitment to unity and peace instead of rubrical debates, and an “unfussy” approach to liturgical celebrations which commission us all to bear witness to Christ’s Gospel and “to share in the very life of God.”

A “Parish Day” followed the national meeting on Saturday, October 4. One hundred eighty parish RCIA team members gathered at nearby Ascension of Our Lord Parish (Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois) to listen to Mr. James Schellman, former Executive Director of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate offer his reflections on “Implementing the RCIA: Then, Now and to Come.” The enthusiastic participants also attended ten workshops, offered in English and Spanish, which were designed to enrich their own formation and to better serve the process in their parishes.

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