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Topic: FDLC National Meeting *photos, page 3*

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LITURGICAL LEADERS GATHER TO DISCUSS THE STATE OF COMMISSIONS

Nearly two hundred leaders from dioceses across the United States gathered in Dallas, Texas, October 7-9, for the forty-sixth annual meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC). Their focus was Liturgy and Ecclesiology, specifically the central role of the Eucharist and the role of diocesan liturgical commissions as advisors to diocesan bishops.

Msgr. Paul McPartlan of the Catholic University of America gave a sweeping historical and theological analysis of the central role of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, the role of the Bishop as Priest and Vicar of Christ, and the Bishop's role as preacher of the Word.

Msgr. John Foster, Vicar General of the Archdiocese for Military Services, who has served as both a director of an Office of Worship and as a professor of Canon Law, offered historical background to the Second Vatican Council's mandate of the formation of liturgical commissions.

The Council Fathers saw the need to establish a liturgical commission for each "territorial ecclesiastical authority" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 44). It recognized that experts in "liturgical science, music, art, and pastoral practice" would aid in the study of the liturgy and in the implementation of the liturgical renewal which the document itself called for. In addition, it called for the establishment of an institute for pastoral liturgy, made up of ordained and lay experts, which would aid in this process. Under the direction of the conference of bishops, the commission was "to regulate pastoral-liturgical action throughout the territory and to promote studies and necessary experiments whenever there is a question of adaptations to be proposed to the Apostolic See" (CSL 44).

Further, the Council mandated the establishment of a liturgical commission in each diocese. "For the same reason every diocese is to have a commission on the sacred liturgy under the direction of the bishop, for promoting the liturgical apostolate" (CSL 45). If circumstances demanded it, the Constitution even allowed for a collaborative effort – "Sometimes it may be expedient that several dioceses should form between them one single commission which will be able to promote the liturgy by means of shared consultation" (CSL 45).

At the heart of the national meeting discussions were the results of a recent study conducted by the FDLC, on the state of Offices of Worship and Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in diocesan structures. It found that

- 88% of dioceses in the USA have an Office of Worship
- 54% have an active diocesan liturgical commission
- 49% have both an office and a commission.

- 46% of offices are directed by lay persons with advanced degrees in theology and liturgy
- 45% of offices are directed by clergy (who often have other pastoral duties)
- 9% are directed by religious women or men

Some commissions have been active in their dioceses for over fifty years, while some were only recently reestablished. Offices and commissions are active in the preparation of diocesan liturgies, the development of diocesan policies, the formation of liturgical ministers, and leadership in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Nearly all of them (95%) act as resources for parish ministers while at the same time serving as advisors to their bishops.

The FDLC was founded by the then Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy in 1969 as a grass-roots network to provide formation on the liturgical reforms after the Council. Still today, the USCCB's Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship cosponsors the annual meeting. The Committee was represented by Bishop Edward Braxton (Diocese of Belleville) and Bishop Mark Seitz (Diocese of El Paso). Bishop Braxton praised the attendees for invaluable assistance to their bishops and for their impact on the liturgical life of the country. He offered updates on the progress of the translation of liturgical books and gave an impassioned talk on the need to prepare liturgies which engage assemblies in God's sacred action.

The celebration of daily Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, as always, was integral to the meeting. On Thursday evening, the attendees participated in a Eucharistic Liturgy at the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe at the invitation of Bishop Kevin Farrell (Diocese of Dallas). The participation of the Bishop Lynch High School a Capella Choir added to the solemnity of the celebration.

On Friday evening, members gathered for a closing banquet at the Dallas Westin Park Central Hotel. Retiring board members were honored and Brother David Wilding – a monk at Conception Abbey in Missouri -- was awarded the Tabat Scholarship, given in honor of Sr. Joan Tabat who died in a car accident in 2000. Mr. Eliot Kapitan (Diocese of Springfield-in-Illinois) was honored with the Alleluia Award for his dedicated service to the Federation.

The FDLC's highest honor, the prestigious Frederick R. McManus Award was presented to Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman (Institute for Liturgical Ministry, Dayton, Ohio) in recognition of her outstanding contributions to liturgical scholarship and ministerial formation.



Mr. Eliot Kapitan (L) receives the Alleluia Award from Board Chair, Father Thomas Ranzino

Photo Credit: Christopher Ferraro



Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman receives the McManus Award from Father Thomas Ranzino

Photo credit – Rev. Stephen Bird

