

## TODD WILLIAMSON RECEIVES THE 2023 ALLELUIA AWARD

*The Alleluia Award annually recognizes a member of our Federation who has made significant contributions to the mission and work of the FDLC. This year's recipient received nearly unanimous nominations from members at their Spring meetings. Todd Williamson was recently re-elected to a second term on the Board of Directors. He has served for three years as Vice Chair of the Board and on its executive Committee. He is especially recognized for all his work on envisioning and coordinating the Federation's OCIA initiative, including the highly successful webinar series – thirty-eight sessions in both English and Spanish. The impact of this formation project is due in large part to his own passion for Christian initiation.*

*Todd serves as the Director of the Office of Divine Worship in the Archdiocese of Chicago. He is a prolific author and an adjunct professor at St. Mary of the Lake University (Mundelein, IL); has taught at the Institute for Pastoral Studies of Loyola University (Chicago); and at St. Gregory University (Shawnee, OK). The text of his acceptance speech follows.*

We have been focused this week, as we all know, on children and our communities and on children and their families. We've heard of the family's importance. We've heard of its place in the Church. We've heard of its *centrality* to our lives.....and to our faith.

During the Synod on the Family, Pope Francis noted that families teach individuals and society the value of “bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation, respect; they encourage people to work toward a world that is livable and to believe in relationships even in difficult situations” (as quoted in National Catholic Reporter, October 7, 2015).

### MY FAMILY

This was certainly the case with my own biological family. At family reunions (Anyone still have family reunions?), I would meet second cousins or great aunts or uncles, whom I didn't know. I would be introduced: “Todd, this is your cousin Denise.....” When introduced like that, I didn't think.....I just hugged. All I knew is that it was family and that was good enough for me.

This family of mine-- did exactly what Pope Francis talked about – and what I HOPE we've all experienced. My family taught me. It taught me how to think. It taught me how to behave. It taught me how to be in the world. It taught me how to pray. It shaped me – and molded me – and formed me – and to this day, continues to transform me.

Pope Francis: “Families teach the value of the bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation, respect; they encourage people to work toward a world that is livable and to believe in relationships even in difficult situations.”

### MY CTU FAMILY

This was also the case with the experience of my CTU Family: Catholic Theological Union in Chicago's Hyde Park Neighborhood. Like most of you, I am very proud of the institution in which I studied liturgy. What I say here about CTU – I know you would say about St. Meinrad's, or St. John's, or Notre Dame. We would all speak of these communities as one of our “families.”

For me, the class was “Liturgy and Pastoral Care” at CTU. The instructors were Fr. Gil Ostdiek and Herbert Anderson. It was a pivotal class in my formation – it broke open for me the power of liturgy: not as a

stagnant routine, an obligation to be fulfilled, an hour on Sunday to be endured. But as a dynamic, living encounter that has application to EVERY part of lives, to EVERY situation – every challenge, every joy.

Through this class and many others, my family at CTU FURTHER taught me how to think, how to behave, how to be in the world, how to pray. It shaped me – and molded me – and formed me – and in SO many ways transformed me.

Pope Francis: “Families teach the value of the bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation, respect; they encourage people to work toward a world that is livable, AND TO BELIEVE IN RELATIONSHIPS...”

### MY FDLC FAMILY

And this is without doubt the case with my FDLC Family – especially that of Region Seven! My first FDLC experience wasn't a National Meeting, it was a regional meeting. Region Seven meets twice a year – in the Fall after the annual meeting – and then like all of us, in the Spring. My first FDLC meeting was the Fall regional meeting – after that year's National. Then I had the Spring meeting. When I got to my first National Meeting the following fall, I was already prepared. I was formed by my region. So you have them to blame!

This family has taught me. It has helped to teach me, as we heard in the Scripture proclaimed to us at Morning Prayer today:

“To let your love for one another be intense,  
Be hospitable to one another.  
As each one has received a gift, to use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's grace.  
So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 4: 8-11a)

This family has also taught me, like all the others I've mentioned have taught me. You have further taught me how to think. You have further taught me how to behave. You have further taught me how to be in the world. You have *certainly* further taught me how to pray. You, too, have shaped me – and molded me – and formed me – and transformed me, many times and in many ways.

To be part of a group – a family – that is in as much love - at such a deep level - as I am, with the Liturgy, with the Church, with Jesus Christ has been so formative for me – and is such a joy in my life.

Yes – we have problems. Yes – there are squabbles and there have been outright fights!!! (“It's a semi-colon in the Position Statement, not a comma!”) Yes – there are areas that the FDLC needs to grow and needs to develop and needs to evolve. In what family are there none of these? Remember Pope Francis – “to believe in relationships, even in difficult situations.”

We also do some really, really, *really* good things!! We help others to encounter the living Christ in his word and in his sacraments. We help others come to a deeper understanding of the most important thing they will do all week long! And we help them to do it in the best possible way that they can. We use our gifts not for ourselves, but so that God may be glorified in Christ Jesus!

I cannot say anything else but “Thank you.” ■

***“Families teach the value of the bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation, respect; they encourage people to work toward a world that is livable and to believe in relationships even in difficult situations” (Pope Francis).***