



NewsLetter

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Bishop Lopes Addresses the 2023 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

The 2023 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions took place in Cincinnati from October 10-12, under the theme “Sign & Pledge of Communion: Masses with Children.” Major presentations were given by Dr. Timothy P. O’Malley (University of Notre Dame), Dr. Donna Eschenauer (St. Joseph’s Seminary, Dunwoodie, NY), and Sr. Sandra DeMasi, SSJ (St. Rose of Lima, Short Hills, NJ). The participants were also addressed during the meeting by Bishop Steven J. Lopes, Bishop of the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter and Committee Chairman; his remarks are reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

On this fiftieth anniversary of the Directory for Masses with Children, you have taken as your theme “Sign & Pledge of Communion.” I’d like to reflect upon the dignity of children, what this implies for the worship of the whole Church, and how children reveal the liturgical act to each one of us.

The origin of every human person is the creative love of God. All human beings are created in God’s image and likeness, equally and fully—whether adults or children, healthy or sick, able-bodied or otherwise. The Church is a communion of these diverse yet equal members, filled with the Spirit and adopted as sons and daughters of God in baptism. All who have been washed in water equally and fully bear the mark of this sacrament. At this National Meeting, we confess that the exemplar of the Christian person is Christ who has died, risen, and come to full stature in every baptized person. As St. Paul puts it: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

No matter our age, health, or condition, each person is a full and equal member of the celebrating Church. That full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which the Church earnestly desires, that participation which the liturgy itself demands, is as much a right and duty of children, the sick, and persons with disabilities as it is of healthy, able-bodied adults. All are capable of the liturgical act in a way appropriate to their condition. The worship of a child does not need to become the worship of an adult in order to have value. It need only be itself. A *different* participation than that of adults is not *less* of a participation.

What does this mean for how we approach Masses at which a large number of children are present? First, a liturgy for the whole Church means a liturgy for the whole person: soul and body. The nature of the human person requires us to attend to all elements of celebration, not only words but also gesture, movement, posture, silence, music, and art. To quote the famous axiom of Pope St. Leo the Great: “Everything of Christ has passed into the celebration of the sacraments.” All aspects of the mystery and power of

Christ are made present and active through the rhythms and movements of the Church's sacred liturgy.

Today, there is sometimes an imbalance between word and gesture in our worship, caused by the neglect of the bodily aspects of liturgical celebration. Processions, smells, sounds, and sights are occasionally cast as unnecessary ceremonial. Where this occurs, the impression is given that the words of the liturgy are of chief importance and the liturgy is primarily the understanding of an idea or the recollection of a memory. In his Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*, Pope Francis actually names this tendency Gnosticism: a disembodied and hyper intellectual approach to Christian worship. Gnostic liturgy is particularly harmful to children and those with intellectual disabilities, whose capacity for abstract, theological concepts is limited. Their capacity for liturgical participation is not! A liturgy for the whole Church must be a liturgy for the whole person, engaging of all the senses of body and soul.

The dignity of the child also requires that we carefully consider the practice of adapting liturgical texts, so we do not underestimate a child's ability to understand. The Directory for Masses with Children notes that a common celebration of the Liturgy of the Word by adults and children fosters the Christian spirit of the family (no. 16). Yes, the Directory goes on to say that special celebrations in a separate place may also be appropriate (no. 17). There is an opportunity for families to continue a reflection on the Scriptures at home, with parents as the first educators of their children in the faith, explaining and discussing the readings at Mass. The fiftieth anniversary of the Directory seems a fitting time for us to reflect on the necessary interaction of the celebration of Mass and the life of faith in the domestic Church.

I'd be remiss if I didn't highlight the service which children perform for other members of the Christian community. While children are the objects of the Church's care, they also have much to offer adults as well.

We are all called to have a posture of childlike wonder before divine mysteries: "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:4). We study, we ponder, we learn, but we never exhaust the meaning of the mysteries we celebrate in the liturgy. Children remind us of the one thing necessary in the liturgical encounter: astonishment. According to Pope Francis, astonishment is the prelude to encounter: we are astonished "at the fact that the paschal mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs" (*Desiderio desideravi*, no. 24) and we marvel "at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus" (no. 25).

Children help us to see a fuller meaning of "conscious" participation. In no. 11 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council echo the rule of St. Benedict: "Let us stand to sing the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices." To participate consciously is not primarily to understand or even to focus intently. Conscious participation is an openness of mind and heart to the reality of God, a stretching toward God in love, and speaking out of the heart's abundance.

Pope Francis addresses *Desiderio desideravi* to the whole Church, and in the section on liturgical formation (nos. 27-47), he invites the Church to rediscover the capacity for symbol. In describing the kind of formation that reawakens potential, he gives a single example – that of a child learning the sign of the cross from a relative, teacher, or pastor (no. 47). The teacher takes the child's hand, makes the gesture, and slowly recites the words that accompany it. Over time, the child begins to possess the gesture or, as our Holy Father notes, the gesture begins to possess her; the sign of the cross becomes a habit that grows in meaning. We do not outgrow this kind of formation. As Pope Francis states, "Growing up we will have more ways of being able to understand, but always on the condition of remaining little ones" (no. 47).

The Synoptic Gospels each recount Christ's blessing of children. You know the pattern: the crowds bring children to Christ, the disciples rebuke them, and Christ becomes indignant. He responds, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them" (Mk 10:14). This anniversary of the Directory is an occasion for us to reflect upon the great dignity of children whom the Lord calls to come to him in the Sacred Liturgy and an opportunity for us to consider what prevents their liturgical encounter with Christ. It's also a moment for us to acknowledge how children build up the Church. My hope for you who participate in this National Meeting is that, along with the scholarly insights, pastoral wisdom, and fellowship, you depart from here with "the humility of little ones, the attitude that opens up into wonder" (*Desiderio desideravi*, no. 38).

Rev. Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM, Presented with McManus Award

During the 2023 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in Cincinnati, the annual Frederick R. McManus Award for contributions in furthering the liturgical renewal in the United States was presented to Rev. Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM, professor emeritus and former President at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He also served at the International Commission on English in the Liturgy for fifteen years. Speaking on the topic of liturgical catechesis, excerpts from his acceptance address are reprinted for the benefit of our readers:

As I plunged into parish liturgy workshops... I soon discovered that highly theological lectures did not work. Brave listeners might ask a question or two, but real discussion was minimal. The approach was too cerebral, and it did not pay enough attention to peoples' experience.

Then I remembered my experience teaching 3rd grade catechism in my seminary years. I had discovered a German manual for catechists in our library. It dated from the late 1930s, when kerygmatic catechesis had burst onto the scene. You simply told biblical stories, illustrated them by drawing stick figures on the blackboard in various postures as you told the stories, and engaged children in conversation. To sum up the lesson you wrote a single word on the blackboard. This approach enabled children to imagine themselves in the story.

Remembering that experience I reversed my approach of lecture followed by questions. Instead, I started with questions for the participants, to stimulate their naming and exploring of their liturgical experience. To my delight it worked. I soon came across the early catechetical writings of Thomas Groome. They affirmed the experience-based approach I had chanced upon. You evoked people's experience and stories and put those into conversation with important elements of our tradition.

I made another discovery in those workshops. By the 1970s people knew the Eucharistic Prayers well enough to lip-sync them. I would ask them to name and comment on any words and phrases they could remember, without benefit of the text. They could only come up with four or five. Most of the prayer did not register. It lacked memorable phrases, and people simply turned off their ears.

I also discovered that despite not remembering most of the words, people knew in their bones much more about Mass than I had thought. You only had to help them find words for what they already knew. I discovered that non-verbal "languages" were often more powerful bearers of meaning than words: ritual symbols do – rather than say – the meaning, ordinary time becomes *kairos*-time filled with God's presence and action, music makes words memorable, and a place of worship becomes a built theology and symbol of identity. Those workshops taught me two things. At its best, liturgical catechesis is mystagogy (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1075), and the non-verbal "languages" had become my favorite resource for that reflection... The communicative power of non-verbal "languages," inscribed in the body, rather than in cerebral thought, opened up a much richer understanding of how liturgy makes meaning, a meaning often beyond what words can say. [...]

The mystery of the Trinity is the foundation of the entire history of salvation, from creation to parousia. The mutual love, self-giving, and life-sharing community within the Trinity is the model for all that God does in creation and salvation. The Blessed Trinity is the lynchpin connecting all the mysteries of our faith. They all spring from God's incredible love (*Ad gentes*, no. 32), and their common goal is the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, to whom be all praise, honor, and glory.

2024 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

October 1-3, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Bridges of Hope: Merging Parishes

New Committee and Subcommittee Appointments

Two appointments were made on October 10, 2023 that affect the membership of the Committee on Divine Worship and the Subcommittee on Divine Worship in Spanish:

Committee Consultant – At the 2023 National Meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, Dr. James M. Starke, was elected the new Chairman of the Board for a one-year term, succeeding Ms. Laura Bertone. Dr. Starke is the Director of Liturgy, Assistant Professor, and Chair of the Department of Systematic and Liturgical Theology at St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore. As the Chair’s position is also an *ex officio* consultant to the Committee on Divine Worship, Starke was appointed to that role by Bishop Steven J. Lopes, Committee Chairman. The Committee also thanks Ms. Bertone for her service as a consultant during the past year.

Subcommittee Member – During the past summer, San Bernardino Bishop Alberto Rojas stepped down from the Subcommittee on Divine Worship in Spanish, owing to commitments in his diocese and within other USCCB committees. Bishop Mario A. Avilés, CO, Subcommittee Chairman, appointed Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano of San Diego as a new member to succeed Bishop Rojas. The Subcommittee thanks Bishop Rojas for serving, and welcomes Bishop Bejarano as a collaborator in the Hispanic/Latino liturgical life of the Church in the United States.



In Memoriam: Msgr. Anthony F. Sherman

Monsignor Anthony F. Sherman of the Diocese of Brooklyn, who served as the 8th Executive Director of the Secretariat of Divine Worship from 2007-2011, and as Associate Director from 2002-2007, passed away on October 8, 2023 at the age of 78. Ordained to the priesthood in 1970, he served in various pastoral assignments and the diocesan liturgical commission. He was named as a Prelate of Honor with the title of Monsignor in 1986.

Sherman’s service with the USCCB was focused largely on the approval process of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition* and the initial stages of its implementation. He also assisted in the liturgical coordination of Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to the United States in 2008. His pastoral zeal was evident to all who met and worked with him. The Secretariat mourns the loss of Msgr. Sherman, and we pray for the repose of his soul:

*Hear with favor our prayers,
which we humbly offer, O Lord,
for the salvation of the soul of Anthony, your servant and Priest,
that he, who devoted a faithful ministry to your name,
may rejoice in the perpetual company of your Saints.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*