

“Disciples Making Disciples” Theme of Initiation Conference

Mary G. Fox

As new Christian initiation ministers consider the work of making disciples, they are often filled with questions. Not only are they learning a new vocabulary that includes such words as *catechumen*, *scrutiny*, and *election*—they are also learning a new process with liturgical rites, periods, and steps. At first, these ministers seek other coordinators and pastors who can provide details on practical matters, such as what occurs during a dismissal session and if the catechumenate has a set length.

After a few years of coordinating the process in the parish, attending diocesan workshops, and holding conversations with the neighboring parish’s Christian initiation coordinator, new questions replace old ones. Year-round inquiry sessions occur at the parish, and the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens usually occurs more than once a year. Still, the coordinator seeks to discover more about how to discern readiness with inquirers and catechumens, how to better form catechists, and how to make apostolic works part of the process.

Also looming are questions such as what it means for the whole parish to be involved in Christian initiation and how new Catholics are inspired to evangelize. No matter an individual’s role in the Christian initiation process, it doesn’t take long to realize that making disciples is hard work. And it’s work that seeks conversation.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Liturgy Training Publications is offering an opportunity to further that conversation through the National Gathering on Christian Initiation™: A Conference for Catechumenal Ministers and Pastoral Leaders. The conference, with the theme “Disciples Making Disciples,” will take place July 5 and 6 at the Sheraton Grand in Chicago.

To serve varied needs, the event will be organized in two tracks; one for parish leaders and initiation ministers and the other for regional or diocesan trainers. Within these tracks both theoretical and practical aspects of initiation ministry will be explored. Participants will have a chance to attend a variety of sessions and share their experiences.

The conference is the fruit of more than two years of conversations and meetings that editors at LTP have had with practitioners and leaders in the field of Christian initiation.

From the start of these discussions, LTP sought to discover how best to serve the needs of initiation ministers for development in practical and theoretical skills as well to enrich their theological background. Initiation ministers, though, are not the only ones whose interests need to be served. LTP also sought to determine ways to form the parish in Christian initiation, for the person in the pew has a vital role in Christian initiation. As LTP senior editor and liturgical consultant Victoria M. Tufano reminded attendees

(from a quote by Balthasar Fischer), “Shepherds do not make sheep. Sheep make sheep.”

Ideas for virtual workshops on initiation as well as a number of books arose from these meetings. “As Liturgy Training Publications began to explore ways to recover its roots in training people for ministry, the importance of Christian initiation as an area of focus soon became clear,” Tufano said. “A number of Virtual Workshops™ have been offered on various initiation topics, and more are scheduled. At the same time, we are concentrating on offering new print and video materials and updating previous materials that have stood the test of time.”

To ensure that all involved in the process have an opportunity for formation, resources have been developed for specific audiences. Among the books being published are *The Role of the Priest in Christian Initiation*, by Stephen S. Wilbricht, csc, (due out in March) and *The Role of the Coordinator in Christian Initiation: A Pastoral and Practical Guide* (due out in July).



The National Gathering on Christian Initiation™ will offer ministers education, formation, and renewal.

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National Gathering on Christian Initiation™

A Conference for Catechumenal Ministers
and Pastoral Leaders

Disciples Making Disciples 2017

The conference will be one of many avenues for LTP to nurture the ministry of Christian initiation. “This event is a dynamic way for LTP to reach out to Christian initiation ministers,” said Deanna M. Keefe, acting director of LTP. She noted that the conference reaches back to the agency’s initial mission to train ministers and looks forward to new ways of evangelizing. Through the conference, she said, LTP will heed Pope Francis’ call in *The Joy of the Gospel* to do more than “passively and calmly wait in our church buildings.” Keefe said, “In sponsoring this conference, LTP is not just waiting for people but reaching out to energize Christian initiation ministers. We are again gathering people to share how they evangelize.”

Michael Ruzicki, LTP editor and liturgical training consultant, said the conference will allow Christian initiation ministers to consider how they go forth as missionary disciples. He explained that, in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis invited parishes to “be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, styles, and methods of evangelization.” The conference, he said, “will provide Christian initiation ministers the opportunity to share the best practices that they have developed and encourage each other to be bolder and more creative in the ways that they bring the Good News of Christ to our parishes.” He added, “we will see how others are, as the pope says, ‘filled with joy as they evangelize.’”

For LTP to gather Christian initiation ministers from across the nation at a conference is just another step in serving them, Tufano noted. “The National Gathering on Christian Initiation™ was a natural outgrowth of this focus on Christian initiation. In addition to offering education and formation, we hope the National Gathering will renew the energy of experienced ministers and hand it on to people new to initiation. There’s an enthusiasm that is unique to being with people who have a passion for the same thing. We hope we can spark that enthusiasm and send people out to share it.”

INTERPRETING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Forming ministers in sharing enthusiasm for the person and Good News of Jesus Christ is a main aim of the conference. Participants will develop skills in awakening and sharing faith, integrating catechesis and the liturgy, and celebrating the rites fully. Focus will be outside of the community, too, as participants consider engagement in apostolic works as part of the process of Christian initiation.

Such engagement is an integral part of making disciples, said Rev. Ron Lewinski, of the Archdiocese of Chicago, at one of the meetings that was an impetus to the conference. “Discipleship is not only lived out in the parish, but in the world; what I like about what I am hearing is that we are recognizing that we are preparing people to live in the real world, not in the sacristy. The piece that keeps coming back to me is *Gaudium et spes*. The Church in every age is called to interpret the signs of the times with the light of the Gospel. The initiation process takes *Gaudium et spes* and takes the signs of the times with the light of the Gospel.”

The National Gathering on Christian Initiation™ will seek to be one of the paths that guide and rekindle the spark for evangelization among initiation ministers and parish communities.

More information on costs, presenters, and topics is available at www.NationalGatheringonChristianinitiation.org. ♦

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