

Conference Focus: Discipleship

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The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration. —*The Joy of the Gospel*, 28

The words of Pope Francis in the first chapter of *The Joy of the Gospel* easily resonate with many Christian initiation ministers. In “The Church’s Missionary Transformation,” the first chapter of the apostolic exhortation, the pope holds forth the parish as the place for conversion. “It possesses great flexibility,” the Holy Father writes, continuing, “it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and community” (28).

For decades, pastors, Christian initiation teams, and diocesan leaders have taken to heart the call in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* that each parishioner is an evangelizer. The rite states, “The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized” (9). *The Joy of the Gospel* helps us look at this anew. There, the pope calls us to be “permanently in a state of mission” and to be “bold and creative” in rethinking methods of evangelization.

“Disciples Making Disciples,” is the theme of the National Gathering on Christian Initiation™ that Liturgy Training Publications is sponsoring. The conference will assist catechumenal ministers, pastors, musicians, liturgists, and diocesan leaders in considering how their parishes and dioceses evangelize. As conference attendees discuss their parish participation, they will receive fresh perspectives.

This conference will be held July 5 and 6 at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Chicago. During the two days that leaders and ministers gather, discipleship will be the focus of the four presentations and the breakout sessions that follow. There, attendees will consider what discipleship is, what skills are needed to form disciples, how the parish forms disciples, and how discipleship is lived out. As Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel*, it will consider how to make parishes “environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”

The conference will aim for participants to

- understand that the rite envisions the parish as a community of disciples;
- better comprehend their call to discipleship;
- see the baptismal catechumenate as the process for forming disciples; and
- gain skills in leading group discussions, in relating their story and the catechumens’ stories to the Paschal Mystery, in liturgical catechesis, and in ritual celebration.

The four conference presenters and workshop facilitators will assist in the development of these skills but so will attendees as they tell of their successes and missteps. “During the Gathering, participants who have developed skills, made mistakes, and experienced challenges throughout their years of initiation ministry will share their stories and best practices,” said Michael Ruzicki, conference emcee and editor and liturgical training consultant at LTP. Ruzicki and conference team member Victoria M. Tufano stressed that the breakout sessions and the social events will offer time for attendees to learn from each other as parish experiences are discussed.

Two conference tracks will allow participants an opportunity to exchange information and experiences with participants who share a similar focus and professional interest. The track for parish leaders and initiation ministers will include priests, liturgists, musicians, catechists, and parish coordinators of Christian initiation. Participants in this track seek to make the parish a place where initiation is nurtured. Regional and diocesan leaders will be offered another track. These individuals serve others by providing training and formation. During much of the conference, participants of the different tracks will be together, but the groups will separate for conversation and skill building. Participants who are new to initiation ministry will be offered pre-conference distance-learning sessions as preparation for the conference.

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



The National Gathering on Christian Initiation™ will help participants gain skills to assist their parishes in becoming communities of discipleship.

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