

Archdiocese establishes office for worship

Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot is stepping down as chancellor of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to take on a new role as director of a new archdiocesan office for worship.

The new office will provide support and education to parishes in the area of liturgy and worship. Monsignor Jaskot expects to have the office up and running by September after completing his licentiate in canon law at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

In addition to heading the office of worship, Monsignor Jaskot will serve as an adjunct faculty member and teach an introductory sacraments class at St. Mary's Seminary, Roland Park.

The archdiocese has begun a search for a new chancellor, whose main responsibility is to assist the archbishop – especially in canonical matters. The role may be filled by a priest, a consecrated religious woman or man, or a lay person.

Monsignor Jaskot said liturgy has always been one of his passions. He holds a licentiate in sacred theology in dogmatic theology specializing in sacraments from the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm in Rome. His bachelor's degree in sacred theology is from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

"I am continually astounded by the humility of God who loves us so much and seeks so much to be close to us that he has given us the sacraments," said Monsignor Jaskot. "I love to be able to share that gift, to help others understand and to see what we have so that the sacraments are not taken for granted but seen as a real opportunity to share in the life of God."

Before his appointment as chancellor more than three years ago, Monsignor Jaskot was an associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick. He has also served as priest-secretary to Cardinal William H. Keeler.

The Catholic Review conducted a question-and-answer interview with Monsignor

Jaskot about his new role. Here are the questions and his responses:

What is the purpose of the new office? What will be your responsibilities? Will you be working mostly with priests?

Jesus has given us extraordinary gifts in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The sacraments and the other ways that we worship allow us to come closer to God, to share in his divine life. I see the purpose of the office is to help unpack these gifts and to help others to see the remarkable opportunities for God's grace. The primary responsibility will be education. First, I will need to educate myself by reviewing the documents and the teachings of the church about how and why we celebrate, about how and why we worship. Then I will need to continue that education by visiting our parishes and talking to our priests, pastoral life directors, liturgy committee members, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and others. I want to find out what are the needs of our priests and of those who serve in the parishes. Once I get around to the parishes, I look forward to offering educational opportunities for those in the parishes.

Why is this office needed? Are there certain liturgical issues that need to be addressed? How so?

I think that, on the whole, we do liturgy pretty well in this archdiocese, but there is always room for improvement. I think this improvement will come, not so much from what I will offer, but from the education. As people grow in awareness of the love God wants to share in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, they will grow in appreciation for those sacraments and desire to celebrate them more fully, more actively and more consciously. There is a need for education in so many areas. In the celebration of the Eucharist, how do we celebrate, what we do and what does it mean? This is also true in the celebration of the other sacraments, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. I think we also need education in how we can celebrate with other Christians and with peoples of other faiths. There are many opportunities that could bring us together in worship. How do we do that in a way that recognizes our common elements but also recognizes the differences that exist among us?

What are the greatest challenges parishes faces in fostering good liturgy? How can your office assist them?

I think the greatest challenge is the lack of a deep awareness of God's presence, of his desire to be close to us, of his desire to share his love with us. This comes from many reasons. People today are hungry spiritually. They want to draw closer to God, but they are also very busy and there are many voices competing to be heard. Jesus wants to set us on fire, to be aware of his love for us and grow in our love for him and for one another. The greatest opportunity to build this awareness comes through education, not merely in the logistics, but the theology of each sacrament, to see how Jesus seeks to draw us closer to the Father and to one another. It begins in the sacred Scriptures and follows through the tradition of the church. The catechism is a great resource here. The ritual for each of the sacraments, the prayers and the signs and the symbols are a treasure trove of the theology that makes manifest God's love.

In your opinion, what makes good liturgy?

It is not about my opinion. The church herself, in "Sacrosanctum Concilium," the document of the Second Vatican Council, repeatedly referred to the full, active and conscious participation of the faithful in the rites of the church. From the church, then, we see good liturgy when all of the people know the ritual, help to prepare the liturgy, take an active role and share in the grace God seeks to give. This is true in every role, every ministry and for every person. Not one of the faithful is excused. The document also instructs that liturgy is to build us up as a community, as the body of Christ, and to strengthen us to make the mystery of Christ present in this world. It is my prayer that through the office for worship I can help the people to understand better what God is giving to us and what he is asking from us in the sacraments.

Given that the pope has allowed for a greater freedom in celebrating the Tridentine rite, will you be working with priests in that area? If so, how?

The Eucharist, because it is the source of activity for who we are as a community and the summit of what we hope to be, will be the primary focus for the office. The majority of this will be about improving the way we understand and celebrate the ordinary form of the Eucharist. But this will include the extraordinary form that Pope Benedict (XVI) gave us recently in the traditional Latin Mass. Here again I

hope that education will help all to see the gift we have in the traditional Latin Mass and the proper place that this will play in the life of the church. Pope Benedict made it clear that he wanted to share the gift of our tradition with us but that this should not be separate from the rest of the life of the church.