Celebrating the Anniversary of Dedication of a Parish Church Building
Prepared by the Diocese of Des Moines
Office for Worship

This centennial year, why not do a little research to find out what day your parish church was dedicated and celebrate the date with a little more flourish than usual? One of the opportunities we have is to look both at our history as a diocese, but also as local parish communities.

Throughout the course of the year, the Church calendar calls our attention to several significant Roman basilicas in memorials and a feast. St. Mary Major on August 5, St. Peter and Saint Paul Basilicas on November 18 are three memorials, and St. John Lateran on November 9 is a feast. The local cathedral’s anniversary of dedication, which is October 11 for the Cathedral of Saint Ambrose in our diocese, is also a memorial for all the parishes of the diocese.

But the anniversary of dedication of each local parish’s church building is celebrated as a solemnity in that local community, outranking most Sundays in Ordinary Time and even the parish’s patron (which may be celebrated as a feast). Thomas G. Simons, author of *Holy People, Holy Place: Rites for the Church’s House* (LTP: 1998), writes:

> “The celebration of the anniversary of the dedication of the parish church building is an often-forgotten opportunity to celebrate the life of the local church and re-emphasize to the people the importance of the gathering place for God’s holy people. It is an occasion in which sacred identity and local history become tangible. The continuity of the faith from generation to generation is celebrated” (68).

Following are some quick tips gleaned from Simons’ book and from the liturgical life of the Church that might help you give this celebration a try this year or sometime in the future. As always, do not hesitate to contact Kyle Lechtenberg, director of the Office for Worship, for assistance in planning this or any other liturgical celebration.

**The character of the celebration**

- joyful recollection of the day the building was first used for worship
- looking toward the new and eternal Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God
- Reminder that the building houses the Church—the People of God,
- Connects the tangible symbols of our salvation with God’s presence and action in our lives

**To prepare and involve the parish, try to uncover:**

- oral histories about the construction, furnishings, artwork
- photos from the liturgy of dedication or the early days of the parish
- history of the places the parish has used for worship

**Getting Together**

A simple reception (e.g. coffee and rolls) after the anniversary liturgy can be a great time to foster today’s community while reconnecting with past experiences.

*Next page: Preparing the anniversary liturgy…*
Preparing Liturgy for the Anniversary of the Dedication of a Church

Selecting the Date

- Use the actual date of dedication if known, and if the community can observe this date
- The Sunday nearest the anniversary date (if in Ordinary Time, excluding Trinity Sunday, the Body and Blood of Christ, and Christ the King), or a Sunday in the Christmas Season (excluding Epiphany)
- The Sunday before November 1, “to emphasize the bond between the church on earth and the church in heaven”

If your church was dedicated in Advent, Lent, or Easter seasons, choose the Sunday before November 1. These guidelines were printed in the Vatican question-answer journal (Notitiae 8 [1972], 103).

Art & Environment

- Enhance the major symbols of the church with seasonally appropriate flowers, candles, cloth, or lighting:
  - cross, ambo, altar, font and ambry
  - eucharistic chapel and/or tabernacle
  - devotional shrines or images
- Highlight the places on the walls that were anointed with the Sacred Chrism
- Light the dedication candles—before or as part of the liturgy

Liturgical Texts

- Readings are selected from the Common of the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church (Lectionary #701-706)
- Use the “Common of the Dedication of a Church” (Sacramentary page 765-767) to locate the options available. For example, below is the text from the preface for the Anniversary of the Dedication of a Church. The liturgical texts of the anniversary liturgy have much to teach about the celebration:

  Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. We thank you now for this house of prayer in which you bless your family as we come to you on pilgrimage. Here you reveal your presence by sacramental signs, and make us one with you through the unseen bond of grace. Here you build your temple of living stones, and bring the Church to its full stature as the body of Christ throughout the world, to reach its perfection at last in the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which is the vision of your peace. In communion with all the angels and saints, we bless and praise your greatness in the temple of your glory:

  Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Music Ministry

- Use suggestions from the dedication of a church. Two years ago, the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica fell on a Sunday—and the NPM has resources up on their website. You can visit this link: [http://www.npm.org/Planning/yearb/latbasilica.html](http://www.npm.org/Planning/yearb/latbasilica.html) for a number of suggestions, many of which would fit for any readings you select for the celebration.
- Call together a combined group of musicians. What music was done at the dedication? Is it still a part of your community’s repertoire?

Be creative! This is an opportunity to do what your parish does best and to connect it with the most familiar symbol of your parish community. If you would like assistance planning an anniversary celebration in your parish, contact Kyle Lechtenberg at 515.237.5046 or at worship@dmdiocese.org.