



PRESS RELEASE

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

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(Chicago, 4 May 2007) – Thanks to the Traditional Latin Mass, a double revival is already occurring in the south-side of Chicago, even before Pope Benedict XVI issues his much anticipated *motu proprio* granting wider use of this ancient Rite. The Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest was officially established by Francis Cardinal George last June 2006, with exclusive use of the Traditional Latin Rite. It may be unique in the world as the only church with the status of a “Shrine” to offer Mass and all the sacraments of the Catholic Church exclusively in that Rite since 1969, when the Catholic Mass was changed. The Shrine of Christ the King functions at the site of the former St. Clara/St. Gelasius, a magnificent neo-renaissance church once threatened with demolition, towering majestically over the recovering south-side neighborhood of Woodlawn.

Here, where at one point the church had been closed and there were no faithful, a steadily growing congregation gathers every Sunday for a High Mass in the Classical Latin Rite offered by the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. They come from near and far, to experience the transcendent beauty of an ancient ritual that is timeless, in the small space of an attractively fitted temporary chapel in the basement of the rectory building (6415 S. Woodlawn Avenue). The church itself is gutted, awaiting the full restoration which the Institute of Christ the King plans to undertake. The interest is such that a second Sunday Mass will be added this month in order to accommodate the growing numbers that are already close to overflowing the small confines of the chapel.

The limestone church building to where this congregation will some day move is a fine example of the art of revivalist architect Henry Schlacks, designer of many of the well-known churches in Chicago. Under its original name of “St. Clara,” it was built for Carmelite Friars in the 1920s and

was a thriving center of faith for many decades. In the 1970s the neighborhood took a sharp turn for the worse when it became the seat of one of the most dangerous gangs in the city, the Blackstone Rangers. Though the area started making a comeback in the 1990s, the parish, renamed St. Gelasius, was eventually closed because of small attendance and the costly repairs that the building required. When a decision to demolish the church was announced by the Archdiocese, different advocacy groups rose from among the neighborhood, the nearby University of Chicago, and a variety of preservationist interests. They moved to have the building declared a historic landmark, and were successful in their endeavors thus securing its survival.

However, even before the City of Chicago landmarked the former St. Clara/St. Gelasius, authorities in the Archdiocese had already approached the priests of the Institute of Christ the King offering them the challenging project of bringing the church back to life, both by re-establishing there a vibrant parish life and restoring the building itself. A side effect of this double revival, is the further revitalization of the upcoming neighborhood of Woodlawn, still on the ascent.

The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest has a track record of what has proven to be a winning formula: the transcendence of the Classical Latin Rite performed with great care for detail, with incense, Gregorian Chant, and richly decorated vessels and vestments, combined with the transformation and restoration of church buildings into jewels of architectural beauty. In Wausau, Wisconsin, Old St. Mary's Oratory is such an example. Restored according to the molds of a late medieval Bavarian chapel, it is now considered by the local township tourist office a must see stop. Another restoration project still underway is at their St. Francis de Sales Oratory in St. Louis. However, the most impressive and challenging is by far the Shrine of Christ the King, a neo-renaissance edifice that could seat up to 2,000 in its heyday. It is currently gutted. The Institute plans to restore its interior following the lines of early baroque churches in Rome, such as Santa Maria in Campitelli, upon which the high altar will be modeled.

As in all other cases, the priests of the Institute of Christ the King must raise the funds for their restoration project in Chicago. Vicar General and Provincial Superior, Msgr. R. Michael Schmitz is confident that generous benefactors will arise among those interested in reviving the glories of classical architecture, and among those who see the value of many aspects of Catholic faith and

culture that have been neglected over the last few decades. “They will also have the satisfaction of knowing that they are contributing to the rehabilitation of a historic neighborhood,” he comments. “Our experience is that, wherever the Classical Latin Rite is offered, in all its beauty and surrounded by the supporting outer signs and symbols of what it is, there is growth. Especially among the youth there is much interest. Our oratories and churches are typically filled with youth and young families with many children. Here in Chicago, as at other of our locations, some of the faithful are moving to be closer to our church.”

The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest is a young society of priests established in 1990 in Florence, Italy. It operates its own seminary there, in the small village of Gricigliano, where under its founders, Msgr. Gilles Wach and Fr. Philippe Mora, seventy young men are being trained to become priests for the Traditional Latin Rite. Aspirants to the priesthood receive preliminary education and training at the several churches of the Institute around the world. The nearly 50 priests of the Institute serve at 42 locations worldwide in the U.S.A., Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, France, Spain, Ireland, England, Sweden, and in missions in Gabon (West Africa). In the United States, it is based in Chicago, and operates in ten churches: Chicago, Rockford, Virgil (IL), Cashton (WI), Green Bay, Wausau, St. Louis, Kansas City (MO), Oakland, and Santa Clara.

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