



LAY PREACHING

**A Recommendation to the Archdiocese
of St. Paul and Minneapolis**

COUNCIL OF THE BAPTIZED

SERVING CATHOLICS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. PAUL/MINNEAPOLIS



The Council of the Baptized

The Council of the Baptized is a twenty-one member panel of Catholics, chartered in January, 2012, to be a collegial voice for a growing community of Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in honoring their baptismal responsibility for their local church.

Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (CCCR), initiator of the Council charter, having listened to Catholics since its incorporation in 2009, recognized a need for a representative body to hear the people's concerns of conscience. The community in Synod on September 17, 2011, called members to leadership on the Council of the Baptized, representing the four geographical quadrants of the Archdiocese. The Council's role is to deliberate on concerns brought to them and to speak to them, fully grounded in the tradition of the Church and in its official teaching in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The Council of the Baptized is not an officially designated or recognized council of the Archdiocese.

For further history, go to About Us at www.cccrmn.org. To read the charter and job descriptions of the Council of the Baptized and to find the current membership, go to www.councilofthebaptized.org.

The Proposal for Lay Preaching

One table discussion group at Synod of the Baptized 2011 continued to meet to understand the need for and justification of lay preaching. The committee submitted its proposal to the Council of the Baptized on August 31, 2012. The proposal was given preliminary approval on October 2, 2012, and, after completion of the work of the Research/Drafting Committee, unanimous approval for publication on September 3, 2013.

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LAY PREACHING

A RECOMMENDATION TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

The Council of the Baptized recommends that Archdiocesan leadership implement a program of lay liturgical preaching in our archdiocese. We believe that permitting lay liturgical preaching at the Eucharistic assembly will enhance the spiritual growth of the assembled community. We recognize that, according to current directives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), a priest must deliver the homily, usually the celebrant, or under certain circumstances, a deacon. We also acknowledge the teaching of Vatican II that "...priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all" (PO, 4). Nonetheless, we also believe that the chief purpose of both church law and of the priestly ministry is the spiritual growth of the faithful. We present this recommendation in the hope that the ministry of lay preaching can resume in parishes and allow lay people to bring their study and experience to serve the relevance of the Word to people today.

The People's Concern

Liturgical preaching aims to open up the scriptures and connect the 2,000-year-old message of Jesus to our deepest longings and hopes for ourselves, our families, and our world. In the dynamic of each Eucharist the homily connects the Word of God and especially the message of Jesus to our lives. We bring our lives, nourished by the Word, as gifts to the altar in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We depend on the Word to move us to gratitude in the Eucharistic Prayer and to action in solidarity with the whole Body

of Christ. We become the Body of Christ anew in every holy communion, sent forth to co-create the reign of God in our world. Authorization of lay preaching will multiply the voices testifying to the good news and linking Jesus' message to people's everyday experience.

Mass is the primary source for sustaining Christian life for Catholics, but only 34% of registered parishioners attend weekly according to the fact sheet produced by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis for the strategic planning initiative in 2010. That being the case, 66% of the parishioners don't participate in the great public prayer of the universal church. In making some homilies especially relevant to families and people working in the world, lay preaching can help draw an increased number to the Eucharistic celebration.

In our Archdiocese we do have many skilled and trained lay homilists who are not currently allowed to preach at Mass. We need them along with ordained preachers to help us hear and respond to the Word of God. Even the most gifted homilist finds it challenging to open the heart of the scriptures week after week for everyone. We believe that lay preaching is one way to link the liturgy to life and inspire the assembly to further the Church's mission in the world. Lay preaching also gives ordained preachers a chance to hear the homily and benefit from others' insights.

Applicable Law on Lay Preaching in the United States

What is the issue? What prevents pastors from freely inviting lay people to preach at Mass? There is no question about the baptismal responsibility for lay preaching in other forms than the homily at Mass, for example, in evangelization, catechesis, and moral instruction. Lay people may preach at children's liturgies, weddings, funerals, prayer services, communal celebrations of the anointing of the sick and reconciliation (Parachini, 2008, 5). What is the problem with lay people preaching from the scripture readings at Mass? The answer involves a quirky puzzle in canon law.

Canon law governs who can preach and when. In response to the teaching of Vatican II encouraging participation of the People of God

in the life of the Church, the Code of Canon Law was revised in 1983, preserving the preaching role of the ordained minister while providing for the needs of the people for scripture-based preaching (Baumer, 2002). For the first time, Canon Law recognizes that lay people by virtue of their baptism and confirmation can “be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word” (Canon 759). Canon 766 allows lay preaching “if necessity requires it in certain circumstances or it seems advantageous in particular cases.” However, and herein lies the quirk, in Canon 767, the form of preaching called the “homily,” the lectionary-based preaching that is part of the liturgy, “is reserved to a priest or deacon.” But preaching happens primarily in the liturgy of the Mass, so the canon raises the question of how lay people can be authorized “to preach” without being authorized to do it during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. In effect, a “homily” by definition can only be given by a priest or deacon. (For a discussion of leading canonists’ interpretations of these canons, see Parachini, 1999, Chapter 3. For the text of the canons, see Appendix A, 14).

Canon 766 authorizes national conferences of bishops to decide when letting lay people preach might be necessary or advantageous. The USCCB brought several versions of its implementing document to a vote before one finally received Vatican approval. The USCCB authorized diocesan bishops to be the decision-makers for their own dioceses. Bishops can permit qualified lay people to preach, to give conferences, and instructions. The first document sent to the Vatican for approval in 1999 said, “In every case care must be taken that such preaching, conferences, or instructions not be confused with the homily.” That wording was not approved.

The wording finally approved in 2001, effective in 2002, for the complementary norm of the USCCB prohibited lay preaching “within the celebration of the Eucharist at the moment reserved for the homily” (USCCB, Canon 766, 2001, 1). In their concern to preserve the role of the presiding ordained minister, the Vatican officials made it particularly difficult for bishops to allow lay people to break open the Word at Mass.

According to interpretive principles of canon law, canon lawyer Elissa Rinere says, "Bishops may apply the national legislation broadly if they wish, using gifted lay preachers freely in their diocese, while always acknowledging the unique relationship of the homily at the Eucharist to the ordained, or they may choose to apply the legislation narrowly, or not at all" (Rinere, 2006, 29). It is up to the bishop, but he has to appreciate the value of lay preaching to make time for it at Mass.

Subsequent documents from Rome and the USCCB reinforce the 2002 prohibition. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM), published by the USCCB in March, 2003, says "The Homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to the deacon, but never to a lay person" (GIRM, 66).

Then in 2004, in response to complaints about unauthorized innovations in liturgy, the Vatican issued an instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*. In Section 4, the instruction states:

"Certainly the liturgical reform inaugurated by the Council has greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful." Even so, "shadows are not lacking." In this regard it is not possible to be silent about the abuses, even quite grave ones, against the nature of the Liturgy and the Sacraments as well as the tradition and the authority of the Church, which in our day not infrequently plague liturgical celebrations in one ecclesial environment or another. In some places the perpetuation of liturgical abuses has become almost habitual, a fact which obviously cannot be allowed and must cease."

The instruction reiterates the prohibition on lay preaching at the time of the homily (*RS*, 2004, 74, 161). It narrowly construes the provision of Canon 766, adding the words "outside Mass" to the sentence in the canon that allows lay preaching. Since the phrase

“outside Mass” does not appear in the 1983 legislation giving rise to the instruction, the instruction does not supersede the canon (Rinere, 2006, 29; see also Hilkert, 2009, 15).

Though this instruction does not have the force of law that the USCCB’s norm of 2002 has, it is reasonable to suppose it had a chilling effect on the U.S. bishops’ willingness to allow lay preaching. This is not a settled question. There is ongoing canonical, theological, and pastoral debate about the prohibition of lay preaching at the time of the homily (Hilkert, 2009, 12).

The most recent document of the USCCB on preaching, *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: the Sunday Homily*, published in 2012, is chiefly addressed to the role of priests and deacons in preaching the homily; however, it does refer to the possibility of lay preaching: “We recognize that qualified lay persons may be authorized to preach in churches and oratories, and we are grateful for the ways in which they enrich the Church through their proclamation of God’s word” (PMF, 2).

What Happened in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

From the early 1980s until 2008 in our Archdiocese, trained lay preachers broke open the Word of God at Mass in as many as 29 parishes (*Catholic Spirit*, 5/13/08). In 2013, only a few parishes welcome lay preachers at Mass. What happened?

Inspired by Vatican II and encouraged by the revision of canon law that allowed lay preaching, parishes in St. Paul and Minneapolis began training programs and implemented lay liturgical preaching immediately. The USCCB’s publication entitled *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (1982) provided inspiration and guidance, stressing the importance of the homily in bridging the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic celebration. The local archbishops during that period did not discourage the people’s enthusiasm for participation. The programs flourished. When in 2002, almost 20 years later, the Vatican recognized the USCCB implementation plan, it included the prohibition of lay preaching at homily time. The prohibition was not enforced, however, in parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Six years later still, in 2008, as Archbishop Harry Flynn prepared to retire and hand over the governance of the Archdiocese to his successor Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, he notified all parishes to develop “a pastoral plan” to end lay preaching at the time of the homily (*Catholic Spirit*, 5/1/08). Although the Archbishop could have encouraged pastors to invite lay preachers to speak at other times during the liturgy, these “pastoral plans” in effect ended lay preaching in the Archdiocese. This decision did not end the prophetic desire of many lay people to open the Word of God at Mass or the need of the people to hear the word from many points of view.

For a brief history of lay preaching from Apostolic times to Vatican II, see Appendix A.

Why We Need Lay Preachers:

Diversity of perspectives, life experience, and modeling

Varieties of perspective and experience may be the most important contribution that lay preachers can provide in opening the Word. The USCCB’s most recent document on preaching speaks at length to the need for relating the scriptural message to the experience of the assembly: “Preachers should be aware of what their people are watching on television, what kind of music they are listening to, which websites they find appealing, and which films they find compelling” (PMF, 36). And again: “...the homilist may need to wrestle for a while with the challenging aspects of the biblical Word, searching for ways it could connect to ordinary experience and how it might be proclaimed to the congregation the homilist serves” (PMF, 44). The life experiences of the laity are quite different from that of the celibate clergy. Lay preachers have firsthand experiences in the challenges, problems, joys, and fears that beset or comfort lay people. They can, therefore, connect life experience to the good news of the Gospel.

Anecdotal evidence from parishes where lay preachers were the norm before 2008 is available from many parishioners. When asked about the practice as they experienced it, people peppered their descriptions with words such as “authentic,” “relevant,” “down to earth,” “useful,” and “refreshing.” Attendance at Mass in one parish

precipitously declined when lay preaching ceased. The termination of lay preaching happened at the same time as a turnover in parish staff, so it is difficult to pinpoint the cause of the decline in Mass attendance, but many people cited the termination of lay preaching as one reason for leaving the parish.

Many parishioners remarked that the mixture of male and female lay preachers along with ordained priests and deacons make all of the preaching more meaningful. Several parishioners who experienced lay preaching commented about the modeling lay preachers give their children, both boys and girls. Seeing Mommy or Daddy or a friend's parent doing the preaching provided examples for children and youth that help them to live out their faith in an active manner. One parishioner pointed out that we learn in three ways: by being taught, by trial and error, and by the modeling we experience, with modeling being the most effective method.

For further testimony of participants in lay preaching programs, see APPENDIX B

Some Ways to Solve This Problem

There are times other than that reserved for the priest's homily at Mass in which trained lay preachers can contribute their insights into the readings. One such instance might be immediately after a brief homily by the priest. The presider can introduce a lay preacher to share a complementary perspective on the readings of the day. Thus our congregations might hear many people with their unique experiences, style, vocabularies, and walks in life illumine the Word of God, rather than hearing only one pastor during the entire liturgical year, even year after year.

We agree with the position of Catholic Theological Association USA and FutureChurch, organizations that jointly issued a paper on lay preaching with the following suggestions:

Encourage your clergy to weave the voices of lay people into their homilies. A short homily can be followed by comments from members of the community. Two preachers, one lay person and one ordained, could speak alternately

during the homily. The ordained minister could provide Scriptural and theological commentary, while a parent, single-person or teen-ager, for example, could share personal experiences" (Ballenger, 2012).

In addition, the permission in canon law to use lay preachers when "necessary or useful" "is best interpreted in the broadest light" (Baumer, 1999, 11). Baumer points out that Vatican II recognized need for the Liturgy of the Word to address diverse, multicultural communities, for "enculturation." As in allowing for lay preaching at children's Masses (1973), there are other occasions when the ordained presider finds it difficult to adapt himself to the culture of the assembly (Baumer, 1999, 8). For example, it could be considered necessary and useful to permit lay partnership with an ordained presider whose English is not understood by the assembly.

Conclusion

It is imperative that church leaders do everything within their power to bring Catholic faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist. Because varieties of perspective and experience in preaching will enrich the liturgical experience for people, the Archbishop should use his authority to encourage pastors to partner with lay preachers in creative ways, utilizing their Spirit-given talents at the weekly Eucharist.

Therefore, we recommend that the Archbishop implement the training of lay preachers and pastors in collaborative preaching. We believe that lay preachers can assist pastors in showing how the Spirit revealed in the Word of God is also revealed in their own lives and in the lives of their fellow parishioners, leading them into the Church's public prayer of thanksgiving, and sending them forth in joy and hope to be God's messengers to the world.

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APPENDIX A

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAY PREACHING AND ITS AUTHORIZATION

Patricia A. Parachini, summarizes the history and theology of lay preaching in a series entitled *American Essays in Liturgy* edited by Edward Foley (*Lay Preaching: State of the Question*, 1999). This appendix follows her summary.

The word *preaching* is used today for many different kinds of witness: pre-evangelization, evangelization, catechesis, preaching in prayer services, and liturgical preaching, also called homiletics or lectionary-based preaching, that is, the preaching done after the readings at Mass. Parachini says that in her historical survey all lay preaching is included. The historical documents do not distinguish between kinds of preaching so it is impossible to say for sure if lay people were preaching at Mass in any of the eras in which they were allowed to preach at all (Parachini, 15).

In the early history of preaching in the church, three important characteristics are evident. First, in the beginning centuries of the church, the authority to preach was based on baptism. Second, before ordination in the church as we know it today, preaching was essential to spread the Gospel. Third, to be called to preach meant having the charism of preaching, a gift of the Spirit, as well as the affirmation of the faith community.

Baptism as the Basic Authority for Preaching

“Baptism as the first of the sacraments of initiation into the Christian community is recognized by bishops and theologians alike as the basis for participation in the Church’s mission of proclamation of the gospel to all” (Parachini, 24). Although the language of being anointed to preach is often assumed to refer to the sacrament of holy orders, Mary Catherine Hilbert, OP, cites liturgical theologians Mary Collins, OSB, and J. Frank Henderson among others, who have demonstrated that in liturgical tradition the language of anointing applies primarily to baptism. “The most fundamental anointing from which all ministry—including that of the ordained—derives, is the anointing of baptism and confirmation.” Hilbert cites Cardinal Suenens’ argument at Vatican II: “... we all receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the lay[person] as well as the priest, bishop, or

pope. The Holy Spirit cannot be received more or less, any more than a host is more or less consecrated' " (Hilkert, 2009, 9).

Before and After Ordination in the Early Church

In the early church, Acts 2:1-4, we read, "At Pentecost, inspired by the Spirit, the disciples immediately began to proclaim the gospels to the crowds in Jerusalem." As the disciples went out to found communities, they continued to preach charismatically. Men and women, authorized by their baptism, preached to the Christian communities that multiplied around the Mediterranean and in Asia Minor during the first century after Jesus' death and resurrection. During this first century the oral preaching tradition was committed to writing in the gospels of Mark, then Matthew and Luke, and, by the end of the century, John. By the end of the second century, the orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon had been instituted. Bishops were given the authority to preach or to delegate others to do so. It seems that by the third century women were excluded from preaching in "orthodox" communities, though lay men could be delegated to do so. By the fifth century lay men were also excluded (Parachini, 11-12).

Affirmation of the Faith Community from the Fifth Century to the Twentieth Century

The call to preach consists in being gifted by the Spirit with the charism of preaching along with the necessary affirmation of the faith community to exercise it. If originally "affirmation of the faith community" meant that the worshipping community selected its preachers, by the end of the second century it had come to mean "authorization by the bishop" as it still means today.

With the invasion of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the North into the Roman Empire at the end of 406 CE, the "one office that survived intact from the classical to the medieval polis was the office of Catholic bishop," the last vestige of order (Cahill, 1995, 61, 179-180). From the fifth century through the early Middle Ages, the bishops no longer officially sanctioned lay preaching. Until the rise of monasticism and development of educational systems, bishops delegated the preaching to priests who were expected to reform the populace through sermons (Parachini, 13).

The eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries, influenced by the rise of monasticism, saw a revival of lay preaching. Pope Innocent III authorized Francis of Assisi's order of friars to preach. Parachini quotes William Skudlarek describing the lay preaching phenomenon of the twelfth century, which, as well as St. Francis of Assisi, included Hildegard of Bingen and St. Dominic with his Order of Preachers. It was an "awakening of the human spirit that affected not only the church but all of Western civilization. ... [It was] more than an office in the church; it was an integral part of the full and complete following of Christ" (Parachini, 14-15).

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) halted that movement; preaching again became a clerical prerogative. The Council developed guidelines for the education of clergy to improve their preaching. For several centuries after the Fourth Lateran Council the quality, content and effectiveness of preaching continued to be a concern.

In the sixteenth century, the Reformation disclosed the problems arising from an under-educated clergy. One of the scandals crying out for reform was the monarchs' and popes' practice of appointing men to lucrative bishoprics, sometimes several to one man, in return for financial support and loyalty. The Council of Trent (1545-1563), the reforming council of the Counter-Reformation era, struggled throughout its long and interrupted sessions to require one bishop per See with the obligation of the bishop to "care for souls," to live in the diocese, and to preach regularly to his people. Trent also established the seminary system to educate clergy and published the first universal catechism to help them prepare sermons. The council established that a bishop must authorize who could preach (O'Malley, 2013).

The bishops' focus on the difficult task of wresting power to govern the church from civil authorities and educating a clerical class to lead in the dioceses effectively excluded the laity. The teachings of Trent were codified in 1917, the first Code of Canon Law, authorizing only preaching by the clergy. Mass, read quietly in Latin, became a private prayer of the priest. The people turned to private devotions. "Pastors of parishes were obliged to preach at the principal Sunday Mass. ... However, the length of the service or some other circumstance—excessive summer heat was commonly cited—was sufficient reason to omit the sermon" (Rinere, 2006, 26; see

also Gaillardetz, 2012, 23, for a description of the passivity of the congregation in pre-Vatican II liturgy).

Affirmation of the Faith Community by the Second Vatican Council

Then John XXIII opened the windows. The bishops of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), going back to the sources in the early church, proclaimed in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, that by their baptism all members of the church have the responsibility to participate fully in the life of the Church and to preach the good news (LG, 10).

Two long historical movements affecting preaching bore fruit at Vatican II. First, Pope Pius XII in his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* recognized the centrality of scripture to the Christian life and the historical critical method of interpreting the scriptures in the contexts of their origins. Catholic scripture scholars joined Protestant scholars in methods and their work resulted in the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.

Secondly, the liturgical movement, spearheaded by European Benedictines and by the Benedictines of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, culminated in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first of the 16 documents published by the Council.

Following years of research and development of liturgical reform, dating from the early years of the twentieth century and the reforms of Pope Pius X, the Vatican II document on the liturgy integrated the liturgy of the word with the Eucharistic meal. The preaching of the word and the sacrament of the Eucharist together nourish the People of God (Gaillardetz, 2012; Heubusch, 1996. 89). Fifty years later it is hard to imagine consecration and communion without the Liturgy of the Word and the homily that connects them in the experience of the assembly.

As a result of this long preparation and the reform of Vatican II, at long last the bishops of the Church gave the affirmation of the faith community to lay people with the charism of preaching in the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law. It provides for preaching by lay people when it is necessary or useful in the judgment of national bishops' conferences (canon 766).

The Code of Canon Law can be found on the Vatican website by searching "canon law." Preaching is addressed in Book III, Title I, Chapter I, The

Preaching of the Word of God, canons 762-772. Six of the canons are cited here.

Can. 762 Sacred ministers, among whose principal duties is the proclamation of the gospel of God to all, are to hold the function of preaching in esteem since the people of God are first brought together by the word of the living God, which it is certainly right to require from the mouth of priests.

Can. 766 Lay persons can be permitted to preach in a church or oratory, if necessity requires it in certain circumstances or it seems advantageous in particular cases, according to the prescripts of the conference of bishops and without prejudice to can. 767, §1.

Can. 767 §1. Among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or deacon, is preeminent; in the homily the mysteries of faith and the norms of Christian life are to be explained from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year.

§2. A homily must be given at all Masses on Sundays and holy days of obligation which are celebrated with a congregation, and it cannot be omitted except for a grave cause.

§3. It is strongly recommended that if there is a sufficient congregation, a homily is to be given even at Masses celebrated during the week, especially during the time of Advent and Lent or on the occasion of some feast day or a sorrowful event.

§4. It is for the pastor or rector of a church to take care that these prescripts are observed conscientiously.

Can. 768 §1. Those who proclaim the divine word are to propose first of all to the Christian faithful those things which one must believe and do for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.

§2. They are also to impart to the faithful the doctrine which the magisterium of the Church sets forth concerning the dignity and freedom of the human person, the unity and stability of the family and its duties, the obligations which people have from being joined together in society, and the ordering of temporal affairs according to the plan established by God.

Can. 769 Christian doctrine is to be set forth in a way accommodated to the condition of the listeners and in a manner adapted to the needs of the times.

Can. 772 §1. In the exercise of preaching, moreover, all are to observe the norms issued by the diocesan bishop.

APPENDIX B

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF LAY PREACHING

My First Experience of Lay Preaching

Edward Flahavan

I was about five or so years into what would be my 12-year term as pastor. And I was beginning to sense that the people could pretty well tell what I was about to say before I began the homily.

Like it or not, routine was beginning to take its toll on me—and most likely on the people in the pews as well, though I had always wrestled with the assigned Scripture texts, reflected deeply on them, prayed over what I would say, and insisted that what I was about to say must first have deep meaning in me—before opening my mouth.

Furthermore the parish had become “a one priest parish,” down from three when I arrived. No longer would the people hear a variety of “takes” on the readings from three different priests. It was now just me.

Then a permanent deacon was assigned, and he brought his own rich experience and reflection on the weekly Scriptures. That helped. But after a time parishioners began suggesting that a whole lot of lived experience with the Scriptures and the Christian life was sitting out there in the pews—untapped. And it was not confined only to the male gender. It could be coaxed out and shared. We might all grow from the experience.

Could the Holy Spirit be calling, speaking, suggesting change? I began to believe so. I believed it was worth the try. So I invited one of the “heavy lifters” in the parish, someone well respected both in the parish and in the larger community, to consider delivering the homily based on the assigned readings of the Sunday some weeks out. She accepted. I knew her to be a

person of prayer, a deeply convicted gospel believer, and someone who saw the Christian vocation as a call to grow in the love of God and service to the neighbor. She was a woman Religious with a doctorate degree, to boot.

When the appointed Sunday came, I positioned myself in the sanctuary so as to be able to watch her and the congregation fully. She was poised, fully engaged in both proclaiming the gospel and “breaking open the Word of God” with deep and clear conviction and gentle persuasion.

And the people “out there?” You could hear the proverbial pin drop, they were so attentive. They sat erect, still, forward, listening to every word. They were in full attention both to what was happening as well as to the message being preached. They seemed to be thinking, “Wow! This is wonderful. Maybe my story can also throw light on these texts. That could be me doing this.”

And so the door had been opened, and we walked through it together—into a large room of lived experience by people who were struggling to make ends meet, raising families with the usual challenges, holding onto marriages against the usual odds, holding onto hope in a hostile economy. The church’s room was full of good people who came together weekly for rich nourishment from their God in the Eucharist, from God’s Word, and from each other. And they WOULD be satisfied.

I believe embracing Lay Preaching was yet another deepening in the parish’s growth in the love of God and in the Church’s liturgy. It was as though a river of freshness, of nurturing from the Scriptures, was flowing through the community, irrigating it, renewing it, maturing it. I dare say, it was perhaps one of the most growth-inducing chapters in the parish’s long history.

As the Pentecost hymn puts it, “The Holy Spirit must come down and set all people free.....”

In Our Parish **Frank Meuers**

We have experienced lay preaching for many years in our parish. We feel one benefit of it is to get a different perspective from people that are involved in family life, and daily jobs just like we are, and so may have a completely different perspective on the readings of the Sunday or involvements in current events, than a single, ordained person.

It appears to us that these lay people put hours of research into their subject and try to approach many of the subjects with a story involving themselves, or their family members. This captures the attention of the people in the pews, and there is much head shaking as people remember themselves in similar situations. In other words, the message gets across.

We have found in the past our pastor purchased sermons from a religious order, and read them to us. Although the content was well researched and written, it seldom rang true to the activities of our daily lives, and therefore seemed distant, and perhaps not pertinent. I remember trying to remember after the service what the sermon had been about and seldom being able to recall much of substance.

Why I Preach **Harrison Nelson**

I preach because I feel the need to share Jesus' message. When I was 11 years old, my Grandmother asked me to live my life as Jesus lived his life. I foolishly agreed to do this. Subsequently, I have spent a great deal of my life searching for what Jesus actually said and did.

Jesus "performed" parables to physically and emotionally involve his listeners. This level of involvement was needed in order for some of his listeners to make their own decision to radically change the way they lived. This is how the Jesus movement began and grew. So I also try to involve my listeners (in Jesus' message) and then guide them to their own "insights" (sometimes "in-cites") that can lead to improving their own and other people's lives.

In Support of a Program of Lay Preaching **Kathleen & Mark Swanson**

For many years St. Thomas Becket benefitted from the variety of insights provided by having lay ministers preach the homily at Mass on Sunday. While this program is no longer in place, our parish continues to be blessed by having within the community many talented members with theological training similar to that of the priest. As lay ministers, they have provided a diversity of experiences and insights that added richness to our faith community. In a time when we are being asked to bring our "gifts to the table," we feel that resuming this ministry should be considered.

Concerns for misinterpretation of the gospel by lay preachers can easily be monitored by having homilies submitted to the pastor well in advance. The talents and treasures of a parish should not be wasted at a time when our priests are being asked to carry an even greater burden in growing the faith of the church community.

My Experience as a Lay Preacher

Paul Mandell

As a lay preacher for over eight years, I am most appreciative of the thorough training we received and then of the quality of preaching with which our parish has been blessed—four very personal, spirit-filled, gifted priests—since the start of our parish in the early 90s.

During that time when the ministry of lay preaching was available to those with training, I felt that the challenge of rooting homilies in the readings of the day greatly strengthened my study of and hunger for Scripture. I learned to make the connections to our particular parish journey as well as my personal faith experience.

As a married father of three kids, I was able to relate to some ideas in ways our priests might not, as gifted as they were. I believe that because of many of the comments after Mass. I hope that in a time when the church needs to speak to an increasingly diverse population with constantly changing life questions, our church leaders would acknowledge that the Spirit is alive and that the light which gospel instructs us to let shine wants to be released.

For the decisions of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) implementing the canons, see the main text, 2.

Proposals to the Council

To honor our baptismal responsibility in the local church, we must act on our concerns of conscience. We can address our concerns in positions we propose that the Council take, with programs we implement ourselves or with programs we recommend to the Archdiocese to implement.

Anyone may submit a proposal to the Council of the Baptized. Please submit proposals in writing to info@councilofthebaptized.org.

COUNCIL OF THE BAPTIZED
20 2ND ST NE, SUITE 2304
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