



## **GUIDELINES FOR LAY PREACHING**

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

### **Introduction:**

1. Preaching is one of the principal means by which the Church carries out its responsibility for the ministry of the Word of God. Together with catechetical formation, preaching holds primary place in the proclamation of the Christian faith (Canon 761).
2. Preaching the Word of God is an exercise of Christ's prophetic office, in which all christian believers share (*Lumen gentium* # 12). Through their baptism and confirmation all have received the commission of the Lord to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Enlivened by the Spirit of truth, the people of God partake in a true ministry of the Word of God by the witness of their persevering faith and ceaseless charity with praise of God always on their lips (see *Lumen gentium* #12).
3. The bishop bears the responsibility for moderating the entire ministry of the word in our local Church in Eastern Montana. In a special manner he is assisted in the proclamation of the Gospel by the presbyters and deacons of the Church. The gift each brings to the Christian community is cherished and blessed, and so the bishop also relies on many members of the Church who are not ordained, who cooperate in this same ministry.

### **Lay Preaching Today:**

4. Since the Second Vatican Council there has been a broadening of those permitted to preach the Word of God. The Council reminded us that there is a widespread need for more persons to preach - persons who are committed to the ministry of the Word, trained in the scriptures and theology, and skilled in communication. Church law itself gives all the ordained the faculty to preach, and lay persons may be permitted to preach in churches in certain cases of necessity or of usefulness (Canon 766).
5. Canon 766 states that "lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory if it is necessary in certain circumstances or if it is useful in particular cases according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops and with due regard for Canon 767§1" which deals with the issue of the liturgical homily.

### **The Homily:**

6. The liturgical homily holds primacy of place within the preaching activity of the Church. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy taught "By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year, as part of the liturgy itself therefore, the homily is strongly recommended; in fact, at Masses celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and holy days of obligation it is not to be omitted



## **GUIDELINES FOR LAY PREACHING**

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

except for serious reasons.” A part of the liturgy itself, the homily is reserved to a priest or a deacon (Canon 767.1).

### **Forms of Lay Preaching:**

7. Apart from the liturgical homily, forms of preaching to which lay persons may be admitted include preaching at parish missions, retreats and days of recollection, spiritual exercises, and popular devotions. In addition to these, especially when no priest or deacon is present for a celebration of the Word of God or for morning or evening Prayer from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, or a *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of A Priest*, it may be opportune for lay persons to preach.

### **The Role of the Diocesan Bishop:**

8. As chief shepherd of the diocese, and moderator of the liturgy, the bishop has first responsibility for what is preached to his people. The diocesan bishop therefore may issue norms concerning the preaching ministry which are to be observed by all the faithful of that diocese (Canon 772.1).

### **Norms for Lay Preaching:**

9. Bishop Milone has established the following norms for use in the Roman Catholic communities of Eastern Montana:

The pastor, pastoral administrator or other priest in charge of the pastoral care of a community may choose qualified persons to preach in the following circumstances:

a) at a liturgical celebration when, because of illness or lack of familiarity with the language of the assembly, no ordained minister is able to preach

b) at a celebration of Mass with children when, because of difficulty in adapting to the mentality of children, no ordained minister is able to preach (see *Directory for Masses with Children* #24)

c) at a celebration of the Word of God in the absence of a priest or deacon with preaching faculties, especially on a Sunday or holy day of obligation (see *Directory for Sunday Celebrations In the Absence of a Priest* #43)

d) at a celebration of baptism (see *Rite of Baptism of Children* #137), marriage (see *Rite of Marriage*, 2nd edition, #125), or one of the funeral rites (see *Order of Christian Funerals* #27), led by authorized lay persons because ordained ministers are absent (Canon 230.3; 1112)



**GUIDELINES FOR  
LAY PREACHING**  
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

e) at parish mission, retreats, days of recollection, and spiritual exercises led by lay persons with expertise in Scripture, theology or the spiritual life

f) at celebrations of morning prayer or evening prayer, particularly on a Sunday or solemnity, when no priest or deacon is present (see *Liturgy of the Hours* # 27 & 47)

g) at popular devotions and those blessings which may be given by lay persons (see *Book of Blessings*, #21)

3. In addition, certain lay persons can be permitted to preach in a church in the following special circumstances:

h) when those who have been admitted to candidacy for ordination receive a particular assignment as part of their pastoral formation

i) when particular circumstances recommend preaching by lay person with special expertise

10. When lay persons preach the Word of God under the conditions required by Church law, they do so in virtue of their Christian baptism and confirmation (Canon 759). Accordingly all lay persons who are to be admitted to preach in a church must be suitably qualified both by the witness of their lives as Christians and by a preparation for lay preaching appropriate to the circumstances.

11. Those chosen to preach are Roman Catholics who are baptized, confirmed and who have received the Eucharist. They are people who are in good standing, both in the parish and in the larger community, and actively involved in the liturgical, spiritual and charitable life of their communities.

12. Since preaching at the celebration of the Eucharist is to be ordinarily given by the presiding priest, schedules for preaching should be arranged so that the presiding priest is seen and understood by the community to be the normative preacher, and not simply as one among several preachers. Preaching, particularly the preaching of the liturgical homily, is one of the essential responsibilities of the presbyterate, and must not be compromised. "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).

13. Lay or ordained persons may not preach in the celebration of the Lord's Supper held by separated Christians, nor may separated Christians preach at the Roman Catholic celebration of the Eucharist.

14. Those designated for lay preaching must have completed a process of discernment with the pastor or pastoral administrator responsible for the pastoral care of the faith community. They must also complete the program for training, certification and



## **GUIDELINES FOR LAY PREACHING**

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

commissioning provided by the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. Formation in the ministry of lay preaching includes thorough familiarity with the document *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily In the Sunday Assembly*, published in 1982 by the United States Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry.

### **Qualifications:**

15. Those selected to be lay preachers are expected to:

- a) have been fully initiated (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist) Catholics for at least two years and who are in full communion with the Catholic Church
- b) have a recommendation/endorsement from their pastor or pastoral administrator
- c) be suitably qualified for this role by the witness of their lives as Christians
- d) actively participate in the liturgical, spiritual and service life of their faith community
- e) be persons who understand the mission and ministry of the Catholic church and who are respectful of the Catholic faith and tradition as expressed in worship and the teaching office of the church
- f) have skills in interpersonal communication, including verbal and non-verbal skills
- g) have a living appreciation for scripture
- h) have a spirit of cooperative involvement with the leadership of the faith community
- i) be committed to this ministry and have the time to minister

### **Competencies:**

16. As a result of the required training and experience, the lay preacher will:

- a) be an effective public speaker in a liturgical setting
- b) understand the proper role of the liturgical assembly according to the norms and guidelines
- c) be able to demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity
- d) be knowledgeable about the principles in the documents of Vatican II, the post-conciliar documents, canon law on liturgy, and documents regarding cultural diversity
- e) be knowledgeable about the Scriptures and how they are interpreted within the context of Catholic faith and liturgy
- f) be knowledgeable about one's own community and be effective in integrating this knowledge and experience into preaching



**GUIDELINES FOR  
LAY PREACHING**  
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

**Terms of Service:**

17. Those designated for lay preaching are commissioned in this ministry for three years in the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. At the end of three years, a person should participate in evaluation and continuing formation in the preaching ministry, before renewing a commitment for another three year period.

Updated October 2007  
Ritual Committee/Diocesan Liturgical Commission  
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings  
October 1996