

# Gathering hopes to revive liturgy among laity

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These gatherings are normally accompanied by the presence of incense and/or a paschal candle.

Psalm recitations are spread out over a four-week cycle, known as a "psalter." All but six of the 150 psalms are recited during this period.

These psalms can be orchestrated to represent a theme, such as praise and worship, thanksgiving, petitions for protection and strength, distress, sorrow, repentance or wisdom.

In addition to the normal Divine Office cycles, special sets of prayers are implemented at Lent and Advent. Many parishes not normally observing Liturgy of the Hours will do so during these seasons.

The presence of men and women religious is not mandatory since Liturgy of the Hours does not include celebration of the Eucharist. In addition, this rite can be practiced at home as well as at church.

Although Sister Heffernan does not know the exact number of diocesan parishes practicing Liturgy of the Hours throughout the year, she acknowledged that St. Mary's in Rochester is one of the very few.

According to Mary Lu Coffey, pastoral associate at St. Mary's, these services take place on Monday evenings as well as on days of special parish events. She added that approximately 15 participants usually attend.

Coffey noted that the intimate character of these services results in a spirituality that is difficult to achieve through other Roman Catholic rituals — including Sunday Mass.

"Sunday assemblies are so huge, we don't get a sense of people's own lives," said Coffey. "When you do Liturgy of the Hours in a parish you're not going to get a large amount of people, but you will get people who really like to pray that way."

"Praying the psalms has become a



Kay Cahoon (far right) gives a hug during the sign of peace.

part of my interior prayer. A psalm can become almost a part of me," Coffey added.

Yet Liturgy of the Hours is still a more common practice among priests and women religious than lay people. The Divine Office has remained especially widespread in cloistered communities.

For instance, at Mount Saviour Monastery in Pine City, Chemung County, and Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, Livingston County, Liturgy of the Hours is split into six segments per day, seven days a week.

Father Martin Boler, OSB, who serves as prior at Mount Saviour, explained that Liturgy of the Hours ceased becoming an expansive practice among Catholic laity in the Middle Ages.

"Little by little, there became a real separation," said Father Boler. "The prayers were in Latin, and with the laity not knowing Latin, they simply dropped out. So the rosary got to be the lay people's Liturgy of the Hours. That's what came to be their way of all Christians praying together."

The Second Vatican Council sought to again make Liturgy of the Hours accessible to the entire church. In fact, Chapter IV of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which outlines several revisions on observance of the Divine Office, frequently refers to this practice as the public prayer of the church.

Yet a general lack of familiarity with the rite's process has kept lay participation relatively low in the decades since Vatican II.

Sister Heffernan acknowledged that

the upcoming convention's goal is to change this trend.

"Our hope is that it will encourage delegates — that it will give a renewed spirit to help promote, educate and prepare," she said.

Another dilemma regarding a rejuvenation of the Divine Office, Father Boler pointed out, is the presence of numerous psalm passages which don't translate very clearly to the year 1993.

"It isn't simple to pick up the liturgy of 3,000 or 4,000 years ago and edit it for modern times," Father Boler remarked.

Dr. Paul Bradshaw, one of the scheduled speakers at the October convention in Rochester, added that this transformation is being stalled by the ongoing perception that clergy and lay people are distinctly divided.

"The people are the church, but for all the things that have been said since Vatican II, they don't think of themselves as the church," said Bradshaw, who serves as director of graduate studies in the University of Notre Dame's theology department. An Episcopalian priest, he has written several books about Liturgy of the Hours.

However, revisions are being made to overcome these problems. For instance, Liturgy of the Hours can now be recited in English as well as Latin.

Father Boler has further simplified the process. He has made available a revised prayer book for lay people on retreat who wish to join in Divine Office with Mount Saviour's Benedictine monks.

"The people seem to appreciate it," he remarked.

"You have to adapt to make it work, but you don't abandon the structure of the whole rite," Bradshaw noted.

Father Boler believes that these efforts will enable Liturgy of the Hours to achieve a more widespread, lasting presence.

"I once thought it was a dream. But then, with the Charismatic movement, you saw people so desirous of prayer that now it's a real possibility," Father Boler remarked. "It would be a tremendous thing."

EDITORS' NOTE: Tickets are still available for the national meeting. Various packages are available covering different presentations, an Oct. 17 banquet, and/or hotel accommodations. For registration information, call 716/328-3210, ext. 342.

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