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Eucharist

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by, a member of the council and pastor of Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford; and Father Robert J. Kennedy, assistant professor of liturgical studies at St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester.

Workmaster noted that the team wanted to keep the four-page letter brief and easy for parishes to use. The document contains guidelines for discussion, but no strict directives to parishes, she emphasized.

"We want an open-ended discussion of the Eucharist and the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist," she said.

The letter's content, in part, draws on discussions undertaken by diocesan priests and parish staff members throughout the last year, Workmaster and other diocesan officials explained. Parish and regional discussions on the letter will continue and include the Diocesan Priests Convocation next spring.

In addition to the letter, parishes will be receiving copies of a Father Kennedy essay titled, "A Eucharistic People Living a Eucharistic Life," which is to be used as a bulletin insert. The priest's essay reflects on reasons that people have for attending Mass and analyzes its different parts.

"We engage in the actions of the Eucharist to remember who we are and what we love ...," Father Kennedy wrote. "Our participation in the eucharistic celebration and the eucharistic life is an obligation of the heart — God's and ours."

At Diocesan Ministry Day, slated for Oct. 30 at the Holidome in Rochester, Father Kennedy will also address how homilists can integrate preaching on the Eucharist into their scriptural talks over the next year, he said.

The diocese is also distributing a series of three discussion guides to parishes on the topics of eucharistic theology, liturgical quality and eucharistic devotions, Work-

master said. Discussions will begin in November, and a fourth discussion guide topic will be issued after input on the first three topics is collected from parishes, she added. Parish input will become part of the diocese's overall strategic pastoral plan. That plan will incorporate the goals that developed out of the Synod process, the suggested means for parishes to implement those Synod-generated goals, and the Pastoral Center's role in supporting the parishes' efforts. It is currently being developed and is scheduled for release next year, she reported.

Eucharistic reflection is also an integral part of a new facilitator's guide, being issued to parishes for adult education, according to Karen Rinefierd, diocesan coordinator of young adult, adult and family faith formation. The guide contains suggested questions and a list of books and audiovisual resources that parishes can use for such discussions, she said.

One pastor who has already welcomed the document and what it has to say is Father Phillips, who also serves as chairman of the priests' council.

"I think it's very challenging," Father Phillips said of the letter. "It goes right to the heart of the matter. I hope that we can get some discussion going in the parish on it."

In fact, Bishop Clark noted in an interview with the *Catholic Courier* that inspiring such discussion was precisely the reason he issued "East to West." Explaining the Eucharist's importance, the bishop cited the fact that the Second Vatican Council's "Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery" called the Eucharist the "source and summit of the whole of the Church's worship and of the Christian Life."



"That's a pretty strong statement," Bishop Clark said. "It recognizes the primacy of the Eucharist in Catholic life."

In citing the council's emphasis on eucharistic worship, as opposed to eucharistic reception, the bishop stressed in both his letter and the interview that diocesan Catholics must understand the great value the church places on celebrating the Eucharist.

Elaborating further on this point, the bishop pointed out that the Mass invites Catholics to participate in the dying and rising of Christ as a united community each Sunday. In all its aspects — readings, offertory, consecration and communal prayer — the Mass is designed to create a communion of the faithful, he noted. Hence, the idea that a parish can deal with the priest shortage by simply scheduling a Sunday Communion service whenever a priest is unavailable overlooks the supreme value of the Sunday eucharistic celebration, he said.

"The reception of Communion is only one part of the Sunday celebration," he said. "Communion services can be very good things. Having said that, Communion services cannot replace Sunday celebrations."

Parishes may consider slating Communion services during the week or at such events as weddings and funerals, he said, but the bishop urged parishes to focus on keeping Sunday Mass alive. Such a focus might mean that Catholics will have to sacrifice some of the convenience they have come to associate with multiple Masses on weekends, he said.

"I think, for obvious reasons, it behooves us to look at how often we celebrate the Eucharist," he said. "Let's not celebrate them in a way that diminishes their quality."

To illustrate his point, the bishop explained that while priests in the diocese are more than willing to say as many Masses as needed by the faithful, many are overwhelmed by the number of liturgies they must do in a weekend, sometimes as many as eight, due to funerals and weddings in addition to regularly scheduled Masses.

"There are real limits," he said. "We can unwittingly pound our presiders into the ground."

He added that Catholics must accept the fact that, due to their declining numbers, priests can simply no longer be present at every wedding or funeral in a parish, nor are they always available for pastoral visits to such places as hospitals. Yet some Catholics take personal offense when they are unable to obtain a priest's services for one reason or another, he said.

"Sometimes, those expectations can unwittingly be excessive," the bishop said.

Bishop Clark and other observers noted that the church will increasingly use the services of deacons and lay people, as appropriate, in its rites when priests are unavailable. Canon law provides that deacons, and, when necessary, lay Catholics may preside at funerals and weddings, neither of which the church requires to be accompanied by eucharistic consecration.

Father James B. Callan, administrator of Corpus Christi Parish in Rochester, said in a phone interview last week that he was wrestling with a prime example of the demands placed on a priest. Although he was going out of town for only two days, he was unable to find any priests to preside at four funerals slated for the next two days at his parish.

"It's harder and harder for me to find replacements for weddings and funerals in general," he said.

He added that the issues about which Bishop Clark wrote in his pastoral are starting the church in the face.

"We're no longer talking about a future challenge," he said. "We're talking about a present one."

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