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Norms

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• Anyone who preaches must first receive authorization from the bishop's office.

• Everyone who preaches regularly "must be engaged in ongoing continuing education that is designed to develop their knowledge and skill."

The norms, which take effect July 1, have been in the works for nearly three years. They were primarily developed by Father Robert J. Kennedy, a longtime professor of liturgy; Franciscan Sister Chris Treichel, pastoral associate of Sacred Heart in Auburn; and Workmaster. The process involved consultation with several diocesan committees.

"These are to be taken seriously. They are based on canon law and liturgical law, and are being presented so we can do the best we can within the confines of the law," Workmaster said. She said that norms, by their definition, are expected to be followed — as opposed to the term "guidelines," which allows for a looser application.

Many diocesan parishes, especially those that employ a regular rotation of lay preachers and people who read the Gospel, will be affected by these norms.

"If a parish has been active in the use of qualified lay preachers, this seems to pull back from its present position," Workmaster said.

However, diocesan officials stressed that the norms will help preserve lay preaching — not only because church law allows it in several instances, but also because the standards for all preachers are being raised.

"This will elevate the whole ministry of preaching," said Workmaster, who herself preaches on occasion.

"I would want for us to enjoy as fully as we possibly can ... the beauty of lay preaching in this diocese. It's a value I don't want to lose in any way," Bishop Clark said during a May 1 workshop about the norms at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Rochester.

"We have had for more than 25 years, a wonderful, rich experience of lay preaching in this diocese. It is a rich blessing and is part of what is playing into these norms," Father Kennedy said at the workshop. "But the local church also has to stay connected with the greater church."

Approximately 150 priests, pastoral administrators and parish staff members attended the May 1 gathering, and 50 attended a workshop the previous day at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads. Both were led by Father Kennedy and Father John Huels, a canon law expert from St. Paul University in Ottawa. Bishop Clark attended both workshops.

Laws fuel changes

According to Workmaster, Rochester is among the most advanced dioceses in the United States in its use of lay preachers. Under current practice, this usually has involved a parish staff member or guest speaker taking the place of a priest or deacon after the Gospel reading.

Yet church directives indicate that preaching is a role chiefly designated for the ordained. Canon 767,1 of the *Code of Canon Law* states: "Among the forms of preaching the homily is preeminent; it is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or to a deacon." Canon 767,2 adds: "Whenever a congregation is present a homily is to be given at all Sunday Masses and at Masses celebrated on holy days of obligation; it cannot be omitted without a serious reason."

And, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Decree of Promulgation*, released in December 2001, adds: "Preaching by the lay faithful may not take place within the celebration of the Eucharist at the moment reserved for the homily."

However, Canon 766 notes: "Lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory if it is necessary in certain cir-



Tom Tripiciano, a full-time pastoral minister at St. John the Evangelist in Greece, listens to Bishop Clark.

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— Father Robert J. Kennedy

cumstances or if it is useful in particular cases according to the prescriptions of the conferences of bishops and with due regard for Canon 767, 1."

Under the new norms only priests or deacons will give homilies after the Gospel, and preaching by lay people must occur after the homily — but not in place of it.

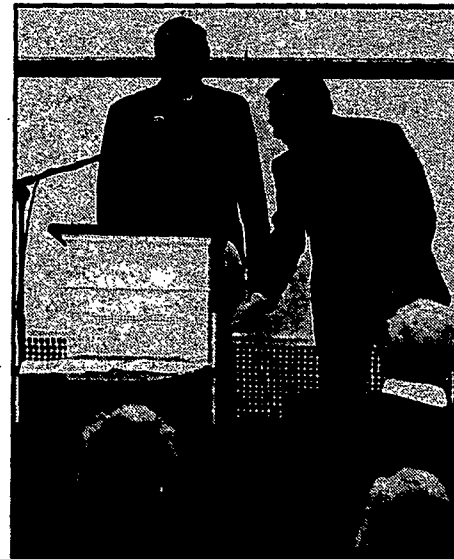
In many past instances in the Rochester Diocese, a lay preacher has also read the Gospel passage that precedes the homily. While Canon 766 leaves the door open for lay preaching to continue, Father Kennedy said there is no such "wiggle room" for reading the Gospel and that the practice is effectively ending. This is based on *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, No. 34: "The reading of the Gospel is reserved to a deacon or a priest."

Workmaster acknowledged that the cessation of lay people reading the Gospel will be the hardest change of all for many people in the diocese. While saying there's no detailed text in church law as to why this practice is reserved for a priest or deacon, she ventured that the Gospel's relevance to liturgy is so vital that "at that particular time the ordained would come in."

She said lay people who have preached in place of the homily and read the Gospel have done so with good intentions, commenting, "I think it came out of the recognition of the value of lay participation in the diocese. I don't think anybody engaged in it was doing anything radical." But she remarked that "the climate of the times" — a thrust from Rome for all U.S. dioceses "to look more closely at what they're doing" — lent to the development of norms for the Rochester Diocese.

Workmaster declined to detail what sanctions would apply to parishes that don't comply with these norms, saying that Bishop Clark simply expects they will be followed.

Opportunities remain



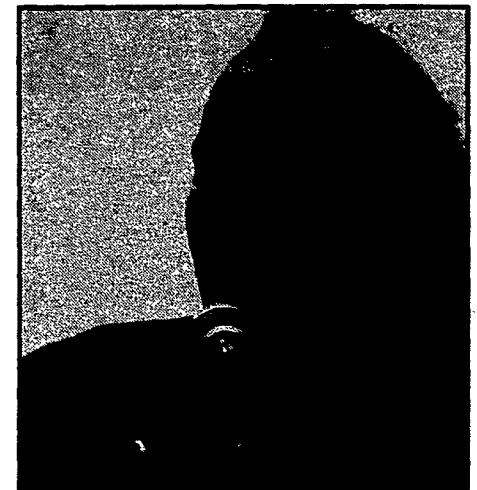
Father Bob Kennedy (left), primary author of the new norms and pastor of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church, laughs with co-presenter Father John Huels, a canon lawyer from Ottawa, Canada.

Despite the restrictions, the new diocesan norms still allow for many occasions when lay preaching could be considered "necessary or useful," under the terms of Canon 766. According to the USCCB, such examples include "the absence or shortage of clergy, particular language requirements, or the demonstrated expertise or experience of the lay faithful concerned." For example, Workmaster said that a priest who covers several parishes — and may not have time to adequately prepare a homily — might find it useful to engage a lay preacher to speak after he gives a short homily. Workmaster added that opportunities continue to exist for lay preachers at parish missions, retreats and other events outside the eucharistic celebration.

Perhaps most importantly for lay preachers, church law does not prohibit the practice of a priest or deacon giving a brief homily during Mass — Father Huels uses the term "homilette" — and then giving way to a lay person. Father Huels added that the lay preacher should immediately follow the homily, rather than speak after Communion — a slot where announcements and brief talks are often made — because worshippers aren't as attentive by that time.

On the other hand, Father Kennedy said, lay people should not be taking turns to the point they diminish the role of a priest or deacon. For example, he said he plans to continue giving a full homily two out of every three weeks at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish, where he is pastor. Four lay preachers share the third slot, meaning that each lay preacher would only perform this role once every 12 weeks.

Meanwhile, Rose Davis preaches every six weeks at Rochester's Holy Rosary and Most Precious Blood parishes, where she is pastoral associate. Father Gary Tyman, pastor, said that to comply with the diocesan norms, he now plans to offer a reflection during the spot reserved for the



Bishop Clark speaks about lay preaching during the workshop.

homily whenever Davis preaches. Father Tyman added that he considers Davis' role as a preacher to be vital for the parish.

"She's very fine, a very good preacher. She does a good job of exploring the Scriptures and connecting to what's going on in people's lives," Father Tyman commented. He added that Davis does not read the Gospel when she preaches, although that custom did exist while he was Catholic chaplain at the University of Rochester.

At many parishes, Father Kennedy said, little change may be precipitated by the new diocesan norms. "My sense of it is, things are not going to significantly change. We're simply formalizing the process," he said.

Yet in some places, he said, it will take time to clearly define such terms as "useful" or "necessary." He added that "these norms do not cover every circumstance or name every circumstance."

Quality preaching

According to the new norms, all lay preachers must now be approved by the bishop's office "upon request of their pastor/pastoral administrator, who will demonstrate the usefulness or necessity of this preaching." Workmaster said that a committee will be in place by July 1 to assist Bishop Clark in clearing lay people to preach.

The norms state that all preachers — ordained and non-ordained — should exhibit such traits as good maturity, critical theological reflection, communications skills and academic preparation. And all preachers are now required to attend at least one preaching-related workshop, seminar or course per year.

"What's coming out now are not simply norms about lay preaching. This has something to say to those of us ordained about our own preaching," Father Tyman said.

Workmaster sees these requirements as elevating an already high quality of preaching in this diocese. She also said some parish leaders who haven't yet utilized lay preachers may now feel more comfortable doing so in the instances where church law permits it.

Both Workmaster and Kennedy said the workshops at St. Mary Our Mother and St. Bernard's drew a positive response from participants. "I've had people say they left much more hopeful than when they came," Father Kennedy said.

Despite initial resistance to the idea of establishing norms, Workmaster said, those affected were kept in the loop and asked for their opinions throughout the development process. "It's no surprise to anyone on a parish staff. They're not blindsided by this," she said.

One such person is Alice Miller-Nation, pastoral associate at St. Joseph's/St. William's in Livonia and Conesus, where she has preached regularly. She has also read the Gospel in the past, although she does not do so in her current assignment.

"I could look at this as restrictions, but I look at it as an opportunity," Miller-Nation said. "The hurt I felt at the beginning was that these are qualified and gifted people, and I thought that was being taken away. And now I see that it isn't, so I'm all for it."