

LAY REFLECTING AND PREACHING GUIDELINES IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

Introduction

“In October 2023, following the first General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops session in Rome, I called an advisory committee of women leaders who would further explore women’s leadership within the Church today. I asked them to particularly discern the extent to which the Church empowers women as they assume leadership roles. The Diocese of San Diego is proudly spearheading this effort with paragraph 60 of the final synod document in mind, “This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilized. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.” (Robert Cardinal McElroy, former Bishop of San Diego)

This introduction to the “[Catholic-Women-in-Leadership Final Report](#)” and its survey findings offer the rationale for offering guidelines and criteria for lay preaching in our diocese. Since then, many parishes have embraced the diocesan-wide initiative “Reimagining Church” and begun the journey of implementing the final document “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”

Against this background, we encourage our parish communities to expand and utilize the gifts of the laity, particularly those of women, whose voices have much to offer our worshipping communities. These criteria and guidelines for lay preaching are intended to support our parishes in this important dimension of the Church’s mission.

Description

The Lay Reflecting and Preaching Ministry is made up of those among the laity whose pastors invite them to provide short reflections on, for example, the daily readings at non-Eucharistic services, at the Liturgy of the Hours and other services offered by the parish. Reflections are given on the readings of the day’s liturgy and/or saint or feast day, consistent with Roman Catholic teaching and tradition. The intent of their reflections and preaching is to speak to the minds and hearts of parishioners and others who seek to deepen their relationship with God, and to encourage others to live into their baptismal calling of priest, prophet, and kingdom builder.

Opportunities for Lay Preaching or Reflecting

- Video or audio reflections on the daily readings
- Lay Preaching at non-Eucharistic celebrations (e.g., Liturgy of the Hours, All Souls Evening Prayer Service, Good Friday Morning Prayer, Communion Services)
- Reflections and/or preaching for on occasions like Parish Missions, Retreats, Days of Recollection etc.

Lay reflections on the daily readings are a starting point in this ministry. This experience may lead to preaching at non-Eucharistic services.

Lay reflectors and preachers will participate in an ongoing process of formation and discernment, to include peer support and feedback.

Guidelines for Lay Preaching and Reflecting

Desired Characteristics

- Spiritual depth, humility, and a commitment to prayer and continued growth in relationship to God
- Commitment to the Roman Catholic faith, its teachings and traditions
- Involvement in and sense of the parish community
- Some academic background, or study and knowledge of Scripture, theology, liturgy and /or related areas
- Openness and willingness to offer feedback and collaboration in a collegial and supportive spirit
- Strong verbal communication skills and a pastoral approach
- Reliability and attention to details and scheduling
- Cultural sensitivity and global awareness
- A willingness to share one's everyday experiences of Christian life in one's reflecting and preaching

Expectations for lay reflection and preaching

- At the discretion and approval of the pastor, he may summon a lay person to provide a reflection on an agreed topic or theme in accord with the vision or intent. The pastor along with the lay person will review and ensure that the content of the sharing aligns with the pre-established expectations as described below:
- Preparation: sufficient time devoted to prayer and careful study of the biblical text.
- Length: 500-600 words or from 5 to 6 minutes for recorded reflections; 7-10 minutes for preaching at non-Eucharistic services.
- Feedback to the reflector is encouraged.
- Although background for the scriptural text is welcome, the heart of the reflection is based on one's own personal reflection, including one or two points offered for the personal reflection of the hearer to open a space of encounter with God, through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.