

## **A Proposal for Lay Eucharistic Preaching to Further a Synodal Church in Mission**

*As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another  
as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10).*

### **Part I. Our Work: Connecting Lay Preaching at the Eucharist to Synodality and Mission**

The Dominican Preaching Network—a collaboration of three Dominican schools of preaching in the United States, Germany, and the Philippines—convened twenty-seven scholars and practitioners of preaching from March 11–14, 2024, to reflect on the guiding principle of “a synodal Church in mission” through the lens of lay Eucharistic preaching. We conducted our work attending to synodal documents, specifically commissioned scholarly papers, listening and discussion sessions, panel presentations, and thematic analysis, all situated within a synodal listening process. We prayed together. We asked the Spirit’s help. As a community, we now share the fruits of our discernment and submit them for further discernment by the Synod in October 2024 and the Synod’s study group on “theological and canonical questions concerning specific forms of ministries.”

Many lay ecclesial ministers discern a call from God and receive theological and ministerial training and formation to preach. Canon law permits lay preaching and yet restricts lay ecclesial ministers from receiving an ecclesial commission to preach the homily at Mass. We gathered as a group of theologians, ecclesialogists, preachers, and a canonist to consider this obstacle to lay preaching at Mass. Responding to the Synod’s question about our Catholic identity as a synodal Church in mission, we now offer a constructive homiletic and ecclesiological appeal to charge or commission a more extensive and diverse pool of qualified lay preachers and evangelists to preach the Word of God at the Eucharist.

### **Part II. Convergences: Co-responsibility for the Ministry of the Word**

We discovered among ourselves a remarkable number of places of deep agreement:

- The vocation of the baptized includes a share in the prophetic office of Christ; this office includes the proclamation of the Word.
- Within the Eucharistic celebration, an essential moment is the Liturgy of the Word: readings, Gospel proclamation, and homily. The Word arises within the gathered community, and the People of God hunger for both Eucharist and Word.
- That the gathered Assembly might attend ever more fully to God’s Living Word made present in a liturgical communion between God and God’s People in the Liturgy of the Word, the Church calls forth prepared liturgical ministers of the Word from within the Assembly—Lectors, Cantors, Catechists, and Preachers.
- The Eucharist, the source and summit of our life in Christ, is a synodal act. Therefore, the Church must listen to the voice of the Spirit and discern the many charisms for preaching in the community, given by the Spirit for the benefit of the Church to nourish those gathered at the Eucharistic table more fully.
- The task of the synodal Church is to listen humbly, speak boldly, and dialogue attentively, conscious that the Spirit gives multiple gifts/charisms for Eucharistic preaching. If the Church does not make efforts to discern charisms among the baptized, it cannot live fully its synodal identity.
- The Spirit is at work in preaching by diverse lay and ordained people from the centers and the margins, reflecting the variety of languages in gender, ethnicity, age, race, social class, sexuality, geography, and cultures. We see the fruit already in diverse contexts, including churches and oratories; Eucharistic preaching is another appropriate context.
- The Church continues to experience an urgent and long-identified need for more effective proclamation of the Word and for preaching that reflects intercultural competence.

### Part III. Our Proposals

To reflect a synodal Church more fully, we seek an opening of the ministry of the Word by incorporating a more comprehensive range of ministries under this umbrella. As scholars, theologians, and preachers, we believe that calling forth the *homiletic* preaching gifts of lay persons allows the Word of God to reach more people in a way that they can understand and connect to their experience. Specifically, our discernment leads us to two proposals:

1. Rather than waiting for a complete revision of canon law, **we propose to address the question of lay Eucharistic preaching canonically by an amendment to Canon 767 §1**, to read as follows:  
  
Can. 767 §1. Among the forms of preaching, the homily is distinguished by its placement within the Eucharistic celebration. In addition to concelebrating priests or deacons, properly prepared laity may be admitted to preach the homily, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Conference of Bishops.
2. In view of Item 1 above, **we propose expanding the use of installed ministries, such as Lector, Catechist, or a newly instituted ministry of Lay Preacher**. We believe that local communities need to call forth persons who might discern the preaching charism and receive formation to exercise this ministry in their Eucharistic Assemblies. Our ancient tradition records a lay ministry of Teacher or Reader that included proclaiming the Word and expounding on the Word in the liturgy (*The Apostolic Tradition* and the *Canons of Athanasius*). This tradition can be restored by enriching the currently instituted ministries of Lector and Catechist to include preaching and by instituting a new ministry of Lay Preacher. Pope Paul VI recovered the tradition of lay liturgical ministries by establishing the instituted ministries of Lector and Acolyte. Pope Francis further revitalized these ministries by opening them to women, instituting the ministry of Catechist, and calling for further development of lay ministries in local churches.

Liturgically, our proposals hold a promise to expand the theological understanding and ministerial reality of lay preaching at Eucharist; theologically, we invite a grounding away from the distinction between clergy and laity toward the relationships of community and ministry. Ecclesially, we seek a Church in which the baptismal call of every believer, given by the Spirit for the benefit of the Church, will be more fully realized, including the ministry of the layperson as preacher at Eucharist. Therefore, we submit our work to the Synod and its Ministries Study Group for further discernment, and we offer to assist in providing our theological study.

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