

DIRECTIVES FOR PREACHING BY LAYPERSONS

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2003)

1. The Second Vatican Council spoke of the role of lay people in spreading the message of salvation (e.g. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 33) and encouraged laity to use their gifts, in co-operation with the bishops, to proclaim the gospel and communicate Christian teachings (e.g. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 21). In some cases this may involve the ministry of preaching.
2. While preaching is primarily the responsibility of bishops, priests and deacons (canons 762-764), in some circumstances laity may be commissioned to preach. "The laity may be allowed to preach in a church or oratory if in certain circumstances it is necessary, or in particular cases it would be advantageous, according to the provisions of the Episcopal Conference and without prejudice to canon 767.1" (canon 766).
3. If it is necessary in certain circumstances or if it seems useful in particular cases, the diocesan bishop may admit lay faithful to preach, to offer spiritual conferences or give instructions in churches, oratories or other sacred places within his diocese, when he judges it to be to the spiritual advantage of the faithful. This might be, for example, in the absence of clergy, or when there are particular language requirements, or when the lay faithful concerned have special expertise in addressing certain subjects.
4. It is also noted that the Directory for Masses with Children in no. 24 makes the provision with the permission of the priest that "...one of the adults may speak to the children after the gospel, especially if the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of children."
5. The lay faithful who are to be admitted to preach in a church or oratory must be orthodox in faith, and well qualified, both by the witness of their lives as Christians and by a preparation for preaching appropriate to the circumstances. In accordance with canon 767.1 such preaching should be aligned to the liturgical year to expound the mysteries of faith and the rules of Christian living from the sacred text. Specific reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church will substantially aid this preparation.
6. In providing for preaching by the lay faithful, the diocesan bishop may not dispense from the norm which reserves the homily at Mass to those who have received the sacrament of orders (canon 767.1; see also Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, 26 May 1987, in AAS 79 [1987], 1249).
7. In accord with canon 772.1, the diocesan bishop may issue further norms regarding lay preaching. These could refer, for example, to the training required for preaching and the procedures to be followed when a lay person is to be delegated to preach on a specific occasion or on a continuing basis.