

MINISTRY OF THE WORD, PREACHING & THE PERMANENT DEACON

[Promulgated by Cardinal Rigali on September 22, 2006]

I. PRINCIPLES & NORMS

The purpose of this document is to offer principles and norms concerning the deacon and the important ministry of the word which he exercises in the Church. This document also lists conditions required for a deacon to exercise the faculty to preach in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and it treats the frequency of a deacon's preaching.

Speaking of deacons and the three *munera* proper to their ministry, the Second Vatican Council states: "For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishops and his group of priests, they serve the people of God in the ministry of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 29). It then adds: "It is the duty of the deacon, to the extent that he has been authorized by competent authority...to read the sacred Scripture to the faithful..." (*ibid.*)

Canon 757 explains how both priests and deacons exercise the ministry of the word: "It is proper for presbyters, who are co-workers of the bishops, to proclaim the gospel of God; this duty binds especially pastors and others to whom the care of souls is entrusted with respect to the people committed to them. It is also for deacons to serve the people of God in the ministry of the word in communion with the bishop and his *presbyterium*."

Canon 764 points out that priests and deacons "possess the faculty of preaching everywhere; this faculty is to be exercised with at least the presumed consent of the rector of the church, unless the competent ordinary has restricted or taken away the faculty or particular law requires express permission."

Canon 772, §1 specifies: "In the exercise of preaching, moreover, all are to observe the norms issued by the diocesan bishop." Canon 756, §2 states that the individual bishop in his particular Church exercises the function of proclaiming the gospel and that he is "the moderator of the entire ministry of the word."

An important specific norm about preaching is found in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition)*: "The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to the deacon, but never to a lay person. In particular cases and for a just cause, the homily may be given by a bishop or a priest who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate" (no. 66).

Canon 767, §4 points out that the pastor or rector of the church has an important role in ensuring that the prescripts affecting the homily are faithfully observed. The entire canon reads:

§1. Among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or deacon, is preeminent; in the homily the mysteries of faith and the norms of Christian life are to be explained from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year.

§2. A homily must be given at all Masses on Sundays and holy days of obligation which are celebrated with a congregation, and it cannot be omitted except for a grave cause.

§3. It is strongly recommended that if there is a sufficient congregation, a homily is to be given even at Masses celebrated during the week, especially during the time of Advent and Lent or on the occasion of some feast day or a sorrowful event.

§4. It is for the pastor or rector of a church to take care that these prescripts are observed conscientiously.

The exercise of faculties in accordance with the aforementioned principles and norms regulates the preaching ministry and protects its integrity.

II. CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISING THE FACULTY TO PREACH

For a deacon, the exercise of the faculty to preach in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is dependent on the fulfillment of certain conditions:

- A. The deacon must successfully complete the entire ten-semester academic curriculum in the formation program. This will ensure theological grounding, especially in the Scriptures and Church teaching, on which the deacon bases his preaching.
- B. The deacon must successfully complete six semesters of homiletics. There is a written evaluation at the end of each semester. This evaluation includes: theological accuracy; ability to proclaim; coherency of thought; evidence of serious reflection on

the word of God and an ability to articulate that reflection with clarity. These six semesters cover all the types of homilies the deacon may give (e.g., Ordinary time; seasonal homilies; at Funerals; at Weddings; with children; for devotions; etc.)

- C. The Director of the Office for Permanent Deacons provides a recommendation to the Vicar for Clergy concerning the individual deacon who has successfully completed the program in homiletics.

The Office for Permanent Deacons will, at appropriate intervals, provide workshops on the topic of preaching so that deacons may be updated and provided with continued evaluation of the theological content and pastoral appropriateness of their preaching.

III. FREQUENCY OF PREACHING

The frequency of preaching at Mass by an individual deacon is to be determined by the pastor, who will take into account the relevant canons and the prescriptions of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition)* as well as the needs of the parish. It is presumed that such a decision would also involve dialogue between the pastor and the deacon, as well as consultation with any other priests who are assigned to and/or celebrate Mass at the parish. In addition to preaching at Mass, a deacon may be called upon to preach when he baptizes, presides at vigils for the deceased, celebrates Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, etc.