

Lay Preaching: An Outsider in an Inside Place.
What is the "Authority" of the Lay Preacher?

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DEDICATION

To the Sisters of Mercy of the Rochester Regional Community
for their steady support of my ministry of lay preaching,

and

to Bishop Matthew H. Clark whose openness has found a way to
balance the demands of “Mother Church” and “Sophia” as they
meet in the ministry of lay preaching.

ABSTRACT

Lay Preaching: An Outsider in an Inside Place
What is the “Authority” of the Lay Preacher?

This thesis addresses the “authority” of the lay preacher within the Roman Catholic tradition and specifically within a 24 year period (1980-2004), how that authority unfolded within the Diocese of Rochester, New York.

Through research, personal experience, interviews with parishioners, lay preachers in the diocese, as well as the Bishop of the Diocese, I will show that the authority of the lay preacher does exist, but often, not in the traditional manner understood by some Roman Catholics.

Additionally, this thesis will help lay preachers understand the complex positive and negative reactions to their preaching, and demonstrate a developing and changing understanding of authority within the Roman Catholic Church. In many cases, this development has resulted in the gradual acceptance of qualified lay preachers.

CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
CONTENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Goal and Overview of the Thesis	
CONTEXT OF THE THESIS.....	2
Diocese of Rochester, New York	
Parish Contexts	
Author's Personal Context	
DISCUSSION OF AUTHORITY.....	7
Overview of Authority in the Roman Catholic Tradition	
Authority within Roman Catholic Religious Orders	
The response of Roman Catholic Lay Women	
LAY PREACHING IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.....	14
The History of Lay Preaching	
Roman Catholic Polity and Lay Preaching	
Lay Preaching in the Diocese of Rochester, New York	
RESEARCH FINDINGS	23
The Roman Catholic Church in the United States	
Interviews with Lay preachers	
Parish Focus Groups	
Other Interviews	
CONCLUSIONS.....	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	46
SUPPORTING MATERIAL.....	48

INTRODUCTION

Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge: for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. Acts 4: 20

The goal of this thesis is the exploration of the "authority" of the lay preacher within the Roman Catholic tradition. This topic will be addressed within a limited historical time frame and specific geographic location. The topic will also be situated within the broader framework of Roman Catholic understandings of authority. The location of this thesis is the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, New York, and the time frame is a 24 year period from 1980-2004. Although my 32 year lay preaching ministry began in 1972, this thesis focuses on my personal experiences beginning in 1980. In 1980, the Bishop of Rochester enforced Vatican liturgical norms that barred lay persons from preaching, and he called for lay preachers to be removed from the pulpit. The thesis time frame concludes in 2004 with the presence of 84 lay men and women preaching in Roman Catholic settings in the Diocese of Rochester, New York. These lay preachers now exercise their ministry with canonical faculties authorized by the same Bishop who withdrew and silenced lay preachers in 1980. They also exercise these canonical faculties with the blessing of pastors who request their presence in the pulpit.

Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978 and remains in office. Bishop Matthew H. Clark was installed as the 8th Bishop of Rochester in 1979 and remains in this role. Importantly, the 1917 Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law was updated in 1983, during the time frame of this thesis. Two Roman Catholic parishes, in which I did and now serve, play a prominent role in my experience of lay preaching, and in the struggles surrounding this ministry.

CONTEXT OF THESIS

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29: 11

The context of these 24 years is critical, and in many ways, the exploration of this topic of lay preaching is an attempt to answer three fundamental questions addressed by Alice Mann in her work, *Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline*. She asks, “Who are we (especially on a faith level)?” “What are we here for?”, and “Who is my neighbor?”¹ Her questions and the ensuing answers enable individuals, parishes, and the Church as a whole, to remain current, faithful to Jesus Christ, and responsive to the context in which they find themselves. Her questions have everything to do with theological understandings of authority, and the way these understandings impact the ministry of lay preaching. They also assist the exploration of authority within the culture and context of the Roman Catholic Church.

Rosemary Haughton in her book, *The Catholic Thing*, describes the Roman Catholic Church as a balance between twin sisters, “Mother Church” and “Sophia.” She describes the former as the institution, and the later as the charismatic voice of the community. “But the strange thing is that the two sisters, in spite of everything, have always been devoted to each other.”² Lay men and women who minister within the Roman Catholic Church and lay ministers in other Christian traditions, have experienced this tension as gifts are discovered and offered to the Body of Christ. An understanding of these “sisters” undergirds this thesis which, I believe, describes the struggle of Sophia to be heard from the pulpit and often the reluctance of Mother Church to be open to these

¹ Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline* (An Alban Institute Publication, 1989), 3.

² Rosemary Haughton, *The Catholic Thing* (Springfield: Templegate Publishers, 1979), 11.

gifts. The tension between these “sisters” is very personal in the life of Christians, and unfolds in the call of lay preachers as authority in the Church is lived and exercised.

The Diocese of Rochester, New York, established in 1868, consists today of approximately 350,000 individuals, 200 faith communities, and covers a 12 county geographic area in New York State. The diocese stretches from Lake Ontario on the north to Pennsylvania on the south, and includes the famous Finger Lakes District of central New York State. The diocese has one medium sized urban community, Rochester, as well as many smaller urban areas. In the 12 counties, growing and sprawling suburban communities exist side by side with rural population centers. Cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic diversity is present among Catholics in this diocese. These realities coupled with a wide range of theological differences among our local Catholic parishes and Catholics themselves, remind one of the theological and cultural differences between and among the early Christian communities. Paul tried to express this unity in the midst of diversity with the metaphor of the Body of Christ. It is not unusual today that the level of lay participation and theological views in some progressive Catholic parishes in Rochester resemble the views of some Reformed, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches in the same geographic area. It is also important to note that theological differences and the interpretation of authority and the law differ among the spiritual leaders of Rochester’s neighboring dioceses. All these contextual factors impact the understanding of authority, the application of church law, and views regarding the role and contribution of lay men and women in the life of the Roman Catholic Church.

Under the leadership and pastoral encouragement of the 7th Bishop of Rochester, Joseph L. Hogan (1969-1978), lay preaching in parishes, hospitals, and campuses began to develop in tandem with the rise of the role of the Parish Pastoral Assistant. This ministerial role exercised by lay persons, the majority of whom were Roman Catholic Sisters, served in many cases as the gateway to lay preaching.

From 1972 to 1980 I served as the Pastoral Assistant in St. Monica's Parish. It was, and still is, a struggling urban parish in the city of Rochester, New York. This parish is known for its lively liturgies, community outreach, vibrant staff, and lay leadership. During the 1950s the parish boasted of a Sunday attendance of 5,000. By the time I left the staff in 1980, about 540 individuals attended weekly liturgies. Urban flight had taken its toll.

In April of 1980, The Vatican's Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship published a set of liturgical norms regarding the Eucharist. The aim of the document was to correct the confusion surrounding liturgical roles, and the perceived abuses Vatican officials believed had crept into the Liturgy. Among the practices that raised concern was the delivery of homilies by lay persons. In section A # 2 of the document, it is clear that the proclamation of the Gospel was reserved to the ordained and A # 3 states, "Accordingly the homily is to be given by the priest or the deacon."³ Bishop Clark called for "study and obedience" regarding these norms. One specific canon from the 1917 Code of Canon Law was also the basis of the conflict surrounding lay preaching. Canon 1342 barred lay persons from officially preaching, however, other

³ Vatican Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *Origins*, Vol. 10 # 3 (June 5, 1980), 42.

canons, 1327 and 1328, did offer some small leeway for lay preaching at, for example, children's liturgies.

Bishop Clark's decision caused controversy within the diocese, and tensions within St. Monica's parish. The parish took a public stance to preserve lay preaching. Our local situation also drew some national attention in a December 13, 1980 article in *America* magazine. This article, written by Camille D'Arienzo, RSM, was entitled, "Preaching a Ministry in Distress." Her concern about the state of preaching in general also reflects the growing national interest in the topic of lay preaching.

I resigned from St. Monica's in November of 1980 because of the Bishop's enforcement of these liturgical norms. However, my lay preaching ministry continued and expanded primarily in ecumenical settings. Invitations from Christian Churches surfaced because of my interfaith ministry in our local county jail. These invitations brought me into the pulpits of 10 denominations. However, in 1994, because of a parish need, the Pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Victor, New York, invited me to serve as an interim lay preacher. This invitation indicates that on an informal basis, lay preaching had begun to reemerge within the diocese. In fact, the ministry was already resurfacing in the 1980s. This preaching role at St. Patrick's Parish became permanent for me, and this parish serves as the context and community that concludes the 24 year time frame of this thesis.

St. Patrick's Parish in Victor, New York, is located within the Diocese of Rochester, and is approximately 20 miles south of Rochester. It consists of 1,560 families with 10 – 15 new families registering a month. Weekly, 1,100 parishioners attend the 4 weekend services. St. Patrick's is a predominately white congregation

circled by affluence, yet with a number of families who struggle financially, and others who are more typically middle class.

In retrospect, my departure from St. Monica's Parish staff in 1980 marked a significant turning point for me in the areas of ministry and theology. My ministry shifted to an ecumenical setting which enabled me to observe and experience other modes of authority within the Christian Church. In addition, my interaction with parishioners at St. Monica's and the context of my pastoral work had changed me. As the debate and discussion unfolded regarding lay preaching, I discovered that my understanding and appreciation of Holy Baptism deepened. I like to express this shift in the following way. "Slowly but surely I cast my lot with the laity of the parish." This shift is important because of my own personal pre-Vatican II training and understandings of authority. From all these experiences the topic for this thesis emerged: "Lay Preaching: An Outsider in an Inside Place." Lay preaching is a ministry to which I have been called and because of my role on a parish staff, my education, membership in a religious order, and presence in the pulpit, some consider me an "insider" within the Church. I am also very aware of being an "outsider" in the pulpit. This is true because I am a lay person, a woman, and nonordained. My call can only be exercised within my tradition at the pleasure of the Bishop and Pastor of a parish. There is also a fragility surrounding lay preaching because one must negotiate its practice within local liturgical customs, and individual pastoral and parish realities. These realities make me aware that authority has many faces, and that being on the "margins" in the preaching enterprise carries with it a variety of experiences and understandings.

DISCUSSION OF AUTHORITY

...the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.... Matthew 7: 28b-29

Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Mark 9:35b

In September of 1972, I delivered my first sermon in St. Monica's Parish. Rita P., then a recent widow in her 40s and mother of five, was there and has been a constant support and connection until the present time. She was interviewed for this thesis. She comes from a very traditional theological setting, environment, and understanding of authority, but by 1980 during our struggles regarding lay preaching, she was asking the following question. "I do not understand. If sisters can teach young men who will become priests, why can't they also instruct the congregation from the pulpit?" Her context and culture make her observation all the more powerful.

In general, when the early Church focused on authority which rested in Jesus Christ, and acted in a more collegial manner, voices of the Baptized and voices from the margins surfaced. As centralization of power and authority developed within the Church, these voices were, for the most part, silenced. A brief review of authority within the Roman Catholic Church supports this conclusion.

David J. Stagaman, S.J. in his book, *Authority in the Church*, notes that "presently we are moving toward a dialogue model in which all Christians are granted some participation in the divine authority through baptism, and church officials derive their power from the body of the church as actualized by the Spirit of God."⁴ In many cases this was a reality in the early Church. For many, this is the model of authority proposed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). However, 40 years after the Council, this

⁴ David J. Stagaman, S.J., *Authority in the Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 3.

model has not become a universal reality, and in some instances has lost its momentum. Edward Schillebeeckx in his book, *Church: The Human Story of God*, states that the “co-responsibility of all believers for the church on the basis of our Baptism in water and Spirit essentially included the participation of all believers in decisions relating to church government....”⁵ Schillebeeckx points out that unfortunately, Vatican II did not establish the “institutional safeguards” that would preserve these views of authority. Yet, Vatican II is the catalyst for developing views regarding Baptism, authority, lay ministry, and the increase of lay preaching.

Stagaman names two types of authority that are experienced in the practical realm of church life. One he calls “in” authority, the other, “an” authority. The former refers to official authority in the Church, the institution, and the latter refers to a charismatic authority within the Church. An overview of Church history reflects that “an” authority principle was a common approach in the New Testament and the early Church, as well as in the post Vatican II life of the Church. “In” authority gradually won the day as the early Church grew, spread and was influenced by outside forces, conflict, and struggles with civil society. Some see “in” authority gaining prominence in today’s Roman Catholic Church. The struggles around this tendency reflect the tension between “Mother Church” and “Sophia.”

Stagaman writes that, “Whatever authority appears in the New Testament, the overriding conviction is that it derives from God...as its ultimate source and functions at the service of others.”⁶ Jesus Christ, who “spoke with authority” bestowed his authority after the resurrection, and gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to his followers. “In the

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 209.

⁶ Stagaman, *Ibid.*, 66.

Church, all members share in the authority given by the risen Christ (John 20: 9-23; Acts 2: 1-4). Authority is his collective endowment.”⁷ The Greek understanding of authority, *exousia*, conveyed the meaning of *power* over someone, and the exercise of high handed actions. “The early Church avoids words that signify authority and power in classical Greek. The authorities were not either in theory or practice, abstracted from, let alone set over against the communities in which they exercised an important function.”⁸ Authority in the Church shifted as growth occurred, and as the influence of civil society in which the Church rested impacted its structures. The collegial nature of authority gradually became more centralized, and the voices of those outside the circle of power were not welcomed. These are important concepts arising from the New Testament and early Church understandings, and they impact this thesis which shows that in some instances, when authority within the Church was more inclusive, lay preaching grew and was accepted even on a limited basis.

The earliest form of government in the Church was collegial in nature, but by the 2nd century, the role of the Bishop rose in prominence, and local churches were governed by a single Bishop. “By the early third century Hippolytus can take for granted that monoepiscopacy exists everywhere in the Church.”⁹ Yet even in the midst of this trend, local churches reflected great diversity in their liturgies and discipline. Authority seemed to be more horizontal in nature. It is interesting to note that during that same century, Tertullian points to the understanding that the sacrament of Baptism is the reason all Christians are part of the Christ’s priesthood. This ancient concept is critical to this thesis. As the Church grew and spread, the Bishop was seen as the source of unity and

⁷ Ibid. , 67.

⁸ Nicholas Lash, *Voices of Authority* (Shepherdstown: Patmos Press, 1996), 46.

⁹ Stagaman, Ibid., 73.

the one who preserved what the apostles had taught. The election of the Bishop was common in the 4th century and was conducted by clergy and laity until the mid 11th century. By the 5th century the authority of the Bishop was firmly in place and a gradual separation of clergy and laity developed as centralization became firmer. The Edict of Milan in 313 offered freedom and recognition to the Church, and the practice grew for the Church to model itself after civil structures. In addition, a study of ecumenical councils from 325 to 1869 indicates that the Church was often in a defensive posture responding to heresies, controversies, and political conflicts from within and without. These facts and the response to the context in which the Church found itself, led to the institution's focus on orthodoxy, preservation, and centralization of power and authority.

In relationship to this study, Stagaman notes that there were examples of non-clerical authorities in the early Church. He points to two groups who exercised that role. Martyrs and persons of renowned holiness carried authority within their person by their life and role. This fact and a similar development in the Medieval Church are important to consider in the discussion of the authority of the lay preacher. While not wide spread, there were examples of exceptions to the general rule in the life of the Church.

The emergence of Ecumenical Church Councils in the mid 4th century and the growing understanding of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome are two significant events that impacted the understanding of authority in the first millennium of the Church. Bishops generally saw councils as authoritative and local churches received them as such if their decisions were in harmony with the beliefs of the local church. Four of the five great churches, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople did not see Rome's word as absolutely final. However, by the 3rd century, Rome's decisions carried great

weight. By the 9th century, Rome's place and authority were secured as well as the hierarchical order within the Church.

In the 2nd millennium, authority was understood as God's and that God bestowed divine authority on the leadership of the church, i.e. councils, synods, and popes.

Medieval views of authority shifted from the first millennium in several ways. As Yves Congar states,

In the first millennium people focused on the content of what was said and looked for continuity between that content and tradition of the Church. Furthermore, that focus on continuity sought a connection between the local church here and now and apostolic origins. Even when the Church as a whole came to accept the great ecumenical councils, the process involved reception of the faith by local churches. The medievals, on the other hand, cast their attention more on the teacher than the teaching and on authorities who could express the faith on the whole Church, that is, popes and councils or unanimous consent of the Fathers.¹⁰

The movement away from understanding of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body to a visible ordered body impacted the hierarchy's understanding of their authority, and the role and place of lay persons within the structure. As in the first millennium, another subset of lay authoritative figures began to appear. Doctors of Theology were considered among three centers of authority along with the Pope and Emperor. Again, this fact gave recognition to the gifts of some lay persons.

Schisms, the need for change, and the power of the Papacy all cried out for reform. In 1545, the Council of Trent was convened to respond to the Reformation, but focused its efforts on strengthening the Papacy and institutional Church. Centralized authority in a visible Church was reinforced. "In most nineteenth century theology it was assumed that the unity of the Church would only be explained on the basis of Church

¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

authority, and that to be one Church required a visible principle of unity.”¹¹ In 1870, Vatican I reinforced the power of the Papacy through the dogma of infallibility.

The 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) not only reached back into early Church history and enhanced the authority of the Bishops in concert with the Pope, but also broadened the understanding of authority within the Church and the laity. There was a return to the understanding of the Church as “The Mystical Body of Christ” and the whole Church, laity and clergy alike, as a “pilgrim people.” In the Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Bishops stated that, “...the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore in the Church and the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God.”¹² Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church reads, “The baptized...are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood....”¹³

One other dimension of authority within the Roman Catholic Church impacts my personal experience and journey. Since my history of lay preaching is set within the context of my call as a Sister of Mercy, the development of authority within religious communities since Vatican II has played a major role in many sisters’ views and understanding of call and service. Asked by Vatican II to renew religious life, to return to the “charism” of one’s original founder/foundress, and to be responsive to the signs of the times may have sounded benign, however these directives were taken seriously, and the results were in many ways, revolutionary. Mary Linscott SND in her article, “The Experience of Women Religious”, points to attitudes and practices regarding authority

¹¹ Ibid. , 112-113.

¹² Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992), 768.

¹³ Ibid., 360.

that have changed and developed within 60 congregations. She writes that there is, “A clear sense that religious authority has its source in Christ...and is to be exercised ...as service, and for his purposes.”¹⁴ This reflects a view that was common in the early Church. In addition, she notes that awareness of the founding vision of each religious order influenced decisions regarding authority. This development enabled religious orders of women to be very creative in their ministries, use their gifts, and yet often placed them at odds with the institutional church. Linscott refers to terms such as shared responsibility, diversity of gifts, subsidiary, and consensus as qualities of “authority” as it is lived out and exercised in religious orders since Vatican II. It is no wonder that in the 1970s and onward, many new lay pastoral positions within Roman Catholic parishes in Rochester were created and filled by sisters, among them lay preaching, chaplaincies, pastoral associates, and parish visitors.

While this thesis focuses on lay preaching in general, facts indicate that the majority of lay preachers within the Diocese of Rochester are lay women. Presently, of the 84 lay persons who have canonical faculties to preach within the diocese, 72 are women of whom 23 are sisters. Not all Roman Catholic women find themselves in the same theological place, but Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes’ 1995 study of Christian women and their relationship to the Church, offer insights into the views of Catholic women. In their book, *Defecting in Place*, they interviewed 3746 women of whom 1213 were Roman Catholic. They concluded the following about Roman Catholic women:

¹⁴ Mary Linscott, SND, “The Experience of Women Religious” in *Governance and Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Noel Timms and Kenneth Wilson (Towbridge: The Cromwell Press, 2000), 85.

1. More women (four out of five) feel alienated in the Catholic Church than in any other denomination.
2. Catholic women ...want equal access...to decision making responsibilities and to positions of leadership.
3. Catholic women in this study find the male hierarchy's response to women alienating.
4. Catholics care passionately about their faith and identify with their tradition.
5. As women assume leadership roles and gain experience...many begin to question the limitations restricting their ministry.
6. Catholic women who feel alienated from the church are for the most part remaining in the church.¹⁵

Beneath these conclusions lie issues of authority, and its exercise within the Roman Catholic Church. These conclusions point to a need for new expressions of authority and discussions about ministry as it is exercised within the tradition, as well as actions that speak to women who are "defecting in place".

LAY PREACHING IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony.
John 4: 39

When lay preaching's historical context is explored, there is a limited but rich history beginning with the New Testament. Mary Catherine Hilkert's *Naming Grace: Preaching and Sacramental Imagination*, offers the reader a brief history of lay preaching. Hilkert points first to the call conferred on Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome found in Mark. "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you", (Mark 16:7). The women said nothing out of fear and amazement, but the call and the authority behind their instruction

¹⁵ Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, *Defecting in Place* (New York: Crossroad), 1995), 101-114.

are evident. Considering the context and culture of the Gospels, the fact that the call and commission made the text is significant. In the longer version of Mark 16, Mary Magdalene alone, "Went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping", (Mark 16: 10). "Christian Scripture offers clear evidence of women as preachers of the gospel. In terms of preaching, there is...clear evidence that women were so gifted and did exercise ministries of preaching, prophesying, and teaching."¹⁶ Romans 16 presents a significant list of women who taught and led house communities which in some manner, must have included liturgical and preaching activities. Both 1Corinthians 14: 33b-35 and 1Timothy 2: 11-15, have been used to silence a woman's voice in the assembly. Hilkert believes these prohibitions may have referred to cultural conditions and their presence in the canon indicates that women did "pray and prophesy publicly at worship."¹⁷ These texts however, became the basis for a preaching prohibition which in many instances has lasted until this day. Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M. in her essay, "New Testament Foundations for Preaching by the Non-Ordained", believes that the stories about the Samaritan women as well as Mary Magdalene offer evidence of women preaching in the New Testament. She comments on texts used to prohibit preaching:

...Paul both knew and approved of women speaking in the churches and indeed exercising both of the essential roles in the liturgy; prayer and prophecy. (1 Cor.11:5) Consequently, the prohibition of women's speaking in the churches three chapters later is either a flat self-contradiction, or much more probably, an interpolation by a later hand intending to limit the freedom women exercised, with Paul's approval....¹⁸

¹⁶ Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 147.

¹⁷ Ibid., 149.

¹⁸ Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., "New Testament Foundations for Preaching by the Non-Ordained" in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, ed. Nadine Foley, O.P. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 66.

There is evidence that women offered leadership and preached the Word in the Montanist communities but once this sect was called heretical, their voice was suppressed. By the 2nd century the role of preacher was firmly in the hand of the Bishop. In her book, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, Elaine Pagels states that, “Tertullian (2nd century) expressed shock that as in some philosophic circles, women participated with men, ‘These heretical women-how audacious they are! They are bold enough to teach, to preach, to take part in almost every masculine function-they even baptize people.’”¹⁹ The *Apostolic Constitution* in the 4th century reveals that lay men could preach but, from this point until the Middle Ages, lay preaching falls into a period of silence.

In the 12th century, lay preaching blossomed as “preaching bands” surfaced in Western Europe. “These preachers saw their source of authority to preach in their faithfulness to living the gospel life.”²⁰ This view, which saw the authority to preach flowing from a commitment to Jesus Christ, is reminiscent of the experience of the early Church’s view of authority. “Those preaching bands included among their numbers laity and monks who were not ordained. Preaching became more detached from a Eucharistic setting as the preaching bands moved out of churches into the public squares of Europe.”²¹ Monks and lay persons were encouraged by the 11th century Georgian reforms of the clergy, and these activities enhanced a sense of call for the lay person. The importance of lay preachers such as Abbess Hildegard (1098-1179) cannot be underestimated. “Historical data seems to support the view that during this period (11th

¹⁹ Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 159.

²⁰ Patricia A. Parachini, S.N.J.M., *Lay Preaching: State of the Question* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

to 13th centuries) the mandate to preach was not tied to ordination alone and that women as well as lay men, in certain circumstances, preached.”²² In 1215, at the 4th Lateran Council, lay preaching was prohibited; however, Pope Innocent III did not seem to have difficulty with qualified lay men preaching. This practice however, was not viewed as permanent. From the Council of Trent in 1545 until the establishment of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, preaching was firmly linked to Holy Orders.

Patricia Parrichini draws 6 conclusions after reflecting on the history of lay preaching.

1. Lay preaching has been a practice in several different historical periods in the Church and some was liturgical preaching.
2. Lay preaching included both men and women but women were excluded both before men.
3. Authorization was approached differently in each era.
4. Reasons for prohibition are complex and include political, social, cultural, ecclesiastical as well as theological influences.
5. At present, lay preaching is permitted under certain circumstances by Church law.
6. Lay preaching is growing as an accepted practice in some segments of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church.²³

Events flowing from Vatican II, the 1983 revision of Canon Law, and the ministerial needs of the Church bring the role and place of lay preaching to its contemporary position in the Church.

The 1983 revision of the Roman Catholic Code of Canon law states in its preface that, “From the time of the primitive Church it has been customary to collect the sacred canons into one book to facilitate a *knowledge* of them as well as their use and observance especially by sacred ministers....”²⁴ An overview of this expression of

²² Ibid., 15.

²³ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, (Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), xvii.

church law and its implications provide a critical context for the present status of lay preaching as well as the authority that undergirds the ministry. It is also important to note that the Code of Canon Law is not the only form of polity within the Roman Catholic Church. James H. Provost, a canon lawyer, states that the documents of Vatican II, the decrees that implemented those documents, liturgical law, particular law, special permissions, and the customs of members of the Church carry weight and authority.

The first ten centuries of church life witnessed numerous collections of church law that often contradicted each other. These laws were the result of decrees from Popes as well as councils. The monk Gratian in the middle of the 12th century put these disparate laws and regulations into a collection named *Decretum Gratiani*. The *Degree of Gratian* was part of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* that gathered together directives and decretals of various Popes. However, as time passed and additional laws began to be issued by councils and the Roman Curia, they were not added to the *Corpus* and law seemed to be heaped upon law. Prior to Vatican I (1869-1870), Bishops called for a clearer codification of church law, and Pope Pius X (1903-1914) undertook this task. Existing materials were organized into five books and finally after twelve years, the revised code was issued on May 27, 1917. When Pope John XXIII announced his plans to convene Vatican II (1962-1965), he called for a renewal of the Code of Canon Law. John XXIII recognized the changing context in which the Roman Catholic Church found itself, as well as the changing needs of the faithful and the world in which they lived. His actions indicate that he was trying to answer the contextual questions Alice Mann raises. "Who are we?" "What are we here for?" "Who is my neighbor?" For many he was trying to bring a balance between "Mother Church" and "Sophia."

The commission to undertake this task of revision was established in 1963 and formal work began in 1965. It is also clear that Paul VI (1963-1978), John XXIII's successor, desired the new code and viewed the task as one that, "was also and essentially a matter of reforming the norms to accommodate them to a new mentality and new needs even if the old law was to supply the foundation of the work of revision."²⁵ Principles that formed the foundation of the 1983 revised code are important because they offer a basis that supports lay preaching. Examples of these principles are the setting aside of "unduly rigid norms," "attention to subsidiarity," "fundamental equality of all members of the Christian faithful," and "the authority of local Bishops...in many circumstances to dispense from general laws," which prior to 1983 was considered extraordinary.²⁶ These principles, with an emphasis on the role of the baptized, are significant because they offer for some a rationale for the role of the lay preacher. On January 25, 1983, twenty years after Pope John's announcement, the revised code was issued.

The canons of the 1983 code that *directly* impact lay preaching are 204, 228, 759, and 762-772. However, before these canons are explored, it is important to *revisit* the 1917 Code to provide a context for the 24 year time frame of this thesis. In the 1917 Code of Canon Law, "preaching is part of the work of the magisterium. This view of teaching or preaching is rooted in the more fundamental concept that the Church is *societas inequalis*, a society of at least two classes – those who govern and those they rule."²⁷ This statement reflects an understanding of authority that is hierarchical, inward, and institutional. It neglects to emphasize a theology of charism and a theology of the

²⁵ Ibid., xx.

²⁶ Ibid., xxi.

²⁷ James H. Provost, "Lay Preaching and Canon Law in a Time of Transition" in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, ed. Nadine Foley, O.P. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 136.

priesthood of the laity. The four 1917 canons that directly impact lay preaching are 1327, 1328, 1342, and 1344.

Canon 1327 designates the primary role of preaching to the Pope who delegates that duty to the bishops who, in turn exercise the same delegation to their respective dioceses. Canon 1342 clearly bars lay preaching, however 1327 and 1328 do allow a bishop to designate individuals to preach at special events such as a children's liturgy or when it would meet the needs of the faithful. Canon 1344 requires a homily be given at all Sunday and holiday liturgies and it can only be omitted for a serious reason. With a broad interpretation of these canons one can understand how during the 1970s, lay preaching emerged and developed within the Diocese of Rochester. In 1974 and 1975, Bishop Joseph Hogan received a lay man into the orders of Lector and Acolyte. These are the first two steps on the path to ordination. In September of 1975, following these installations, the same lay man formally requested and received canonical faculties to preach in response to invitations he was receiving. The rationale for these faculties flowed from an explanatory document entitled *Ministeria Quaedam* (1972), which was formulated to address canon 1342 in the 1917 Code. The critical point is the flexibility of the Bishop, and the way in which the Canons were interpreted by the local Church.

In 1973, the Bishops of West Germany requested and received permission from the Congregation for the Clergy to designate competent lay persons as preachers as the need arose. This permission was to last for four years and then, in 1977 was extended for another four years. An exception for lay preaching at children's liturgies found in the 1973 *Directory for Masses with Children*, and the example of the European Bishops' requests, set legal exceptions which are important. My interviews with lay preachers who served in Latin

America from the 1960s onward, also reflect a precedent. In Latin America, the absence of priests for weekly Eucharist, and the presence of trained catechists provided opportunities for lay preaching in a variety of contexts.

Vatican II reversed the *societas inequalis* of the 1917 Code of Canon law with an emphasis on the Church as a community of baptized men and women. James Provost states that Vatican II shifted the concept of preaching as the primary role of the magisterium to an “exercise of *munus docendi* – the teaching mission of Christ himself, committed to the Church to be carried out in Christ’s name until the end of time.”²⁸

The revised 1983 Code of Canon Law presents the Roman Catholic Church with openings and opportunities to draw upon the gifts of lay persons as they exercise the ministry of preaching. There are several *foundational* canons upon which the expansion of lay preaching now rests. Canon 204 # 1 states:

The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; ...since they have become sharers in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one.²⁹

Canon 228 # 1 states, “Qualified lay persons are capable of assuming from their sacred pastors those ecclesiastical offices and functions which they are able to exercise in accord with the prescriptions of law.”³⁰ Canon 759 states, “By virtue of their baptism and confirmation lay members of the Christian faithful are witnesses to the gospel message by word and by example of Christian life; they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word.”³¹ And critically, Canon

²⁸ Ibid., 136.

²⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Ibid., 69.

³⁰ Ibid., 77.

³¹ Ibid., 287.

766 states, “Lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory if it is necessary in certain circumstances or if it is useful in particular cases according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops and with due regard for canon 767, # 1.”³² Canon 767 # 1 does reserve the homily within the liturgy to the priest or deacon, and this law creates a process problem that different dioceses have addressed in a variety of ways. The homily is given after the proclamation of the Gospel. If the preacher is a lay person some priests introduce them with a few comments, others interpret “homily time” as a moment of silence after the gospel, and then the lay preacher shares the sermon. The liturgical norms distinguish between a homily and sermon. The former, which “breaks open the Word for practical life,” is reserved for the clergy. The sermon is a lengthier exposition of a moral principle or practice. However, the terms are often interchanged, and practice reflects this reality.

On November 14, 2001, by a vote of 190–20, the Latin Church members of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted norms for the United States regarding lay preaching. The legislation is a compliment to Canon 766 in the revised code. The legislation took effect in January of 2002, and was to be implemented at the discretion of the local Bishop. Thus there is a range of implementation processes across the United States. On April 25, 2002, Bishop Matthew Clark issued his *Norms for Liturgical Preaching*. In June of 2002, the Bishop’s office sent pastors and pastoral administrators the process for requesting canonical faculties for lay preachers. As a result of the local process, 84 lay men and women are now preaching in the Diocese of Rochester.

³² Ibid., 289.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and so not return there until they have watered the earth...so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in that thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55: 10-11

Statistics reflecting the declining numbers of ordained clergy are often used as a reason to reemphasize lay ministries. The Diocese of Rochester commissioned the Georgetown University Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, CARA, to project the number of priests who are and would be serving the Diocese from 2001 to 2030. Their December 2001 report concluded that if the current trends in retirement and ordination rates continue, the Diocese will have 52 active priests serving in 2030. Views differ widely regarding the causes for the declining numbers of ordained and the impact of this reality. Some lay ministers see their role flowing from Holy Baptism and express the view that lay ministry is needed and valuable regardless of the number of ordained. Others view the declining number of ordained as an avenue that will bring the role and gifts of the laity to the surface. They see God's hand in this process and hope it will restore the Church to its original charisms. Still others see the declining numbers of ordained as a reflection of the decline of a Church that is not responding to its context. Patricia Hughes Baumer, M.Div. in an article entitled, "The Need for Lay Preaching" summarizes four factors in the life of the Church that have influenced the resurgence of lay preaching. "Among them are 1) Changes in ministerial leadership; 2) Heightened expectations for quality preaching; 3) Recognition of the need for the liturgy of the Word to address diverse, multicultural communities; and 4) Recognition of the gifts of lay persons for the preaching ministry."³³

³³ Patricia Hughes Baumer, M.Div., "The Need for Lay Preaching" in *Empowering a New Voice: A Lay Preaching Training/Formation Manual*, (Partners in Preaching 1999), 1.

For some lay preachers, the questions of Alice Mann offer a context through which the issues of clerical shortages and authority need to be addressed. “Who are we?” “What are we here for?” “Who is my neighbor?” For others, the use of older models to solve the clergy shortage is problematic. Rather than addressing the varied understandings of authority, and opening the clerical state to women and married men, there is a move on the part of some, to heighten the role of the ordained male. The 2003 American Bishop’s *General Instructions for the Roman Missal*, GIRM, reflect this reality. The instructions emphasize the role of the laity in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, except of course for the proclamation of the Gospel. But they clearly diminish the role of the laity in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, while elevating the place and the status of the ordained. For example, the ordained must receive the Eucharist before lay ministers, pour the consecrated wine, and not move through the whole congregation for the greeting of peace. This increased barrier reflects an attitude toward authority that focuses on Holy Orders rather than Holy Baptism and once again, creates barriers and walls between the baptized reinforcing the old concept of *societas inequalis*. These barriers reflect clashing understandings of authority that are emerging in the Church. Holy Baptism, which is the fundamental sacrament in our tradition, and Holy Orders now seem at odds with each other. Rosemary Haughton might describe these recent liturgical norms as a clash between “Mother Church” and “Sophia.” Institutions often seem threatened when the gifts and creativity of the membership surface, and one response is to heighten control and order. The gift of “Sophia” in the Christian Church is her ability to encourage gifts, and to focus on the charisms of the community in its role of proclaiming the Gospel.

The review of authority in the Church and in Religious Orders is an important context for this thesis, but the lived experiences of lay preachers brings a unique perspective to the topic. Fourteen lay preachers in the Diocese of Rochester were interviewed. Four men were interviewed, 2 of whom are married. Two married women, 1 single woman, and 7 Sisters representing two Religious Orders in the Diocese were also interviewed. Their combined lay preaching experience encompasses over 240 years, and their range of experience covers 1 year to over 46 years. They serve or served in urban, rural, and suburban parishes, and some did or do use their preaching gifts in schools, other Christian Churches, and institutions such as the jail and nursing homes. Two of the interviewees have preached in Latin America. Another is Mexican preaching in the United States. When interviewed, the preachers were asked how long they had been preaching and they were invited to describe their context. They were also asked if the 1980 enforcement of liturgical norms and removal of lay preachers from the pulpit impacted them. Finally, they were asked what they believed gave authority to their preaching and that of other lay preachers.

The first person interviewed is a Sister of Mercy. She was a teacher and principal of a girl's Catholic high school. Sister Mary B., preached "on and off for 8 years" and began the ministry in the early 1980s at the invitation of an ill pastor of a suburban parish who needed the assistance. The 1980 directive to leave the pulpit did not impact her ministry, and that fact points to the openness of the pastor, and the gradual theological shift on the part of the Bishop. She expressed the fact that while she could speak without notes to 1,000 students and their parents, she was "terrified" to preach and does not believe she has the gift. She stated, "It is a responsibility not to be taken lightly. It is an

awesome task to try to move hearts and souls.” Sister Mary B. believes that preaching is a “gift and grace,” and clearly she does not believe that gender or ordination makes the difference. This view is interesting because the laity and women in particular, have unique insights to share with the congregation. Patricia Hughes Baumer notes in her work, *The Need for Lay Preaching*, “The recognition of the need for a diversity of preachers and a diversity of spiritualities was one of the two major reasons for the establishment of the lay preaching ministry at our home parish of Pax Christi in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.”³⁴ Sister Mary B. responded to the authority question by saying that people listen to lay preachers because “they care and they want to learn.” Two other areas regarding authority of the lay preacher surfaced in our discussion. Sister Mary B. reflected on Bishop Clark’s flexibility in interpreting the canons, and reopening the pulpit to lay preachers. In addition, she deeply believes that the gift of preaching itself carries an “authority.” She compared the call to preach to the call of Jeremiah. “You cannot not do it!” She also recognizes the tension between the “desire to be within the law”, and the pull to “use the gift you have for others.” She is describing the tension between “Mother Church” and “Sophia.”

The second interviewee is a single lay man who preaches in three settings. He has faculties for a rural parish, and preaches as a staff chaplain at a community nursing home. He also assists with the liturgical life of the local gay/lesbian ecumenical community. His three contexts make him aware of the uniqueness of each sermon as it relates to each context. He has preached for 5 years and also preached while in a Franciscan community. For Michael N. the authority of his preaching flows from his ability to tell

³⁴ Ibid., 8.

his and the community's story of faith. He believes it is expressed when "connections" are made with the congregation. He shared his belief that while the laity's role is expanding it is happening in a hierarchical manner. He believes the authority and history of religious life gives sisters an edge in the preaching ministry. During liturgical changes and clerical shortages, people slowly let go of the authority of the clergy as preacher, and are willing to shift that authority to a sister more easily than another lay man or woman.

Sister Jacqueline R., a Sister of Mercy, serves in one of the newest pastoral roles for lay persons. She is the Pastoral Administrator of a suburban parish. In this role, lay persons and some Deacons administer the day to day activities of a parish and rely on a sacramental minister to assist on the weekends. Part of the job description for this position is preaching. This reality existed before the preaching norms for the Rochester Diocese were formalized in 2002. Prior to this new role, her introduction to preaching came from a pastor who hired her as Director of Faith Formation. It is important to note that many clergy within the Diocese saw the value of lay preaching and found pastoral reasons to maintain its practice within the parish. As her pastor's health declined her preaching role increased, and for the past 8 years she has been preaching once a month. She speaks about authority in terms of "authorship." For her, the authority to preach is authored by the Holy Spirit. She believes that, "Our Church has marginalized almost everyone except the clergy, and it is the lay preacher's important task to hold up for the congregation the power and promise of their Baptism, and the roles the laity are called to play within the Church and world." Her belief that the preacher is called forth from the community supports the view of Lucy Atkinson Rose in her book, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. "The preacher comes down off a pedestal and

stands under the Word along with the congregation. And the members of the congregation are invited to participate more substantially in the sermonic event.”³⁵ Sister Jacqueline stated that as the role of the lay preacher grows, “Our brother priests might be influenced to approach preaching differently as they see and experience the skills of the lay preacher.” If that happens, an important form of authority will flow from the role of the lay person in the pulpit.

Joe K. a professor of Religious Studies at a local private college has had faculties to preach for 28 years. His experience reflects the manner in which Bishop Hogan handled the 1917 Code of Canon Law and preaching. Joe’s experience of being installed into the role of Acolyte and Lector along with the seminarians preparing for ordination, and his subsequent permission to preach, reflect the pastoral approach of Bishop Hogan. However, these actions in 1974 and 1975 preceded the present Pope, and his publication of new and revised liturgical norms. But Joe’s experience points to the exceptions that were present even within a more stringent Code of Canon Law.

Sandra R. is a lay woman ministering in an inner city bilingual parish in Rochester. She has been preaching in both Spanish and English for 4 years, 1 year in her present assignment, and 3 years as a student at the California Franciscan School of Theology. Sandra, a native of Mexico, found her early preaching difficult because of cultural and prejudicial attitudes. Some did not listen because she was speaking Spanish and others, because she was a woman. She said that, “Some Hispanic ladies started to read the bulletin when she began to preach.” She experienced fear as she tackled English sermons, and indicated that the rudeness of some “silenced her for a while.”

³⁵ Lucy Rose Atkinson, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 61.

People who experience negative reactions to their preaching know the feeling, and realize that negative forces have the capacity to sap or question whatever authority one may have.

Sister Barbara S. is a Sister of Mercy with 8 years of preaching experience. Her preaching has stretched from rural to suburban communities. She has served 2 parishes as Pastoral Administrator. As she reflected on the authority of the lay preacher she believes her ministry to the sick and dying has enhanced her authority in the pulpit. Walking with the sick, with families, and knowing all involved in the process, give her presence and words at a funeral liturgy an authority and deep meaning for a family. She also believes her personal faith adds to the authority. Being a woman also makes a difference. She believes a woman's voice and experience are important and their presence impacts the authority equation. Carol M. Noren in her book, *The Woman in the Pulpit*, concurs, writing, "However one chooses to define authority, it appears that women identify and claim it more readily in the ministries of word and sacrament than in the ministry of 'order' (parish leadership and administration)." ³⁶

Gloria U. is a mother, grandmother, story teller, author, and preacher. She has 17 years of preaching experience. For her, the love of Scripture and liturgy drew her to the ministry of preaching. She believes the authority for that movement comes from a deep call from God. This call, which was most unexpected, is her "primary authority" for preaching. She also believes that the authority to preach flows from the actions of Jesus

³⁶ Carol M. Noren, *The Woman in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 49.

Christ in the Scriptures. He called and commissioned women to preach and she holds up Mary Magdalene as the prime example. Her third comment focused on the authority that flows from the response of the community. It is interesting to note that the authority of her preaching has evolved into two other ministries. She is a story teller of Scripture stories about women, and has put these stories into print.

Rosalie R. is also a mother and grandmother. She commented that when she was in a Catholic high school she was invited to share some reflections, thus she states that she has been preaching for 46! For Rosalie, the authority of the lay preacher flows primarily from Holy Baptism, from the Scriptures, relationships and life experience, and from the reality that we “author” our own lives as we respond to God’s spirit. Without using the Haughton terms about the twin sisters in the Church, she pointed to the pain “Mother Church”, the institution, often inflicts on the women and lay persons who respond to the inspiration of “Sophia.” That inspiration flows from the Holy Spirit’s gifts and call.

Sister Kay S., a Sister of Mercy, is a Pastoral Associate in an inner city parish in Rochester. She has preached for 24 years, 12 in Rochester and 12 in Chile. Her Rochester parish consists of 80 percent Hispanics representing multiple nations. The context for her sermons is critical and the fact that she is bilingual gives her sermons a sense of authority among the people. In Chile, lay preaching and lay liturgical leaders were a fact of life since Eucharist was only celebrated monthly. Sister Kay also believes authority for the lay preacher comes when a sermon is well done, and when the message is clear. She believes preaching is a gift which does not necessarily flow from Holy Orders. The Hispanic community is open to lay witnessing and appreciates the faith

stories of others. Kay believes many in the community have the authority to preach because of their lives. Justo Gonzalez in his essay, “A Hispanic Perspective” writes, “Then preaching as an act of *ministry* is a relationship. Ministry can never be performed alone.”³⁷ Yet for some in her parish, traditional views of authority are still alive and some will question why she preaches when a Deacon is present. She also believes one preaching voice from the pulpit can be “deadening,” and that the voice of women and their shared experience is critical.

Similar to Sister Kay’s experience, Sister Janet K., a Sister of Mercy, has 40 years preaching experience, 15 of which unfolded in Chile. Presently she preaches for the Diocese of Rochester on topics of justice, mission, and Catholic Charities. For her, authority comes from the “sanctioning” of the lay preacher by the community, one’s gifts, education, and the diocesan process to grant canonical faculties to preach. She also notes that one’s life and one’s attempt to live the gospel add authority to the preacher’s words and often, that authority comes from within the person. Like Sister Kay, her preaching ministry in Chile developed in the absence of a priest. She also noted that the 1960s and 1970s reflected a very progressive time in the Latin American Church as it took a radical stand for the poor, and called upon the gifts of lay leaders. The collaboration between “Mother Church” and “Sophia” seemed to be evident as the Latin American Bishops asked Alice Mann’s questions, “Who are we?” “What are we here for?”, and “Who is my neighbor?”

Richard W. brings 9 years experience to lay preaching both in Rochester and the Baltimore Diocese. In Rochester he serves in a downtown city parish with a diverse

³⁷ Justo Gonzalez, “A Hispanic Perspective” in *Preaching Justice*, ed. Christine Marie Smith (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 80.

congregation representing over twenty zip codes. He also has suburban parish experience. He came to preaching through his work in children's faith formation, and an accepted role as preacher at children's liturgies. For him, Holy Baptism is the main source of his authority. He states that, "The graced action of Baptism empowers anyone with the capacity to open the Word." Mary Collins, O.S.B. writes, "...it is in holy baptism that the Church can recognize the radical capacity and fundamental imperative for the preaching ministry."³⁸ In addition he believes his unique life experience, training, and educational background give him the authority to preach.

Like Richard W., Leo C. is a "new" preacher in the Diocese of Rochester. He has canonical faculties and has preached just once in his rural/ suburban parish. Like Richard, his evolution into lay preaching flowed from his work with the youth in the parish religious education program, and his designation as a lay presider in the absence of a priest. This is a relatively new role for the laity in the Rochester Diocese. For Leo, his presence in his local church community for 27 years adds to his authority. He is on the parish staff, and his knowledge and awareness of the congregation give credibility to his words.

Sister Diane D. is a Sister of St. Joseph. For the past 4 years she has served as the Pastoral Administrator of a 300 family rural parish. However, she has been preaching since the early 1980s because of her role as a school principal, and as a participant in the program which prepares adults for admission into the Roman Catholic Church. Authority flows through her preaching because of her companionship with Jesus Christ. "I must speak about it." She sees her leadership role as a "bridge builder" bringing the parish and

³⁸ Mary Collins, O.S.B., "The Baptismal Roots of the Preaching Ministry" in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, ed. Nadine Foley, O.P. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 113-114.

Christ together. The role of preacher is one way to do this. While lay preaching is part of her job description, she sees it as a necessary one for the position of spiritual leader of a parish. Preparation and her assignment to the parish also grant her preaching authority.

Finally, Sister Miriam N., a Sister of Mercy, is preaching in a large suburban parish of 2,500 families. She is a Pastoral Associate and preaching was part of her job description when she was hired 6 years ago. This fact is important because it reflects the growth of this ministry well before the diocesan preaching norms were published in 2002. For her, knowing and loving the people as well as continual updating and well planned sermons give her authority. She added another kind of authority which comes from her membership in the Sisters of Mercy. She believes the community history and service of the Order give her words and ministry credibility.

In addition to the interviews with lay preachers, the views and insights of the parishioners in St. Patrick's Parish in Victor were gathered. They were invited to express their opinions about the credibility or lack thereof of my preaching. They had the opportunity to do this in one or both of two venues at which I was not present. They could attend a focus group after each of the four liturgies on one weekend, or answer the same questions through a questionnaire that was in the church bulletin. Seventeen parishioners attended the 4 focus groups led by members of the lay committee,³⁹ and 42 responses came from the questionnaire as well as 2 signed letters. Three questions were asked and were the same for both the focus groups and the questionnaire.

1. Does Sister Barbara's preaching have credibility? If yes, why? If no, why?
2. What do you value about her preaching?
3. What would you like to see changed?

³⁹ The Lay Committee, also called the Parish Project Group, is a requirement of this D.Min Program.

The use of the word, “credibility” was deliberately selected by the lay committee when the tool was developed. The committee believed if the word “authority” was used, it might limit some responses to a more traditional understanding of the concept. Of the 42 responses on the designated form, 40 indicated my preaching had credibility, 1 did not answer the question, and 1 said no. The following list summarizes the responses of those who said “yes”. The credibility comes from Baptism, charism, experience, personality, and education. Some indicated that the Word was taken seriously and was applied to today’s society. Others commented that speaking skills added to the credibility. Responders valued the preparation and research that went into the sermon. Connections with everyday life and the Scriptures were noted. One commented on the connections between the preacher’s faith life and the sermon. One individual wrote, “Sister Barbara’s sermons always juxtapose the Scriptural readings with relevant current issues of everyday living. Her comments are insightful and often challenge us to look at an array of issues with a different perspective, and to reflect on ourselves as Christians.” Several appreciated historical information, another did not. The fact that the preacher is a sister carried weight with some, and another commented that the preacher “understands what she preaches about.” Interestingly, for one person, the fact that the preacher can “be heard” was important. Another felt the words were too precise. While one person found credibility in my preaching, they commented, “Sister Barbara needs to keep her liberal, Democrat leanings out of her homilies. Some of us do not share her partisan views.” This view expresses a dilemma many preachers face as they make efforts to place the Word of God in the context of the life of the congregation.

The comment from the one individual who responded “no” to the first question was direct and clear.

“She does not preach but uses the pulpit to promote her political agenda to a captive audience. She oversteps her boundaries often to get her personal political message across. As an example, to discuss her “feelings” regarding the proposed closing of the Canandaigua Veterans’ Hospital was completely out of her realm, as many of her other speeches (have) been. I can watch Reverend Schuler (sic) or his son and get so much more spirituality and faith than anything Sister Barbara has to offer.”

Those comments were concluded with a statement that the person “does not feel she should be “preaching.” I think this view represents a segment of the Roman Catholic Church’s view of authority that is more traditional. I cannot tell if the problem is mainly theological, laity, or gender based. The comment about the nearby Veterans’ Hospital was in the sermon because the Federal Government has slated it for closure, and 800 jobs in the neighboring community would be affected. My comments were an attempt to bring the Word to the congregation’s context.

Suggested changes included, “less theology and history,” shorter sermons, avoiding terms like “I feel,” to be less personal, to be more assertive, and dynamic. These were listed by individuals but delightfully 6 suggested the schedule to be changed so I could preach more often, and some would change nothing about my preaching. One person made an interesting comment. “The parishioners are happy to have a new pastor. But the real question is not about our priest, but it’s about preaching.” I view this comment as a strong statement about the “authority” of the lay preacher.

Of the 2 letters sent, a negative comment was voiced because I spoke about ordaining women from the pulpit when, according to Rome, “all discussion was to be ended”. This letter was signed and the woman continued, “(I) never have heard her quote

our Holy Father although she has mentioned protestant theologians.” Another woman signed her letter and commented that, “I just wanted to say I go to another parish whenever Sister is scheduled to preach. She always talks right after the Gospel when we are supposed to hear a homily and no bishop can give permission for anyone but an ordained minister to do that.”

Focus groups, led by the lay committee, were held after each of the 4 Masses one weekend and 17 attended the sessions. The questions asked were the same as the parish questionnaire. All of the participants stated that the preaching had credibility. Some reasons offered were the preacher’s preparation, understanding of people, and ability to apply Scripture to daily life. Interestingly, one liked an “older woman preaching.” There was a call by some to have the sermons focus more on the younger teens.

Two final interviews embrace the 24 year period this thesis addresses. Father Robert Kennedy, presently pastor of an urban church in Rochester, was, in 1980, Director of Liturgy in the Rochester Catholic Diocese, and was quoted in the 1980 article in *America Magazine*. Locally, he teaches liturgy at St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry in Rochester. Now, as a first time pastor, he indicated that preaching takes on a different flavor. He sees the authority of any preaching, including lay preaching, coming from the pastoral activities and life of the preacher. The tie to the lives of the people gives credibility and authority to the preacher’s words. The value of a variety of voices, in his view, justifies the role of the lay preacher, who according to the norms exercises this ministry as an “extraordinary” activity. The “ordinary” preacher remains the priest or deacon.

Finally, the critical interview for this thesis was with Bishop Matthew Clark who, in 1980, ordered the end of lay preaching in the Diocese of Rochester. However, in the early 1980s, some in the Diocese observed a slow and noticeable change happening in him, and his approach to the people. Many believe that change came because of his listening heart, his prayerfulness, and the wise counsel of men and women he respected. Signs of that “conversion” appeared on many fronts in the Diocese. In 1982, he privately apologized to me for the way he handled St. Monica’s and the issues surrounding lay preaching. He invited me to attend a symposium on lay preaching in October of 1982. He gathered a group of over thirty persons for an ongoing Diocesan listening experience. Most of the members were women. The fruits of that listening produced on April 29, 1982, his pastoral letter on women entitled “Fire in the Thornbush.” The letter, called “American Catholic Women: Persistent Questions, Faithful Witness” was later published in *Origins*. In 1985 he established a Commission on Women which, while not a highly visible or vocal group, still exists in the Diocese.

In November of 1990, a symposium entitled, *The Wisdom of Women: Models for Faith and Action*, was held in Washington D.C. The symposium was sponsored by the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Women in Society and the Church. Bishop Clark chaired the above committee. He delivered one of the keynote addresses at the 1990 symposium. The title of his address was, “On Conversion and Listening to Women.” One statement in his talk, among many, reflects the ongoing heart of his ministry in Rochester. “The people among whom I was asked to stand in a position of pastoral leadership, I was learning, had much to teach me in this regard. I knew I had to open myself to their

experience, or I could never hope to be a credible leader among them.”⁴⁰ In his 1990 keynote the Bishop presents himself as a pastoral leader who, while deeply loyal to the traditions and unity of “Mother Church,” understands the importance of honoring the gifts of “Sophia” as she struggles to be heard in the Church. “I hope that the Church, under the leadership of whoever is successor to Peter and at his request, will be willing fully and carefully to hear the wisdom of the people as they express their convictions about some of the issues that cause tensions in the Church today.”⁴¹

During my interview with Bishop Clark, I asked him one question. “Bishop, I know why I have remained committed to the call and ministry of lay preaching, but why have you grown in your commitment to the ministry, and done what you have done to preserve the role in our Diocese?” His response was consistent with the views of many interviewed lay preachers and parishioners. He stated that the issue was important because of,

the witness given me by those who have... employed their gift of preaching so generously to the people. The powerful impact of such preaching on our lay faithful is another reason. Lay preaching is an expression of what has always challenged the Church, (that is, the) happy union/wedding of the gifts of the people and the every evolving norms of the Church. When I came to the diocese and encountered this reality (lay preaching), it was the first time I had encountered it in any systemic way or widespread way. I rarely was in the presence of nonordained preaching. I was left uncertain about it, and what was happening. But when I came here I soon realized this was something that rested very peacefully with our people. They enjoyed it and found enrichment, and there was something about people sharing their life’s journey in very direct ways, and (it) brought women of power and credibility to them that were very important to them.

⁴⁰ Bishop Matthew Clark, “On Conversion and Listening to Women” in *The Wisdom of Women*, Bishops’ Committee on Women in Society and in the Church (Washington: USCC, 1991), 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

He also pointed out that most of the preachers at that time were women. He commented that this fact provided a most welcome voice to the people.

The quality, the credibility and the good fruits of such preaching are the reasons why I felt it important to do all I could to keep those voices and spirits (in) communication with our faithful people. This is much to our good that this has happened. That is, even before we talk about shifting vocation patterns and numbers. Were we blessed with all the vocations of every kind we need, I think this would be an important element of our lives.

The Bishop went on to discuss the Diocesan norms for lay preaching that have been well received in the midst of the “exigencies of today’s world and Church.” He pointed out that the norms have achieved a balanced approach and that approach has been reached “thanks (in part) to the patience and good spirit of many of (the) people who are preaching as well as other pastoral ministers in our community.” He again pointed to melding happily the charismatic and structural aspects of our Church. He pointed out that “as history moves on; our task is to find the happy blend.” He concluded with the words, “This (thesis) is important work...good luck.”

CONCLUSIONS

“...because, if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them-in that case you may even be found fighting against God! Acts 5: 38b-39

My personal 32 year lay preaching experience, plus research and interviews focusing on the past 24 years, have led me to the following conclusions regarding the authority of the lay preacher as it unfolds in the Diocese of Rochester. At the very heart of all the discussions and debates about this role is the concept of authority. Who has it? Who gives it? And how is it experienced? Christine M. Smith in her book, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, writes:

There is some agreement among homileticians that the church needs new ways of understanding the preacher's authority. The automatic authority once given to the preacher is no longer present in many places. The ecclesiastical authority bestowed on the preacher from the church's hierarchical bodies means little to communities who find the content and style of Christian preaching irrelevant and often judgmental.⁴²

The lay preacher's most important source of authority is **Holy Baptism**. This is the sacrament that unites us to a community. The prayer of anointing during the Baptismal rite names us "priest, prophet and royalty" and joins us to the ministry of Jesus Christ. The struggle within the Roman Church and perhaps other Christian churches is a tug between Holy Orders and Holy Baptism. It unfolds as a tension between "Mother Church" and "Sophia." Mary Collins, O.S.B. in her reflections on Holy baptism writes:

Unless and until the theology of baptism and the theology of ordination are examined together within the theological community for their Christological and pneumatological foundations and for their adequacy to contemporary Christian experience, those who want to find solid ground for developing lay collaboration in the full preaching ministry, including liturgical preaching will be kept on the defensive.⁴³

At the June 2002 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Dr. Sara Fairbanks from Barry University, delivered a paper entitled, "Dei Verbum 2002: A Look at a Theology of The Laity and Ministry of the Word in Our Times." The abstract of the paper states that Dr. Fairbanks draws two conclusions from her interpretation of the documents of Vatican II that support the role of the lay preacher within the liturgy. First, the abstract states, "The entire Church, and not the hierarchy alone, are entrusted with the word of God. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit the laity is to undertake the ministry of the word in all its forms."⁴⁴ Secondly, Fairbanks states that Vatican II

⁴² Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 44-45.

⁴³ Collins, Ibid., 130.

⁴⁴ Catholic Theological Society of America, *Proceedings of the Fifty-sixth Annual Convention, Vol. 57, 2002*, 143-144.

stressed that the laity promote the prophetic nature of the church through their very lives, and from that context they preach the Gospel. Both the laity and clergy are sharers in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Rather than emphasizing the differences between the two, Baptism unites us in a fundamental equality or as Elizabeth Fiorenza calls it, “A Discipleship of Equals.” Proceeding from this premise, we then look for the gifts in the Body of Christ that will build up the life and wholeness of that Body, the Church.

The second source of authority for the lay preacher is **the call to preach**. By call I mean either the quick assurance of an inner movement, the surprise suggestion of someone, or the long slow realization that God wants you in a certain place giving a gift that in and of itself may be a surprise to you. The call may come from deep within or, from the invitation of another person, or from a community. The call is something that cannot be ignored and often in the midst of opposition, it continues to find ways to be expressed. I believe the call must be tested, but cannot be ignored because of its holy source. I also believe it is sinful to suppress or ignore a call from God. One of the 14 lay preachers I interviewed seriously doubted her call to preach. One preacher, Gloria U., said that, “No one was more surprised than she with the direction her life and gifts took.” David Buttrick in *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, writes, “We do not preach for any reason except that God has called us and seeks us to use our voices for the liberation of humanity.”⁴⁵ The 32 years that cover my experience of lay preaching and the 24 year period of this thesis, have been filled with great joy and deep pain. I have concluded that there is an authority present in the **willingness to persevere in the call itself**. In the midst of it all, God’s grace and the community’s support point to the value

⁴⁵ David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 32.

of persistence in the exercise of the call. That persistence may happen within the structure or, as some have found, outside the structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

Charism or gift is another source of authority. Paul in his letter to the Church in Corinth emphasized, “Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit....To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12: 4a, 7). This source of authority of the lay preacher was recognized in the responses of the parishioners who attended the focus groups and answered the questionnaire. Some said, “She speaks with the authority of the Word of God. It is clearly her gift of the Holy Spirit.” “Her delivery is compelling...and (her) ability to be easily heard and distinctly understood,” were considered important. Another aspect of the authority of gift is the impact that the gift may have on the life of the listener. If the sermon leads to a deeper love of Scripture or a response to the Word, then it has an authority in the life of the community.

The **response from the community** is a further source of authority for the lay preacher. The community’s responses, inquiries, comments, and questions indicate their acceptance and willingness to listen and glean insights. One of the most conservative parishioners, who calls himself a “Papist”, admitted that he could see the value of the lay preacher because their experience in the community offers insights and examples that assist the congregation. Several parishioners commented on their questionnaire that “(she) applies her preaching to modern topics.” Several commented that “(my) sermons always juxtapose the Scriptural readings with relevant current issues of everyday living.”

Connections, relationships and the pastoral care of the congregation lend authority to the lay preacher’s words. This view surfaced more than once in the

interviews. The beauty of pastoral care is the trust and acceptance extended by the people. These relationships enable the preacher to come in contact with the lives and experience of others, and to see in new and different ways the manner in which God is working in individual and communal lives. These connections and relationships broaden the preacher's perspective and understanding. They help to make the preaching event meaningful, and thus carry authority because of the reality they express.

The place of **experience** plays a part in the acceptance of the lay preacher. It was clear from my research that my experience as a Sister of Mercy lends credibility to my preaching. I carry with me on one level, the history and service of my religious order. In addition, life experiences and ministry add credibility to the words of the preacher. The experience of a woman adds nuances and examples of Scriptural interpretation that bring diversity to the pulpit. In addition, the experience of being on the "margins" of the Church as a lay person and a woman enables a different voice to be heard, and a different set of eyes to explore the Scripture texts. Frequently, these views and interpretations resonate with the lay persons in the pew, who often feel like "outsiders" and on the margins of the Church. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez in their book, *The Liberating Pulpit*, write that, "God has a proclivity for speaking the word through the powerless."⁴⁶ I believe that two factors are at play regarding the role of the lay preacher. The "outsider," who is the non-ordained, steps into the pulpit and by that fact becomes a quasi "insider." It is critical however, that the lay preacher holds on to the authority that comes from the marginal place they have, and that takes effort. If lay preachers ultimately are seen as "insiders," their words may decrease in credibility.

⁴⁶ Justo L. Gonzalez & Catherine G. Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 21.

The effort to **update and seek education** is noticed and appreciated. The people of St. Patrick's in Victor, the location of the practical aspects of this degree, recognize the efforts of my educational process, and the parishioners were supportive of the program. One questionnaire states, "(She) has studied hard and had learned well." Interestingly, the present Director of the Liturgy Office in the Diocese commented that the new preaching norms are in place to maintain the quality of the lay preacher, but also to call our clergy to improve their preaching as well.

The **authority of one's life** was also an issue raised through my interviews and research. The daily struggle of the lay preacher to bring harmony between their lived experience and the Word of God give an authenticity to their words. The recognition of the call and action of God's Spirit enable the preacher to serve as an "icon" through which the people experience the power and promise of God. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. has written, "The real norm and justification for competent proclamation of the gospel message is the praxis of Jesus himself embodied in the life of the preacher. We are always overtaken by that to which we bear witness, and it comes upon us as a grace".⁴⁷

Of course, the actual **presence in the pulpit and the conferring of canonical faculties by the Bishop** add to the authority of the lay preacher in the eyes members of the congregation. **Scripture** itself is a source of authority. Not only does it call the lay preacher forth, but it transforms the life of the preacher by the very process of study,

⁴⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., "The Right of Every Christian to Speak in the Light of Evangelical Experience 'In the Midst of Brothers and Sisters'" in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained*, ed. Nadine Foley, O.P. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 37.

prayer, writing, as well as the delivery of the sermon. It has an authority over the preacher and the preacher's life which is recognized by the congregation.

Ultimately, it is **the Holy Spirit** who is the source of all authority. That Spirit flows into Christians at Holy Baptism, and is the source of our gifts and call. It is the lay preacher's commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the power of Christ's Spirit that are the deepest source of our authority as ministers of the Word.

The issues that surround the authority of lay preaching within the Roman Catholic Church are part of a larger and ongoing struggle within the whole Christian Church. The issue of authority is a universal struggle. My experience and faith journey are but a small piece of that struggle. The ways in which Christians respond to their Baptismal call and to the gifts they have received to build up the Body of Christ have been present from the earliest days of the infant Church until the present, and reflect the ongoing tension between "Mother Church" and her twin sister, "Sophia."

Hopefully the history and process reflected on these pages will enlighten some, encourage others, and enable lay men and women who feel called to preach, to test that call and persevere in its hope and promise.

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words
became to me a joy; and the delight of my heart;
for I am called by your name."
Jeremiah 15: 16