



## THE PREACHING FOR ENCOUNTER PROGRAM

In the worldwide synodal process, we are praying for the growth of the Catholic faith through listening to each other. The lay people in our pews tell us that one of the ways that their faith grows is through liturgical preaching that connects with their lives. Our research reveals that the Sunday homily especially matters for those who are on the margins of faith, whether vaguely committed weekly Mass attendees or those who only come once in a while.

The pairing of preaching and evangelization is at the core of the purpose of the Institute for Homiletics. The Institute is a collaboration between the Diocese of Dallas, the University of Dallas, and the Catholic Foundation. The goal is to revitalize our people by an encounter with the living God through Catholic preaching. That encounter will then launch committed disciples who are on fire to renew this world in which we live. This is our hope. This is our aspiration. This is our mission.

### ***The Preaching for Encounter Program***

We are now recruiting participants for the 2026 cohort of the Preaching for Encounter program. We currently have forty-three priests and deacons participating in the 2024 Cohort, including a group of deacons from the Archdiocese of San Antonio. They are working together to improve their preaching skills, grow spiritually, and discover new ways for God to speak through them to inspire their people. Here is a brief summary of what that two-year program entails:

- Peer-learning groups are at the heart of the process. In the first year, groups of eight to ten priests or deacons meet once a month to discuss preaching materials, to evaluate each other's homilies, to pray together, and for food and fellowship. Orientation for the new peer learning groups will be in the spring of 2026. The groups themselves will begin to meet in October of 2026. Most groups will be able to meet in person, but hybrid groups will meet online because they can be in different locations throughout the U.S.
- Each preacher will be provided with a personal preaching coach who will work with him to set goals, evaluate his homilies, work on an upcoming homily, and offer personalized coaching toward more effective preaching. Many of the preachers have described this one-on-one coaching to be a blessing for them. Coaching begins in September 2026.
- Over the 20-month program, there are two winter retreats and two summer retreats. These teaching moments bring preachers away from their parishes to focus on their learning. This year's first gathering of the whole 2026 cohort will be two days at Mundelein

Seminary in Chicago and a few days at Marywood Retreat Center in Jacksonville, Florida  
February 2027.

- Each preacher will have a lay support group who will pray for him and encourage him in this work.. This group will meet independently in the first year to learn to pray the Mass, do *lectio divina* on the Sunday scriptures, give feedback on sample homilies, and learn what makes for effective preaching. In the second year of the program, the lay support group will meet with their preacher to study the scriptures and share with him how they are encountering God in ordinary life. The preacher's responsibility is to select a lay coordinator for this group. That person will then recruit a diverse mix of 8-10 participants. This unique approach to further connect with your congregation has shown to be one of the most meaningful parts of the program.

**We seek priests who passionately and humbly want to grow in their preaching**

Thank you for all that you do for your people! Let us pray together for the renewal of our Church and the part that each of us plays in that revitalization. And if you are interested in learning more about bringing your people into an encounter with God through the Sunday homily, please reach out to us!

Deacon James Baird, Coordinator of Preaching for Encounter Program, [jgbaird@udallas.edu](mailto:jgbaird@udallas.edu)

Or, Dr. Karla Bellinger, Executive Director, [karlabellinger@gmail.com](mailto:karlabellinger@gmail.com)

<https://instituteforhomiletics.org/programs/>

[Contact Us](#)