



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Institute for Homiletics in Catholic Church Established in North Texas**  
***Pioneer in Listener Studies from University of Notre Dame, Karla J. Bellinger,***  
***Selected as Founding Executive Director***



**DALLAS** - Karla J. Bellinger, M.A., DMIN, has been named founding Executive Director of the Institute for Homiletics at the University of Dallas with the goal of improving preaching in the Catholic Church. The Institute is a collaboration of The Catholic Foundation and the University of Dallas.

In her new role, effective immediately, Bellinger will work to strengthen the preaching of Catholic priests, deacons, and seminarians so that they flourish in their ministry of the Word. Beginning with the Diocese of Dallas and then moving outward to the broader Church, the Institute will build a vision of preaching whose purpose is to bring the people of God into an encounter with the living God.

The Institute will pair homiletics and evangelization, for incremental growth in the improvement of preaching can yield exponential growth in the renewal of the Church.

Bellinger most recently served as the Associate Director at the John S. Marten Program for Homiletics and Liturgics at the University of Notre Dame. She is the current vice president and rising president (2022) of the Catholic Association of Teachers of Homiletics (CATH), the professional guild for those who teach preaching.

At age 21, Bellinger and her husband, Daniel, joined the Catholic Church while they were students in the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina. A mother of five adult children with five grandchildren, Bellinger is a pioneer in Catholic listener studies, particularly with youth, beginning with her doctoral thesis *Are You Talking to Me? A Study of Young Listeners' Connection with Catholic Sunday Preaching*. Bellinger is also a certified lay ecclesial minister in the Diocese of Cleveland, where she worked for many years. Bellinger is also the reflection writer for the current three-year liturgical cycle of the publication, *Living the Word*, published by GIA Publications.

Bellinger earned her doctorate in preaching from Aquinas Institute of Theology, master's degree in systematic theology from the University of Notre Dame and bachelor's degree in forestry from North Carolina State University. She's a lector and Eucharistic minister at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Niles, Michigan, in the Catholic Diocese of Kalamazoo. She also serves in the same liturgical roles at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of Notre Dame.

"It is vital that we continually strive to improve our preaching in the Catholic Church so that the people of God cast their gaze upon the Lord not just during Mass, but every day of the week," says Bishop Edward J. Burns.

"I am so pleased that we are establishing the Institute for Homiletics within the Dallas Diocese and grateful to the donors who contributed to the funds that make this initiative possible. The tremendous knowledge and wisdom Karla has accrued in knowing how homiletics and evangelization are united provides the Institute with a proven leader," Burns adds. "Through her work, with God's grace, Karla will help our priests and deacons here in the Diocese of Dallas and beyond to enhance their preaching in ways that will positively transform lives and create deep-rooted encounters with Christ."

In her book, *Connecting Pulpit and Pew: Breaking Open the Conversation about Catholic Preaching*, Bellinger says effective preaching arises out of a homilist's spiritual life. She says that if preachers have a profound relationship with Jesus and have given their life to serving God, it comes across in what they say. She notes, however, that the responsibility for an encounter with God through the medium of preaching also involves the receptivity of the listener.

"Listeners hunger for inspiration," says Bellinger. "People in the pews want to hear a message that gives them life. Clergy thirst for their congregation to encounter Jesus Christ and want to inspire them and see the fruit of a Christian life."

In describing her one-on-one coaching of almost 100 preachers - bishops, priests and deacons - at the John S. Marten Program for Homiletics and Liturgics at the University of Notre Dame, she often set this challenge before them as they were working on their Sunday homily: "I hope to help you get an A on your homilies, but even more, I hope your homilies help your people get an A in life."

"So many people have given up on preaching as a tool of evangelization. We can't give up. The value of the liturgy is that it's not just the body of Christ that fuels us. It's the music. It's the community. It's the preaching," she adds. "The purpose of the liturgy is to bring people together as a community and help them to go out and change the world for the better."

"The holiness and skill of the preacher and the receptivity of the people have to go together if we are to renew the Church," says Bellinger. "There is no greater joy for a preacher than for him to hear, 'You helped me find God. And that has made all the difference in my life.' Let us see what we can do to help that to happen more often."

The Institute for Homiletics will operate in space provided by the University of Dallas on its Irving campus.

"We are excited to welcome Dr. Bellinger to the University of Dallas, and we are grateful for our partnership with The Catholic Foundation in establishing The Institute for Homiletics at UD," says UD President Jonathan J. Sanford, PhD. "Welcoming the Institute as part of the UD community reflects our desire to support and advance the new evangelization within our diocesan home, and it is perfectly aligned with one of the key pillars of our strategic plan - to deepen our commitment to both Church and country."

People in pews all over the country are heard to complain about Catholic preaching. Donors in the Dallas Diocese have come together to do something about it, and to invest in better Catholic preaching.

Funding that supports the new Institute will come from The Bishop Tschoepe Institute of Homiletics and Communications Fund of The Catholic Foundation - established in 1985 - along with The Homiletics Fund of The Catholic Foundation established by Jim Moroney in 2019 for the purpose of creating a permanent endowment which will support the annual operations of the Institute. Presently, including the Bishop Tschoepe Fund, \$8 million of the \$10 million goal has been raised. Fundraising is ongoing, and the \$10 million endowment will provide a permanent source of funding for the annual operations of the Institute. The permanent funding will free up the Executive Director to focus on enhancing preaching rather than constantly fundraising.

"The generous response we have seen from donors will ensure that the program will endure over time," says Matt Kramer, president and chief executive officer at The Catholic Foundation that stewards the Funds. "The establishment of the Institute for Homiletics and donor support for the realization of the program is a game changer."

“Donors may make contributions to the Funds at any time and from anywhere,” Kramer adds. “We believe there will be a strong interest among people to become donors given the tremendous impact the faithful will experience as they benefit from pulpit messages that don’t just fuel their faith but help them to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

### **About the Catholic Foundation**

The Catholic Foundation is a trusted giving vehicle for the Catholic community. Chartered in 1955, the Foundation was founded by a group of dedicated Catholic laymen with a vision that extended far beyond the charitable needs of the moment. The Foundation has spent decades building a strong community, helping donors fulfill their charitable goals, and preserving the founders’ vision and philanthropic legacy. Over time, the Foundation has provided more than \$226 million in grants to religious, charitable and educational organizations. Today, it manages approximately \$285 million in assets and houses more than 490 charitable funds and trusts. For additional information about The Catholic Foundation, call 972-661-9792 or visit [www.catholicfoundation.com](http://www.catholicfoundation.com).

### **About the Diocese of Dallas**

The Diocese of Dallas encompasses an area of 7,523 square miles stretched across Dallas, Collin, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro, and Rockwall counties. Its 74 parishes and 36 Catholic schools serve approximately 1.2 million Catholics and a larger North Texas community of more than four million people. The Most Reverend Edward J. Burns, serves as the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Dallas. He is assisted by the Most Reverend Greg Kelly who serves as auxiliary bishop. The Diocese of Dallas was established in 1890 and formerly encompassed a 120,000 square mile area. Over time, the Dioceses of El Paso, Lubbock, Amarillo, Tyler, and Fort Worth were carved out of the Diocese of Dallas.

### **About the University of Dallas**

Located in one of the largest and fastest-growing metropolitan areas of the U.S., the University of Dallas is a nationally recognized Catholic liberal arts university with campuses in Irving, Texas, and Rome, Italy. Known for the academic rigor of its undergraduate Core curriculum, rooted in the great works of Western civilization and Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of Dallas also offers flexible graduate degrees in business, liberal arts, and ministry, all taught by exceptional faculty who are dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom, truth and virtue. For more information, visit [udallas.edu](http://udallas.edu).

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