**Executive Summary**

A primary way that Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is through preaching. According to the official teaching of the Church, central to this preaching enterprise is the Sunday homily.

While there is an expectation that such preaching is doctrinally and scripturally correct, of primary importance is that it is understandable to its hearers. Different from teaching or other forms of religious instruction, homilies are intended to move hearts, encourage individual and communal transformation, and nourish Christian witness and action in the world. Consequently, the value of a homily is directly related to its reception.

The Compelling Preaching project at CTU will investigate the way in which preaching by Roman Catholic clergy affects local assemblies. CTU proposes an innovative approach, in partnership with the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago, to explore significant learnings from neuroscience applicable across multiple contexts.

As one of the leading Catholic graduate schools of theology, Catholic Theological Union is known for its homiletics faculty and curriculum, which gives seminarians, women religious, and lay men and women an excellent foundation in preaching. CTU also enjoys decades of intercultural experience which provides the necessary context for exploration of preaching in both English and Spanish.

One important aspect of this project is the development of a database of reliable empirical data, employing a variety of neuroscientific and psychological methods. These data will be collected to test specific aspects of the way in which preaching can affect listeners. This research will be conducted across both English speaking and Spanish speaking Roman Catholic communities.

There are two primary overarching goals in carrying out the proposed studies. The first is to assist those who preach to understand with greater clarity what actually affects their hearers. This project is designed to begin uncovering the perceived traits of a preacher (e.g., trustworthiness), as well as the homiletic design (e.g., its narrative quality), in order to steer preachers towards more effective preaching.

A second and more systemic goal of this project is to enable those who form and teach current and future preachers to be equipped to shape homileticians more effectively. Having a body of empirical evidence that parses the effectiveness of various designs and styles of homiletic delivery is a resource they currently do not have.

To achieve these two main purposes, this project will not only embark upon innovative empirical studies of the preaching event, but also produce accessible, online, and open access video and print resources. These are intended to assist individual preachers who wish to improve in this ministry as well as more broadly resource the curricular designs and pedagogical efforts of teachers of preaching. While focused on Roman Catholic preaching, these findings and the ensuing resources will have resonance and value beyond Roman Catholicism and be truly “catholic” in their reach.