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'A Bible in one hand and The New York Times in the other'

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At Holy Wisdom Monastery, the weekly sermon, called a homily, is given by a rotating roster of about a dozen people, most with a theology background.

Among them are a female Mennonite minister, a retired UW-Madison professor and several Catholic priests who resigned to marry. Sister Lynne Smith, a Protestant woman who joined Holy Wisdom, also is a regular leader.

At recent services, the speakers referred favorably to the Occupy Wall Street movement and to efforts to fight gay bullying and negatively to voter ID laws. One speaker said in composing a homily for Holy Wisdom, it's appropriate "to have a Bible in one hand and The New York Times in the other."

Another Sunday, the speaker noted the recent elevation of New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan to cardinal and asked parishioners to "pray for those less-doctrinaire priests and sisters who quietly and effectively minister to the needy in the world's lesser-known places."

Strips of rainbow fabric, a sign of solidarity with the gay community, adorn many name tags, and the language at the services has been stripped of gender-specific references.

Instead of saying “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” when giving the sign of the cross before and after prayers, Holy Wisdom parishioners use “creator, redeemer and sanctifier” or another variation.

Parishioners worship in a section of an \$8 million facility opened in 2009 that received national attention as one of the most environmentally “green” buildings in the country. The new sanctuary is considered one of several factors in the recent rapid growth in the congregation’s membership.

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