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Catholics urged to talk about new missal

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | Feb. 9, 2010

WASHINGTON -- The new English translation of the Roman Missal might not be in U.S. parishes for as long as two years, but Father Rick Hilgartner hopes Catholics are talking about it now.

Mention of the upcoming changes in the prayers at Mass might come in the occasional bulletin insert, in adult religious education classes or Bible study groups or in a homily at Mass, said the associate director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Divine Worship in Washington.

'Anything to heighten people's awareness,' Father Hilgartner added in a Feb. 2 interview with Catholic News Service.

Along with such organizations as the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, the divine worship secretariat is gearing up to help educate the nation's 68 million Catholics on changes to the language of the Mass that were initiated in 2002 when Pope John Paul II issued a new edition of the Roman Missal in Latin.

The last time a new edition of the missal was implemented was in 1975.

For nearly a decade, representatives of bishops' conferences in 11 English-speaking countries, including the U.S., have been working on the English translation of the 2002 missal, which each conference has approved in sections over the years.

A news release issued at the Vatican in late January said the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments is in the final stages of reviewing the last sections of the translation before issuing its 'recognitio,' or approval.

Once the Vatican approval is received, the president of each bishops' conference will decide when the new missal will start being used in each country.

But before that can happen, priests and people must be involved in a 'two-tiered catechetical process' that starts with 'general and broad' discussions of such issues as the 'nature of the Mass, how it builds up the church and how we encounter Christ,' Father Hilgartner said.

'Some people want to jump right to conversations about the texts' themselves, without the proper context and background, he added.

But some of the liturgical texts that have been translated date to the fourth century and 'were not crafted in the 21st-century American sound-bite culture' that communicates in 'short, simple statements,' Father Hilgartner said.

He said those who have criticized the new liturgical language as out of touch with today's Catholics are not

taking the context into proper account.

'The way I might send a text message to a friend is not the way I'd speak in a job interview,' Father Hilgartner said. 'And the way we speak in prayer ought to communicate a sense of reverence.'

Some critics have regarded the new translations from the original Latin as 'slavishly literal' and 'elitist and remote from everyday speech and frequently not understandable.' One critic recently said that the translation's use of words such as 'ineffable,' 'consubstantial,' 'incarnate,' 'inviolate,' 'oblation' and 'ignominy' are not understandable to the average Catholic.

Beginning in April and continuing through November, Father Hilgartner and Msgr. Anthony Sherman, executive director of the divine worship secretariat, will be traveling around the country for 11 each of the 22 scheduled workshops on implementation of the Roman Missal. The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy are co-sponsoring the two-day sessions.

Designed for priests and diocesan leaders such as clergy personnel administrators, members of liturgical commissions and diocesan music directors who will play key roles in implementing the missal, the workshops will provide an overview of the new texts, demonstration and practice of the chants of the missal, discussion of the 'art of celebrating' the Mass and discussion of leading a community through change.

For those unable to attend the workshops, the federation is offering a video 'workshop-in-a-box' that can be used in small groups and a set of audio recordings to help celebrants listen to and speak the prayers aloud to become more familiar with their construction and cadence.

Further information and resources are available at a Web site launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org/romanmissal.

U.S. publishers are gearing up to offer other resources, such as the World Library Publications' recently announced 'Prepare and Pray' recordings of the new eucharistic prayers, as read by Bishop J. Peter Sartain of Joliet, Ill.

'I imagine that priests will find it useful and time-saving to play the CDs in their cars while traveling, or even downloading them to their MP3 players to listen while exercising, walking and taking time in prayer,' said Jerry Galipeau, associate publisher of World Library Publications.

The National Association of Pastoral Musicians also is hosting Webinars and preparing audio and video recordings of the priests' chants in the new missal.

In addition, an international group of priests and scholars called the Leeds Group -- for Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds, England, longtime chairman of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy -- is developing a multimedia resource called 'Become One Body, One Spirit in Christ.' The package will include more than 80 hours of video, including expert interviews and scenes of Mass from New York to Auckland, New Zealand.

Also in the works at the USCCB is a parish implementation kit that will outline when and how parishes should take each step toward implementation of the missal, such as preparing the music and worship aids for the congregation.

That timeline will be established after an implementation date is announced for the new missal, Father Hilgartner said.

See also: When will we actually get a new missal? [1]

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