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Phoenix bishop advises Vatican on Mass translations

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Feb. 9, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- With the new English translation of the Roman Missal "substantially complete," a committee that advises the Vatican on English translations has added five new members, including two Americans.

The new members of the Vox Clara Committee, established by the Vatican in 2001, included Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix, and Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., former chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Divine Worship.

Other new members of the international committee, which met Feb. 2-3 at the Vatican, were Irish Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam; Auxiliary Bishop David McGough of Birmingham, England; and Bishop John Tong Hon of Hong Kong.

A press release about the meeting was posted on the blog of Vox Clara member Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa, Ontario.

According to the press release, Cardinal George Pell of Sydney, chairman of Vox Clara, said that "with the work of the translation of the Roman Missal substantially complete, initiatives should continue around the English-speaking world for its effective reception." The Roman Missal is the book of prayers used in worship in the Latin-rite church; the third edition of the missal was published in Latin in 2002.

Marist Father Anthony Ward, an official at the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, said the remark implying some work remained to be completed did not refer to the Mass texts common to all Catholics, but simply to the approval of special adaptations requested by individual bishops' conferences and to prayers for a nation's special occasions. An example of a prayer for a special occasion would be Thanksgiving Mass prayers in the United States.

National bishops' conferences have different timetables for readying their priests and people to use the new translation and have set different dates for beginning to use the text. The U.S. bishops have announced that use of the new Missal will begin the first Sunday of Advent, which is Nov. 27. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales said parishes will begin using the basic Mass prayers in September but would not switch totally to the new translation until the texts for local feasts have been finalized.

While the Vox Clara press release said committee members were pleased that the new translation "has been welcomed throughout the English-speaking world," not everyone has been enthusiastic about the final product or about the way the translations were done.

Most recently, a group representing more than 400 of Ireland's 4,500 priests called in early February for a five-year waiting period to study alternatives to the new English translation of the missal.

During the meeting, members discussed "the process for the completion of the Roman Missal, continuing

initiatives for publications of the Lectionary (book of Scripture readings) for Mass by various conferences and the recent confirmation of the Grail Psalter" of Psalm texts, the press release said.

Father Ward said the Roman Missal will not be considered complete until each English-speaking country has printed and distributed copies of the text.

As for the texts of the Psalms, Father Ward said that every English-speaking bishops' conference around the world has approved and is using the Revised Grail Psalter for the Liturgy of the Hours, including morning and evening prayer. The Vatican, and most bishops' conferences themselves, would like to see the same Psalm translations used at every liturgy -- including for the responsorial Psalm at Mass, he said.

Vox Clara members also discussed the English translation of the blessing of holy oils for the chrism Mass, the press release said; each year, often the morning of Holy Thursday, diocesan bishops bless the oils that will be used in the diocese during the coming year for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick.

Because only a bishop uses the prayer of the blessing of holy oils, it is not part of the Roman Missal and was not translated with the Mass-text project, the press release said.

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