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Creative priest resigns over strict missal requirements

Robert McClory | Feb. 6, 2012 NCR Today

Belleville, Ill., Bishop Edward Braxton has accepted the resignation of a diocesan priest who has refused to strictly follow the translation of the Roman missal while celebrating Mass.

Fr. Bill Rowe, 72, told *NCR* he has for about 20 years regularly added his personal reflections to the prayers or inserted appropriate comments elsewhere in the liturgy.

"It's the only way I can pray honestly," he said. "I can't change that."

Rowe said his improvisational approach to the Mass is not directly related to the new English missal, "though I certainly don't like the translation." But there is an indirect link, since the English-speaking bishops have been mandated to require the new translation throughout their dioceses. Last summer, Braxton made it clear to the priests that he would tolerate no deviation from full compliance. And in October, he told Rowe he was no exception. Rowe said he offered his resignation at that time but heard nothing further from the bishop until Wednesday, when he received a letter notifying him that his resignation had been accepted.

Rowe is the pastor of a 400-family parish with a school in Mt. Carmel, Ill., and is reportedly well liked by his parishioners. He is a retired Air Force chaplain and has long managed on his service pension, taking no salary from the diocese. Rowe said since he must leave his parish, he would like to help out in other parishes in the priest-scarce Belleville diocese, "but I doubt [Braxton] would let me do that."

He added he hopes to remain active in some capacity and "would gladly serve in a soup kitchen if the opportunity comes."

A story on Rowe's resignation appeared in the Feb. 3 St. Louis Post-Dispatch [1].

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