

Association of U.S. Catholic Priests considers resolutions on church renewal

Dan Morris-Young | Jul. 1, 2013

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A resolution to address widespread frustration over the Latin-to-English translations in the revised Roman Missal did not pass during the June 24-27 national assembly of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests because it was not strong or inclusive enough, participants and officials said.

The resolution would have sought permission from Pope Francis to use older translations, notably from the 1974 Sacramentary. The new translations have been in use since November 2011.

Resolutions asking for reinstatement of general absolution in the United States, the addition of clergy and laity to a more transparent bishop selection process, and energetic support for labor union efforts received the strongest backing of the roughly 150 priests from across the country participating in the annual meeting, held this year at Seattle University.

In "weighted" voting that reflected degrees of support or lack of it, the priests also passed resolutions calling for promoting inclusive language, ordaining women as deacons and encouraging broad use of "a consensus decision-making process" to further "the exercise of authority" in church matters in a "collegial manner."

[According to a survey released in May](#) [1] by St. John's School of Theology in Minnesota, 59 percent of priests said they did not like the new texts used for Mass, and 39 percent said they did.

Recently retired Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pa., has agreed to convey the group's concerns about the lectionary and missal translations to U.S. bishop's conference officials, the association's board chairman, Fr. David Cooper of Milwaukee, said.

Trautman was honored with the organization's Blessed Pope John XXIII Award on June 26 for championing "the vocabulary and linguistic style of contemporary mainstream Catholics" during his terms as chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Liturgy and for "lifelong dedication to the love of the liturgy and for the devotion exemplified in his priestly and episcopal ministry in implementing the liturgical renewal envisioned by the Second Vatican Council."

Recruiting new members was mentioned frequently during the meeting at Seattle University, as was forming strong ties to priest organizations from other nations.

The latter was underscored during a live Skype conversation with Redemptorist Fr. Tony Flannery of the Irish Association of Catholic Priests, followed by a similar exchange with Fr. Helmut Schüller, who founded the Austrian Priests' Initiative.

Flannery said his group represents about 30 percent of Ireland's clergy and has credibility with the public and

hierarchy. Results of meetings with Irish diocesan priest councils and the group's report on the significant decline in the number of priests available for ministry in Ireland were widely reported in Irish media outlets recently.

Schüller emphasized his hope for a strong international network of priest associations.

Schüller, the former vicar general of Vienna, is scheduled to launch a tour of the U.S. in mid-July, starting in New York. He was stripped of his "monsignor" title in the fall after publicly questioning church teachings, including celibacy, male-only priesthood and divorce.

Among other things, Schüller reportedly will seek support for his organization's call for the Vatican to renew consideration of the "Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalism" initiative of Pope Paul VI following Vatican II to develop a church constitution along the lines of the U.S. Bill of Rights for all Catholics.

Formed in late 2011, the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests has a membership of about 1,000 priests from more than 120 dioceses, said Cooper, pastor of St. Matthias Parish in Milwaukee and chairman of the independent Milwaukee Archdiocese Priests Alliance. The organization's inaugural assembly in June 2012 drew more than 240 delegates from 55 dioceses to St. Leo University, northeast of Tampa, Fla.

Asked about the drop in attendance, several participants mentioned the expense and time of traveling to Seattle, and some said the organization was largely unfamiliar to American priests. Others expressed concern about the group's membership, whose average age is about 70.

Cooper said the organization is growing slowly, and "many priests do not know we even exist." He said there has been resistance by younger, more recently ordained priests, some of whom "see us as disloyal if not downright dissenting."

Alluding to recent studies that have pointed to differing views of church and authority between older and younger generations of Catholic clergy, Cooper described "Vatican II priests" as viewing the priesthood in terms of "service, of washing the feet of others" in contrast to clerics who hold a "priest as ruler" model.

He said the group is working hard to "build bridges" and to "hold hands with the laity and, at the same time, with the bishops."

"Sometimes it makes you feel like you are on the rack, being torn part," he said, adding that the association is an organization "of, by and for priests." Its core work is "keeping alive the vision of the Second Vatican Council" and "offering support to our brother priests," he said.

On the opening evening of the assembly during a "lament" session, participants voiced concern about the exercise of ecclesial authority, ministerial fatigue, the marginalization of groups such as the divorced and gay populations and treatment of priests falsely accused of transgressions, among other topics.

While six resolutions passed, seven others did not, including the one on Sacramental language. Two were withdrawn: one critical of the annual collection for the Archdiocese for Military Services and another advocating a "priest of the month" honor from the group.

The conference included four keynote addresses:

- Catherine Clifford, director of the Research Centre on Vatican II and 21st Century Catholicism at St. Paul University in Ottawa, offered a theological reflection on the assembly theme, "Lumen Gentium: God's Pilgrim People."

- Fr. James A. Coriden, a professor of church law and dean emeritus at the now-closed Washington Theological Union, traced modern-day canon law developments and how church law can apply in relations between clergy, the hierarchy and the Vatican.
- Two journalists -- Robert Blair Kaiser, who covered the Second Vatican Council for *Time* magazine, and Robert Michens, who is Vatican correspondent for *The Tablet* based in London -- offered differing time vantages on "Lumen Gentium" and Vatican II. Both shared behind-the-scenes insights and experiences.

Jackie O'Ryan of Seattle, a veteran communications and public affairs consultant, was introduced as the group's new managing director on the opening day.

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