

Liturgy debates linger

Bishops to follow up issues in June

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — To resolve issues raised in their extended liturgy debate in November, the U.S. Catholic bishops have agreed to extend their June assembly in San Diego, taking an extra day to discuss the principles behind liturgy texts.

One of the basic issues: How literally should Latin prayers be translated into English, a language with significant structural differences? Should the Vatican translation guidelines in effect since 1969 be revised in light of experience since then?

What makes the debate especially crucial at this time is the fact that the bishops are embarking on one of their most important liturgy decisions in a quarter-century: a new translation of the Sacramentary, the book containing all the prayers of the Mass.

The process of evaluating and approving a new English Sacramentary, expected to last at least two to three years, began at the November meeting.

The seriousness with which they are addressing the project could be seen in the lengthy debate they had over the process itself for reviewing the proposed text.

The process they finally approved included changes designed to strengthen each text's doctrinal evaluation.

During the debate it was also evident that there was considerable support among the bishops for a proposal by Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles to extend the timetable for the project by a year or two.

For starters, the bishops voted to de-

lay until next year a vote on the first segment of the Sacramentary. Originally, they were supposed to vote during their meeting on that segment. But they decided it, too, should undergo the more rigorous review process that future segments will go through.

The first segment comprises opening prayers, prayers over the gifts and prayers after Communion for the Sundays of "Ordinary Time" — the weeks between the end of Christmas season and Lent and between Pentecost and Advent.

Originally, the bishops were to consider the remaining six segments at their meetings in 1994 and 1995. Now it appears likely that they will take them up at a slower pace.

According to several Catholic News Service sources, the bishops decided on the extra study day in June at the suggestion of the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore.

His proposal came Nov. 18 at a closed-door session that concluded the bishops' four-day general business meeting in Washington. The need for fuller study and discussion emerged from several hours of public debate by the bishops which showed significant differences among them about how Latin liturgy texts should be translated for use in English.

Sources said when Archbishop Keeler asked to see how many bishops wanted an extra day on liturgy in San Diego, support for the idea appeared to be unanimous.

The San Diego assembly, scheduled for June 16-22, is not a business meeting, but a retreat-style session of prayer and reflection that the bishops hold once every three years. The theme of the assembly is "Shepherding a Future of Hope."

The study day is to be tacked on to the end of the assembly. The main topic, said one bishop, will be a review of

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the translation principles contained in the English version of "Comme le Prevoit," the 1969 Vatican instruction on translating Latin liturgical texts into English.

Before the meeting, bishops all across the country got mail complaining about use of gender-inclusive language in the liturgy and about plans to introduce original alternative opening prayers in addition to those translated from Latin from the Roman Missal.

Comments by bishops at the November meeting and in CNS inter-

views afterward indicated that they were not swayed by the letter and postcard campaign, however.

Cardinal Mahony, who for two years has pressed for stronger episcopal involvement in the liturgy translation process, publicly criticized the campaign, saying some pre-meeting mail the bishops got was "unhelpful, even hysterical."

At a press conference after the meeting Archbishop Keeler was asked if the bishops' concerns about the liturgy translations stemmed from the letter campaign. "I'd say what unease was expressed came more from bishops talking with bishops," he said.

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