

Priest-less worship rules proposed

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops will be asked to approve a revised version of the liturgical book, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest: Leaders Edition*, when they meet in Washington Nov. 10-13.

One of the main proposed changes is the shift of the act of thanksgiving in such services to after Communion if the service includes a Communion rite. In current practice, when there is a Communion rite the act of thanksgiving precedes it.

The revised version eliminates the current prayers after Communion that change each week.

Another major change involves permission, when the rite of morning prayer or evening prayer is used, to omit the second reading of the Liturgy of the Word.

The revised document includes an expanded introduction, with detailed treatment of the liturgical year, the importance of singing and the participation of the assembly.

Like the current document, the proposed text offers three main forms for Sunday worship without a priest: the Liturgy of the Word alone, or the Liturgy of the Word preceded by either morning prayer or evening



Reuters/CNS

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., right, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, walks with U.S. Cardinal Avery Dulles in Rome Oct. 17. The USCCB will meet Nov. 10-13.

prayer. A Communion rite is optional with all three forms.

The bishops first approved a book of rites for Sunday worship in the absence of a priest in 1989, following publication of a 1988 Vatican directory setting out norms and rules for such celebrations.

Use of the U.S. text, which re-

ceived Vatican approval in 1993, began in January 1994. Before that, many dioceses facing the need for Sunday worship services without a priest were using the Rite for Holy Communion Outside Mass, published by the Vatican in 1973 and adopted for U.S. use in 1976.

In 1987 the bishops' Secretariat

for Liturgy surveyed the nation's 174 Latin-rite dioceses to find out how many were facing situations of parishes that did not have a priest to lead Sunday worship. Of the 167 dioceses that responded, 51 said that was already happening weekly or at least occasionally; 91 others said they expected it to be the case within the next five to 10 years.

In 1987 about 1,200 of the 19,600 parishes in the country were without a resident pastor. Today more than 3,000 parishes do not have a resident pastor.

Msgr. Anthony F. Sherman, associate director of the secretariat, said information coming in from dioceses indicates that the need for Sunday worship without a priest is growing across the country.

If Communion is to be distributed at a Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest, the instructions call for the use of hosts consecrated earlier that day at a neighboring parish, if possible, but hosts from a previous Mass may also be used.

A diocesan bishop is responsible for determining whether Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest are necessary and to establish local norms governing those rites.

A deacon, if available, is "called in a special way to lead these Sunday assemblies" since ordination makes him a minister of the word and an ordinary minister of the Eucharist.

If no deacon is available, the bishop is to delegate a lay person or religious to lead such celebrations. "The lay leader may preach with the permission of the diocesan bishop and give a brief explanation" of the readings, the instructions say.

In an outline of changes made in the revision, the Committee on Liturgy said, "It was decided that the previous ritual distinctions between deacons and lay leaders were not effective and so now both deacons/lay leaders say the same prayers."

Bishops oppose same-sex benefits

BOSTON (CNS) — In recent testimony before a Massachusetts legislative committee, Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Worcester urged the defeat of bills that would redefine marriage to include same-sex couples or would give same-sex civil unions a status equivalent to marriage.

He said the state's Catholic bishops are unalterably opposed to that, but "willing to join the discussion if the goal is to look at individual benefits and determine who should be eligible beyond spouses."

An Oct. 28 memo by the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, the bishops' public-policy agency, said "Bishop Reilly told the committee that the church objects to any bills that equate unmarried relationships to married spouses. The civil union bills would give same-sex couples all the rights and benefits of spouses. Domestic partnership bills are more limited in that they apply only to public employee benefits. But they too equate same-sex couples to spouses for eligibility purposes.

"By referring to 'individual' benefits, Bishop Reilly was mindful of the church's long-held distinction between individual rights and group claims. The church recognizes that all human beings have dignity and enjoy basic civil rights in their capacity as individuals.

"When individuals get together, however, and ask for benefits by virtue of a particular relationship, the issue moves beyond individual rights. Not all relationships deserve public endorsement ..."



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