

Irish priests' group calls for postponement of new missal translation

DUBLIN - A group representing more than 400 of Ireland's 4,500 priests has made an urgent plea to the country's bishops to postpone the introduction of the new English translation of the missal for at least another five years.

The call from the Association of Catholic Priests came as the National Center for Liturgy in Maynooth launched a new publication aimed at explaining and preparing priests and laypeople for the changes in the missal. The new texts will be introduced Nov. 27, the first Sunday of Advent and the start of the liturgical year.

At a news conference in Dublin Feb. 3, representatives from the priests' group said the proposed literal translations from Latin had produced texts that were "archaic, elitist and obscure and not in keeping with the natural rhythm, cadence and syntax of the English language."

Father Dermot Lane, president of Mater Dei Institute of Education in Dublin, said the priests were making an eleventh hour appeal to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and urged the bishops to begin consulting with priests, liturgical committees and laypeople to develop new texts that would inspire and encourage the faithful.

"We are passionately concerned about the quality of our liturgical celebration and about the quality of the language that will be used in the way we worship Sunday after Sunday," he said. "If this goes ahead, instead of drawing people into the liturgy, it will in fact draw people out from the liturgy."

The association said in a statement distributed at the news conference that it was "gravely concerned" that the "word-for-word translation from Latin into a vernacular language ... demonstrates a lack of awareness of the insights gained from linguistics and anthropology during the past 100 years."

The translation was mandated by the Vatican's 2001 instruction "Liturgiam Authenticam" ("The Authentic Liturgy"). The International Commission on English in the Liturgy met for several years to develop translations that more closely matched the original Latin prayers. Local bishops' conferences also worked on the translations and submitted them to the Vatican for approval.

Despite such efforts, concerns similar to the Irish priests' association have been raised in English-speaking countries around the world, including the United States and Canada.

The priests' association suggested that the Irish bishops follow the example of the German bishops and assert the right to make their own decisions regarding the celebration of the liturgy in Ireland.

"We are saying very clearly that this new translation of the missal is not acceptable," Father Gerard Alwill, pastor of a rural parish in the Diocese of Kilmore, said during the news conference. "We are deeply concerned that if these new texts are imposed, they could create chaos in our church. Our church doesn't need chaos at this time.

"How can we, the priests, be asked to introduce this with any conviction when we ourselves haven't had any input into it and when we have such serious doubts and reservations about it?" he added.

Father Alwill called upon priests, parish pastoral councils, religious men and women and laypeople to read the texts and to raise any concerns they may have with their local bishop.