

Liturgy, stem cells, sex abuse among topics at bishops' June meeting

WASHINGTON - Matters of liturgy and language will dominate the agenda of the U.S. bishops' spring meeting June 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress in Orlando, Fla. But such hot-button issues as embryonic stem-cell research, medically assisted nutrition and hydration, and clergy sex abuse also will come before the bishops.

Much of the three-day meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will be closed to the media, with the schedule calling for executive session, regional meetings and an afternoon of prayer and reflection.

As they begin what Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., chairman of the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship, called "the final phase of the process of translation and approval of the Roman Missal for use in the United States," the bishops will vote on a new translation of the proper prayers for each Sunday and feast day during the liturgical year.

But in a break from previous practice, the 700-page draft text of the readings was distributed to the bishops not on paper but only in electronic form, except for special requests.

"In an effort to save on paper and to 'go green,' we've been trying to get people using the Web more" for documentation ahead of the bishops' meeting, said Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations for the USCCB. "The liturgy document is so large it seems wasteful" to print copies unnecessarily, she added.

On a Spanish-language liturgical matter, the bishops will be asked to approve a change from the formal "vosotros" to the more familiar "ustedes" in Spanish-language Masses in the U.S.

Although both words mean the plural "you" in English, "vosotros" is "no longer

current speech” in most of the Spanish-speaking world, except in Spain, Bishop Serratelli said in an introductory note to his fellow bishops on the proposed change.

In 2006 the heads of 22 national liturgical commissions in Latin America and the Caribbean asked the Vatican that the order of the Mass in Spanish be published “using ‘ustedes’ in place of ‘vosotros’ since the majority of Catholics who speak Spanish (more than 90 percent) use ‘ustedes,’” the introduction noted.

“The Committee on Divine Worship recommends for pastoral reasons that the ritual accommodate the manner of speech which has been in use for many years in Mexico, the Caribbean and South American countries and used by the majority of Hispanics in the United States,” Bishop Serratelli said.

The change must be approved by at least two-thirds of the Latin-rite members of the USCCB and then confirmed by the Vatican.

After the liturgical readings, the longest text to come before the bishops in June is a seven-page policy statement from the Committee on Pro-Life Activities on embryonic stem-cell research. The document is aimed at providing “background for the more pastoral educational resource on why Catholic couples should not resort to some reproductive technologies,” said Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, committee chairman, in an introduction to the draft text.

The document rejects a number of arguments made in favor of permitting stem-cell research involving the destruction of human embryos, saying that “once we cross the fundamental moral line that prevents us from treating any fellow human being as a mere object of research, there is no stopping point.”

“The issue of stem-cell research does not force us to choose between science and ethics, much less between science and religion,” the draft text says. “It presents a choice as to how our society will pursue scientific and medical progress. ... We must pursue progress in ethically responsible ways that respect the dignity of each human being. Only this will produce cures and treatments that everyone can live with.”

The document on reproductive technologies is to come before the bishops at a later meeting. The policy statement must be approved by a majority of the bishops

present at the Orlando meeting.

The same group will be asked to accept a request from the Committee on Doctrine to begin revising passages in the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services” that relate to medically assisted nutrition and hydration. The directives guide Catholic health care facilities in addressing a wide range of ethical questions.

The proposed revisions would be drawn up in consultation with the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities and would go back to the bishops for a vote before being finalized.

The Orlando meeting also will include a 45-minute presentation by researchers from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York on their study of the causes and context of clergy sex abuse in this country. The study is set for completion in 2009.

The bishops will consider a recommended structure for dialogue between priests and bishops about how the church has handled sex abuse allegations against clergy and how the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” adopted by the bishops in Dallas in June 2002, has been implemented.

The agenda also features a presentation on the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate’s survey on “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics” and the Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. The surveys were released in April and February, respectively.

Other items to come before the bishops for a vote include:

- A recommendation by the Committee on Budget and Finance that the 2009 assessment on dioceses remain at the same level as 2008, resulting in a total assessment of just over \$10 million to fund the USCCB.
- A proposal to declare Sept. 26, 2010, as National Catholic Charities Sunday to mark the 100th anniversary of the Catholic Charities network.