

Synod on Bible can 'change Catholic culture,' says Ottawa archbishop

VATICAN CITY - The world Synod of Bishops on the Bible "is meant to change Catholic culture," said Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa.

All Catholics should have a Bible, all Catholics should read the Bible and all Catholics need to have regular prayer experiences where they "open the book and let it become the word of God" speaking to them, he told reporters Oct. 21.

The archbishop met journalists shortly after the synod leadership had presented the first draft of propositions the synod members will ask Pope Benedict XVI to consider when writing his traditional post-synodal document.

Synod officials said the 253 members of the synod, working in small groups with experts and observers, had written 254 separate propositions. By dropping repetitive suggestions and combining related texts, the first draft contained 54 proposals.

The 54 draft items, Archbishop Prendergast said, included the needs to promote closer collaboration between Scripture scholars and theologians; to improve homilies; to strengthen relations with the Jews; to promote "lectio divina," a process of praying with and reflecting on Scripture; and to support the translation and distribution of Bibles.

The draft will be discussed in the synod's small groups and amendments will be suggested before the final list is drawn up and put to a vote Oct. 25.

Synod members also will vote Oct. 24 on the final version of their message to Catholics around the world. Archbishop Prendergast said it is likely to include a simple, one-page preamble and a longer, more detailed treatment of the synod's theme, "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church."

Archbishop Prendergast, a member of one of the synod's three French-speaking groups, said his group has decided to begin its meetings with a half-hour of "lectio divina," listening to a passage of Scripture, reflecting on it, praying about it and sharing what it meant.

"It was a very interesting experience for me," he said. "Bishops find themselves listening to the word of God and called to conversion." One bishop actually said he might have to change how he relates to some aspects of his ministry, he added.

Archbishop Prendergast said the most basic message he expects to come from the synod is that "the word of God is not an aspect of the mission of the church. It is the foundation and the guiding principle of all that we are about.

"God reveals himself to us in his word, not in a book, but in a word that speaks to us," he said.

"The written text we have of the Scriptures is a privileged locus (place) for that," but the word of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, speaks through the tradition and teaching of the church, cries out to the world through the poor and is even echoed in creation and in art, the archbishop said.

To speak about the word of God is to speak about a call to a relationship of listening to God and speaking to him through prayer, he said.

The synod wants Catholics to realize that the word of God is God speaking to them and listening to them, he said.

"If that happens, it would be a big, big step," the archbishop said.