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Mail-in ballot: bishops approve liturgical translations

by Patricia Zapor by Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced July 17 that four liturgical texts for use in English-speaking countries have been approved by the bishops, nearly a month after their spring meeting in San Antonio.

The texts contain prefaces for the Mass for various occasions; votive Masses and Masses for the dead; solemn blessings for the end of Mass; and prayers over the people and eucharistic prayers for particular occasions, such as for evangelization or ordinations.

With only 189 of the 244 Latin-rite U.S. bishops eligible to vote at the meeting, the items did not receive the necessary two-thirds vote for passage. The remaining 55 bishops had to be polled by mail. July 16 was the deadline for submission of ballots.

On the floor of the bishops meeting in June, some of the texts were criticized by Bishop Donald W. Trautman of Erie, Pa., who voiced frustration with grammar, sentence structure and word choices that he said are not suitable for contemporary worship.

One of the texts which he singled out for a critique of language -- Masses and prayers for various needs and intentions -- was approved by 163 bishops, the minimum needed for passage, after the mailed ballots were counted. Fifty-three bishops voted not to approve it and five abstained.

A new translation of the Order of Mass II was approved on a 191-25 vote, with five abstentions.

A translation of rituals for votive Masses and Masses for the dead passed 181-32, with two abstentions. And the translation of the text for ritual Masses passed 186-32, with two abstentions.

The texts are the latest pieces of an ongoing update of the translation of the Roman Missal used in the

United States. After the U.S. bishops' approval, the text goes back to the Vatican for "recognitio," or confirmation. In June 2008 the Vatican granted "recognitio" to the translation of the main parts of the Mass, which the U.S. bishops had voted to approve in June 2006.

Msgr. Anthony Sherman, executive director of the Secretariat of Divine Worship of the USCCB said in a statement July 17 that in the fall the bishops will consider the Proper of the Saints Gray Book, the commons Gray Book, U.S. propers for the Roman Missal, U.S. adaptations for the Roman Missal and the Roman Missal supplement Gray Book. Gray Books are revised translations proposed to the International Commission for English in the Liturgy.

The priest said the bishops will then have completed that section of the review process and would await the "recognitio" from the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

At the June meeting, Bishop Trautman's objections were to phrases such as this one from the translation for votive Masses and Masses for the dead: "May the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Lord, cleanse our hearts and make them fruitful within by the sprinkling of his dew."

"What does that even mean?" he asked, citing frustration also with phrases such as "the sweetness of your grace."

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"I don't think the word 'sweetness' relates to people today," at least not in the way the translation intends, he told CNS in June.

Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli of Paterson, N.J., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Divine Worship, had warned that delaying approval or failing to send the Vatican guidance by the end of November would risk shutting the U.S. bishops out of the English-language translation approval process.

"We're at the end of the process," Bishop Serratelli said. Of the missal text, he said it's "a very, very good text. ... It's not perfect, but we're at the end of a long, healthy process."

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