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Group offers petitions, protest letters to Catholics unhappy with translation

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NCR Today

The newly translated Roman Missal, the text of liturgical prayers and responses, will be launched later this month at Masses in U.S. Roman Catholic churches.

And at least one group hopes that once Catholics hear its very different-sounding language, they'll be moved to protest and press for change, rather than leave the church in deep disappointment.

"We want to give people a month or so to experience it," said to a spokeswoman for a group that plans to post petitions and sample protest letters on its website, misguidedmissal.com, after the first of the year. "If they're upset, it is our fondest hope that people will speak out."

The group is urging Catholics to write their pastors and bishops as well as the Papal Nuncio. The sample letters can be used as-is or as a starting point for their own correspondence. The website will post further instructions in early January.

The new translation of prayers used at Mass will be initiated the first weekend of Advent, Nov. 26-27. Some changes may seem minor, while others, critics charge, are jarring, complex, wordy or just plain odd.

Rita Ferrone writes in the July 15 issue of *Commonweal* magazine that the new translation has many examples of words and expressions that don't make sense, or that sound pompous or bewildering.

Chant historian Peter Jeffery at the University of Notre Dame has described the rules that guided the new translation as "the most ignorant statement on liturgy ever issued by a modern Vatican congregation."

Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pa., who formerly chaired the U.S. bishops' liturgy committee, said in 2009 that the translation of the Roman Missal from the original Latin into English was "elitist" and "remote from everyday speech," often not understandable and could lead to a "pastoral disaster."

"The vast majority of God's people in the assembly are not familiar with words of the new missal like 'ineffable,' 'consubstantial,' 'incarnate,' 'inviolable,' 'oblation,' 'ignominy,' 'precursor,' 'suffused' and 'unvanquished,'" he said. "The vocabulary is not readily understandable by the average Catholic."

Others believe the new translation inspires a reverence in the Mass that has been missing since changes brought by Vatican II. And they've criticized the critics for assuming that Catholics can't learn or appreciate multi-syllable language.

The group of eight Catholic clergy members and lay people behind misguidedmissal.com formed over the summer to educate fellow Catholics about the Missal translation. The U.S. and Canadian group also advocates for reconsideration of the 1998 Missal translation that was approved by bishops but rejected by the Vatican.

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The group, which remains anonymous, reportedly includes experts in liturgy, with individual members holding advanced degrees in liturgy, theology, pastoral ministry or English.

"And all share a great love for the Roman Catholic Church," the spokeswoman said.

The group is not identifying its members for fear of retribution, saying the church's overbearing control has kept people of goodwill from openly discussing opposing points of view.

"Today the upper echelons of church leadership are more into control over others than in service to others," the group's spokeswoman said. "As such, they are violating both the Gospels and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council."

After Vatican II opened the way for the liturgy to be spoken in a country's native language, the first English translation of the Roman Missal was put into use in 1973. A second translation by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, or ICEL, in 1998 was approved by English-speaking bishops' conferences but rejected by the Vatican, which released new rules for translation that called for strict adherence to the Latin. ICEL was reorganized, and an advisory committee, Vox Clara, was formed to keep the Vatican abreast of progress. The bishops ultimately approved the new translation in 2008; Vox Clara added more changes last year.

Beginning in late November, churchgoing Catholics can draw their own conclusions.

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