

M

y dear friends,

During the November United States bishops' meeting in Baltimore the final translations of the Roman Missal were approved.

For some years now the bishops and others have been working on a new translation for the Roman Missal which we use in all our celebrations of the Eucharist. It has been a long and tedious process. The present texts were written rather quickly after the Second Vatican Council. The goal of reworking the texts has been to assure greater accuracy in the translation and to have texts that are well-written and proclaimable. There was a desire to also use the same translation in all English speaking countries.

The new texts are an improvement but are not perfect. They have, after a long process, been approved by the bishops and sent to Rome for final recognition. It is expected that approval will come quickly. Upon notification from Rome, the text will go to the publisher and is expected to be in use in 2011.

Prior to the introduction there will be various materials and programs explaining why the changes were made. Our diocesan worship office will be coordinating this effort locally. It is worth noting that the translations are important because they express what we believe in faith.

During the bishops' meeting a pastoral letter on marriage was approved. A document titled "Life Giving Love In An Age of Technology" was also approved. It deals with issues of in vitro fertilization and cloning.

You may find the Bishops' Conference Web site (www.usccb.org) of interest. All of the above matters and others were addressed and information is provided.

Our Faith, Our Future: We need the prayers of all as we continue with our diocesan planning process, "Our Faith Our Future" to look at our parishes and schools. The initial stages have begun in the Big Rapids, Northwest Lakeshore and Grand Haven deaneries. This spring and fall the process will continue in the Grand Rapids, Ionia and Muskegon deaneries.

Key issues we are facing are: Not enough priests to staff our parishes; parish finances which are stretched; and aging facilities. We are further challenged with sustaining our present model of pastoral care and ministries. The shifts in values and priorities of our Catholic population (makeup of the population) must also be addressed.

The Plan will not be about downsizing, although that is not excluded, but rather looking to the future with hope, confidence and creativity; engaging the whole church and making the church grow. We are looking for a new vision and energy and the development of a means that will enable us to be good stewards of our finances, facilities, personnel and resources. We are looking to provide an opportunity for clergy and lay people to work toward a common vision, recognizing that it is God's Church and that he walks with us. We cannot let this effort sit on a shelf. This Plan is not meant to resolve the problems of a few parishes but those of the entire diocese.

Christmas Greetings: As we gather to celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons, there could be many reasons to be discouraged but greater reasons to be filled with hope. A hope that is not rooted in ourselves, but in God, who has come to make his dwelling among us.

With war, unemployment, a poor economy and great personal and family struggles in the lives of many we can become discouraged and afraid. Christmas and the birth of the Lord is a beacon of hope for us.

They remind us "Do not be afraid" and that "God has sent his only son" among us – to walk with us on our life journey both in joy and sorrow until he calls us to himself in glory. This season should fill us with awe and wonder at the Word of God who came down from heaven. It should fill us with gratitude at the nearness of our God.

I wish you and your families a blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with God's gracious blessings.

May your hearts be open to receive the love of God poured out and may your days be filled with his glory and peace.

Bishop Walter A. Hurley



photo courtesy of JoAnn Fox

Recognition of the Year for Priests Nov. 24 at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew.