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The Ritual Expression of the Gift of Peace at Mass

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments

After nine years of study and consultation, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments has told Latin-rite bishops around the world that the sign of peace will stay where it is in the Mass. However, the congregation said, "if it is foreseen that it will not take place properly," it can be omitted. But when it is used, it must be done with dignity and awareness that it is not a liturgical form of "good morning," but a witness to the Christian belief that true peace is a

"If the faithful through their ritual gestures do not appreciate and do not show themselves to be living the authentic meaning of the rite of peace, the Christian concept of peace is weakened."

gift of Christ's death and resurrection. The text of the congregation's circular letter to bishops' conferences worldwide, dated July 12, was approved by Pope Francis. Catholic News Service obtained a copy of the letter in English. In 2005, members of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist adopted a formal proposition questioning whether the sign of peace might be better placed elsewhere in the Mass, for example at the end of the prayer of the faithful and before the offering of the gifts. "After further reflection," the congregation said in its letter, "it was considered appropriate to retain the rite of peace in its traditional place in the Roman liturgy and not to introduce structural changes in the Roman Missal." But that does not exclude the need for new or renewed efforts to explain the importance of the sign of peace so that the faithful understand it and participate in it correctly, the congregation's letter said. A cover letter from the congregation and the circular letter follow.

during the debates of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist (2005, Proposition 23), a question concerning the "sign of peace" emerged regarding the appropriateness of maintaining it in its present form and at the place where it is found in the ordinary of the Mass. The Holy Father Benedict XVI, during the postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Feb. 22, 2007), No. 49 (Footnote 150), invited the pertinent congregations to study this question.

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