

## **Reflection on Vatican Structures for Anglicans Seeking Full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church**

November 20, 2009

We are a group of lay ecclesial ministers, vowed religious, deacons, and presbyters, ministering in the Archdiocese of Seattle, who gather regularly for mutual support and collaboration, and to sustain the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

We recall, with joy, the enthusiasm of that Council for promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians, and specifically, its desire for reconciliation with our Anglican sisters and brothers. We remember how that was worked out, in due course, in the documents of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, established in negotiations between the Roman Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity and the Anglican Lambeth Conference. Those documents discerned consensus on the Eucharist (1971), on church office and ordination (1973), and on authority in the church (1976/81).

We recall, also, Pope Paul VI's vision at the time of the Council of a reconciliation that would respect the autonomous church order under the Primate of Canterbury with its heritage and patrimony, and a recognition of a pastoral primacy of Petrine ministry for the reconciliation between the churches. Paul VI's vision, and that of those gathered at the Council, was of a reconciliation, not of a 'return to Rome'.

After the Council, many hoped that Anglicans and Roman Catholics would reunite as ecumenical dialogue progressed. However, Anglicanism continued to evolve in directions that led it away from Roman Catholic practices, especially in the ordination of women and in teaching about homosexuality. These developments divided the Anglican Communion, leading some Anglicans who opposed the ordination of women and gays to approach the Roman Catholic Church about union.

Our Church has always been willing to receive individual Anglicans seeking full communion, even allowing married Anglican priests to act as priests after their ordination by a Roman Catholic bishop. In late October of this year, Cardinal Levada announced that the Vatican will establish Ordinariates - in effect, dioceses - to allow Anglican *groups* to join our Church, whereby the new Roman Catholics will preserve their Anglican spiritual and liturgical heritage. Anglicans seeking the use of this provision appear to be opposed to women's ordination and uncomfortable with gays and lesbians. This poses questions, now, for our own Church:

- Should our Anglican friends be forewarned that two out of three U.S. Roman Catholics support the ordination of women?
- What will the impact be of our now having three approved versions of the Roman Catholic liturgy: the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, the reformed vernacular liturgy, and now an Anglican liturgy?
- How will these new members in full communion with us assimilate the interpretation of Vatican Council II in continuity with Catholic doctrinal tradition?

- Will not many of our people ask: if Anglican ‘converts’ have married priests, why don’t we? And what about our married Roman Catholic priests? How do we deal with the shortage of priests in our church without honestly dealing with mandatory celibacy?
- Does the decision sustain a disregard for valuing women and homosexuals, whose progress toward respect and equality is a global measure of justice?
- How can this decision be understood as other than Rome angling in the waters of the extreme religious right, and how is this not seen as a further gesture to groups disenfranchised with Vatican II (Opus Dei, the Lefebvrites, Legionaires)?
- How was the decision’s announcement made without representation of, and communication from, Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity?
- How is the decision not seen, at first glance, as a ‘return to Rome’ for a million Anglicans and 20 to 30 bishops, while disregarding the remaining 76 million Anglicans?

These are questions we need to ponder, as the path now opened unfolds for full communion of these Anglicans with our Church.

At Vatican II, our Church embraced its role as a builder of the future in equal partnership with other believers and with all people of good will. That meant tolerance for differing religious bodies, like the Anglican Communion. It also meant a compact of mutual advancement.

We need to pray and hope that this latest gesture from Rome toward Canterbury will eventually be a step in this direction.

Of this we are assured: God’s Spirit writes straight with crooked lines. That gives us hope, even now, in this present moment.

*If you wish to respond to this reflection, please do so at [info@catholicministers.org](mailto:info@catholicministers.org) Thank you.*