

Vatican Sets Up Safe Haven for Anglican Converts to Catholicism

The Vatican has approved a new church structure in Canada to administer to disaffected Anglicans there who convert to Roman Catholicism because they feel their own church has become too liberal.

Called a deanery, it will be headed by Father Lee Kenyon, a married Anglican priest from Manchester, England who converted to Catholicism in 2011.

The deanery will come under a structure known as the “ordinariate” for North America, roughly equivalent to a trans-national diocese, which is based in Houston, Texas and headed by Rev. Jeffrey N. Steenson, a married former Anglican bishop.

Steenson announced the Vatican approval in a joint statement on Friday with Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Toronto.

In 2009, Pope Benedict decreed that Anglicans who leave, many because they feel their Church has become too liberal, can find a home in Catholicism in a parallel hierarchy that allows them to keep some of their traditions, such as parts of the Anglican liturgy and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

It was the boldest step by the Vatican to welcome disaffected Anglicans since King Henry VIII broke with Rome and set himself up at the head of the new Church of England in 1534.

Similar structures, which also prepare those who want to convert, have been set up in England and Australia and others are planned elsewhere.

Benedict's move in 2009 followed years of discontent in parts of the worldwide Anglican community over the ordination of women priests and homosexual bishops.

In 2003, the Episcopal Church in the United States triggered what many observers describe as an ongoing schism in Anglicanism by consecrating its first openly gay bishop, the since-retired Gene Robinson.

Last month, the Church of England voted against allowing women to become bishops. But the vote only served to guarantee more internal strife over an issue that has for years divided the mother church for the world's 80 million Anglicans.

The regulations concerning former Anglicans do not affect the Catholic Church's ban on its own priests marrying, but continue an age-old practice of allowing a married Anglican priest who converts to remain married.

The current membership of the North American ordinariate is about 1,500 members and 25 priests.

The most prominent recent Anglican convert to Catholicism was Tony Blair, who joined after stepping down as British prime minister in 2007.

Both Vatican and Anglican leaders have stressed that the two churches would continue dialogue aimed at eventual reunion.

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