

Some Thoughts on the Anglican Ordinariate

By Bishop C. Andrew Doyle, January 3, 2011

As many of you may be aware, the [Anglican Ordinariate](#) launched nationwide this week and it will be operated out of the Roman Catholic diocesan office in Houston . The Rev. Jeffrey Steenson, a former Episcopal bishop, now a Roman Catholic priest working and teaching in Houston, will oversee the [Ordinariate](#).

What is an Ordinariate? An ordinariate is a canonical structure within the Roman Catholic Church enabling former Anglicans to maintain their “Anglican” identity and autonomy within the Roman Church. Its precise nature may be viewed in the [Anglicanorum Coetibus](#) of November 4, 2009. The document states that the goal is "to maintain the liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions of the Anglican Communion within the Catholic Church, as a precious gift nourishing the faith of the members of the Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared."

This is not a unique event within the Roman Catholic Church. In the Roman Church there are other Latin rite churches with similar accommodations. One in particular offers a similar structure and governing principles for Eastern Churches that wanted to return to communion with the Holy See ([Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches](#)).

This is not a new initiative. The process for the current Ordinariate began in 1977 when the Episcopal Church began ordaining women priests. A 1980 pastoral provision was granted only for the United States and it directly subjects those former Anglicans to whom it is applied to the governance of the existing local Latin Rite bishops. In October 2007 the [Traditional Anglican Communion](#) (TAC) presented a petition to the Holy See requesting full union in corporate form, an action that has resulted in the Ordinariate we see in today’s headlines. This Ordinariate was a topic of discussion at the Diocese of Texas’ Clergy Conference in 2009 when it was initially announced.

The Ordinariate is news within the Roman Catholic Church today because it shows a broadening of the Roman tradition within a Church not known for change. In the Episcopal Church and Anglican tradition, we regularly welcome and receive members from all denominations. For many years we have had a process by which a person or congregation might affiliate with our Church and become Episcopalian. While our canons have offered this provision for movement for a long time, it remains a novelty for Rome.

Not many people are expected to make a change. The Rev. Steenson and Cardinal Daniel DiNardo have represented publicly that some 1400 individuals *nationally* have expressed interest in joining the Roman Church. Many of these individuals are members of congregations who already have pastoral oversight of regional Latin bishops and are not members of any Episcopal diocese. In the Houston area, Our Lady of Walsingham will be participate in the Ordinariate but the congregation has never been an Episcopal

Church. Other break away congregations may seek to join the Ordinariate. I know of only one retired clergyman in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas who is considering joining the Roman Church.

It is also important when speaking about numbers to recognize the small nature of the numbers of individuals interested in the Ordinariate. In the Episcopal Diocese of Texas alone we welcome more than 200 new members a year from Roman and Orthodox churches. This number is even larger when you consider numbers received by the Episcopal Church in the continental United States.

Why aren't more people participating in the Ordinariate? I think it is because to participate in the ordinariate one must professes Roman Catholic principles and doctrines in their entirety and maintain fidelity to the Pope. Divorce and remarriage alone present particular stumbling blocks for many Episcopalians and worldwide Anglicans.

Is this an ecumenical unification of two Christian denominations? The Ordinariate is not an ecumenical joining of the Anglican Church with the Roman Church. While friendship and courtesy exist between our two Churches, there remain major doctrinal divisions between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Ordinariate is about expanding the definition of who may be considered part of the Roman Church, based upon liturgical use.

Are we, as Anglicans, moving back to into unity with the Roman Catholic Church? It is true that as of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's both the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church have been in dialogue (along with many other denominations). In these conversations we have agreed that, regarding the historic churches, the essential shape of our language relating to God and Christ Jesus is shared. We understand that we are a community in relationship with God and with other believers and that the Church, in its broadest sense, is a model for human life together in accordance with God's purpose and intention.

In his [Willebrands Symposium](#) in 200, Archbishop Rowan Williams said: "the Church is a community, in which human beings are made sons and daughters of God, and reconciled both with God and one another. The Church celebrates this through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion in which God acts upon us to transform us in communion." In fact the Trinitarian doctrine and the discourse around the Lord's Supper are strongly affirmed on all sides of the ecumenical discussion.

All of that being said ... there remain major obstacles when we move beyond these common beliefs. Most of the divisions stem from the nature of the [Roman Catholic Magisterium](#). The magisterium is the teaching authority of the Roman Church. This authority is rooted solely in the episcopacy, which is the combination of the bishops of the Roman Church in union with the Pope. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Magisterium is able to teach or interpret the truths of the faith, and may do so either non-infallibly or infallibly. ([Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. 1997, pt. 1, sect. 1, ch. 2, art. 2, III \[100\]](#)) For example: "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him." (ibid)

One can easily see that issues such as divorce, remarriage, married clergy and women priests are but a few practices that are locally discerned by our Episcopal Church, but remain stumbling blocks for the Roman Church as we pursue greater ecumenical unity.

Our polity and nature as Anglicans does not hold that there is one mechanism or person in the Church that has the clear right to determine for all where the limits of Christian identity and practice reside. We do not believe the integrity of the Church is dependent upon one single, identifiable ministry or person of unity to which all local ministries are accountable. But rather **that it is the sum total of the Church's discernment and prayer which guides the teaching practice of the missionary church.** (Ibid) All this is to say that we as Anglicans do not have a Pope or understand the teaching ministries of the Church in the same manner as do our Roman brothers and sisters, and such a divergent opinion is a very real gulf between the two Churches.

As Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, where do I stand regarding the new Roman Catholic Ordinariate? I have no anxiety and I hope that the Ordinariate will be a place where some who feel spiritually homeless may find a dwelling place; and a place where others may come to a better understanding of their own Anglican heritage.

In the Bible Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem. His last teaching to Israel was this, he said, "Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

I have chosen to follow God in Christ Jesus through the particular and unique church community of the Episcopal Church. I am unabashedly Episcopalian and I love my church. Furthermore, I embrace and welcome all those who choose to serve Jesus in and through the ministries of this Church. We in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas are a people in mission and we are focused on the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, such that men and women will be drawn into relationship with him as Savior and follow him as Lord in the specific fellowship of the Episcopal Church; which is part of Christ's universal and catholic church.