

The Catholic Journey of St. Luke's Episcopal Church

June 2011

In response to repeated and persistent inquiries from Anglican groups worldwide who were seeking to become Catholic, Pope Benedict XVI issued an apostolic constitution called *Anglicanorum coetibus* (pronounced Anglican-orum chay-tee-boose) in November 2009. This document authorized the creation of "ordinariates," geographic regions similar to dioceses but typically national in scope. Parishes in ordinariates will be Catholic yet retain elements of the Anglican heritage and liturgical practices.

In September 2010, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith appointed Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, to be its representative for the implementation of this effort in the United States. The first step was to assess the interest. An ordinariate has not been established in the United States at this time, but on January 15, 2011, the Vatican approved the first ordinariate of this type in the world for England and Wales.

Now, St. Luke's Episcopal Parish of Bladensburg, Maryland, after much discernment and prayer, has decided to become Roman Catholic, with the intent of joining a U.S. ordinariate when it is established. Until then, the community will be under the care of the Archdiocese of Washington. St. Luke's Parish has the support of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and the Archdiocese of Washington as it makes this faith journey. Below are some questions and answers about this process.

Is there precedent for this?

These ordinariates are new in that they will provide a way for Anglicans to enter the Church in a corporate manner; that is, as a group or community, while also retaining some of their Anglican heritage and traditions. However, there are other Catholic ordinariates. One that many people are familiar with is the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, which has responsibility for Catholics serving in the U.S. armed services worldwide and which works in collaboration with local bishops.

Is there a difference between Episcopal and Anglican?

Parishes that are part of The Episcopal Church belong to the worldwide Anglican Communion, under the spiritual direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. Thus, they are both Episcopalian and Anglican. However, other Christians in the United States identify themselves as Anglican, but are not part of the Anglican Communion. These Christians therefore are Anglican, but not Episcopalian.

Will St. Luke's be a new parish for the Archdiocese of Washington?

St. Luke's intent is to become a part of an ordinariate when one is established by the Vatican in the United States. Until that time, St. Luke's will come under the care of the Archdiocese of Washington. While spiritually Catholic, St. Luke's will not be formally Catholic until its members have completed a formation process and been received into the Catholic Church.

Will the pastor become a Catholic priest?

Fr. Mark Lewis, who was ordained an Episcopal priest in 2001 and became rector of St. Luke's in 2006, hopes to begin an expedited process to become a Catholic priest.

Who will lead the parish during this time?

Fr. Lewis will continue to be pastoral leader of the community. In addition, Fr. Scott Hurd, a former Episcopal priest who was ordained a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Washington under what is known as the "pastoral provision," will serve as chaplain during this transition period. The pastoral

provision was established by Pope John Paul II in 1980 to provide a way for individual Episcopal priests, including those who may be married, to be ordained Catholic priests.

Are St. Luke's parishioners automatically Catholic?

St. Luke's members will undergo a period of preparation to be received into the Catholic Church, likely later this year. They will be assisted by Fr. Scott Hurd in this process. Their formation will include the use of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. In fact, the parish already has been using the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in Bible study.

Is the parish doing this because it disagrees with the Episcopal Church on various matters?

The parish is responding to what they feel is a call from the Holy Spirit that this is God's will for them. As the rector put it, discussions within the Episcopal Church over a variety of theological issues were not of themselves the reason for this decision, but they helped lead the rector and parish community to consider more deeply their beliefs on topics such as apostolic authority. The possibility of an ordinariate made the parish's move to Catholicism possible.

What aspects of the Anglican heritage and liturgical tradition will they be able to keep?

That still needs to be fully worked out, but the parish will use the *Book of Divine Worship*, a liturgical text authorized by the Vatican that incorporates Anglican prayers and material.

Have other parishes done this?

St. Luke is the second parish in the United States to take this step and the first to work out a resolution with its Episcopal diocese regarding property matters. A substantial number of other parishes and groups nationwide, not part of the Episcopal Church, have indicated their desire to join an ordinariate.

How did the parish come to this decision?

In January 2011, the vestry, which is a board of elected parish representatives with decision-making authority, met and affirmed its decision for the parish to enter the Catholic Church as part of a proposed ordinariate. This decision came after prayerful discernment and meetings of the vestry, the Episcopal Diocese of Washington and the Archdiocese of Washington.

What about the property and relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Washington?

The Episcopal Diocese of Washington has been supportive of the prayerful discernment of this community and its journey of faith. St. Luke's members will continue to worship in their current church building through a lease agreement with the Episcopal Diocese that includes a purchase option. The parish's modest resources will be retained by the community.

Tell me about St. Luke's parish.

The parish community includes over 100 active members and is very international, with members from West Africa, including Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the West Indies. The parish already has a number of ties with the local Catholic Church. For example, it is a SHARE food site (a program of Catholic Charities) and each year the parish and Elizabeth Seton High School cosponsor a Christmas gift program for children in Bladensburg. To support this program St. Luke's presents two concerts annually. This past Christmas, by working together, they raised funds, purchased and donated toys for 75 local children in need.

What can we do as Catholics?

Please join in praying for the members of St. Luke's as they undertake this new journey of faith, and welcome them as brothers and sisters of our One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.