

Announcement from Archbishop Hepworth 16th January 2010

In the past three weeks, each of the Bishops and Vicars General who signed the Petition to the Holy See of October 5th 2007 seeking “corporate reunion with the Holy See” has received a formal response. These letters, from the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, William Cardinal Levada, complete the process of the response of the Holy See to the Petition, and initiate the process of our formal response to the Apostolic Constitution.

The Cardinal makes the point in his letter that

This provision (the Apostolic Constitution with the Norms and Commentary) constitutes the definitive response of the Holy See not only to your original request, but also to the many others of a similar nature which have been submitted over the last years.

In the Petition, the bishops sought

...a communal and ecclesial way of being Anglican Catholics in communion with the Holy See, at once treasuring the full expression of catholic faith and treasuring our tradition within which we have come to this moment.

In another place, they state that the Traditional Anglican Communion was formed, in part

to seek as a body full and visible communion, particularly eucharistic communion, in Christ, with the Roman Catholic Church...

The Cardinal, in his letter, acknowledges our request

that some way might be found to welcome groups of clergy and faithful from the Traditional Anglican Communion into full visible unity with the Catholic Church, in a structure that could offer support and witness to the many evident graces of the Anglican tradition.

He goes on to add that, in the period since the submission of the Petition, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has completed a long and detailed study with the aim of making available

A suitable and viable model of organic unity for your and other such groups.

In the concluding paragraph of his letter, Cardinal Levada states that

I am only too aware of the delicate process of discernment that will no doubt need to be embarked upon by many of our Anglican brothers and sisters, and no less of the many difficult practical issues that will need to be faced.

He sets out the initial steps that must be taken in response.

I have replied to Cardinal Levada, thanking him once again for the generous pastoral understanding in what he has written to us. I have reiterated my thanks for the groundbreaking and historic nature of the Apostolic Constitution. I note that the Holy Father last week acknowledged the work of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the production of the Apostolic Constitution. Pope Benedict told the Congregation that

Unity is first and foremost the unity of faith, upheld by the sacred tradition of which Peter's Successor is the primary custodian and defender...the faithful adherence of these groups (of Anglicans) to the truth received from Christ and presented in the Magisterium of the Church is in no way contrary to the ecumenical movement, it reveals, rather the ultimate scope that consists in reaching the full and visible communion of the disciples of the Lord.

I stated in my initial comments on the response of the Holy See last October that our obligation was “to be still in prayer and reflection” as a possibility arises that has been unavailable to communities of Anglicans since the cleavage of the Reformation. Our bishops, at my request and that of the Holy See, have maintained their quietness until the whole process of promulgation has been completed.

Next week, I will be publishing a commentary on the Constitution for members of the Traditional Anglican Communion. Now that a formal response has been received, I am also releasing at the same time the text of the Petition. In my statement, I will be setting out the steps that must now be taken by the whole College of Bishops, and by each part of our Communion. I emphasize that this “process of discernment” concerns the primary command of Jesus to His Church. It can neither be hurried nor lightly undertaken. But I also emphasize that a way of achieving unity has been created that is a direct and immediate response to our Petition, and to delay implementing the fullness of communion that we have sought would be in serious defiance of the will of Jesus for His Church. Now, above all, we must be sensitive to our Lord, and sensitive to each other.

The process we are following is this:

1. We are already in detailed and fruitful discussion with other Anglican groups mentioned by the Cardinal, and with bishops nominated to liaise with us by Catholic Conferences of Bishops in several parts of the world.
2. In the next few weeks, in Japan, Central America, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Torres Strait, and a little later in India, Africa and Europe, I will have the opportunity of meeting with many of the clergy and people of our Communion. Regional gatherings of bishops, clergy and people are being organized in each part of our Communion. I look forward very much to being with you.
3. I will be calling a full meeting of the College of Bishops for Eastertide, 2010. The bishops will make a formal response to the Holy See, which will be followed in due time by canonical steps in the member churches of the Traditional Anglican Communion.

In the meantime, as we contemplate our response, we do well to read again and again the words of Jesus in the great prayer to His Father for the unity of His followers, and to measure our response with His words.

And also we should read with careful attention the opening words of the Constitution, in which Pope Benedict spells out his response to our request:

In recent times the Holy Spirit has moved groups of Anglicans to petition repeatedly and insistently to be received into full Catholic communion individually as well as corporately. The Apostolic See has responded favourably to such petitions. Indeed, the successor of Peter, mandated by the Lord Jesus to guarantee the unity of the episcopate and to preside over and safeguard the universal communion of all the Churches could not fail to make available the means necessary to bring this holy desire to realization.

+John Hepworth, Primate

January 16th 2010