

Statement from Archbishop Hepworth

I have spent this evening speaking to bishops, priests and lay people of the Traditional Anglican Communion in England, Africa, Australia, India, Canada, the United States and South America. We are profoundly moved by the generosity of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. He offers in this Apostolic Constitution the means for "former Anglicans to enter into the fullness of communion with the Catholic Church". He hopes that we can "find in this canonical structure the opportunity to preserve those Anglican traditions precious to us and consistent with the Catholic faith". He then warmly states "we are happy that these men and women bring with them their particular contributions to our common life of faith".

May I firstly state that this is an act of great goodness on the part of the Holy Father. He has dedicated his pontificate to the cause of unity. It more than matches the dreams we dared to include in our petition of two years ago. It more than matches our prayers. In those two years, we have become very conscious of the prayers of our friends in the Catholic Church. Perhaps their prayers dared to ask even more than ours. While we await the full text of the Apostolic Constitution, we are also moved by the pastoral nature of the Notes issued today by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

My fellow bishops have indeed signed the Catechism of the Catholic Church and made a statement about the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, reflecting the words of Pope John Paul II in his letter "Ut Unum Sint". Other Anglican groups have indicated to the Holy See a similar desire and a similar acceptance of Catholic faith. As Cardinal Levada has indicated, this response to Anglican petitions is to be of a global character. It will now be for these groups to forge a close cooperation, even where they transcend the existing boundaries of the Anglican Communion.

Fortunately, the Statement issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury reflects the understanding that we have gained from him that he does not stand in our way, and understands the decisions that we have reached. Both his reaction and our petition are fruits of a century of prayer for Christian unity, a cause that many times must have seemed forlorn. We now express our gratitude to Archbishop Williams, and have regularly assured him of our prayers. The See of Augustine remains a focus of our pilgrim way, as it was in ages of faith in the past.

I have made a commitment to the Traditional Anglican Communion that the response of the Holy See will be taken to each of our National Synods. They have already endorsed our pathway. Now the Holy See challenges us to seek in the specific structures that are now available the "full, visible unity, especially Eucharistic communion", for which we have long prayed and about which we have long dreamed. That process will begin at once.

In the Anglican Office of Morning Prayer, the great Hymn of Thanksgiving, the Te Deum, is part of the daily Order. It is with heartfelt thanks to Almighty God, the Lord and Source of all peace and unity, that the hymn is on our lips today. This is a moment of grace, perhaps even a moment of history, not because the past is undone, but because the past is transformed.