



DIOCESE OF THE MISSOURI VALLEY



Anglican Church in America

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Dear Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of the Missouri Valley.

Just under three years ago the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC) met in Portsmouth England, drafted, and unanimously approved a petition seeking “full and visible unity” with the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, since the Anglican Church in America (ACA) is a jurisdiction of the TAC, we too were included in that petition. While I was invited to attend as a bishop-elect, I felt it best to remain here as we were busily preparing for my consecration a week later. However, by all accounts it was a very good meeting, and the signing of the petition was a joyous occasion in which all in attendance felt the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding them as they took this historic action.

Indeed, a few weeks later, I was consecrated as Bishop Coadjutor for our diocese and ultimately became the Bishop Ordinary upon Abp. Falk’s retirement in January 2008. I remember, prior to the consecration, I was asked if I supported “full and visible unity with the Roman Catholic Church.” Of course, I answered that question with a resounding yes, thus joining myself with all of those who signed the petition the week before my consecration. After all, in the *Affirmation of St. Louis* it is clearly stated that “*We declare our firm intention to seek and achieve full sacramental communion and visible unity with other Christians who "worship the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity," and who hold the Catholic and Apostolic Faith in accordance with the foregoing principles.*” Certainly this includes the Roman Catholic Church. Not to endorse the Portsmouth petition would seem counter to the expressed intent of that document. That is exactly why I could affirm and support the Portsmouth petition, specifically the portion that reads:

“...we must now in good conscience bring to the attention of the Holy See, we seek 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. We seek the guidance of the Holy See as to the fulfillment of these our desires and those of the churches in which we have been called to serve.”

By supporting the petition I also felt I was affirming the portion that reads:

“Recognizing that obligation, and with great confidence in the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit, a worldwide community of Anglican Christians have united under the name “The Traditional Anglican Communion” for three main purposes:

To identify, reaffirm and consolidate in its community the elements of belief, sacraments, structure and conduct that mark the Church of Christ, which is one throughout the world

To seek as a body full and visible communion, particularly eucharistic communion, in Christ, with the Roman Catholic Church, in which it recognizes the fullest subsistence of Christ’s one Church and

To achieve such communion while maintaining those revered traditions of spirituality, liturgy, discipline and theology that constitute the cherished and centuries-old heritage of Anglican communities throughout the world.”

Since the delivery of the petition and my consecration, the consistent mantra had been that we are seeking full and visible unity with the See of Peter in such a way that we would be in “Eucharistic Communion” with the See of Peter while at the same time maintaining our own heritage, polity, and structure.

Last fall the Vatican released the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* making the last year a most challenging time for all of us, especially as we tried to determine the implications of the Constitution. Many felt this Constitution was the answer to our petition. Initially, I had reservations as to whether or not this was the case. Since then I have attempted to keep an open mind while listening to all the reasoning as to why it was. However, in the end, I have concluded that, while the Constitution uses some of the language of our petition, it does not appear to be a direct answer to our petition. Rather, it appears to me that *Anglicanorum Coetibus* may be an answer to the call for unity by many Anglican groups throughout the world, first and foremost, within the Church of England.

When I first read the Constitution, I felt that this historic document was offering much more than we had sought, certainly much more than Eucharistic communion. But the question I kept coming back to was, “is that what we really hoped for?” Everyone agrees that the Holy See has been very generous in forging a way for Anglicans to become “Catholic.” And I think therein lies the problem. I am already Anglican Catholic. Whether or not I become part of any Anglican Ordinariate of the Roman Catholic Church will not change that. I have been an Anglican Catholic all of my life.

That is because Catholicism is our Faith and we practice that Faith in the Anglican Tradition. Make no mistake about it, those choosing not to join the Ordinariate will still be Anglican Catholic. Simply put, *Anglicanorum Coetibus* does not “create” Anglican Catholics nor does it recognize Anglican Catholics to the extent that full communion is realized, which was the intent of our petition. Rather, it allows a way for Anglican Catholics to become a part of the Roman Catholic Church while retaining elements of their liturgy and vestiges of their heritage. That is very generous for those who desire such union. However, Anglican Catholics who do not desire such and choose not to take advantage of that do not cease to be Anglican Catholics.

You may ask why I refer to Anglicans becoming Roman Catholics when they join the Ordinariate. We have been told repeatedly that this was corporate reunion and not absorption and that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) was careful not to use the term “Roman Catholic” but Catholic only. The simple fact is that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize any other type of Catholic in the Western world. Therefore, every reference within the Constitution to becoming Catholic means, in their minds, becoming Roman Catholic.

That is why you see terms in the Constitution referring to our Clergy as “ministers” that will become Catholic Priests. They see us as “imitators” of the Catholic Church. Therefore, we have to become “Catholic” Clergy and the laity must become “Catholic.” But make no mistake about it, they mean Roman Catholic. This interpretation is consistent with everything that has been written by Roman Catholic theologians and those in authority. Specifically I would note Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, a canon lawyer who serves as Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.

Bishop Arrieta presented a paper at the Anglican Use Conference last spring making clear his understanding of the implementation of the Apostolic Constitution. With this concrete evidence as well as my own understanding of the Constitution, I have a hard time seeing *Anglicanorum Coetibus* as anything other than absorption. Indeed, the Vatican will develop some sort of liturgy that will have “elements” of Anglican liturgy in it. But it will be developed by the Vatican and it will be uniform liturgy throughout the Ordinariates.

So, while I am sure the liturgies we treasure will still be permissible for use until the Vatican develops an Anglican liturgy for the Ordinariate, once that is developed I would expect that the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, Anglican Missal, and/or American Missal will not be permitted.

Additionally, many other questions concerning provisions of *Anglicanorum Coetibus* have been raised. We have tried to get answers to those questions. Initially we were told that we need to understand how Rome writes such documents and that we essentially have to “read between the lines.” Since that time we have been

told all sorts of things about the Constitution and how it would be applied to the TAC. We have been told that they would be highly flexible in applying both the Constitution and the Norms. We have been told to just trust the CDF, if there is an issue, they will make it right.

It was almost as if we were being told that they will ignore some provisions of their own Constitution and their own Canon Law because the Pope wants this to work. I just do not understand how this can happen. In the end, it seemed that any explanation and/or answer to one question seemed to generate more questions. It also seemed that more and more we are getting conflicting information. What was explained one way on one occasion would be explained completely differently at another time.

There has also been an unexplained secrecy that has surrounded this process. Rome has issued documents and statements, but we have been asked to keep silent. I have followed this directive from Archbishop Hepworth until this time. Now the time has come to be forthright and speak, explain our actions and future plans.

As you know, the House of Bishops met in March in Orlando. We all agreed to request the implementation of the Ordinariate in this country and the ACA joined hands with the clergy and parishes of the Pastoral Provision (Anglican Use Roman Catholics). All Bishops signed the letter to Cardinal Levada requesting the formation of an Ordinariate in the United States. I have been asked why I would sign something if I were opposed to it.

First, let me say that I am not opposed to the implementation of the Ordinariate and at the time I had not made any decisions as to what I would do with respect to joining the ordinariate. Secondly, even if I were not to go into the Ordinariate, I would never stand in the way of those who desire to do so. I still feel that way today. Also at that meeting we generated a list of questions that have come from all over the world, many of which you have asked. We were told that only the formation of an Ordinariate would allow these questions to be answered fully.

These questions were to be covered when the delegation from the TAC met with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). We were told by Abp. Hepworth that the CDF had set aside a whole day for such a meeting. It was in that meeting that I, and others, hoped to finally get many of our questions answered. We were very disappointed that the group only had one hour with the CDF, thus very few questions were answered. The ones that were answered, I shared with you at Synod last June. But even some of those answers have changed since. As a result the many questions you had asked regarding the implementation of the constitution remain unanswered to this day.

I have decided to stop waiting for answers and start seeking my own. So I started with the Vatican itself. I didn't have to look long before I found the above mentioned paper written by Bishop Arrieta. In reading this text, and talking with others who are far more knowledgeable on this document; I have concluded that my first impression of *Anglicanorum Coetibus* appeared to be the most accurate assessment. Based on what I know as of today, the only determination I arrive at is that the Apostolic Constitution is not the answer to our request to be in communion with, but an answer as to how Anglicans can become Roman Catholic while retraining elements of their liturgy and polity and vestiges of their heritage. It does not appear to me to be what we were seeking at all.

Therefore, at this time, I will not apply for entry into the Ordinariate. I simply do not believe that Anglican sacramental acts or our Holy Orders are invalid. I cannot deny my orders. I know it has been said that we don't have to deny or renounce our orders, but to submit to absolute ordination would have the same effect.

Additionally, there remain elements of Roman Catholic Dogma which are not found in God's Holy Word, the Bible that is unacceptable for me to hold or to teach as necessary for salvation. While I do use the Roman Catholic Catechism as a teaching aid, I do not subscribe to the entirety of its teaching. It has been said that many Roman Catholics do not either. But to be ordained into the Roman Catholic Church without accepting all of the Catechism in its entirety would not be something I could do.

For these reasons, I must announce that I intend to honor my commitment to the ACA and I will remain as Bishop of the Diocese of the Missouri Valley (DMV) and continue as servant leader of the people within this Diocese and the ACA at large. For those whose conscience leads them to remain with me in the DMV/ACA, it will be time to refocus on the Mission of the Church. The Apostolic Constitution and discussion concerning the implementation have been an enormous distraction to our work as we seek to proclaim the Gospel. It is now time to start focusing on our common life of greater commitment to our Lord with respect to stewardship, ministry and mission.

It is also my intent to join other Bishops of the ACA, who also will not be joining the Ordinariate, not only in maintaining our National Church, but in moving toward the reality of a mission minded Church. We simply cannot maintain the status quo. We have to find ways to move forward to ensure the future of the Church.

It is apparent that the ACA House of Bishops is divided on this subject. Some are ready to enter the Ordinariate as soon as it is formed as are some clergy and parishes. I certainly support their decision to follow their conscience and it is my intent to do all that I can to continue to minister to them until they begin their new ministry within the Ordinariate. I also pledge my support and assistance in helping them make the transition to the Ordinariate in any way I can. I also want you to know that the House of Bishops is committed to make this transition as smooth as possible for everyone out of respect to all those to whom we have ministered, whether they will join the Ordinariate or remain in the ACA. Many years of work, ministry, and prayer have gone into building the ACA. Indications are that only a small number of clergy and parishes will be joining the Ordinariate, so we want to ensure the continuation of the ACA.

At the same time, the ACA must continue to seek unity where possible. This may be the time when we will be able to focus on the question of unity with like minded Anglicans who share the same theology, Tradition and practice. Perhaps once we accomplish that, we can seek unity with larger bodies in Christendom.

Now regardless of what you have read on the blogs, I am not “joining the APA.” However, it is my desire to begin the process of unity of like minded Anglicans now. I plan to join with other ACA Bishops in proposing intercommunion with the Anglican Province (APA). We hope that the full House of Bishops will support this proposal. As many of you know the APA was once a part of the ACA, leaving about twenty years ago. It seems logical that any unity effort we seek begins with the APA. It is our hope that once we achieve this intercommunion, reunification of the ACA and APA will follow at some point in the future.

While we are working towards greater unity among Anglicans and we will seek unity with other Anglican bodies, I also want to reassure that this is in no way an attempt to undermine the effort to establish an Ordinariate for Anglicans that desire to enter it. In fact, I pray that it will be established soon. However, I do join with my fellow brother Bishops who desire to support and minister to those who wish to remain in the ACA with appropriate Episcopal oversight and work to heal the divisions in the Continuum.

This letter may surprise some of you, others it will not. It may even anger some. I hope and pray that this is not the case. It is not my desire to criticize any of the decisions you have made with respect to the Ordinariate, rather I want to respect those decisions and move forward in love and charity as we seek to serve those to whom God has called us to minister. I can assure you that I did not come to this conclusion of my own accord, but after much prayer and study. I have also informed the Standing Committee of this conclusion. Many will agree with my assessment. Some will not, but I hope we can agree to disagree while loving one another as brothers and sisters. I do ask for your prayers and you may be assured of mine now and in the future.

In the Service of Christ and His Body the Church

+Stephen D. Strawn

II Bishop of the Missouri Valley (ACA/TAC)