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Traditional Anglicans hope for Easter reunion

Deborah Gyapong Catholic News Service | Nov. 10, 2009

OTTAWA -- The primate of the Traditional Anglican Communion said he hopes churches take action to enter into full communion with the Catholic church before Easter.

Archbishop John Hepworth said he reacted "with overwhelming joy" to the apostolic constitution published Nov. 9 establishing the structure for Anglicans to be in full communion with the Catholic church.

The archbishop described the constitution as "generous at every turn" in its description of the Anglican heritage, its dogmatic provisions and its pastoral language.

"We've been asked to show the rich heritage to the whole church, not just to ourselves," he said in an interview from Australia.

The Traditional Anglican Communion includes Anglican churches that have left the much larger Anglican Communion over the ordination of women and sexually active homosexuals as priests. The Traditional Anglican Communion is among the largest group of Anglicans likely to embrace the Vatican's action to welcome them into full communion with the church.

Hepworth expects a positive response from Traditional Anglican Communion member churches around the world. Already, the United Kingdom's Traditional Anglican Communion synod voted to accept the document prior to its publication. He said he has heard from churches around the world, describing their comments as "powerful messages that 'we want it and we want it as soon as we can get it.'"

Hepworth has delivered a timetable to Traditional Anglican Communion bishops involving a series of regional and national synods starting early in 2010.

"I want all the votes in by Lent," Hepworth said. "Then I'm hoping in fact our bishops can meet in Rome after Easter and present the 'yes' votes and take advice on what to do next."

While Hepworth wants to move fast, he said the structure outlined in the apostolic constitution does not require anyone to rush headlong into it. "There's no deadline; it's available way into the future," he said.

"If [the pope] deals with other groups as creatively and as warmly and pastorally as he has dealt with us, he is the pope of [Christian] unity," Hepworth said.

The primate described the personal ordinariate structure established in the apostolic constitution -- which offers the jurisdiction of a diocese without being tied to a geographical area -- as "radical."

"It's a modern church structure that the rest of the church in fact will have to consider," he said. It also paves the way for other groups to come into communion corporately.

The two issues likely to draw the most media attention in the document are the provisions for married priests

and for married bishops to potentially serve in the new structure.

The norm is clerical celibacy, he said, but there is a provision for married men to be ordained on a case-by-case basis approved by the Holy See, Hepworth said.

"It will be done according to the norms developed by the ordinariate and the bishops' conferences and submitted to the Holy See for approval," he said.

"Without married priesthood into the future, it would be very difficult at this stage to sustain the Anglican ordinariate into the future," he added. "We Anglicans going into communion with the Holy See are going to have to deepen our understanding of the celibate priesthood."

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