

Vatican giving 'serious' thought to union with Anglican group

Kevin Eckstrom Religion News Service | Aug. 15, 2008



A top Vatican official said he is giving "serious attention" to a small group of

traditionalist Anglicans who are in talks with Rome about a possible reunification with the Catholic Church.

Cardinal William Levada, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told members of the Australia-based Traditional Anglican Communion that their request is under consideration.

"As Your Grace is undoubtedly aware, the situation within the Anglican Communion in general has become markedly more complex," Levada wrote to Archbishop John Hepworth on July 5, in a letter that was released July 25.

According to Levada's letter, Hepworth visited Levada's offices last October. Levada said his staff is reviewing Hepworth's proposal for "corporate unity" with "serious attention."

Hepworth's group, with a reported 400,000 members worldwide, is not a part of the official Anglican Communion headed by the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

It also does not include any of the major conservative Anglican groups, such as the Pittsburgh-based Anglican Communion Network. The Australian group counts as its U.S. member the Anglican Church in America, which split from the Episcopal Church in the late 1970s.

Yet Levada's letter comes at a crucial time for the worldwide Communion as more than 600 bishops wrapped up their once-a-decade Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, England, amid speculation that conservative Anglicans might try to move en masse to reunite with Rome.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, who heads the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, warned Anglican bishops on July 30 that moves to allow women bishops and increasing acceptance of homosexuality threaten to hamper "full visible communion" between Canterbury and Rome.

It's unclear whether the Vatican would be willing to carve out an Anglican enclave within Catholicism on the model of the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches, which maintain separate hierarchies and distinct practices, including married priests.

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