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100 Anglican parishes to join Catholic church

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ORLANDO, Fla. -- About 100 traditionalist Anglican parishes in the United States have decided to join the Catholic Church as a group.

Meeting in Orlando, the House of Bishops of the Anglican Church in America voted to seek entry into the Catholic Church under the guidelines established in Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic constitution "Anglicanorum Coetibus" ("Groups of Anglicans"), said a March 3 statement.

The Anglican Church in America is part of the Traditional Anglican Communion, a group of churches which separated from the worldwide Anglican Communion in 1991. The Traditional Anglican Communion claims 400,000 members worldwide.

The request means the 100 Anglican Church in America parishes will ask for group reception into the Catholic Church in a "personal ordinariate," a structure similar to dioceses for former Anglicans who become Catholic.

Churches under the personal ordinariate can retain their Anglican character and much of their liturgy and practices -- including married priests -- while being in communion with the Catholic Church.

Archbishop John Hepworth of Australia, primate of the Traditional Anglican Communion, and Father Christopher Phillips of Our Lady of the Atonement Parish, an Anglican-use Catholic church in San Antonio, attended the meeting, according to the statement.

The Anglican Church in America is the third group of Anglican churches to respond positively to the Vatican's invitation.

The first was the United Kingdom branch of the Traditional Anglican Communion, which comprises about 20 small parishes and which in October began the process of joining the Catholic Church under the apostolic constitution.

The second was the Australian branch of Forward in Faith, a traditionalist group which is in communion with mainstream Anglican churches. In February Forward in Faith directed its governing council to take the steps needed for 16 parishes to join the Catholic Church.

The United Kingdom branch of Forward in Faith also is considering making a request for an ordinariate. A final decision is not expected before July.

Anglican Bishop John Broadhurst estimated that about 200 Anglican parishes will seek to join the Catholic Church if Forward in Faith decides to ask for an ordinariate.

The Catholic bishops of England and Wales have established a commission to prepare for the group reception of Anglican parishes. Headed by four bishops working with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the

commission is examining issues such as church ownership, the advantages and disadvantages of church sharing and long-term leases of some Anglican parishes.

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