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Anglican congregation in civil war over whether to join Catholic church

Joe Ferullo | Jul. 18, 2012 NCR Today

Two factions of an Anglican church's congregation have been locked in a month-long struggle: Each occupies a different floor of the main parish building in Los Angeles, refusing to move, threatening to lock out the other side. The dispute: whether or not to join the Roman Catholic Church.

St. Mary of the Angels is a small, 60-member Anglican community based the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles, a neighborhood with deep Hollywood history, peppered with grand Spanish-style homes up against Griffith Park and the famed Greek Theatre.

But the drama going on at St. Mary's is of a particularly vicious kind. Court battles have dragged on for months -- and there is no sign the face-to-face occupation will end anytime soon.

According to the *Los Angeles Times* [1], the clash began soon after the Rev. Chistopher Kelley arrived as parish priest in 2007. Once Pope Benedict opened the door for Anglicans to join the Catholic church, Kelley -- along with his wife and children -- strongly advocated the move.

"We can see the dispiritedness of the Anglican movement," he told the *Times*. "Pope Benedict's offer was a sanctuary for us."

A large faction of the small congregation quickly agreed -- but others held out against the move, and in December, a majority of the parish board asked Kelley to leave. He didn't. In April, Anglican officials also tried to push him out. He wouldn't budge.

The court battle began. Restraining orders have been issued against Kelley, along with accusations of temper tantrums and theft of parish resources. He's been locked out of the parish, he's broken back in -- and now followers of both factions are squatting at the church, clinging to the property as another round of lawsuits is filed.

Presiding over the first floor area occupied by Kelley and his supporters: a portrait of Pope Benedict.

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[1] http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-church-fight-20120716,0,2983566.story