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Archbishop praises former Anglicans for their zeal for Catholic faith

Jim Townsend Catholic News Service | Feb. 6, 2013
Houston

The prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a Saturday address in Houston called for a "culture of communion" and the continued path toward reunification.

"Christ's prayer 'that they all might be one' underscores the imperative of seeking full visible unity among Christians," Archbishop Gerhard Muller told a symposium marking the first anniversary of the Catholic church's U.S. ordinariate for former Anglicans.

The Houston-based Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, headed by Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson, sponsored the symposium with the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Sessions, which were held in Houston at the archdiocese's St. Mary Seminary, explored the ecclesiology, evangelizing and liturgical missions of personal ordinariates created by the Vatican for former Anglican groups and clergy seeking to become Catholic.

While fully Catholic, the groups in an ordinariate retain aspects of their Anglican heritage and traditions. Similar to dioceses, though national in scope, ordinariates were authorized by Pope Benedict XVI in a 2009 apostolic constitution, "Anglicanorum coetibus."

"The Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter serves this vision of unity by making it possible for groups of Anglicans to enter into communion with the Catholic Church while preserving elements of the distinctive Anglican spiritual and liturgical patrimony," Muller said in his keynote address.

"It can certainly be said that, in creating this new structure, the Holy Father was responding to a movement of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that draws the disciples of the Lord together, fashioning them into the ecclesial body of Christ," he added.

Muller's attendance marked his first official visit to the United States since his appointment as prefect in July 2012. His message hit on Vatican themes of Christian unity and the new evangelization.

The first ordinariate was established in England and Wales in 2011, then in the United States and Canada in January 2012, and in Australia last June.

"Last year, Cardinal William Levada, my predecessor as prefect ... told the clergy of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham (in England) that 'Anglicanorum coetibus' was very much 'the pope's project,'" the archbishop said. "I have come to understand how true that is. You are very much in his thoughts and prayers."

In attendance were dozens of parishioners from Houston's Our Lady of Walsingham Catholic Church, located a few minutes' drive from St. Mary Seminary. The parish is the seat of the ordinariate; it was established in 1984 as an Anglican-use parish under a pastoral provision of the Blessed John Paul II.

Muller noted that the ordinariate leadership has a "delicate but all-important task to both preserve the integrity of your parish communities and, at the same time, help your people integrate into the larger Catholic community." This he said, creates a culture of communion -- "communion with the bishops of the church, communion with the local diocese and parishes, communion with the Catholic faithful, and bonds of charity and friendship with those still separated from the church."

The Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter includes 30 priests -- all former Anglicans who have completed an approved formation program -- and about 1,600 people in 36 communities across the United States and Canada, most of whom became Catholic within the past year.

Muller acknowledged that for some, the path to full communion with the Catholic Church has not been easy.

"I am well aware that many of you have experienced conflict and division in the years leading up to your decision to seek full communion with the Catholic church," he said. "We must be reflective about these experiences, discerning carefully that they do not overly influence our attitudes toward ecclesiastical authority or church life.

"It takes a great deal of courage to be Catholic and so I say to you: Be courageous," he continued. "Be courageous in maintaining the vibrancy and orthodoxy of your faith in the Catholic church. Your loyalty to the Holy Father and your commitment to seeking the truth has brought you this far and will sustain you, and will also serve as a powerful encouragement to those 'born' into the Catholic Church to rediscover her beauty and the consistency of her teaching. Your 'youthful enthusiasm' is a great gift."

He urged the former Anglicans to "be courageous pioneers of communion, placing the diversity of your gifts at the service of the universal church."

"The distinctiveness of your traditions and manner of prayer and worship are no obstacle to true unity in the church," he said. "But courage in maintaining these traditions also recognizes that, for them to be a true enrichment to Catholic life, you will need to win the trust and confidence of the local Catholic community."

Muller suggested that "a robust engagement with the pastoral and charitable initiatives of your Catholic and Anglican neighbors will not only redound to the glory of God and actually strengthen your ordinariate parish, but provides an example of diversity grounded in the unity of faith which furthers the new evangelization."

Other speakers included Steenson; Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston; Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, ecclesiastical delegate for the U.S. ordinariate; Msgr. Steven Lopes, a San Francisco priest on staff at the doctrinal congregation and secretary to the commission preparing liturgies for the ordinariates worldwide; and Bishop Kevin Vann of Orange, Calif., ecclesiastical adviser for the Catholic church's pastoral provision which since 1980 has allowed married Episcopal priests to become ordained diocesan Catholic priests.

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