

Archbishop O'Brien welcomes 10 Episcopal nuns, priest into Catholic Church

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A spiritual journey that began seven years ago ended in the sanctuary of a Catonsville convent Sept. 3 when 10 Episcopal nuns and their priest chaplain were received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

In administering the sacrament of confirmation, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien traced a cross on the foreheads of each candidate as he anointed them with sacred chrism oil and called on them to be sealed with the Holy Spirit. The sisters then renewed their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as some 120 worshipers looked on.

Ten of the 12 members of the All Saints' Sisters of the Poor joined the Catholic Church during the liturgy. The two nuns who have decided to remain Episcopal will continue to live, pray and work in community with their now-Catholic sisters.

Father Warren Tanghe, former chaplain to the All Saints' Sisters of the Poor, was also confirmed and has applied to become a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

In his homily, Archbishop O'Brien welcomed the newcomers and extolled the sisters for their dedication to the consecrated life.

"In the successor of St. Peter and vicar of Christ, Pope Benedict XVI, you find fulfilled your desire for full, visible and spiritual unity with and in the universal church - one Lord, one faith, one baptism," Archbishop O'Brien said.

The archbishop noted that the sisters and their former chaplain retain great affection and respect for their Episcopal roots.

"I speak for all the faithful of the Archdiocese of Baltimore in expressing our thanks to God that you, good sisters, will ennoble our Catholic community with your sterling and steadfast witness to consecrated life, with a rich heritage of prayer, liturgical and private, and with a 137-year tradition of joining contemplative prayer with care for the poor, for children with special needs and for the dying," he said.

Wearing black habits, long black veils and white wimples that covered their heads, the sisters seemed visibly moved as they knelt before the archbishop and were confirmed. Some closed their eyes in prayer as their sponsors stood behind them.

Mother Christina Christie, the order's superior, said the entire liturgy was intense. As well-wishers hugged her following the Mass, Mother Christina found it difficult to express her feelings.

"At one point, I just started to sob," she said of the liturgy. "There was so much joy that I thought I was going to lose it. I thought, 'wait a minute - keep it together. It was so rich in the Holy Spirit.'"

Mother Christina noted that when she woke up that morning, one prayer came immediately to her lips: "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us be glad in it."

The nuns said they wanted to join the Catholic faith because of their strong desire for the unity that Christ spoke of in the Gospels. They had been troubled by their former church's ordination of women, the ordination of a gay bishop and what they regarded as lax stances on moral issues.

The sisters said they worked to champion orthodoxy within their former church, but expressed feelings of frustration. Their "witness to orthodoxy" was not embraced, they said.

Moments before the liturgy began, Sister Emily Ann Lindsey said the sisters have received countless messages of support from around the country following an Aug. 27 Catholic Review article that reported on their impending reception into the church.

"For once, we feel like we're really wanted," Sister Emily Ann said. "Seeing all this support makes me feel this is what the Lord meant for us to do."

Several faith leaders of different denominations were present for the liturgy, including Bishop Donald Parsons, Bishop Visitor of the Episcopal Church.

In a written statement, Bishop Eugene T. Sutton of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland said he has been “impressed” with the depth of the sisters’ prayer and the pace of their discernment.

“I wish them God’s blessings as their journey takes them into the Roman Catholic Church,” he said. “Despite the sadness we feel in having to say farewell, our mutual joy is that we remain as one spiritual family of faith, one body in Christ.”

Sister Margaret Muraki said she was moved by the liturgy, but acknowledged some pain in leaving the Episcopal Church.

“I’m glad I have done it,” the nun said, standing on neatly manicured grounds that are now adorned with a papal flag. “There are some goodbyes to say.”

The sisters’ former chaplain said he had remained in the Anglican Communion out of a sincere hope that it might one day fully unite with Rome. In recent years, that no longer seemed like a realistic possibility, he said. He expressed “deep joy” in being received into the Catholic faith.

“I have no business being here unless I was led by God through the power of the Holy Spirit,” he said. “I believe God did that.”

Archdiocesan leaders are working with Vatican officials to establish the sisters as the first “diocesan institute” in the Archdiocese of Baltimore – a religious community that is overseen directly by the bishop. The sisters will attend Mass in the Latin rite and have received permission to also attend Mass in the Anglican-use rite.

The All Saints’ Sisters of the Poor were founded at All Saints Church in London in 1851. They arrived in Baltimore in 1872. Over the years, their ministry has included outreach to the sick and dying.

On their 88-acre Baltimore County campus, they offer religious retreats and maintain a Scriptorium where they design religious cards.

In addition to Mother Christina, Sister Margaret and Sister Emily Ann, the other sisters who entered the Catholic Church were: Sister Hannah Smith, Sister Catherine Grace Bowen, Sister Elaine Swan, Sister Elizabeth Grant, Sister Julia Mary Nicholson, Sister Mary Joan Walker and Sister Mary Charles Colbertson.

[Click here to see a slide show of the event.](#)