

# Baltimore Episcopal parish votes to enter Catholic faith

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Mount Calvary Church, a small Episcopal parish in Baltimore, voted Oct. 24 to leave the Episcopal community and become an Anglican-use parish within the Roman Catholic Church. The 168-year-old church became the first Episcopal parish in Maryland to vote to sever ties with the Episcopal Church.

Of the 45 eligible voters, 28 were present for the meeting – casting ballots on a resolution to separate from the Episcopal Church and another to become an Anglican-use parish. The first resolution passed with 24 votes in favor, two against and two abstentions. The second resolution also passed, with 24 votes in favor, three against and one abstention.

“I don’t agree with a lot of what is happening in the Episcopal Church with their practices and the way their doctrine is,” said 27-year-old Abigail Davis, a parishioner who voted in favor of both resolutions. Like many other parishioners, Davis was particularly troubled by the Episcopal Church’s ordination of women and what she considers its acceptance of homosexuality.

“I feel like the Catholic Church is the way to go,” she said. “It’s home and it’s where we all started, and I think that’s where we should all be. It’s definitely been very emotional, but it’s also exciting.”

The Rev. Jason Catania, Mount Calvary’s rector, said it was not easy for parishioners to make their decision. He believes the Holy Spirit is leading them into the Catholic faith. Both he and his associate pastor, the Rev. David Reamsnyder, intend to apply to become priests for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

“We’re asking people to pray for us and to pray for the Episcopal Diocese,” Rev. Catania said.

In an Oct. 25 written statement, Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, said he was “saddened that members of this small congregation have found a need to leave the Episcopal Church.”

“For those who are leaving,” he said, “I wish God’s blessing upon them.”

The bishop visited the church Oct. 10, celebrating a liturgy and hosting a meeting with members that he called “an honest, open discussion.”

Sharon Tillman, director of communications for the Episcopal Diocese, told The Catholic Review that the diocese intends to follow Episcopal canons regarding Mount Calvary’s property.

“We will abide by the canons,” she said, “and, according to the canons, the property stays with the Episcopal Church.”

Rev. Catania said he hopes to have a discussion with the diocese concerning the property.

“I’m hopeful about the outcome of that,” he said.

Diane Barr, chancellor for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said Mount Calvary must resolve internal issues such as property before proceeding with entering into the Catholic Church as a group.

“Once that has been resolved – and that’s purely between them,” she said, “we would then offer them the opportunity to enter into an education process about the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It would be similar to an RCIA process for a group of persons entering into the church.”

Barr said a local Catholic pastor would be appointed to work with Mount Calvary parishioners seeking entry into the faith.

“Each person would have to follow their own conscience on whether they would want to come into the Roman Catholic Church,” she said. “We want to be very respectful of the individual person’s journey, just like we would with any person’s journey.”

Last year, Pope Benedict XVI called for the establishment of “personal ordinariates,” special structures similar to dioceses, which would be formed for Anglicans who want to join the Catholic Church while maintaining aspects of their spiritual and liturgical tradition. Those ordinariates have not yet been established.

Barr said the archdiocese would work with Archbishop John Myers of Newark, ecclesiastical delegate for the pastoral provision concerning Anglican-use parishes. How communities would become part of a possible ordinariate is yet to be determined, she said.

In an interview with The Catholic Review several weeks before the vote, Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien emphasized that the archdiocese will proceed with respect for Mount Calvary parishioners, the Episcopal Diocese and the Episcopal bishop.

“When these cases arise,” he said, “we want to work things out as best we can without creating any division.”