

Episcopal bishop is expected to become Catholic

WASHINGTON – Saying that “an effective leader cannot be so conflicted about the guiding principles of the church he serves,” the Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande announced in a Sept. 21 letter that he intended to ask his fellow bishops for permission to resign.

The letter from Bishop Jeffrey Steenson did not specifically state that he intended to become a Catholic, but said that “many of you already know of my love for the Catholic Church and my conviction that this is the true home of Anglicanism.”

The 55-year-old bishop, who has headed the diocese based in Albuquerque, N.M., since January 2005, said his “conscience is deeply troubled about where the Episcopal Church is heading, and this has become a crisis for me because of my ordination vow to uphold its doctrine, discipline and worship.”

The resignation came as the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, the U.S. branch of the Anglican Communion, was meeting in New Orleans to consider a response to conflicts with the worldwide communion on issues such as the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of openly homosexual bishops.

The consent of a majority of the House of Bishops is required for a bishop to resign before reaching the mandatory retirement age of 72 or being declared incapacitated.

Although the bishop’s letter had not been made public as of Sept. 24, lengthy excerpts from it were published by Episcopal News Service and The Living Church, a weekly magazine dedicated to the promotion of “orthodox, catholic Anglicanism within the life of the Episcopal Church.”

Bishop Steenson told The Living Church in an interview to be published in a forthcoming edition, “I believe that the Lord now calls me” toward the Catholic Church.

“It amazes me, after all these years, what a radical journey of faith this must necessarily be,” he added. “To some it seems foolish; to others disloyal; to others an abandonment.”

Less than a week before his letter, Bishop Steenson helped arrange for members of the diocese’s Pro-Cathedral Episcopal Church of St. Clement in El Paso, Texas, to buy the cathedral property for \$2 million and sever all ties to the Diocese of the Rio Grande.

He told members of the congregation in a Sept. 16 letter that he agreed “with the leadership of St. Clement’s about where the Episcopal Church seems to be heading.”

But as a bishop he said he was obliged to uphold “the perspective of the Episcopal Church ... that all real and personal property of a congregation is owned not by the local congregation but by the diocese and Episcopal Church.”

Bishop Steenson would be the third Episcopal bishop this year to resign his post and join the Catholic Church. The others were retired Bishop Dan Herzog of Albany, N.Y., and retired Bishop Clarence C. Pope of Fort Worth, Texas.