

Mount Calvary Episcopal Church considers entry into Catholic Church

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Mount Calvary Church, a small Episcopal congregation in Baltimore, is discerning the possibility of entering the Roman Catholic Church.

The church's nine-member vestry, or parish council, voted unanimously to separate from the Episcopal community and become an Anglican-use parish within the Roman Catholic Church. Mount Calvary parishioners will vote Oct. 24 on two resolutions – one to leave the Episcopal Church and another to seek entry into the Catholic Church as an Anglican-use parish.

The move comes a year after 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.

The Rev. Jason Catania, rector, said his 50-member faith community has been considering joining the Catholic Church for three years. Many parishioners were recently inspired by 10 members of the All Saints' Sisters of the Poor who joined the Catholic Church last year, he said. The former Episcopalian community of nuns had long been associated with Mount Calvary Church.

“We feel this is where the Holy Spirit is leading us and this is where our future lies,” Rev. Catania explained.

The pastor said parishioners are troubled by the Episcopal Church's ordination of women and by what he called the “promotion” of homosexuality. One of the resolutions states that the Episcopal Church “has clearly, substantially and

fundamentally changed its doctrine, discipline and worship.”

Mount Calvary Church, founded in 1842, has been known as an orthodox community that practices “Anglo-Catholicism.” It was the first Episcopal parish in the United States to offer daily Mass, Rev. Catania said. The church includes confessionals and Stations of the Cross. The community practices many traditional Catholic devotions.

Rev. Catania believes there is “overwhelming” support to proceed with the journey toward the Catholic faith.

“People are very excited,” he said. “They feel like this is something that’s been a longtime coming. The vote, in a sense, is just a formality.”

Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien said parishioners will have to resolve internal questions before the archdiocese can work out arrangements on how they would be received into the faith.

“We want to be respectful of them, of the Episcopal Church and of the (Episcopal) bishop,” he said. “When these cases arise, we want to work things out as best we can without creating any division.”

The archbishop said he’s open to welcoming Mount Calvary parishioners “if that’s where the Holy Spirit directs them and us.”

Rev. Catania said he and his associate pastor, the Rev. David Reamsnyder, are planning to seek permission to become Catholic priests. Warren Tanghe, a former Episcopal priest who served as a chaplain to the All Saints’ Sisters of the Poor, is currently studying to become a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Washington Archbishop Donald Wuerl, the pope’s U.S. delegate for overseeing the possible creation of an Anglican-use ordinariate in the United States, said a program will be established to work with priests seeking ordination within the Catholic faith.

“Lay members received into the church will be required to make a request in writing saying that they profess the faith of the Catholic Church,” he said, “and then there will be an ongoing effort to enrich their faith using something that’s based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”

Archbishop Wuerl said the U.S. bishops have received several requests from Episcopal parishes seeking entry into the Catholic Church as Anglican-use parishes.

"If there is a community that would like to be a part of the ordinariate, their task right now is simply to let us know," he said. "My responsibility and the responsibility of the committee set up by the bishops is to assess how many of these communities there are and what would be the criteria for their coming into the ordinariate."

In a Sept. 21 letter to parishioners, Rev. Catania said his church's possible reception into the Catholic faith is "not about rejecting our past and our heritage, but rather fulfilling it."

"We have before us the opportunity to carry with us the richness of the Anglican tradition into full communion with the wider Catholic Church," he said. "I therefore ask that each of you pray that God's will be done in this place which we all love so dearly as we approach this momentous decision."