

Personal ordinariate for former Anglicans to reach nearly 1,000

LONDON – The first personal ordinariate created for former Anglicans who decided to enter the Catholic Church will reach almost 1,000 by the end of the Easter Vigil.

The count of people entering the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham includes more than 60 former Anglican clergy.

The personal ordinariate was established under Pope Benedict XVI's November 2009 apostolic constitution "Anglicanorum coetibus." It allows the group reception of former Anglicans into the Catholic Church while allowing them to retain much of their distinctive patrimony – including married priests – as well as their liturgical practices.

Monsignor Keith Newton, who heads the ordinariate, told Catholic News Service that although he was incardinated into the structure after it was established by Vatican decree Jan. 15, it was only during Holy Week that he felt it was coming alive.

"This is the start of it. The lay faithful moving into the Catholic Church is really the start of the ordinariate. Until now there have been only about a dozen members, but now it is growing to between 900 and a thousand," he said.

"It is not an enormous number of people in Catholic terms, or even for the Church of England, but it is quite significant that such a number of people are making this step together," Monsignor Newton added.

Because the structure is new, many Anglicans are watching the process carefully, he said.

"There will certainly be a second wave. This is only the beginning," he said.

Monsignor Newton said he has been busy with confirmations and first Communion ceremonies at group receptions since April 18, when he received about 30 former Anglicans into the Catholic Church at St. George's Cathedral, London.

Other groups are making the move throughout Britain, many in rural southern England where the Catholic Church does not have the same presence as it does in urban areas.

Most members of the ordinariate formally left the Church of England on Ash Wednesday, March 9, and have undergone an intensive period of instruction as they prepared for reception into the Catholic Church.

Those former Anglican clerics who wish to serve as priests in the ordinariate will be ordained to the diaconate shortly after Easter and then to the priesthood around Pentecost, June 12.

They include Rev. Len Black, who served as an Episcopalian pastor in the Scottish Highlands for 31 years, and who will be among the married Catholic priests.

He will lead a Scottish ordinariate group after he and 12 others are received into the church at the Easter Vigil in St. Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen, Scotland.

"The pace of it all has been quite amazing," he told Catholic News Service. "Lent has been a very, very strange season for me this year, but it is going to have a wonderful climax. ... The group is going to have a celebratory lunch on Easter.

"At times I can't believe I am caught up in all this. It is just a wonderful experience," he said.