

Traditional Anglicans ask for full communion with Catholics

DUBLIN, Ireland - Parishioners from three Church of Ireland parishes have joined traditional Anglicans from 12 other countries in requesting that the Catholic Church receive them into full communion.

If approved by the Vatican, the move would allow 400,000 traditional Anglicans worldwide to be admitted into the Catholic Church.

The decision to petition for the move “seeking full, corporate, sacramental union” was made during an early October plenary meeting of the Traditional Anglican Communion, the umbrella organization for traditional Anglicans, in Portsmouth, England. The move, requested in a letter to the Vatican, would see the entire parish communities received into the Catholic Church.

It is extremely rare for entire Anglican communities to seek corporate communion with the Catholic Church whereby every member of the parish becomes Catholic and the parish effectively becomes part of the Catholic Church.

At the Vatican, officials would not comment on the letter, although they confirmed the doctrinal congregation had received it.

While the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is the Vatican’s lead office for official unity talks with the Anglican Communion, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith deals with the situation of former Anglican priests who want to become Catholic priests and with groups of former Anglicans who want to become Catholics together. The situation of individual Anglicans wanting to become Roman Catholics is considered a matter of conscience and not primarily an issue in the

ecumenical dialogue.

Pope Benedict XVI and top Vatican officials have expressed their hope that the Anglican Communion would find a structure able to keep Anglicans united while strengthening the faith and doctrinal heritage they share with the Roman Catholic Church in order to continue moving Roman Catholics and Anglicans toward full unity.

The Traditional Anglican Communion describes itself as a worldwide association of orthodox Anglican churches, working to maintain the faith and resist the secularization of the church.

The traditional rite of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) emerged in 1991 after the House of Bishops of the Church of Ireland decided to start ordaining women. Traditionalist Anglicans decried the move as a “defiance of both Scripture and tradition.”

A spokesman for the traditional rite declined to comment further, insisting that a decision had been made “not to give interviews at this stage.” Besides Ireland, the parishes are located in Africa, North America, Asia and Australia.

After the Episcopal Church in the United States decided in 1976 to ordain women to the priesthood, some former Episcopalian priests and laity sought full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Vatican established a special “pastoral provision” to oversee the movement in the United States of former Episcopalian clergy wanting to minister as priests in the Roman Catholic Church. The provision also set up guidelines for “Anglican use” Catholic parishes, allowing former Episcopalian parishes to retain some of their Anglican liturgical and spiritual traditions.