

The lay members of CITI Ministries released the following open letter to the Baltimore media during last week's meeting of the American bishops.

Your Excellencies:

What a blessing we have received from the Holy Spirit during this "Year of the Priest," to welcome back into full communion many of our Anglican brothers and sisters along with their clergy and families. Certainly this was a gift of the Spirit, recognized by the Vatican, to accept, after four and a half centuries, the validity of their sacramental oneness with us.

As the whole church prays for the growth in vocations to the clerical and religious life, the Holy Spirit responds to our prayers by adding a significant number of clergy to our ranks.

Because of this visible grace granted to Jesus' Church, we ask you, during your upcoming meeting, to consider extending this same welcoming hand to your own brother priests, who for many and good reasons have accepted the invitation to fulfill God's calling by living a non-celibate life. Many of these men are known to you personally, and known to live good and holy lives. We, the lay members of CITI (Celibacy is the Issue), ask, no plead, for your help in petitioning the Vatican to provide the opportunity for these thousands of good and holy men to return to full ministry in our church ... to serve us for His greater honor and glory and to allow optional celibacy for all priests.

As lay people, we recognize and appreciate what we are asking on behalf of the hundreds and thousands of good Catholics who are poorly served due to a current shortage of priests. There are also "new needs" that exist among the unchurched who have sought out married priests for spiritual and pastoral support. Perhaps God is answering our prayers for vocations by giving us this opportunity to welcome back these men. We know that not every Catholic will readily accept the return of these valid priests and their families; nor will they readily accept the Vatican's decision to welcome back our Anglican brothers and sisters. Yet, we believe that this is what Jesus had in mind when we read at the end of Matthew's gospel: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."* (28: 19-20)

And we lay people, believing in Heb: 5-6 ("*You are a priest forever ...*") again ask you, as successors of the non-celibate Apostles, to petition the Vatican, as a group, to welcome back these worthy workers in the vineyard of Jesus.

CITI Ministries can be contacted at citiministries@aol.com.

Victor L. Simpson writes from Vatican City for the Associated Press.

The archbishop of Canterbury held his first talks Saturday with Pope Benedict XVI since the Roman Catholic Church's unprecedented invitation to disaffected Anglicans, with the Vatican saying the two sides still want to press ahead for closer relations.

Archbishop Rowan Williams and Benedict met privately for 20 minutes in what the Vatican called "cordial discussions," as part of what has clearly been a difficult visit by the Anglican leader.

The Vatican said in a brief statement that the two leaders "turned to the challenges facing all Christian communities" and the need "to promote forms of collaboration and shared witness in facing these challenges."

Referring to the recent overture for traditional Anglicans upset over the ordination of women and gay bishops to become Catholics, it said the talks reiterated "the shared will to continue and to consolidate the ecumenical relationship between Catholics and Anglicans."

The Vatican said the pope presented the archbishop with a gold bishop's cross as a gift.

There was no immediate comment from the Anglican side and the Vatican declined to elaborate.

Since coming to Rome on Thursday, Williams has sought to downplay the implications of the Vatican's unprecedented invitation.

The Vatican says it was merely responding to the many Anglican requests to join the Catholic Church and has denied it was poaching converts in the Anglican pond.

But the move has already strained Catholic-Anglican relations and is sure to affect Williams' 77-million worldwide Anglican Communion, which was already on the verge of schism over homosexuality and women's ordination before the Vatican intervened.

In a speech at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Williams was gracious in referring to the Vatican's new policy, which he called the "elephant in the room." The policy was an "imaginative pastoral response" to requests by some Anglicans but broke no new doctrinal ground, Williams said.

He spent the bulk of his speech describing the progress that had been achieved so far in decades of Vatican-Anglican ecumenical talks and questioning whether the outstanding issues were really all that great.

Anglicans split from Rome in 1534 when English King Henry VIII was refused a marriage annulment. For decades, the two churches have held theological discussions on trying to reunite, part of the Vatican's broader, long-term ecumenical effort to unify all Christians.

But differences remain and the ecumenical talks were going nowhere as divisions mounted between liberals and traditionalists within the Anglican Communion itself.

The new policy allows Anglicans to convert to Catholicism but retain many of their Anglican liturgical traditions, including married priests. The Vatican will create the equivalent of new dioceses, so-called personal ordinariates, for these former Anglicans to be headed by a former Anglican priest or bishop.

Estimates on the number of possible converts have ranged from a few hundred to thousands.

Williams — the spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion — wasn't informed of the change until right before it was announced.

It remains to be seen how the new policy will affect Pope Benedict XVI's planned trip to Britain next year. Saturday's Vatican statement did not mention it.

The following report was posted by Stefan on November 20 at CathNews Asia (<http://www.cathnewsasia.com>).

The Catholic Church in Korea has lost four priests to the Anglicans in recent years, with marriage cited as the most important reason.

“They want to marry and at the same time serve as pastors,” Anglican Fr Peter Lee Kyong-nae, himself a former Catholic seminarian, told UCA News. Two more Catholic priests are currently preparing to become Anglican priests, he added.

“The priests made an honest and courageous decision to leave the Catholic Church in order to build a family, and they gave up all the privileges they enjoyed in the Catholic Church,” Fr Lee said.

Fr Abraham Kim Gwang-joon, secretary general of the Provincial Office of the Anglican Church of Korea, confirmed that the Catholic Church's requirement of celibacy was a major factor in the priests' decision.

“There are various personal reasons, but marriage is the most important,” he said.

It is not difficult for Catholic priests to join the Anglican clergy although they must pass a screening process and study Anglican theology for a year.

“The Anglican Church sees the Catholic Church as a brother Church inherited from the Apostles, so we recognize Catholic priestly ordination as valid as ours,” Fr Lee explained.

Priestly celibacy was a hot discussion topic after Pope Benedict recently made it easier for Anglicans to join the Catholic Church.

In the apostolic constitution “*Anglicanorum Coetibus*”, issued by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Nov. 9, married Anglican priests are allowed to be ordained Catholic priests on “a case by case basis.”

It is generally known that many of those priests making the move from Anglicanism to Catholicism are doing so because they disagree with the ordination of women and the recognition of homosexual priests in the Anglican Church.

The Korean Anglican Church is relatively liberal on such matters, particularly the ordination of women, Fr Lee says. It has ordained 14 women priests since 2001.

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