

An address given to the Catenian Association on September 23, 2024, by Father Ramsay Williams, priest in charge of St Edmund Campion Ordinariate Community, based at St Patrick's Church, Mentone.

1. The story begins on the fifth of November 2009, nearly 15 years ago, when one of those significant and defining historical occasions occurred which when recalled, also brings back the memory of what one was doing at the time.

2. I was in bed, listening drowsily to the 7 am ABC news, preparing to get up for another day in the life of the Anglican parish of All Saints', East St. Kilda, of which I was the Vicar. The last item of 'hard' news before the sporting news extracted from me a 'whoop' of joy and disbelief and caused me to leap out of bed and on to my knees in thanksgiving.

3. At a media conference in London, at which the Archbishops of Westminster [Catholic] and Canterbury [Anglican] were both present, it had been announced that the then Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, was making special provision for groups of Anglicans [and individuals] to enter the Catholic Church, while at the same time retaining much of their Anglican patrimony or heritage - liturgical and cultural. These the Holy Father referred to in his document as 'precious gifts' to be shared with the whole Church.

4. The document is known by its Latin title [the first two words] '*Anglicanorum Coetibus*' ['groups of Anglicans']. It establishes 'Ordinariates', that is, pastoral and administrative bodies, similar to a diocese, based however not on geographic boundaries, but on a characteristic shared in common by those who belong to it. In this case, its members have an Anglican 'connection'.

Thus we are a **personal** Ordinariate. In other words, all our formal members are *former* Anglicans or their extended families, or other Catholics who have completed the rites of initiation [first Communion and Confirmation] through us. [There is already something like our structure in the Catholic Military Ordinariate. The thing all its members have in common is, of course, that they belong to one or other of the Australian armed forces.]

5. Under the provisions of the papal constitution of 2009, the Ordinariates are, although existing *within* and working *with* a local Catholic diocese, under the direct and immediate jurisdiction of the Pope.

6. The Pope is our immediate superior. Our Ordinary, or leader, is appointed directly by the Pope, via the Dicastery for the Faith, and is answerable directly to him. [Of course, there is the greatest possible co-operation with the local diocesan bishop and diocese.]

7. These personal Ordinariates, now set up in England, the United States, Canada and Australia are Catholic in every way. Like the Uniate Churches in communion with Rome, they preserve certain of their own liturgical rites, traditions and culture, and yes, even [as in the Uniate Churches] the possibility of married clergy [although celibacy is the preferred norm.]

8. Catholics of any rite or tradition, however, are free to worship and to receive Holy Communion in Ordinariate congregations, and vice-versa. *Let me emphasise, members of these Personal Ordinariates are fully Catholic, reconciled and incorporated into the Church in the usual way, with the same beliefs, responsibilities and privileges as any other Catholic. They are not some kind of half-baked, cross bred Catholics!! They no longer have any formal tie with Anglicanism.*

9. And we are Roman-rite Catholics. Our liturgy is one of three variations of the Roman or Latin rite – the Ordinary form [in the vernacular], the extra-ordinary form [in Latin] or the Ordinariate form [in traditional or sacral English]

10. The Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross in Australia was established only as recently as June 15, 2012, by special Papal decree.

11. We are under the patronage of St. Augustine of Canterbury, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, who brought the western Catholic tradition to England in the sixth century. Our Ordinary is Bishop Anthony Randazzo, who is also Bishop of Broken Bay and President of the Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania.

12. The Ordinariate in Australia is not as large, of course, as those established in the U.K. and the U.S. [quite small at first, in fact].

13. As you can imagine, because of the geography of our wide brown land, and to a certain degree, the Australian character, we face certain cultural and geographic difficulties. Nevertheless, it is part and parcel of the life of the Catholic Church in Australia.

14. Those of us who rejoice in the document '*Anglicanorum Coetibus*' are grateful beyond words to Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI for his extraordinarily generous and pastoral approach to those Anglicans who have yearned to be reconciled with the successor of St. Peter, after a breach of 450 years.

15. I was baptised and brought up as an Anglican. From an early age I felt a vocation to ministry and discovered an attraction to Catholicism through the influence of neighbours.

My mother was a practising Anglican. I only learned later in life that my father was baptised as a Catholic. He had not practised his religion since childhood.

16. At the conclusion of Year 12, I became a journalist, employed by ABC radio and television in Melbourne. At the age of 20, I began studies for the ministry at a seminary run by an Anglican religious order in South Australia. I graduated from the Australian College of Theology.

17. In 1973 I was ordained for ministry in the Church of England in Australia [as it was still then called] for the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat. For 39 years I exercised my ministry, mostly in parishes in the Anglican Dioceses of Ballarat, Wangaratta, and Melbourne, and also served as a hospital and school chaplain.,

18. My last ministry was as Vicar of All Saints', East St. Kilda in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne] Throughout all this time, I continued to question the claim that the Anglican ministry is equivalent to the Catholic priesthood.

19. At the conclusion of nine years at East St. Kilda, at the age of 65, I could no longer remain, in conscience, in Anglicanism. I decided I would not continue for another five years [the retiring age for Anglican clergy is 70].

20. I had come to believe for some time that the Catholic Church is that body of Christians founded by Christ himself, and placed by him in the care of St. Peter, and his successors, the Bishops of Rome. It is the Catholic Church which St. Paul describes as 'the pillar and bulwark of the truth.'

21. Further, I believe that only the Catholic Church, in all of Christendom, has the authority, the influence, the teaching, the resources and the demographics to take up the battle against the forces of evil in our world today: i.e., rampant secularism, the rise of atheism, pantheism [worship of the environment], indifferentism and the threat of militant Islam.

22. I reached the stage where I could no longer remain outside or on the fringes.

23. Consequently, I left my ministry at All Saints', resigned my Orders as an Anglican priest and was reconciled with the Catholic Church.

24. After nearly two years of preparation under the supervision of Bishop Peter Elliott [himself a former Anglican and son of a Vicar], including many hours of meetings, interviews, the filling in of forms and providing the necessary documentation, and constant contact with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, and extra studies at the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne, I, along with three other former Anglican priests, finally received what is called a 'Nulla Osta,' a decree of approval, from the Holy See.

25. The Archbishop of Melbourne, the Most Reverend Denis Hart, gladly and readily agreed to ordain us. Four former Anglican clergy were subsequently ordained deacon on September 6, 2012, and two days later – Our Lady's Birthday - we were ordained to the Catholic priesthood, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne along with four deacons from the seminary, one of whom was also a convert [from Presbyterianism].

A fifth former Anglican was ordained priest at St Patrick's, Mentone the following year, and now ministers in Sydney. One of our original numbers has since died, and one is retired.

26. Ordinariate groups have been established in Perth, Sydney, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, Cairns, Townsville and the Torres Strait Islands, even Japan, the island of Tuam, and others are in the early stages of formation in the Philippines and New Zealand.

27. This remarkable venture was made possible by the pastoral sensitivity of Pope Benedict XVI and his prophetic vision for the unity of all Christians under the care of the Successor of St. Peter.

28. It also has the support of Pope Francis, whose message to us has been just one word [in Italian: 'avanti': advance [go forward!]

29. Not long ago, an Anglican friend asked one of our Ordinariate laypeople if he had experienced any regrets about becoming a Catholic. He said in reply that he had only one regret ... that he had not become a Catholic much sooner! My sentiments also.

30. My appeal to you as a priest of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross in Australia, is for your prayers and support. We are a small, struggling community, within the Catholic Church, with few material resources, but we are here to stay, and we are anxious to live up to and extend Pope Benedict's plan to realise our Lord's vision 'that they all be one'.

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