

www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-episcopalian-20120122,0,2874454.story

One spiritual family living in two houses

Amid movement between Episcopalians and Catholics, the bottom line should be Christian unity

By Eugene Taylor Sutton

8:00 AM EST, January 21, 2012

Each January, many followers of Jesus observe the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It was begun more than 100 years ago by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement. Originally, the friars were an order of Episcopal priests who joined the Roman Catholic Church. Christian unity has been a part of their mission since the order's founding, as it should be for every Christian.

You may have heard that the Episcopal All Saints' Sisters of the Poor in Catonsville were officially received into the Roman Catholic Church. And today, members of Baltimore's Mount Calvary Church, an Anglo-Catholic parish founded in 1842, are being received into the Roman Catholic Church's Anglican Ordinariate.

In 2010, 24 of 28 Mount Calvary members present (out of a congregation of 45) voted to join the Ordinariate, following a long-standing tradition of the Episcopal Church: democracy. Negotiations over real and church property ensued, and an amicable agreement was reached last month. It states that the Anglican Use Congregation (the term for a Roman Catholic congregation that is able to retain its Anglican worship rites) will be deeded the church building, adjacent offices and rectory; will keep all furnishings and personal property; and will retain the right to use the parking lot shared with Joseph Richey House, a hospice that started as a joint ministry by Mount Calvary and the All Saints' Sisters of the Poor. The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland will receive a monetary sum as part of the settlement, and will retain first right of refusal if the congregation vacates the property. Mount Calvary Church officially ends its 170-year history as an Episcopal parish in the Diocese of Maryland when it joins the Roman Catholic Church.

Rome has established a separate Anglican "rite" (worship tradition) similar to several Eastern rites that are in union with Rome. This Anglican "ordinariate," as it is called in the Vatican, has two congregations in Maryland: Mount Calvary and St. Luke's Church in Bladensburg, formerly in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. The head of the ordinariate is a former Episcopal bishop who became a Roman Catholic priest three years ago.

The Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, formed more than 450 years ago. Since its founding, many Anglicans and Episcopalians have chosen to

continue their spiritual journeys in the Roman Catholic Church. And many Roman Catholics have chosen to become Episcopalians. I have often said we are one spiritual family living in two houses.

For instance, the dean of our Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore is a former Roman Catholic priest. Some of the more notable priests who became Episcopalian are Father Matthew Fox, the theologian and teacher of creation spirituality, and [Father Alberto Cutié](#), a television personality and parish priest in Florida. There are currently more than 400 former Roman Catholic priests and deacons now serving in the Episcopal Church. And recently I received two Roman Catholic deacons into our diocese who are currently serving in parishes.

But for me, the bottom line is not which denomination is winning members from the other, but rather whether we are doing the work that Jesus called us to do. I'm an Episcopalian because the Baptismal Covenant in The Book of Common Prayer is all about living out the Gospel, or "good news." When I was confirmed into the Episcopal Church, I was asked if I would seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself, and would I respect the dignity of every human being. I have found I can best do that work in the Episcopal Church, while others have found the Roman Catholic Church or other denominations better suited for them.

Wherever we are on our spiritual journeys, there is work to be done. Too many children in Baltimore City will go to bed hungry tonight. Too many people will not find jobs, or housing, or medical care, or a quality education; and these are the people with whom Jesus most closely identifies in the Gospel.

After the dust settles over who's on which team, let us all remember we're still on the same team. It is all Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church working to build up what Jesus called the Kingdom of God here on earth. That's Christian unity.

The Right Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton is the 14th bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. His email is feedback@episcopalmaryland.org.

Copyright © 2012, [The Baltimore Sun](#)