

Cardinal Kasper says provision for Anglicans is not anti-ecumenical

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The establishment of special structures for Anglicans who want to enter into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church absolutely is not a signal of the end of ecumenical dialogue with the Anglican Communion, said the Vatican's chief ecumenist.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said the visit Nov. 19-22 of Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, primate of the Anglican Communion, to the Vatican "demonstrates that there has been no rupture and reaffirms our common desire to talk to one another at a historically important moment."

Archbishop Williams was scheduled to speak at a conference sponsored by Cardinal Kasper's office and to meet privately Nov. 21 with Pope Benedict.

The Vatican announced Oct. 20 that Pope Benedict was establishing a special structure for Anglicans wanting to enter the Roman Catholic Church while maintaining some of their liturgical, spiritual and pastoral heritage.

The Vatican said the establishment of the "personal ordinariates" -- structures similar to dioceses -- was a response to repeated requests from Anglican individuals and groups, who saw their hopes for full Anglican-Roman Catholic unity blocked by the acceptance of women priests and bishops, the ordination of openly gay bishops and the blessing of homosexual unions in some provinces of the Anglican Communion.

In an interview published in the Nov. 15 edition of L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, Cardinal Kasper said that the papal provision is not anti-ecumenical.

"To think, as some commentators have said, that the pope made this decision just to 'expand his empire' is ridiculous," the cardinal said.

"Let's stick to the facts. A group of Anglicans freely and legitimately asked to enter the Catholic Church. It was not our initiative," he said.

The desire of some Anglicans to seek full communion and the pope's response are direct results of the Second Vatican Council and of 40 years of Catholic-Anglican dialogue, which demonstrated to both sides just how much they have common despite 450 years of separation, he said.

At the same time, Cardinal Kasper said, it makes no sense to try to guess how many Anglicans will ask to join the Catholic Church under the pope's new provisions.

"People do not become Catholic just because they disagree with the choices of their own confession," he said.

It would be wrong to assume that most Anglicans who disagree with the ordination of women or the acceptance of homosexuality will want to enter the Catholic Church, he said, because many of them come from the evangelical, or more Protestant, wing of the Anglican Communion.

Cardinal Kasper also said that the passage of groups of Anglicans into the Catholic Church will involve resolving some very complicated practical problems, including the concern some Anglican priests and bishops will have about provoking a division among their flocks by deciding to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

In addition, there is the question of who owns the Anglican parish churches and determining under what circumstances the buildings would go with the majority of parishioners.

Cardinal Kasper also spoke about the Traditional Anglican Communion, a group that claims more than 400,000 members and describes itself as "a worldwide association of orthodox Anglican churches, working to maintain the catholic faith and resist the secularization of the church."

The cardinal said that while the TAC leaders asked the Vatican two years ago to find a way for them to join the Catholic Church, they did not participate in the conversations that led to the pope's recent provision.

"Now, however, they are jumping on a train that already has left the station. If they are sincere, OK, the doors are open. But we cannot close our eyes to the fact that they have not been in communion with Canterbury since 1992" and therefore are not technically leaving the Anglican Communion to join the Roman Catholic Church, he said.

