

From: The Vicar

To: The Congregation of All Saints', St Ives

You will have read and heard about the recent letter from Pope Benedict and addressed to Anglicans across the world. The press loves to make a story and uses words like 'conflict' 'poaching' and 'anger' to describe what has happened. In truth things are simpler and of deeper meaning than such stories allow.

The truth is that the Pope was responding in a thoughtful way to requests from various Anglican bodies concerning the action the Vatican would take if there were Anglican groups seeking communion with the Holy Father (the matter of personal receptions being a separate issue).

Broadly speaking there are three areas where this could occur in the short to medium term future.

In North America and Australia many congregations in the Anglican Episcopal Church feel unprotected not only from theological changes like the ordination of female priests and bishops, but also from changes on moral matters, and they already feel somewhat under threat in their Church. There is also in North America a fairly large parallel group known as the Traditional Anglican Church which spilt from the Episcopal Church some time ago. Congregations in all these churches are self-supporting and serve quite large areas. For them the offer from Rome that they could continue to use much of their liturgy and their present church buildings, and that many of their priests would be ordained as priests in the Catholic Church will be something some of them could well respond to in the fairly near future.

In Africa the present upheavals in the Anglican Communion have brought many dioceses there to the brink of setting up a parallel Anglican Grouping. This present offer may well be of interest to some of them if matters of dispute are not resolved before or at the next Lambeth Conference.

In England, as we know, the decision has yet to be made about episcopal oversight for congregations that cannot accept that the ordination of female priests and bishops is wise. Whilst there are congregations in the Church of England that are united in their opposition to such ordinations, there are many like ours with people holding a variety of views. For people in parishes like ours the common desire is for the sort of arrangements that allow people to remain together- in effect a continuation of something like the present system which has been successful, in a somewhat untidy way, in enabling people to live and work together harmoniously.

The General Synod is moving slowly towards its decision and the offer from Rome will become relevant if and only if Synod flatly rejects the path that Christian care and kindness would demand. The Archbishop of York has persuaded the Committee making proposals to the Synod to offer a proper statutory provision. We have to hope that Synod members accept his leadership and make a genuine attempt to keep all members of the Church of England worshipping together, but the signs are not entirely encouraging. If the majority merely repeat the arguments of the terrible 2008 Synod meeting and reject effective provision for the minority then I fear that there will be much unhappiness and un-Christian wrangling in many parishes resulting in a weakening of the Church of England both here and elsewhere.

One final positive comment. Pope Benedict has made a wise proposal about how people from different traditions can come together and this may well turn out to be a far-sighted pointer to some happier time in the future when that wonderful ecumenical aim of re-uniting Christians as one body in communion with 'Peter' and with one another could be achieved in a practical and generous way.