

Dissident Anglicans poised to join Catholics

- **Barney Zwartz**
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Disaffected Anglican priest Graeme Mitchell hopes and prays he will become a full member of the Catholic Church. Photo: *Michael Clayton-Jones*

NEARLY half a million dissident Anglicans are on the verge of rejoining the Catholic Church in a move their leader suggests may be the beginning of a flood to Rome of millions of Anglicans worldwide who oppose [gay](#) and female clergy.

Vatican officials are believed to have recommended to Pope Benedict XVI that he accept the Traditional Anglican Communion under a special category, and an announcement is expected in April.

West Australian Catholic newspaper *The Record* yesterday reported the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has decided to recommend to the Pope that he create a "personal prelature" for the TAC, which leading Anglicans confirmed.

Reunion would be the most important advance in Catholic/Anglican relations since 1553, when "Bloody" Queen Mary briefly returned England to Catholicism. The mainstream Anglican Church is also holding discussions with the Vatican, but they are not close to union.

If the Pope agrees, the TAC, which has a large number of married bishops and priests, would answer to the Pope but keep their existing structure, clergy and some elements of Anglican identity. At present, the Catholic Church has only one personal prelature, the ultra-conservative Opus Dei.

The TAC's primate (global leader), Adelaide-based Archbishop John Hepworth, said yesterday: "We are quietly and optimistically waiting for an answer. All 60 bishops accept the role of the Pope, the Catholic catechism and the traditional claims of the church, and want to be part of it."

The TAC has more than 400,000 members in 41 countries, and is not in relationship with the mainstream Anglican Church. In Australia, it has about 1600 members.

Archbishop Hepworth said if the Pope approved, the TAC would be a beacon for Anglicans around the world dreaming of doctrinal stability and unity.

Representative of the disaffected Anglicans is Father Graeme Mitchell, who is hoping to join his fourth church, but says this time "I feel like I'm coming home".

Married with two children, Father Graeme began life as a Presbyterian, followed his mother to the Anglican Church, and in 1987 was one of the founders of the breakaway Anglo-Catholic Church of Australia.

This year, Father Graeme — parish priest at St Mary the Virgin in Caulfield South and registrar of the TAC diocese of Australia — hopes and prays he will join the half-million other former Anglicans as a full member of the Catholic Church.

His disillusionment with the Anglican Church began mounting in 1987, when the Melbourne synod made the Catholic sacrament of

confirmation optional. "It seemed to me a betrayal of what I'd been brought up to in the Catholic faith," he says.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/dissident-anglicans-poised-to-join-catholics-20090129-7t2q.html>