News



Bishop David Waller delivers his first homily as bishop of the London-based Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, in Westminster Cathedral, London, at his June 22, 2024, episcopal ordination presided over by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. (OSV News/Marcin Mazur, courtesy Catholic Church England and Wales)



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The first bishop of a special diocese in Great Britain created for Catholics of the Anglican tradition has welcomed the pope's show of support and predicted the fledgling Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham will continue growing and strengthening.

"We've constantly heard rumors that Rome was going to put an end to our ordinariate — that it was just a papal whim which no one wanted," said Bishop David Waller.

"Yet this was never the attitude of the Holy See, which has always been supportive and caring. In the eyes of the world, we looked foolish and ridiculous when we risked joining the ordinariate 13 years ago. But no one today regrets doing so — our reckless abandonment to God is what's kept us going, along with the joy and excitement of being in full communion with the Catholic Church," he said.

Waller spoke at his episcopal ordination June 22 by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith, as he became the first bishop to lead the London-based personal ordinariate.

In an OSV News interview, Waller said he had been "surprised and shocked" by his nomination, announced April 29, and had spent time, as the ordinariate's vicar general, working out how to satisfy the "criteria and qualities" required by Rome.

However, he added that he had been "inspired and encouraged" by prayers and pledges of backing from the ordinariate's priests and lay members, as well as former

fellow-clergy from the separated Anglican Church of England.

Msgr. Keith Newton, the ordinariate's outgoing head, told OSV News the ordinariates created by Pope Benedict XVI came under the direct jurisdiction of Cardinal Fernández's dicastery — rather than the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops — giving it a "special interest" in its future development.

He said the ordination of the British ordinariate's first bishop would "make a substantial difference," and added the cardinal's personal involvement signaled his "confidence and interest."

"We have several priestly ordinations pending, with others being trained for holy orders in the usual way at London's Catholic Allen Hall seminary," said Newton. As a former Anglican bishop with three adult children, Newton was ordained a Catholic priest for the ordinariate, but he could not be ordained a bishop owing to ancient prohibitions on the practice shared by Catholic and Orthodox churches. Instead, he was made a priest-ordinary overseeing the ordinariate, but lacked the ability to confer ordination — a status similar to a chorbishop in some Eastern churches.

"Some people have long thought the ordinariate was just some kind of temporary arrangement — but this shows it will form a permanent part of Catholic life here," he said.

Established by Benedict XVI in 2009, the personal ordinariates function as Catholic dioceses with Anglican traditions that celebrate the Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, sacraments and other liturgies in traditional English according to the liturgical books approved by Pope Francis.

Benedict originally conceived these ordinariates as a permanent, pastoral response to whole congregations from the Anglican tradition — such as Anglicans, Episcopalians and Methodists — asking to enter the Catholic Church with their traditions as intact groups. In 2019, Pope Francis expanded the ordinariates' missionary mandate to invite all Protestant Christians into full Catholic communion and enliven the faith of Catholics who had weakened or fallen away from the practice of the faith.

Episcopal insignia for Waller, who previously headed a London parish, were blessed June 21 at the ordinariate's central church of Our Lady of the Assumption, where the bishop formally took possession of his flock at a June 23 Mass with the Vatican's

apostolic nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía.

Waller's June 22 ordination in Westminster Cathedral was attended by around 300 people, including 70 Catholic clergy and three Anglican bishops, in the presence of relics from the English martyrs, St. Thomas More (1478-1535) and St. John Fisher (1469-1535).

The new bishop was co-consecrated by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, president of the bishops' conference of England and Wales, and Bishops Stephen J. Lopes and Anthony Randazzo, respectively bishops for North America's Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter and Oceania's Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross.

In his homily June 22, Fernández described the ordinariates' "meaning and mission" as offering Anglicans a "path towards full participation in the gift of apostolic succession" in the Catholic Church, while also enabling them as Catholics to maintain what Pope St. Paul VI had called the "legitimate prestige and worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Communion."

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He added that the ordinariates' "two crucial dimensions" included forming "an integral part of the Catholic Church," and continuing to "see the positive aspects of the Anglican tradition preserved in it 'as a precious gift ... and as a treasure to be shared.'" The cardinal quoted Benedict's 2009 apostolic constitution "Anglicanorum Coetibus," which created the Catholic Church's personal ordinariates for the Anglican tradition.

"The ordinariate's existence reflects a profound and beautiful reality about the nature of the church and the Gospel's inculturation as a rich English heritage," the cardinal said.

"In the case of the ordinariate, the Catholic faith is inculturated by people who experience the Gospel in the context of the Anglican Communion. As they enter into full communion with the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church is enriched. ...
The ordinariate represents one of the faces of the Catholic Church which, in this case, receives certain elements of the rich history of the Anglican tradition — elements now lived out in the fullness of the Catholic communion."

Fernández also emphasized the importance of the ordinariate’s collaboration with local dioceses to promote unity and spiritual growth. He said, “Grow in a spirit of dialogue and sharing, including concerning pastoral goals in light of what Pope Francis proposes."

The ordinariate's website says Catholics of the Anglican tradition, with over 90 priests and 50 pastoral groups across Great Britain, combine "full communion with the Catholic Church" with "elements of the Anglican tradition which are consonant with the Catholic faith," including spiritual writings, prayers and music, and "pastoral practices distinctive to the Anglican tradition."

It predicts further ordinariates will be established over time elsewhere in the world, in addition to those for North America and for Australia and Pacific Rim countries, "to meet the desire of those Anglican communities who in, a similar way, seek to be united in communion with the successor of St. Peter."

In his OSV News interview, Newton said Waller's first duties would include ordaining four new priests July 20, including the married former Anglican Bishop Richard Pain of Monmouth, Wales, who joined the ordinariate in July 2023.

He added that there were no immediate plans to build a cathedral for the ordinariate and said the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith was in regular contact, particularly in processing married Anglican clergy seeking to come into full Catholic communion.

Meanwhile, Waller said the Vatican had "made a very clear statement that the ordinariate is here to stay" through Fernández presiding over his ordination. He said he would be meeting Lopes and Randazzo to discuss how the three ordinariates could cooperate more closely while "securing and developing" their relationship with the Vatican.

The new bishop said he also hoped to improve ties between the ordinariate and the Anglican Church of England, but would rely mostly on "visions and plans revealed by God, rather than formulated around a table."

Waller said the Vatican has made clear the ordinariate is not only here to stay but is also "an additional tool for the evangelization of England."

"We've moved on the prejudicial notion that this is just about disaffected Anglicans seeking a ghetto in the Catholic Church — tiny though the ordinariate may be, it is fully part of the Catholic Church and encapsulates a vision of realized ecumenism which makes it important to the Holy See," Waller said.

Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham, England, told OSV News he agreed the new bishop's ordination was a sign "Rome won't give up on the ordinariate," and said it raises hopes for the ordinariate's "fuller acceptance" not just within the Catholic Church but also by Anglican churches.

He added that the presence of a "relatively large number" of ordinariate priests across Great Britain highlighted the ordinariate's potential for evangelization, and said he believed the ordinariate could also "provide a spiritual home" for some lapsed British Catholics, bringing them back to the practice of the faith.