News



Pope Leo XIV and Anglican Archbishop Stephen Cottrell of York, England, left, lead midday prayer with Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican Oct. 23, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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A former Anglican bishop has urged church leaders to prepare for a surge of Catholic conversions, as a historic Vatican visit by King Charles III coincided with a deepening division in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

"The Church of England has clearly decided to go the way of liberal Protestant denominations, abandoning any claims to be upholding the Catholic apostolic succession," said Msgr. Michael Nazir-Ali, who was one of several Anglican bishops received into the Catholic Church in 2021.

"We're already seeing a significant new wave of conversions, and the church needs to consider how best to respond," he said.

The Pakistan-born former bishop was ordained a Catholic priest for the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, a diocese with Anglican traditions established under Pope Benedict XVI to help bring Anglicans in the United Kingdom into full communion with the Catholic Church.

He spoke as a Global Anglican Future Conference, or GAFCON, claiming to represent at least half the world's 85 million Anglicans, severed links with the Church of England over the appointment of the first female archbishop of Canterbury, accusing her of promoting "unbiblical and revisionist teachings."



Msgr. Michael Nazir-Ali, then an Anglican bishop, in 2019 (Wikimedia Commons/Elekes Andor)

In an OSV News interview, he said he respected Anglicans who sought to uphold orthodox Christian teachings while remaining in their native church.

However, he added that GAFCON's insistence on the autonomy of Anglican provinces in deciding their own doctrine, and on Scripture as the "sole foundation of communion," would create further problems — leaving admission to the Catholic Church as the only option for many.

"The Catholic Church agrees Scripture is the highest authority in matters of faith — but relying on Scripture alone is dangerous," said Nazir-Ali, who studied at Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and other universities, and was Anglican bishop of Rochester, England, from 1994 to 2009.

"Meanwhile, if each province is free to do what it likes, this is a recipe for chaos in today's fast-changing world."

Bishop Sarah Mullally of London was named 106th archbishop of Canterbury on Oct. 3 after 10 months' deliberation by a 20-member panel. She has supported same-sex blessings and other liberal reforms in the Church of England, founded when King Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534.

Her nomination, which follows the July 25 appointment of Cherry Vann, a lesbian living in a same-sex partnership, as Anglican archbishop of Wales, was welcomed by some leaders of the Anglican Communion's 42 national churches.

However, it was met "with sorrow" by GAFCON, which said Mullally had violated her episcopal consecration vows by promoting "unbiblical and revisionist teachings regarding marriage and sexual morality."

"The Archbishop of Canterbury has functioned not only as Primate of All England but also as spiritual and moral leader of the Anglican Communion," said the statement, signed by Rwandan Bishop Laurent Mbanda, who chairs the GAFCON Primates Council.

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"However, due to the failure of successive Archbishops of Canterbury to guard the faith, the office can no longer function as a credible leader of Anglicans, let alone a focus of unity. ... Leadership of the Anglican Communion will pass to those who uphold the truth of the Gospel and the authority of Scripture in all areas of life."

The dispute erupted ahead of a conciliatory Oct. 23 state visit to the Vatican by King Charles, who is supreme governor of the Church of England. The visit included an unprecedented ecumenical prayer meeting in the Sistine Chapel, co-led by Pope Leo XIV and the Anglican Archbishop Stephen Cottrell of York.

In his interview, Nazir-Ali said Charles had approved Mullally's appointment, as constitutionally required, but was not "personally implicated" in recent Church of England decisions.

However, he added that GAFCON provinces had signaled they would no longer attend the Anglican Communion's Lambeth Conference, held every 10 years, or other international meetings, making ties with Catholics harder.

"While some older differences seemed to be set aside during this Vatican visit, new differences have now emerged," the former Anglican bishop told OSV News.

"Orthodox Anglicans are unlikely to stay with the liberal Protestant remnant which the Church of England is becoming. Once divisions occur, they usually become more serious."

In a message after Mullally's appointment, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, chairman of the Catholic Bishops' conference of England and Wales, pledged to continue "bonds of friendship and shared mission" between Catholic and Anglican communities.



Bishop Sarah Mullally of London gives an interview inside Canterbury Cathedral in England Oct. 3, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Toby Melville)

Meanwhile, the nomination was praised by the Oxford-based Dominican Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, who told OSV News he had been impressed by Mullally's "calm grounding in faith," and believed she could avoid "the party politics that often disfigure churches" and be "a bearer of unity, like Pope Leo."

However, Nazir-Ali said any "future reconciliation" now appeared impossible, adding that past Anglican-Catholic agreements on Eucharist, ministry and other issues had been jeopardized.

"We can keep talking in a friendly way, as we do with people of other faiths — but any hope of restoring organic unity between our church traditions has, short of some miracle, gone out of the window," the Catholic priest, who served on two international Catholic-Anglican commissions, told OSV News.

"We can also cooperate, but not on questions relating to marriage and the family," he added. "In the meantime, the Catholic Church should be prepared for new groups of Anglicans seeking union with it, as during previous conversion waves."

In a "message of joy and hope" to Anglicans following her appointment, Mullally said the Communion served "millions of Christians across the globe, spanning diverse cultures and traditions." She added that she was "committed to listening deeply, serving faithfully, and fostering unity and mutual support."

An Anglican Consultative Council is to meet in Belfast in June 2026 to debate structural reforms and a proposed redefinition of ties with Canterbury, while GAFCON members also meet in Nigeria next March to elect a chairman and new Council of Primates.

Fr. Marc Homsey, national ecumenical officer of the English and Welsh Catholic bishops, told OSV News his church was "committed to ecumenical dialogue with the Church of England and other Christian communities at local, regional and national level," adding that the Anglican Communion's "structure and governance" were "an internal matter for its member-bodies."

Anglican holy orders of priests and bishops were declared "absolutely null and utterly void" by Pope Leo XIII in an 1896 apostolic letter *Apostolicae Curae* — a ruling that has not been rescinded.