



**CATHOLIC  
HOME  
MISSIONS**

## A New Diocese for Faith

By Beth Griffin

“It’s faith driven by love. We’re so happy to be part of the Catholic Church, the joy and enthusiasm help us overcome obstacles,” says Msgr. Jeffrey N. Steenson. He is the ordinary, or leader, of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, which receives Catholic Home Missions (CHM) funds.

One of Msgr. Steenson’s biggest challenges is that his responsibility extends to people throughout the United States and Canada. And, for added measure, he can only visit them on weekends. Read on!

The Ordinariate is an ecclesiastical structure similar to a diocese, established by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012 to serve groups of former Anglicans who seek full communion with the Catholic Church. It is based in Houston, Texas, and serves four dozen worship communities of widely differing sizes spread across two countries.

Under the terms of the 2009 apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* (“Groups of Anglicans”), the newcomers maintain distinctive elements of their Anglican heritage while entering into full membership in the Catholic Church. Congregations are led by former Anglican priests educated and ordained as Catholic priests. Masses and other worship services reflect both Anglican and Catholic traditions.

“We’ve been united to, not absorbed by, the Catholic Church,” Msgr. Steenson says.



“Pope Benedict’s vision was that groups of Anglicans would bring our tradition intact and keep it alive for the future. Both the liturgical and pastoral ethos of our old life would come with us, particularly our liturgy, which draws from the Book of Common Prayer.”

Fr. Ronald Roberson, CSP, says, “The Anglican tradition is a real gift to the Church. It’s a fundamental principle of ecumenism

**Parishioners celebrate the first anniversary of the establishment of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Houston. Photo courtesy of The Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.**

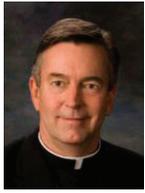
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# Neighbors

WINTER 2015

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Friends,

In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI established a new ecclesiastical structure here in the United States that you may not know about. This new ecclesiastical structure, the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, is similar to that of a diocese and is operated out of Houston, Texas. However, the Ordinariate does not serve a particular geographical region but rather a group of particular people: Anglicans. Specifically, this new “diocese” serves Anglicans who are seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. Pope Benedict XVI created the Ordinariate not only to unite our Anglican brothers and sisters with our Church but also to preserve the Anglican traditions of worship. We are overjoyed to assist the Ordinariate in becoming a substantial element of evangelization and unity here in our Church at home.

In this issue, read about what life has been like for the leaders of the Ordinariate. Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson, the ordinary, shares what the Ordinariate is all about at its core and discusses the road to distinguishing its identity.

Funds from a Catholic Home Missions grant have been able to help the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter establish the much-needed fundamentals of any new organization, from financial processes to leadership and staffing.

**We are able to continue helping our new community of brothers and sisters because of your generosity.** Please continue to remember our new neighbors in faith who have fewer resources in these early stages. Your donation, no matter how small, truly makes a difference.

With your assistance, Catholic Home Missions will continue to support basic ministries in home mission dioceses and provide an opportunity for each person to live out his or her faith. Let us help one another with open hearts, strengthening the Church at home.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen  
Diocese of Boise

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that the goal of unity does not mean uniformity. Everything does not have to become alike, and there are different gifts in different communities.”

Fr. Roberson is associate director of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

The Ordinariate functions like a diocese, and Msgr. Steenson has powers equivalent to those of a diocesan bishop. However, his jurisdiction covers a specific class of people, former Anglicans, rather than a geographical territory.

Msgr. Steenson was the Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of Rio Grande, Texas. He became a Catholic in 2007 and was ordained a priest in 2009. Msgr. Steenson is the only non-bishop member of the USCCB. He cannot be a Catholic bishop, because he is married.

The Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter is the second to be erected, after England and Wales. Its principal church is Our Lady of Walsingham in Houston, a former Catholic church given to the

Ordinariate by Pope Benedict and Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the archbishop of Galveston-Houston.

The young Ordinariate is working hard to establish its identity and procedures. Former Anglicans who want to become Catholics in the Ordinariate must submit individual petitions for membership to Msgr. Steenson, he says. “The apostolic constitution is very clear that members come from Anglican or other Protestant traditions. We don’t exist to serve Latin Rite Catholics, and we respect that they belong to a territorial diocese,” he explains.

The only exception is for Catholic adults who never completed the rites of initiation, including Confirmation, but who develop a relationship with a former Anglican worship community.

Procedurally, the catechesis and preparation to receive people into the Ordinariate is deliberate and takes time, Msgr. Steenson says. “You can’t jump from one team to another and just change uniforms. This is very serious.”

He outlines a process by which individuals or groups of Anglicans begin their discernment process with a



Bishop Richard E. Pates anoints Fr. Chori Seraiah’s hands at his ordination. Fr. Seraiah is currently serving at a parish in the Diocese of Des Moines. Photo courtesy of The Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.

clergy leader. Msgr. Steenson prepares a dossier and sends it to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) for initial consideration. If the CDF approves, the clergy begin a period of discernment and catechesis at a local seminary. Lay people are catechized in the same way as individuals in any Catholic parish, through a series of classes or presentations on the doctrines of the Church.

“Furthermore, the transition for an Anglican clergyman to become a Catholic priest requires special consideration. The pope must give each clergyman dispensation from the requirement for clerical celibacy. Msgr. Steenson works with the diocesan bishop to arrange an ordination and collaborate on establishing an Ordinariate worship community within the diocese. “Most people find this is no cake walk,” he says.

While the seminary program was accelerated by the Vatican to make sure the first worship communities and their leaders were not separated, future priests of the Ordinariate will undergo formation developed for the Pastoral Provision. The Provision was made by Pope John Paul II in 1980 in response to requests from married former Episcopal clergymen for integration, formation, and ordination as Catholic priests.

“The bishops in the United States and Canada have been totally helpful. They’ve opened their arms with welcome, assistance, and encouragement,” Msgr. Steenson says.

And that includes generous support from Catholic Home Missions. CHM has given the Ordinariate funds to support Msgr. Steenson’s travel and a new position devoted to raising funds for the fledgling Ordinariate.

A significant difference between Anglicans and Catholics is that

Episcopal parishes pay a salary to their priests. Catholic priests receive a stipend from the diocese.

Most priests of the Ordinariate, including Msgr. Steenson, support themselves and their families with jobs outside their worship communities. “We’re all tentmakers. We have to supplement or make our income,” explains Msgr. Steenson.

He teaches at St. Mary’s Seminary in Houston during the week and heads out into his vast diocese on the weekends. “We’re a quasi-diocese, and I’m a bishop without portfolio. It’s important to be with the people so we can build a community. I depend on airlines to get me around,” Msgr. Steenson says.

Priests of the Ordinariate have established fraternal relationships with local clergy, but some serve in isolated geographic areas, and clergy and laity alike appreciate the vital pastoral support of a visit from their leader. Ordinariate priests are permitted to confirm children of their communities, as well as converts to the faith, but Msgr. Steenson says his presence at those sacramental occasions is a visible tie to the Ordinariate. “It is especially vital when a community as a whole comes into full communion with the Church,” he says.

Msgr. Steenson says, despite the challenges, he feels joy and confidence moving forward in the new Ordinariate.

Barbara Jonte, his executive assistant, sums it up: “We’re a start-up, but we’re also part of 2,000 years of the Catholic Church and very happy to be sailing in the barque of Peter.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter is not a rite, akin to the Eastern Catholic Churches, but is considered a “use” within the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. It uses an Order of the Mass approved by the Vatican Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith and Divine Worship.
- The Ordinariate stretches from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in the north to Miami in the south, and from British Columbia and California in the west to Massachusetts in the east.
- There is only one paid staff member for the Ordinariate. Other staff serve pro bono, rely on retirement pensions, or are paid through local dioceses and parishes.
- What about celibacy? Married Anglican clergy are allowed to become Catholic priests of the Ordinariate, but Msgr. Steenson says, “The Ordinariate is expected to grow into the discipline of celibacy. We’re expected to produce priests the same way as dioceses do. This will be a big challenge for us in the future. We’ve come from a tradition where we’ve always had a married clergy, and we don’t want to underestimate the difficulty of making that transition.”



Msgr. Steenson preaches at his installation Mass in January 2012. Photo courtesy of The Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.



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READ ABOUT THE NEW ecclesiastical structure, the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, and welcoming our former Anglican brothers and sisters in faith.



**Your generosity to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal supports essential ministries in poor dioceses across the United States and its territories.**

**THANK YOU** for being part of our efforts to strengthen the Church at home.

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