

Eleven Anglican Sisters to be received into the Catholic Church

Community of St Mary the Virgin, Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary



The Sisters intend to follow the Rule of St Benedict (Photo: Fr James Bradley)

Eleven Anglican Sisters will be received into the Catholic Church via the ordinariate, it emerged this week.

The Sisters, from the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, Oxfordshire, will be received into the Church by Mgr Keith Newton, leader of the ordinariate in England and Wales, on New Year's Day.

The group, which ranges in age from 45 to 83, includes the mother superior of the community and a Sister who was once a minister in the Church of England. Three are in their 80s.

Next year they will stay for six weeks at a Benedictine convent. After that, they do not know where they will live and they have no endowments to keep them afloat financially.

Mother Winsome said: “We’ve got an uncertain future. But we are doing this because we truly believe this is God’s call. The Bible is full of people called to step out in faith not knowing where they were going or how they will be provided for and that truly is the situation we are following.”

The community, inspired by the Oxford Movement and founded in 1848, streams its daily offices live on its website and offers retreats and meditations online.

Mother Winsome, in a letter to friends and associates, said Sisters had been coming to speak to her privately about joining the ordinariate since 2009. Once there was a “critical mass”, and after gaining permission from each Sister, she raised the subject with the community.

The decision by 11 of the Sisters, she said, had been reached “after constant prayer and in discussion with spiritual advisers”.

They will leave 30 or so members behind in Wantage. Mother Winsome said they had wanted to stay at the convent, with Anglican and Catholic Sisters worshipping together, though with “appropriate Eucharistic provision”. That way, she said, they could carry on caring for Sisters who were elderly and frail.

But she wrote: “After considerable discussion with the authorities of the Church of England and the ordinariate, it has become clear that this would not be possible.”

The 11 Sisters, she wrote, “are in the main, but not exclusively, the able bodied members who provide the work and management to keep the Community going, so, since the ordinariate community do have to relocate, considerable time has been spent and will continue to be devoted to ensure that the remaining members of CSMV will be well cared for: spiritually, physically, emotionally as well as financially.”

Mother Winsome said the Sisters were likely to return to Wantage as guests until they found a permanent home.

The community, which will be called the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be joined by one of the three Walsingham Sisters received into the Church before the ordinariate was first launched. They are intending to follow the Rule of St Benedict.

Sister Patricia Ann, who used to be a minister in the Church of England, said in a statement that she was not the first Anglican woman priest to “lay down” her ordination within the Anglican Church.

Mgr Newton, the ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, said the Community of St Mary the Virgin had been “at the heart of the Church of England’s religious life” since it was founded.

He said: “The contribution of the community to the life of the Anglican Communion has been significant, not least through the community’s care for those marginalised by society in Britain, and also in India and South Africa.

“Those formed in the tradition of the Oxford Movement cannot help but be moved to respond to Pope Benedict’s generous invitation to Anglicans. The sisters have always prayed for the unity of Christians with the See of Peter, now this is to become a reality for them by means of the ordinariate. We are truly grateful for their faith, courage, and resolve.”

In a statement Mother Winsome said: “We believe that the Holy Father’s offer is a prophetic gesture which brings to a happy conclusion the prayers of generations of Anglicans and Catholics who have sought a way forward for Christian unity. The future of our community is a fulfilment of its origins, and as part of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham we will continue with many of our customs and traditions, whilst also seeking to grow in Christ through our relationship with the wider Church.”

Mark Greaves - The Catholic Telegraph