

The Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham and St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Sevenoaks

Note: I have made a correction from 'women priests' to 'women bishops' (see comment below)

Back in 2011 the Catholic Church offered Anglicans who were opposed to new rules creating women bishops and allowing gay persons into the priesthood, the opportunity to convert. setting up the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham to accommodate them, whilst retaining much of their heritage and traditions. The then vicar of St John's CofE Church in Sevenoaks, Father Ivan Aquilina, his wife and some 40 of his parishioners converted together to form a group called the [Sevenoaks Ordinariate Mission](#). You can find further details of the Ordinariate and its beliefs [here](#), including the legitimacy of a married Ordinariate priest, whereas celibacy is regarded as a priestly obligation for all others.

Normally I would regard such content as irrelevant to this website, but it is clear that the consequences of this decision play a significant part in the events described in my article about St Thomas' Catholic Primary School.

Although I come from a different Christian persuasion, I have talked with a number of Roman Catholics about the Ordinariate and am aware of some of the controversy it created and still continues in places, with members' accountability being to the Ordinariate itself as the equivalent of a Catholic Diocese, rather than the Diocesan Bishopric in which a group might find itself. In particular, there is still strong ill feeling in some parts about the permission for married and family priests belonging to the Ordinate to practice, whereas one of the perceived reasons for an extreme shortage of candidates coming forward for the vocation is the requirement for celibacy.

In the case of Father Aquilina who grew up a Catholic, then converted to Anglicanism, married, then converted back via the Ordinariate, was appointed vicar of Westerham (and subsequently Biggin Hill), and has now left the Ordinariate, this has set up considerable ill-feeling in some quarters. This is also reported to apply to his wife who invited her husband to take RE lessons in St Thomas' since she was appointed to the headship in March 2016, succeeding the popular Elizabeth Baldock, who had taken the school to Ofsted Outstanding two years earlier. Father Aquilina rarely set foot in the school previously, and his presence in the School has caused difficulty for some parents.

The Sevenoaks Ordinate is itself part of the Pembury Ordinariate Mission which holds services twice monthly at the Catholic Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, near to the school, and whose priest is himself a former Anglican and on the Governing Body of the school. The Deacon at Westerham St John is Roland Gooding, OBE, headteacher of the [Valence School](#), a Special School in Westerham, yet another local Anglican convert, but not of the Ordinate.

Meanwhile, the Chair of Governors of St Thomas' School is also an active member of the Catholic Parish of St John the Baptist, Westerham, along with several of the most fervent supporters of Mrs Aquilina through this article and off-line.

It is hardly surprising that the current controversy over Mrs Aquilina's absence has aroused such strong passions, although I understand that her absence from school is itself nothing to do with these matters.

I do not anticipate that everyone will agree with the above, but it is my best effort to be fair.

Comments:

Your article is wrong on so many points regarding the Ordinariate as to be embarrassing. You might want to research before you post.

For the record:

- 1) Fr Aquilina is no longer a member of the Ordinariate at all but of the Archdiocese of Southwark. This has been the case for some years.
 - 2) There are no meetings of the Ordinariate in Sevenoaks area at all.
 - 3) the Formation of the Ordinariate had nothing whatsoever to do with the issues of women's ordination or LGBT matters. It was a desire from high church Anglicans and from Rome working at unity.
 - 4) the reaction to the ordinariate has not been as negative as you suggest. In many places it is functioning well and with fulsome support of the wider local Catholic community
- I could go on. I think you would do well to remove the content about the ordinariate which is not only irrelevant to the issues regarding school life but entirely factually incorrect. My mother taught me that if you can't say anything nice it is best to say nothing at all. I pass that wisdom on in a spirit of friendship. [Father Ed Tomlinson, Priest in Charge, Saint Anselm's Catholic Church, Pembury](#)

PETER: Father Tomlinson, I regret your comment is wrong on so many points regarding my supplementary article on the Ordinate it is embarrassing. You might want to check before you post in future.

- 1) I made absolutely clear in my article that Fr Aquilina is no longer a member of the Ordinate contrary to your claim: *'and has now left the Ordinariate; this has set up considerable ill-feeling in some quarters'*.
- 2) Thank you for pointing out that the Ordinariate Services at Sevenoaks have now come to an end. Not so long ago as I learned from your own blog: *'And thanks to the kind and generous welcome of the Sevenoaks priest, Fr. David Gibbons, himself a former Anglican, St Thomas' now becomes home to the group which meets alternate Thursdays at 7:30pm'*. It is obviously unfortunate and certainly misleading to readers like myself, that you haven't pointed out the subsequent demise of these meetings.
- 3) *'In October 2007 the Traditional Anglican Communion presented to the Holy See a petition for full union in corporate form (i.e., as a body, not merely as individuals) with the Roman Catholic Church. This worldwide grouping, under a single primate, of churches of Anglican tradition but outside communion with the see of Canterbury, was founded in 1991. It was formed over a number of issues, including [liturgical](#) revisions, the ordination of women and open homosexuals as priests, the [sanctioning of homosexuality](#) and the importance of [tradition](#)'* By 2011 as the comment below in my article makes clear, along with the revision in it, matters had moved on and the issue with women priests had been superseded by priests potentially having to be subject to the oversight of a woman bishop. That is what I have quoted, although you have got it wrong again. I made no mention of LGBT as you falsely claim.
- 4) I have made no general comment about the Ordinariate as you falsely claim. I just don't have the knowledge to do so and wouldn't try. What is certainly the case is that there are *'issues in some places'*, one of which is in Sevenoaks as I am sure you are aware, and as I have been informed by Catholic correspondents in unpublished communications. As you surely know, the source of much of the ill-feeling is Fr Aquilina himself, a married Anglican priest and so unable before the invention of the Ordinariate to convert to Catholicism and retain his priesthood. After he joined the Catholic Church along with some of his Sevenoaks Anglican Parish he was allowed to minister solely by virtue of that membership of the Ordinariate and practised at Westerham accompanied by several of his previous Sevenoaks Anglican parishioners who were and remained personally very loyal to him. He

then left the Ordinariate but continued as a standard parish priest, alleged by some to have used the Ordinariate as a device to secure full Catholic priesthood. I can assure you, it is that which caused much ill-feeling which still continues. But you will surely know this through your own Deacon, Robert Smith, who leads what remains of the Sevenoaks Ordinariate. In your own case, you have remained loyal to the Ordinariate, although also married, as you feel the need to point out on the Pembury Parish [website](#).

As you will have noticed, my attempt to provide a factual description of the Ordinariate is not integral to the article about the scandal at St Thomas Primary, for I agree with you it is not directly relevant to school life. It was merely an honest attempt to provide relevant background which is why it is a separate supplement and I remain puzzled about why you have chosen to resurrect these matters in such a combative way. As I have demonstrated above it is not and could never have been *'entirely factually incorrect'*. Thank you for your mother's views, but surely completely irrelevant as I have not attempted to be nasty to anyone in the document, or indeed in my original article. For reference, the only nastiness I have encountered from the many correspondents genuinely saddened by events at St Thomas has come from some extremely loyal personal supporters of Father and Mrs Aquilina who have set out to abuse those whose views differ from their own. Your attempt to align with them, producing this pointless attack on myself, hardly seems to be in the spirit of friendship you claim.

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Your piece on the Ordinariate was a fair attempt to describe the impact of Pope Benedict's invitation to Anglicans in 2011. Just to clarify though: the problem for those who left was not really simply about the ordination of women or gay people to the Priesthood (the former had been in place for around 15 years). It was more particularly born of a fear that the arrangements for episcopal oversight (hitherto delivered through "flying Bishops") were to be compromised beyond the point at which practicing Anglo Catholics (Anglicans) could feel assured that they would not eventually end being overseen by a woman Bishop. I will spare you further details on this point but be assured at the time it was seen as a huge issue. The second point is that whilst former Anglicans arrived in a bus marked "Ordinariate" all signed up to being "full" Roman Catholics which meant they could attend the Mass in any Catholic Church. Likewise any "cradle Catholic" could attend an Ordinariate Mass hosted in a diocesan parish church. All this happened nine years ago and my impression was that all had moved on from the early transition. Based on your account it appears there are some people still around anxious to settle scores or to right some sort of perceived wrong done in 2011. Is that really the case? If it is then Hell really hath no fury like a scorned Christian: [Exasperated of Sevenoaks 3/7/20](#)

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There was an incident in the parish hall at Westerham just over two years ago involving Fr Aquilina and a parishioner. It is not appropriate to go into detail on this forum but it was a very serious matter and was witnessed by other parishioners including the resident parish Deacon, who is himself a headteacher. As a result a number of people raised concerns at the school and with the governors about the appropriateness of Fr Aquilina having unfettered access to St Thomas' school. This was a clear safeguarding matter. Concerns were expressed for other reasons also. Those concerns were ignored, presumably either because (I) those to whom it was reported could not bring themselves to tackle Mrs Aquilina over the matter; or (II) the governors DID tell Mrs Aquilina and she decided on behalf of her husband that the situation was ok; or (III) Mrs Aquilina asked her husband to keep away from the school but he refused to do so. We will never know. Wind forward two years and both have been given leave of absence (seemingly) in relation to safeguarding matters.....[Geoffrey 25/6/20](#)