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PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

by Fr. David Sharpe of St. Michael and All Angels, Mill Hill, London

As an Anglican priest I had not in any way felt excluded from the Fraternity in my three year's association with it. Having believed that God was now calling me to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, the opportunity has begun over the past few month to try and put the Prayer of Abandonment, so often used as a form of words, into practice at a deeper level of my life.

Although the Catholic Church has been at pains to emphasize that former Anglicans in my position are not in any way called upon to renounce their past, but to bring all that is good and fruitful in their Anglican heritage with them in their homecoming into the Church, and although the financial provisions made by the Church of England in the present circumstances are much more favorable than they previously would have been, nevertheless a certain sense of the acceptance of loss and of abandonment to God's providence is required. Guidelines established by the Diocese of Westminster have indeed spoken with respect of our identity as former Anglican priests, but inevitably there must be acceptance of the loss of a priestly identity during the period in which I seek to have my vocation to ordination in the Catholic Church tested. Discounting the more superficial factors of losing the identity and role within the local community of being a priest of the Church of England and the Vicar of a parish, there is the need to accept not being able for the time being to preside at the Eucharist, which I had done for most Sundays and weekdays for over 16 years. The memory of Brother Charles being alone and unable to celebrate Mass for long periods is a help here. His lack of a Christian flock to care for is a point of identity for a former Anglican parish priest in my position now without a congregation dependent upon one for provision of the sacraments and pastoral care, although the opportunity to assist pastorally in a Catholic parish for the months ahead will fill that gap to a considerable extent.

These losses can become an attempt to live out the Prayer of Abandonment in my life. However, they should not be interpreted by me in a spirit of self-dramatization, but of thanksgiving for the path along which God is leading me. Whatever you may do, I thank you. As I hope to be accepted as a candidate for ordination, I must try to live out the prayer which Brother Charles prays, "Let only your will be done in me." Above all, the situation calls for that trust in God's provident and personal Fatherhood which Brother Charles expresses at the end of the prayer. A prayer of Cardinal Newman seems to share some of the sentiment of Brother Charles' Prayer of Abandonment and will have special relevance to former Anglican priests treading the path he followed: "I will trust [God], whatever, wherever I am.... If I am in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him...He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends, he may throw me among strangers. He may make me desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me - still, he know what he is about."