
Anglican Archbishop of York: “Emotional meeting with the Pope. We had a long conversation and prayed together”

"It was my first meeting with Pope Francis, and I wasn't sure what to expect. I assumed that we would exchange just a few words but instead, we had a long talk and prayed together. It was a very special, very emotional experience", said the Archbishop of York **Stephen Cottrell**, the second most senior figure in the Church of England. The archbishop shared the highlights of his four day-long visit to Rome, (May 20-24), punctuated by meetings with the Dicasteries for Evangelisation, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. The archbishop shared the highlights of his four day-long visit to Rome, (May 20-24), punctuated by meetings with the Dicasteries for Evangelisation, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. "The Holy Father plays an extremely important role in ecumenical dialogue. Through his example and his dedication to the poor, he touched the hearts of Christians of other denominations," added the Archbishop of York. "It is the reason why so many Anglicans feel so close to him and are deeply touched by his words." **What were the most important fruits of your visit to Rome?** I was invited to the Anglican Centre in Rome, chaired by Archbishop Ian Ernest, whom Pope Francis greeted as an old friend. I sincerely hope that my visit helped to enhance the Centre's efforts for promoting ecumenical dialogue. The meeting with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, for a dialogue on 'The impact of ecumenism on evangelisation' was a very important moment. Likewise, the exchange of views with Cardinal Kurt Koch, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, was very meaningful. **What were the highlights of this dialogue?** *We laughed and cried and shared some anecdotes. In my experience, those moments were actually more important than what we said.* I hope that those who were watching and listening to us saw two brothers in Christ, sharing their experiences, mutually respecting each other, and that the differences that exist between our two Churches were diminished. I also hope that our meeting has been a defining moment and a sign of the Church that God is calling for us to be. **What are the most challenging obstacles facing Catholic-Anglican unity?** I think we have gotten so used to being divided over the course of the centuries, since the Reformation of Henry VIII, that it's hard for us to envisage the united Church that God wants us to be. Catholics are Catholics in their Church and the same is true of the Anglicans in their Church. We respect each other but we remain on two parallel tracks. Therefore, the greatest challenge is an imaginative barrier. However, I don't think that unity will ever amount to uniformity. Differences will always exist inside the Church, for the Church is the Body of Jesus Christ, formed by its many parts. In Rome, I saw that ecumenism is something one does, and the more it is practised, the more the differences between us can be seen from a new angle. In this way, we might feel frustrated, perhaps even scandalised by the fact that we have become accustomed to our disunity, and this will drive us to change. As Pope Francis said, it is important for us to 'walk together, work together, pray together.' **Many occasions of common prayer, involving the two Churches, are celebrated during the week for Christian Unity, but during the year they are rather infrequent.** At the end of our meeting in Rome, we prayer the 'Our Father' together, with Pope Francis. That 'Our' is by no means taken for granted. Indeed, it is a radical gesture as it means that we are sisters and brothers, children of the same God, finally united. That one word 'Our' symbolizes our commitment to unity." In Rome I realised that the progress of the ecumenical journey starts with prayer, which is always a transforming experience. I also came to realise that I should seek more opportunities to pray together with my Catholic sisters and brothers. In the coming months I will make every effort to identify these new opportunities for prayer, and encourage others to do the same.