

Five Anglican bishops leave for Roman Catholic Church

by [Al Webb](#)

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LONDON (RNS) Five bishops have decided to leave the Church of England and join the Roman Catholic Church under the Vatican's new program to welcome disaffected Anglicans.

The decision by three active and two retired bishops was reported Monday (Nov. 8) by the British Press Association (PA) and confirmed by the Vatican's top spokesman in Rome.

Under a plan announced last year by the Vatican, Anglicans can ally with the Catholic Church while preserving aspects of their Anglican spiritual and liturgical heritage, including married clergy.

The five Anglican bishops were identified as Bishop of Ebbsfleet Andrew Burnham; Bishop of Fulham John Broadhurst; Bishop of Richborough Keith Newton; and two retirees, former bishop of Richborough Edwin Barnes, and the former bishop of Ballarat (Australia), David Silk.

Burnham described the shift to the Vatican as a "fresh, new opportunity for the churches to move close together." But he denied that the ongoing controversy over women bishops in the Anglican Church was the reason.

"Women bishops is a pressing issue," Burnham told the British Press Association, "but this is a question of whether the Anglican Church is, as it says it is, part of the universal church going back to the time of Jesus, or whether it is going off in its own way and making up its own rules, as we think it is."

"We are pioneers," Burnham said, but he also predicted that "there will be priests and parishes who will follow in due course." Burnham

said he had "made this decision in neither sadness nor anger."

Broadhurst said he is "excited but nervous about entering into full communion with the Catholic Church."

He conceded that "I don't know what the future holds," but that "it will either be a huge success or a huge flop."

The head of the Church of England, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, said in a statement, "We wish them well in this next stage of their service to the church and I am grateful to them for their faithful and devoted pastoral labors in the Church of England over many years."