

Pope Benedict XVI, Archbishop of Canterbury to meet

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Despite differences over women's ordination and a controversial Vatican initiative to woo back disgruntled Anglicans, Pope Benedict XVI and Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams will pray together in Rome on Saturday (March 10).

The heads of the Roman Catholic Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion will celebrate vespers to mark the 1,000th anniversary of the Camaldoli monastery in Italy, which is revered by both Catholics and Anglicans.

Benedict and Williams are scheduled to have a private meeting on Saturday morning.

The Catholic Church has strongly criticized the decision to ordain women priests by the Church of England, which is also considering ordaining women bishops.

Before he was elected pope in 2005, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger sent a personal letter of support to U.S. conservatives who later left the Episcopal Church over the ordination of an openly gay bishop.

Relations between the two churches were further strained after the Vatican announced a special structure, called an 'ordinariate,' to allow conservative Anglicans to convert to Catholicism while retaining bits of their Anglican tradition. Two ordinariates have already been created in the U.S. and in Britain.

Even as official relations remain tense, the two men enjoy a strong personal relationship and have met often in the past, most recently in Assisi last October during the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

The renowned Anglican choir of London's Westminster Abbey is scheduled to perform during a papal Mass in St. Peter's Basilica in June.