

Henry VIII's royal chapel hosts Catholic vespers for first time in 450 years

by [Trevor Grundy](#) in the [March 16, 2016](#) issue

For the first time in 450 years, a citadel of Protestant worship in England—the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court Palace in Canterbury—echoed to the sound of Roman Catholic prayers and music.

About 350 people assembled on February 9 inside the ornate palace, about 15 miles from London, as Cardinal Vincent Nichols, head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, led a solemn vespers service, known in the Church of England as evensong.

The service was a symbolic act cementing growing ties between this country's two leading Christian faiths, Catholicism and Anglicanism, divided since the Reformation.

Both are grappling with divisions on women's leadership, sex scandals, and rights for Christian gay and lesbian people; they are keen to emphasize what they have in common in other areas.

"There is much historic resonance about this moment, but in this place, where so much of the impetus of the Reformation was created, was provoked, I think we can now find ourselves side by side with a musical tradition that we share," Nichols said after the service.

A handful of protesters stood on a nearby bridge over the River Thames, including Dominic Stockford, chair of the Protestant Truth Society, founded in 1889 to protest against perceived influence of Roman Catholicism in the Church of England.

"The Roman Catholic Church will treat this as a coup," Stockford said.

Several other protesters from evangelical congregations carried banners reading "The Church of England is denying its own faith" and "Reversing the Protestant Reformation means abandoning the Bible."

The service included 16th-century chants and hymns in Latin, readings from the Bible, and recitation of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). It was assisted by one of the most senior clerics in the Church of England, the bishop of London, Richard Chartres.

In his homily, Chartres spoke of the “tumultuous consequences” of the split between England and Rome during the reign of Henry VIII. And in response to Nichols’s description of Catholics as a “significant minority,” Chartres replied: “Of course, we are all minorities now.” —Religion News Service

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