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## *Friends, Romans, Countrymen!*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

For several weeks, we have heard many reactions to the news that the Roman Catholic Church will announce a process whereby certain Anglicans can join the Roman Church as a group. The world still does not know strict details about this process, but that absence did not keep many of us from speculating about what it meant.

Meanwhile, however, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, we were busy benefiting from the ministry of one of the great contemporary writers on contemplative spirituality, Father Richard Rohr. Yes, he is a priest. Yes, he is actually Roman Catholic, ordained as a priest in the Franciscan order.

He spoke on delightful issues, such as his claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the first non-dualistic thinker in Western Civilization. He reminded us that true contemplative spirituality is really just another phrase for "prayer," and that true prayer is about observing the world non-dualistically. (His recent book, *The Naked Now*, has a special section about how important the word "and" is.)

Over five hundred members and friends of the Cathedral heard Richard Rohr on Saturday, October 24. What a great day it was (even with the competition for parking places with the Cathedral Farmers Market)! I thank the Cathedral Spiritual Formation and Nurture Committee for their work and hospitality. Many of us heard him again at the Dean's Forum on Sunday morning.

Richard Rohr came to the Cathedral of St. Philip not in order to take sides, or even to represent a certain faithful Christian denomination. He came to share his life and experience of the holy. It just so happened that he spoke while many other pundits were trying to pit the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches against one another!

It is moments such as that Saturday that make me proud to be an Anglican, and an Episcopalian, and part of the Cathedral of St. Philip. We are not interested in taking ecclesiastical sides. We are interested in learning about God, in serving God, and in serving the world. It so happens that our most faithful friends, of whatever tradition, are interested in the same things. Praise God! I believe that true progress in ecumenical matters, and in inter-religious matters, will occur most fruitfully at the local level first; it will not happen just because some centralized administration declares it (nor will progress be deterred locally just because an administration has prohibited it!)

In the same way we welcomed Father Richard Rohr, we welcomed the Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery to the Cathedral on Monday, November 2. Naturally, he was proud of having spoken at the inauguration of President Barack Obama. But his deeper words reminded us of an image from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that "there is no separate path to black fulfillment and power that does not intersect with white paths, and there is no separate white path to power and fulfillment that does not share that power with black aspirations."

For Dr. Lowery, that means that, no matter who we are, all our lines intersect. For me, however, that means our lives are always forming angles of blessing with other lives. All our intersecting lines form blessing. Blessing comes from all sorts of angles in the world. Some of those angles are Roman Catholic, and some are Anglican. Some are Jewish, and some might

not be considered religious at all. Some of those angles are black, and some are white.

I am thankful this All Saints season to live in a country where religious choice really is free. Do you want to attend the Episcopal Church? Go for it! Do you want to be Roman Catholic? God be with you! Do you prefer another tradition of faith? Be faithful to it! I believe that our country, the United States of America, is still offering a gift to the world that is quite new: how to live in religious freedom, without an established religion for the political state.

Friends? Romans? Countrymen? Yes and Yes and Yes. Every Christian tradition is about making the word flesh; but there is no perfect religion, no pure denomination that we can convert to, nor even any perfect saint, who always gets it right. God uses every one of us, no matter what our condition, to bless each other and to bless the world.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler