

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



To the clergy, churchwardens and lay archdeaconry synod representatives of France

September 22nd 2016

As you are aware, Archdeacon Ian Naylor will be retiring from office at the end of this month. I know you will want to join with me in expressing thanks to Ian for all that he has done in this role. He is widely respected by clergy and laity across the Archdeaconry. He has given freely and generously of his time and expertise. Many people have told me of the sensitive and wise advice they have received from Ian. He will be greatly missed.

Following consultation with clergy and laity of the archdeaconry and with senior colleagues in the diocese, I am delighted to announce that **The Rev'd. Canon Meurig Williams** has accepted my invitation to take over as Archdeacon from 1st October 2016.

My consultation was extensive and valuable. I am grateful to all those who attended a meeting with me or who wrote thoughtful letters to me. I cannot list all the comments I received but they included the following.

The Archdeaconry is looking for someone whom the clergy will both trust and respect and who will be able to draw alongside those who feel isolated. The appointee should be able to embrace and nurture a wide range of traditions and ways of being church whilst also acting as a focus of unity. They should be able to foster growth whilst also being realistic about decline. They should support the laity and lay officers, encouraging the sharing of expertise between parishes. They need to grasp administrative complexity especially around appointments and health care. The person should be naturally collaborative and work closely with Area Deans. They should be available, communicative and a good mediator in situations of conflict. They should be fluent in French.

Many lamented that we are not, at least at present, in a position to appoint and pay for a full-time archdeacon for France. People spoke of the difficulty of combining the role with chaplaincy responsibilities and of the heavy toll this exacts both on the postholder and on the supporting parish.

Whilst the decision has finally to be mine, I tried to take account of these considerations in my deliberations.

Overall, the post struck me as highly demanding, requiring an exceptional level of pastoral skill, wisdom and experience. Meurig Williams was Archdeacon of Bangor in the Church in Wales for 6 years and has been acting as Archdeacon of North West Europe for the last five years: he is a very experienced archdeacon and has won widespread respect in North West Europe for his sensitivity, wisdom and integrity. He knows the unique character of our diocese well.

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Meurig will continue to act as my commissary and chaplain, and will combine the Archdeacon of France role with the role of Bishop's Chaplain. He will cease to be Archdeacon of North West Europe. As Bishop's Chaplain, Meurig receives a full stipend from the Church Commissioners, who permit me to use my budget to support an archdeacon in this way. Meurig will thus have freedom to visit chaplaincies at weekends and will not be dependent upon resourcing from any particular local chaplaincy.

Meurig's maternal tongue is Welsh and he has life-long Gallic sympathies and instincts. He took his first degree in French and Welsh. Before graduating, he spent a year in Bordeaux before becoming a modern languages teacher. He sensed a call to ministry whilst staying at the Taizé community. Meurig has a deep love for and knowledge of France. He particularly looks forward to supporting the wide range of traditions that our chaplaincies embody in France.

Meurig's home is in Limousin, in central France. His office base will continue to be the Bishop's Office in Brussels and he plans to live mainly in the accommodation we provide for him in French-speaking Belgium. From there, he will have good Thalys/TGV connections into France and good air connections across France from both Charleroi and Brussels airports.

In view of the size and complexity of the Archdeaconry, I would hope that Meurig would give particular attention to the role of Area Deans, and I will be actively considering increasing the number of Area Deans from two to three.

I will commission Meurig on Michaelmas Day, 29th September, at the Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity, Brussels. We hope to hold a service later in the year in France to welcome Meurig to his new role. This appointment is a demanding one, but I am convinced that in Meurig we have the right person for the role. I am personally delighted that he is willing to take on these major responsibilities. I hope you will give Meurig your support as he begins his new ministry.

Yours in the service of Christ,

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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c.c. The Suffragan Bishop
The Diocesan Secretary
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