

Profile: Cardinal-designate Vincent Nichols



Archbishop of Westminster, leader of Roman Catholics in England and Wales and critic of the government's austerity cuts

Archbishop Vincent Nichols speaks to reporters in the week before his is to be made a cardinal by Pope Francis. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

Born 8 November 1945 in Crosby, Liverpool

Age 68

Career: Studied for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome from 1963 to 1970 and ordained in Rome on 21 December 1969 for the archdiocese of Liverpool. Appointed general secretary of the Bishops' Conference in England and Wales in 1984, archbishop of Birmingham in 2000, and archbishop of Westminster in 2009.

High points: Becoming leader of the Roman Catholics in England and Wales five years ago; being created a cardinal by Pope Francis in Rome this coming Saturday.

Low points: Attempting to resist his vocation as he stood in the stands watching Liverpool play as a teenager: "I was protesting to God and saying, 'Why can't you just let me be like everyone else in this crowd?' I don't want this notion of being a priest." And facing a public backlash for declaring that it took "courage" for clergy who had abused children to "face the facts from their past".

What he says

"People do understand that we do need to tighten our belts and be much more responsible and careful in public expenditure. But I think what is happening is two things: one is that the basic safety net that was there to guarantee that people would not be left in hunger or in destitution has actually been torn apart ... And the second is that, in this context, the administration of social assistance, I am told, has become more and more punitive."

What they say

"He's entitled to his own opinion but there are some parts where he is just wrong ... I would think that as a churchman he would be supportive of the work Iain is doing - transforming a cruel and bloated system that often trapped people in poverty on benefits to improve people's life chances." A source close to the work and pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith.

Sam Jones - The Guardian