

Pope Francis appoints a new bishop for Brentwood Diocese



Pope Francis has appointed Father Alan Williams SM, currently the Director of the National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham, as the seventh Bishop of Brentwood.

His episcopal ordination will take place at Brentwood Cathedral on 1st July 2014 at 12 noon.

The bishop-elect was born in Oldham, Lancashire in 1951. He took final vows in the Society of Mary [Marist Fathers] in 1981 and was ordained priest in St Anne's Whitechapel in 1983.

Father Alan holds degrees in theology, psychology and religious education and has served in a number of pastoral roles. He has worked as a teacher and chaplain in secondary schools. He also served as Catholic Chaplain at Sheffield Hallam University and taught Christian Spirituality at postgraduate level.

He is a former major superior of the Marist Fathers in England and has worked as a parish priest in the Archdiocese of Southwark. At Walsingham he has had overall responsibility for pilgrimage and retreat work.

Father Alan Williams said:

“I am both surprised and humbled to have been appointed by Pope Francis as the new Bishop of Brentwood. There is indeed a God of surprises and in my life as a priest and religious I have learned to trust ever more in the grace of God for whatever task has been assigned to me.

“The Diocese of Brentwood embraces many and diverse communities in city and rural locations. I look forward to getting to know the people and clergy of the Diocese; I am aware that I will have a lot of learning and listening to do.

“Emeritus Pope Benedict encouraged Shrine Directors to have a special regard for those on the margins of the Church, ‘of weak ecclesial affiliation’. Great numbers of those on the margins make their way to England’s National Shrine at Walsingham. I believe that the pilgrim journey is an invitation to everyone; Pope Francis reminds us that those who accept the gospel are set free: ‘With Christ joy is constantly born anew’.

“There are many parishes, educational and other communities in Brentwood Diocese and my previous ministries as parish priest, teacher and school and university chaplain, have made me eager to share Christ’s joy with all whom I meet.

“I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor Bishop Thomas McMahon for his faithful and long service to the Diocese. I have worked in a number of different dioceses in England and I know that I can count on the generous support of the priests and deacons of Brentwood.

“I ask for your continued prayers as I undertake my new ministry. Over the years many pilgrims from Brentwood Diocese have made their way to Walsingham; my own pilgrimage now takes me to Brentwood under the patronage of Mary the mother of Jesus and all the saints of the Diocese.”

Outgoing Bishop Thomas McMahon said: “I have been hugely privileged to be Bishop of this diocese for 34 years and now it is time to look to the future.

“I very much welcome the appointment of Fr Alan Williams SM as my successor. Those who have met him in his role at Walsingham – including many from our diocese – have always been deeply impressed by the outstanding hospitality, thoughtfulness and care for pilgrims that he has shown there.

He now brings these pastoral gifts – so important in today’s Church and especially under the present pontificate – to a new and wider role as our next Bishop.

“Part of his charism is that focus on mission which is particularly to do with the fields of evangelisation and education. His skills are wide-ranging: as a former Major Superior to the Marist Communities in Britain, he has leadership experience; he has the pastoral experience of working in a parish; and his work in education is particularly apt for a diocese with nearly 100 schools.”

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