

Francis appoints American archbishop as Vatican nuncio to Great Britain

Pope Francis has appointed a career Vatican diplomat from the United States to be his next papal ambassador to Great Britain.



On Saturday, Archbishop Edward Adams was named to the role which requires him to be the Holy See's representative to Government authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, while also playing a crucial role in the selection of bishops.

Archbishop Adams, a priest from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, will be the first native English speaker to hold the post for more than 50 years: the last one, Archbishop Gerald O'Hara, served from 1959-63 was also from Philadelphia.

PICTURE - Previous nuncio to Great Britain Archbishop Antonio Mennini presents his letter of credence to HM The Queen at Buckingham Palace in 2011.

His position will require him to keep the Vatican abreast of Brexit developments, with the Holy See taking a keen interest in the future of the European Union following Britain's decision to leave the bloc.

The new nuncio, who graduated from Vatican's prestigious diplomatic training school in 1976, is currently serving in Greece and has previously been a papal ambassador to Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and the Philippines.

Aged 72, his posting to Britain is likely to be his last given the bishop retirement age is 75, although this is in keeping with most holders of the position, which is usually seen as a reward for long service.

This changed, however, under Benedict XVI when he appointed Archbishop Antonio Mennini, then aged 63, to the role. Archbishop Mennini, who was recently transferred back to a position at the Secretariat of State responsible for Vatican relations with Italy, was involved in the appointments of a significant number of new bishops in both England and Wales and Scotland.

Whenever a diocese needs a new bishop, the papal nuncio is responsible for drawing up a shortlist of

three candidates along with a detailed report into the local church.

Following the reformation, formal diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the Holy See resumed in 1914 and a Vatican “Apostolic Delegation” to Great Britain was established on 21 November 1938. It wasn’t until 1982, however, that the delegation was promoted to a full nunciature with the papal ambassador today based at a large residence in Parkside, Wimbledon, which is rated as one of the most expensive streets in London.

Following the announcement of Archbishop Adams’ appointment today Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, offered his heartfelt congratulations and “warmest of welcomes” to the incoming apostolic nuncio.

In Scotland, the Archbishop of Glasgow, Philip Tartaglia, who is also president of the Scottish bishops’ conference said: “I welcome the appointment of the new Apostolic Nuncio and offer him our prayerful good wishes for his important service as Nuncio. Together with all the Scottish Bishops, I look forward to welcoming Archbishop Adams to Scotland in due course.”

Christopher Lamb - The Tablet