

## Archdiocese of Southwark



### **Statement of Archbishop Elect John Wilson on his appointment by Pope Francis as the new Archbishop of Southwark**

Someone once said if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans. In whatever way I might have imagined God's plan for my life to unfold, the news of my appointment by Pope Francis as the new Archbishop of Southwark came as a complete surprise. I am grateful to His Excellency Archbishop Edward J. Adams, the Apostolic Nuncio, for his encouragement, and for reminding me of C S Lewis' invitation to be 'surprised by joy.' It is the joy of the Gospel, the Good News of God's love for the world in His Son Jesus Christ, that sustains and animates the Church's mission in which I am to share in a new way.

To say I am deeply humbled by my appointment, while absolutely true, hardly seems adequate. It is an immense privilege and I will do my very best to serve joyfully after the example of the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Aware of my unworthiness and limitations, and with more than a little trepidation, I am grateful to Pope Francis for entrusting me with this new mission in the service of the Lord and His people in the Archdiocese of Southwark. There is so much that is new to me and I know I have much to learn. I rely totally on the Holy Spirit to guide my new ministry of witnessing to the love of God for each person so that we might be evermore a Church of joyful missionary disciples, alive in Christ, our risen Saviour.

For the past three and a half years I have served as an auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Westminster. Through the great kindness and example of Cardinal Vincent Nichols, together with the support of my fellow Bishops, and the clergy, religious and lay people of the Diocese, I have begun to understand

what it means to exercise episcopal ministry. I move to Southwark grateful to the Cardinal for all I have received in Westminster, and not least from the parishes of the western pastoral area and the schools and colleges of the Diocese, for which I have had particular oversight. There have been so many blessings for which I thank the Lord sincerely. I also remain indebted to the Diocese of Leeds where I was nurtured as a priest, and to my family and friends for their constant support and encouragement.

I have received a warm welcome from Archbishop Peter Smith for which I thank him sincerely. I know how much he and his ministry will be missed. I am so pleased that he will be retiring within the Archdiocese. His continued presence and counsel is a great reassurance. We will continue to build on the important foundations he has put in place.

It is with faith-filled anticipation that I look forward to sharing the Church's mission with Bishop Patrick Lynch and Bishop Paul Hendricks, and with the priests, deacons, religious and lay people of the Archdiocese. Together we step out into the future with confidence, trusting that the Lord is indeed with us. As we deepen our love for Him, we will continue to look outwards in the service of our brothers and sisters, not least the weakest and the poorest.

The Lord Jesus says to each of us *'I call you friends'* (Jn 15:15). It is in friendship that I come, a friendship as wide and embracing as the wonderful variety of people and places within the Archdiocese of Southwark, both inside and beyond the Church.

I am reminded again today of the words of Pope Francis which I take to heart: *'The bishop must always foster this missionary communion...following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32). To do so, he will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths.'* (Evangelii Gaudium 31)

My appointment is announced on the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church. May Our Lady, with her heavenly maternal care, pray for everyone in our Archdiocese. May she, the Star of the New Evangelisation, teach us to love Jesus as she loves Him so that others too might know His love.

Please be sure of my prayers for you and for our journey together in faith, hope, love and joy. And please pray for me as I prepare to begin this new ministry of service as a witness to Jesus Christ.

+ John Wilson  
Archbishop Elect of Southwark  
10 June 2019