

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

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Bishop Michael announces his intention to step down as Bishop of Rochester

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali has announced his intention to step down as Bishop of Rochester as from 1st September 2009. He will have been Bishop in the Diocese for nearly 15 years and during this time has played a major part in the life of the church.

Bishop Michael is hoping to work with a number of church leaders from areas where the church is under pressure, particularly in minority situations, who have asked him to assist them with education and training for their particular situation. Details of this arrangement are still being worked out.

Bishop Michael, who will be 60 in August, is the 106th Bishop of Rochester. He is originally from Asia and was the first non-white Diocesan Bishop in the Church of England. He was appointed to Rochester in 1994. Before that he was the General Secretary of CMS from 1989-1994 and before that Bishop of Raiwind in Pakistan and theological Assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Since 1999 he has also been a member of the House of Lords where he has been active in a number of areas of national and international concern.

Bishop Michael says, "We thank God for his blessings and for friends we have made in the Diocese in the past 15 years. I am so grateful to God for the friendship and loyalty of those around us and ask for people's prayers as we take this step of faith 'not knowing where we are going' (Heb 11:8).

The Archbishop of Canterbury says: *Bishop Michael's decision to undertake this new and very challenging ministry will leave a real gap in the ranks of English bishops. His enormous theological skill, his specialist involvement in the complex debates around bioethics, his wide international experience and his clarity of mind and expression have made him a really valuable colleague, and he has served the Church and the wider society with dedication and distinction.*

In his new work with churches in minority situations, he will need all our prayer and support. It is a courageous initiative and a timely one. I am personally very glad that I shall still be able to draw on his expertise and friendship, and wish him every strength and blessing in his work.

The Bishop of Tonbridge, the Rt Revd Dr Brian Castle says: *"Bishop Michael has had a distinguished ministry locally, nationally and internationally. He has been a true prophet in the way that he has courageously spoken out against both injustice and compromising the Word of God. His talks and statements, always prayerfully conceived, are listened to carefully, even by those who disagree with him. His Presidential Addresses at Diocesan Synod merit publication. Bishop Michael, so faithfully supported by Valerie, has exercised a leadership which inspires, challenges and takes full account of the complexities of contemporary culture, ensuring that the structures of the diocese serve its vision. He will be greatly missed by Rochester whose people he has faithfully loved and nurtured over the years."*

The Dean of Rochester, the Very Revd Adrian Newman, says: “Bishop Michael has exercised an influential and high profile ministry within and well beyond the Diocese of Rochester. His passion for making Christ known is matched only by his ability to communicate across cultural divisions, and this has opened doors of influence that he has always been courageous enough to walk through, often at personal cost. It has been a privilege to serve alongside him within the Diocese, and I am delighted that his unique gifts will continue to be offered to the wider life of church and society.”

The Diocesan Secretary, Canon Louise Gilbert, says: “Bishop Michael’s tenure has been characterised by a determination to see some significant Diocesan challenges through to successful conclusion. Through his leadership we now have a senior staff which operates as a cohesive body following a comprehensive Diocesan structures review. This is of benefit to the entire Diocese. In addition, we have reformed partnerships with neighbouring Dioceses. Rochester Cathedral is now positively flourishing thanks to Bishop Michael’s keen interest and thoughtful appointments. His considerable gifts leave the Diocese with a legacy of exemplary arrangements for pastoral care, teaching and a positive environment in which faith can flourish. We will miss his guidance and on a personal note, I wish him every joy and fulfilment in his new role.”

Bishop Michael’s farewell service for the Diocese will be held at Rochester Cathedral on 12th September 2009 at 3.15 p.m. and further details will be circulated at a later date. Details about the process of appointing a new Bishop and the arrangements during the interregnum will also be published later.

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