

Interview with Bishop Richard Moth on his Ordination as Catholic Bishop of the Forces

29 September 2009

How do you feel about taking on the role of Bishop of the Forces?

I am very conscious that great trust has been placed in me with this new appointment. While I do feel privileged to be called to be a Bishop, the responsibility is enormous, serious and awesome.

I value very highly the huge amount of support and prayer I received from many, many people. This is a great blessing.

I have also received many warm words of welcome from the chaplains and from others who serve in our Armed Forces – as well as from the Bishops of these Islands. I look forward to working with them in the years to come.

How will you approach your new role – what are your priorities?

I see my ministry in terms of service to them and in leadership and encouragement in the life of Christ and His Church and I am mindful that I am building on the excellent work of the Bishops who have served the Forces before me.

My first priority will be to meet with people – chaplains, service personnel and their families. I have to get to know a lot of people! This will involve some travelling and I hope that will include a visit to Afghanistan in the not-too-distant future.

A major focus of my work will be support for chaplains in their ministry.

There is a need for more chaplains to serve in the Bishopric of the Forces and this is a matter that I shall be addressing, in conjunction with the Principal Chaplains. It is vital that our service personnel have every opportunity to meet with and have the services of Catholic Chaplains.

I am looking forward to the Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes and to every other opportunity to encourage our chaplains, forces personnel and their families in their spiritual lives.

These are challenging times for the men and women of our Armed Forces. They are faced with the “big questions” – life and death, the possibility of serious injury – which, sadly, becomes a reality for many. Chaplains are there to be with them and bring the consolation of the Gospel message to them, to help them to face those questions.

The families and loved ones of our deployed troops face many challenges too - the anxiety of waiting for news, knowing that it may not be good news. For some, coping with bereavement, for others supporting returning family members who may be physically injured and will be carrying the burden of traumatic experiences that are often very difficult to talk about. The Church has its own, very important part to play in support and care for families.

Your predecessor, Bishop Tom Burns, was outspoken in criticising the Ministry of Defence for what he regarded as shortcomings in the support for the military, for example, equipment shortages and poor standards of married quarters – will you be similarly critical?

Certainly, Bishop Tom did criticise the MoD at times – not, in fact, very often, but when he felt it necessary. As Bishop, the welfare of personnel and their families will always be a priority and I am certainly open to the possibility of speaking out, should it be necessary.

How well do you know the military situation and their pastoral requirements?

My service as a Territorial Army Chaplain took me to Germany and I have also had a very enjoyable visit to the Falkland Islands where the Parish Priest in Port Stanley is a priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark. While my TA service has given me a good insight into service life, it was at a very different time for our service personnel. I have much to learn. I am fortunate to have excellent senior chaplains to assist me and I am very pleased to be working with them.

Will you spend a lot of time travelling?

As with any other Bishop, my task lies in the support of people and priests. I will go wherever they are, at home or overseas, and very much look forward to spending time with them.

Will you be going to Afghanistan?

I consider this a high priority and arrangements will be made as soon as possible for a visit there.

Do you think British troops should remain in Afghanistan?

Our Government views the deployment of troops to Afghanistan as necessary for the security of this country and a step towards achieving a greater level of peace in one of the world's trouble spots. For as long as Government considers it necessary, our service personnel will be there.

What is important for me is the mission of the Church in that context – being alongside people who are doing a dangerous job in very difficult circumstances. Our chaplains continue to minister to our forces personnel, to bring them the Sacraments, to provide a listening ear and a ministry of presence for them. I am completely committed to that work.