

Interview with the Very Rev Mgr Mark Davies on the announcement of his appointment as Coadjutor Bishop of Shrewsbury

22 December 2009

How did you learn of the choice of the Holy Father to appoint you to this service in the Shrewsbury Diocese? Were you surprised?

I suspect it was as much a surprise to me as it was to the Diocese! Amid my normal schedule on a Tuesday morning I received a phone call from the Apostolic Nuncio, the Pope's personal representative in Great Britain, asking me to come to London at the earliest opportunity to meet with him. I travelled to London that night and the Papal Nuncio received me with great kindness and told me the Holy Father was asking me to become the Coadjutor Bishop of Shrewsbury. I was struck by the very personal and direct way the question was put and wanted to respond generously to what the Holy Father asked knowing my own human limitations and so trusting in the grace of God. I'd made a short detour on my way to London to visit a Shrine of Our Lady at Kearsley in Greater Manchester and there to place whatever was to be asked of me into Mary's hands that I might respond with faith and courage. So when asked would I accept the Holy Father's invitation I was able to reply, "If this is what the Holy Father asks of me then I accept." After a prayer in the Papal Nuncio's private chapel I knelt to receive his blessing and set out on the long, return journey to Salford and soon to Shrewsbury Diocese! As the hours passed along the road and in the inevitable traffic queues I was able to pray the Rosary and reflect on what had just happened. I knew amid all my thoughts it was now out of love for Christ and loyalty to the Successor of St. Peter that I must cross the River Mersey from the life I'd known in Salford Diocese and now offer my life in the service of the Shrewsbury Diocese.

How well do you know the area of the Diocese?

I am no stranger to the Shrewsbury Diocese as I've spent most of my life as a close neighbour. Much of my early life was in Stockport and all my priestly life has been in the Salford Diocese which is one of Shrewsbury's closest neighbours. So while I already know a little of the geography and the diverse communities which make-up the Shrewsbury Diocese, I very much look forward to getting to know the Diocese as a whole.

What needs to be done in the Diocese of Shrewsbury?

I remember Pope Paul VI being asked a similar question and replying that what is most needed is always an increase of faith. I'm sure that will always be our greatest need: to increase in faith, to be faith-full! I'm conscious too that I come to the Diocese not only to begin a task but to continue the work which began more than 150 years ago. So it's this story of faithfulness we need to confidently continue at the beginning of the 21st century.

How do you feel about becoming Coadjutor Bishop of Shrewsbury?

Only a very foolish man wouldn't feel apprehension before so great a responsibility! I do, however, feel it's a privilege to have been unexpectedly called by the Holy Father to this service. Such appointments are never of your own making and this brings a consolation to see in these events the Lord calling me to this new life and ministry as a Bishop in Shrewsbury Diocese.

How will you be approaching your new job in the Diocese?

I think initially on a sharp learning curve! I am very blessed at the beginning of my ministry to be an assistant and co-worker beside Bishop Noble and to get to know my brother priests in the Diocese who've already "borne the heat of the day" by their labours across so many years and that's where I'd very much want to start.

What changes will you make? What are your priorities?

My first personal priority is prayer, for everything must begin with prayer and then I want to listen and to see the life of the Diocese and the priorities Bishop Noble has been working towards. The first thing I read was Father Peter Philip's, "Brief History of our Diocese," and his words struck me, "we have a good foundation: sure of our past, our Diocese of Shrewsbury embraces its future with prayerful confidence." I think on this foundation, and very much united with the Holy Father as the Successor of St. Peter, we will be ready to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Will you miss the Diocese of Salford?

This is the hardest part of the change for me. I have a great love for the Salford Diocese and have worked closely with Bishop Terence Brain and felt very much part of the community of priests and the parishes I've served for 26 years. However, I also know we are always, "at home," in the Catholic Church whichever side of the Mersey and look forward to my new place and service in the family of the Shrewsbury Diocese.

What do you think your time spent in Salford has given you to prepare for this position of great responsibility?

I see my experience as first and foremost that of a Parish Priest, a "pastor of souls." The whole of my priesthood, except for my years as Bishop's Secretary, has been engaged in the work of a wide range of parishes while taking on various responsibilities at diocesan level. From this experience I know how much depends on the vocation and task of the Parish Priest as "pastor and leader of the parish community." I've also enjoyed the experience of working closely with my own bishops in Salford first as a young priest sharing the Bishop's daily work as his Private Secretary and for the past seven years as Vicar General of the Diocese assisting the Bishop in his wide range of responsibilities. I bring this experience with me as a new Bishop.

I'm not sure I'm allowed to explain my answers to these questions but I'd like to...

Red/Blue - every Mancunian is born either on the red or blue side of Manchester, so my answer would have to be red!

Beer/Champagne - as a Northerner my answer would have to be beer!

Meat Pies/Fillet Steak - now I'm over fifty not sure either is a healthy option but as my last parish was in Wigan I must choose the meat pie.

Mozart/Boyzone - I've listened to a lot of Mozart but can't remember ever hearing Boyzone so it would have to be Mozart.

Coronation Street/Eastenders - coming from Salford Diocese it would always be Coronation Street!

Cricket/Football - though I play neither as a spectator it would be football.