

## **A New Bishop for Plymouth!**

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The big news today is that as of about 11am it was announced that the Pope has appointed Mgr Mark O'Toole as new Bishop of Plymouth.

Bishop elect Mark (not a bad Christian name if you ask me) was personal secretary to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and then, from 2008, Rector of Allen Hall Seminary.

Mgr O'Toole's piscopal ordination will take place at 2pm on Tuesday 28 January 2014 at the Cathedral Church of St Mary and St Boniface in Plymouth.

He will succeed Bishop Christopher Budd, who has been Bishop of Plymouth since 1986.

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22 June 1963 Born in London, the youngest son of Marcus and Maura O'Toole who originally came from the Irish-speaking community of Connemara, Galway, Ireland. Attended St Ignatius Primary School, Stamford Hill and St Thomas More Secondary school in Wood Green. Left school with four 'A' levels in 1981.

1984 Graduated with a B.Sc. in Geography from the University of Leicester

1984-89 Studied for the Priesthood at Allen Hall Seminary, graduating with a Bachelor of Divinity in Theology.

1989-90 Pastoral work as a deacon in St Joan of Arc Parish, Highbury

9 June 1990 Ordained priest of the Diocese of Westminster by Cardinal Basil Hume

1990-92 M. Phil in Theology at the University of Oxford. Wrote a thesis on the relationship between Divine and Human freedom, supervised by the Lady Margaret Professor, Dr Rowan Williams.

1992-97 Assistant priest in St Mary Magdalene parish, Willesden Green; part-time lecturer in Catechesis.

1997-2002 Member of Staff at Allen Hall Seminary – Lecturer in Theology and Formation Adviser to seminarians. Sacred License in Theology from Pontifical University, Leuven granted in 2000.

1999-2002 Dean of Studies, Allen Hall Seminary

2002-2008 Private Secretary to Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster

Sept. 2008 Appointed Rector, Allen Hall Seminary

A member of the Archbishop's Council (Diocese of Westminster); Council of Priests (Diocese of Westminster); Governing Body of Heythrop College, University of London; Ethics Committee of St John and St Elisabeth Hospital, and Trustee of the Wintershall Trust.

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“I am deeply humbled that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, has appointed me the new Bishop of Plymouth. Recognising that I am a sinner who experiences the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus, I embrace with my whole self this deeper call to service in His Church. I know that the example and witness of Pope Francis will continue to inspire and shape my ministry as Shepherd to all in the Diocese, especially to serve the poor, the weak, and those who feel alienated from God, as I work alongside fellow Christians.

“This part of the country is known for its outstanding natural beauty, and this is mirrored in the gracious welcome shown to the newcomer by its people. I look forward very much to putting down firm roots in the Diocese and making my home in Plymouth. I know I can count on the prayer, co-operation and support of the people, the religious and especially the priests of the Diocese who are renowned for their quiet heroism, fidelity and dedication. You will all show me what it means to be your Bishop. I am grateful, too, that Bishop Christopher will be nearby so that I can draw on his wisdom and experience.

“My own priestly heart has been formed in the Diocese of Westminster and I have been richly blessed by the faith and witness of many – bishops, priests, seminarians, religious, and lay men and women. I

look especially to the outstanding leadership of my three Archbishops - Cardinal Basil Hume OSB, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and Archbishop Vincent Nichols. Each of them has taught me so much. I am deeply grateful for the friendship and love of so many in the Diocese and I ask their continued prayer. I will miss especially everyone at Allen Hall. I have seen how essential the vocation of the priest is for our Church and our society. I hope I can continue to make its promotion a priority in this new mission.

“I entrust the whole Diocese of Plymouth, and myself, into the loving care of Mary, our Mother, as we set out on this journey together, seeking also the intercession of St Boniface and our diocesan saints, especially St Cuthbert Mayne.”

The Catholic Herald reports that Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster, said: “‘It is in giving that we receive.’ These words come to mind as we, in the Diocese of Westminster, welcome the news that Mgr Mark O’Toole is to be the next Bishop of Plymouth in succession to Bishop Christopher Budd.

“Mgr Mark has fulfilled many roles in our Diocese, best known as Rector of our Seminary, Allen Hall, and as Secretary to Cardinal Cormac for six years. He is a dedicated, gifted and experienced priest who will become an excellent Bishop of Plymouth and a valued member of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.

“We shall miss him but always hold him in our prayers especially as he prepares to take up this new mission, given by the Lord. He will go to Plymouth fully supported by the love and esteem of everyone in this Diocese.”

Personally I am a bit worried that this will be seen as confirmation of the rumour that Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor has special influence with Pope Francis. I would emphasise that this is rumour and we can't really know what is going on.

The people I know who know Mgr Mark say that he is a decent enough fellow, though I have heard it said that he has not been terribly receptive to Summorum Pontificum, even going as far as to differentiate the two forms on a theological basis (I would like to hear that argument!).

I met him when I was at Heythrop for Robert Barron's lecture a couple of years ago. There's no doubt that he is a safe choice; pleasant, probably a bit of a yes man, someone who won't rock the boat. He is orthodox, and apparently reads von Balthazar, so that's good.

Given the rumours that the bishop's conference felt that Bishop Mark Davies and Bishop Philip Egan were too orthodox, perhaps this might be a compromise appointment. He's certainly not in the liberal camp, even though he's no Philip Egan.

The thing is, I have heard it reported of Mark Davies from someone who knew him that before his episcopal ordination, he was rather unremarkable. We must pray for Bishop-elect Mark O'Toole, that the grace of episcopal ordination may fill him with zeal and courage to do what is right for his flock.

Reporters