

Welcome to His Holiness Pope Francis

It gives me enormous pleasure to welcome Your Holiness to the Church of England Parish of All Saints this afternoon. This is the first time that a Roman Pontiff has visited an Anglican parish in his own diocese of Rome and so it is an historic occasion.

Of course, Your Holiness is no stranger to Anglican-Catholic relationships. You have had three formal meetings with our Primate, Justin, and your friendship towards him is something our communion values greatly. In October last year during Vespers at San Gregorio al Cielo you presented him with a replica of the pastoral staff given by Pope St. Gregory to St. Augustine of Canterbury. That was a deeply significant symbolic act.

Also at that service, pairs of Anglican and Catholic bishops were jointly commissioned by Your Holiness and Archbishop Justin. I was one of the Anglican bishops and the memory of that occasion will stay with me forever.

Your Holiness, I would like to express gratitude to God for your global leadership, and for the particular inspiration you have been to those of us in the Anglican Communion. You have recalled us to the importance of ministry amongst the poor. You have stood alongside the refugee and the migrant. You have initiated work on modern slavery and human trafficking. Within Europe and our diocese, you have challenged members of the European Union to rediscover their Christian heritage and values. Your published work speaks far beyond Rome in addressing difficult ethical issues that face us all.

Your holiness, we are deeply honoured by your presence with us today. We hope and pray that this will be one more small step in further strengthening the unity between our churches and in celebrating the deep bonds of Anglican Roman Catholic friendship that we already enjoy.

+Robert Innes

Bishop of the Church of England Diocese in Europe