

THE PARISH OF ST GEORGE, BICKLEY

Part of the Richborough Family

3rd October 2025

Dear Friends,

You will have seen that the Prime Minister has announced the appointment of The Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullaly as the next archbishop of Canterbury. Parishioners have been asking me what this means for us here at St George's as traditional Anglo-Catholics, and so I am writing to make things clear.

While the appointment of a female archbishop may be an attention-grabbing event, it need make no practical difference to the life of traditionalists in the Church of England. In the settlement that allowed women to be consecrated as bishops, provision was explicitly made for the sacramental ministry of traditionalist bishops to be available to traditionalist parishes. The bishops of Richborough, Ebbsfleet, Oswestry and Beverley exist to serve the traditionalists in the Church of England, building on the model used by the diocese of London for some years, where the bishop of Fulham has provided episcopal ministry to traditionalist parishes. The point for traditionalists has always been that since the ordination of women to the episcopate is plainly a break with the tradition of the worldwide Church, and goes against the witness of scripture, that calls into doubt all the sacraments that they celebrate, and since the whole purpose of sacraments is that they are trustworthy channels of God's grace, this introduces an alarming element of uncertainty into the sacramental life of the Church, which is wholly at odds with the bishop's role as a focus of unity.

For the past eleven years the Church of England has ordained women bishops, but has ensured that traditional believers have continued to be served by priests and bishops whose orders they can wholeheartedly rely on and whose biblical orthodoxy they can trust. Bishop Sarah has worked within that system faithfully, and as a parish priest in central London I had personal experience of that. When she says that she wants the traditional integrity to flourish in the Church of England I believe her. I fully expect that she will continue to operate the system in the same way as archbishop Justin did. So, although the bishops of Richborough, Oswestry and Ebbsfleet are technically suffragans of Canterbury this is simply a legal device to enable them to minister throughout the province of Canterbury without question. I was present at the two most recent consecrations (of the current bishops of Oswestry and Richborough) and saw that the archbishop, while presiding at the service, took no part in the consecration of the bishop, which was done by three traditionalist bishops about whose sacramental ministry there could be no doubt. The orders of our bishops and priests do not depend on the archbishop of Canterbury. The efficacy of our sacraments is not affected in any way by the identity of the archbishop of Canterbury. Our traditionalist bishops continue to ordain new priests to serve in our parishes, irrespective of the occupant of the throne of St Augustine.

Having said that, however, of course the appointment must be a cause for concern. It is at the least uncomfortable for those of us who hold a biblical faith and a traditional understanding of the Church's faith and order to find that the figurehead of the Church of England has been appointed with apparently so little regard for those values. It is by no means only traditional Anglo-Catholics who are unsettled by this appointment, as many Evangelicals are equally alarmed. For Anglo-Catholics sacramental certainty is vital, but we share with our Evangelical brethren a deep anxiety about teaching that departs from biblical and traditional orthodoxy. It is frankly very surprising that an appointment process that was supposed to have listened more to the input of worldwide Anglicanism has produced an appointment that is out of step with the majority in worldwide Anglicanism, where biblical truth and traditional authority are strongly upheld. This is not merely a question of holy order, but of faithfulness to the scriptures and the traditional moral teaching of the Church, and the Church of England appears to have chosen instead to go along with a contemporary secular consensus. You can rest assured that as long as I am the parish priest here the Church's traditional understanding of Christian marriage and personal morality will continue to be taught, alongside the Catholic faith and order that the Church of England claims to uphold.

Please pray for bishop Sarah, as she prepares to take on an impossible role, and continue to pray for bishop Jonathan of Rochester, and Luke, bishop of Richborough and our bishop, who will be visiting us next month to confirm our nine confirmation candidates. I am always available to discuss this (or any other) matter.

Yours in Christ

Fr Henry

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