

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



July 1st 2016

Pastoral Letter

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The UK's Referendum on EU membership is one of the most significant political events of our time, for British people and for Europeans more generally. For some it is seen as an opportunity, for many others of us it has generated profound feelings of sadness, grief and shock. These feelings may exist within the membership of our chaplaincies and if so need to be recognised. We encourage you to talk to your clergy about what has happened, and to seek mutual support and understanding.

We know that many with British connections in our diocese are fearful and uncertain about the future. There are concerns about health care, pension rights, residence rights, employment rights. In fact none of these rights will change in the short to medium term. If the leaving process ('Article 50') is invoked by the UK Government this autumn then the arrangements for the UK's future relationship with the EU are unlikely to be sorted until the end of 2018. And there are several alternative models for a new relationship. Those of us with influence can do what we can to keep the situation of those UK nationals who are relatively vulnerable in the public eye in forums such as General Synod and the House of Lords. Meanwhile we encourage an attitude of patience, wisdom and the avoidance of hasty decisions.

We have had English-speaking chaplaincies on the European mainland for over 400 years. That is not going to change, and the Church of England remains fully committed to this her Diocese in Europe. Our ecumenical partners have reacted with dismay to the UK's referendum result. It is now more important than ever that we reassure our brother and sister Christians at a local level of our unwavering commitment to our partnership with them. We believe it is also right that our churches re-double their efforts to demonstrate the unity which transcends national and political boundaries, and their social commitment to the places and projects in which they are involved locally.

One of the least attractive features of the Referendum campaign has been the intolerance – racism even - that it has seemed to encourage. This is a worrying feature of contemporary Europe more generally. So we emphasise that our churches are open and inclusive places where all are welcome.

We exhort you all to pray. Pray for political leaders across Europe as they seek to maintain European cohesiveness. Pray that the UK may be a generous and outward looking country that contributes to human flourishing around the world. Pray also for church leaders that we may enable the Christian family to model that harmony and unity which is the vision of God's kingdom, in the midst of a fractured world.

Faith is the powerful antidote to fear and uncertainty. As Christians, we believe in a God who holds the destiny of the nations in his hands. So at an uncertain time in Europe's history, we pray for and invoke the providential guiding and leading of God in the hearts of us all and upon every nation.

Yours in Christ,

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