The Bishop in Europe:

**The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes**

ST. MICHAEL’S PARIS

Statement from the Diocesan Bishop

The Diocese in Europe is the 42nd Diocese of the Church of England. We are by far the biggest in terms of land area, as we range across over 40 countries in a territory approximately matching that covered by the Council of Europe. We currently attract unprecedented interest within the Church of England, as we are that part of the Church that specifically maintains links with Europe at a time of political uncertainty between Britain and Europe.

To help oversee our vast territory we have two bishops, myself based in Brussels, and my Suffragan Bishop David based in London. We have six Archdeacons. The Archdeacon of France is also my chaplain and commissary, and he works out of my office in Brussels as well as having a base at his home in Limousin. We have a diocesan office that nestles in a corner of Church House Westminster. Importantly, and unlike English dioceses, our chaplaincies pay for their own clergy, and the diocese has relatively few support staff.

The diocesan strategy was formulated and approved over the course of 2015. We are emphasising our commitment to building up congregational life, our part in the re-evangelisation of the continent; our commitment to reconciliation at every level; and our particular role in serving the poor, the marginalised and the migrant. I am hoping that all our chaplains will help their communities find their place within this strategy.

Our ‘overseas’ nature gives us a very different character from other English dioceses. Our clergy and their families live within the intersection of English church culture with local cultures. Whilst this requires a high level of resilience, and can put particular pressures on clergy and accompanying spouses, it is enriching and energising. The cultural transition involved should not be underestimated, and candidates should note the French language criterion applying to this post. Of course, the centre of Paris is a world heritage site and an exceptionally beautiful place to live and work!

St. Michael’s Paris offers, in my view, an exceptional opportunity for an exceptional priest. The chaplaincy was once the largest church in the diocese. Its luminaries have included the current Archbishop of Canterbury. It was once the major English-speaking worship centre in Paris. But the religious landscape has changed; there are other English-speaking churches in town, and now St. Michael’s must establish a new identity and a new sense of mission. So we need someone who can inhabit fully the great heritage and at the same time lead and guide the community into a new future.

St. Michael’s occupies a wonderfully central location, close to metro routes and just around the corner from the Presidential Palace. ICS has a 49% stake in the valuable central Paris property used by St. Michael’s for worship and meetings. The question of St. Michael’s identity vis-à-vis its building and location recurs frequently, and the new priest will need to be willing to engage with these issues with enthusiasm.

St. Michael’s is a diverse, international community. The Tamil community is a treasured part of the chaplaincy. St. Michael’s has a reputation as one of the diocese’s most generous churches with a fine tradition of hospitality. Its central location means it is used from time to time for diocesan events such as chrism eucharists. The tradition of the church is evangelical in an attractively open and mildly charismatic way.

As Bishop I would want St. Michael’s new chaplain to be rooted in prayer, a clear and orthodox teacher of the Christian faith, who has the capacity to provide capable and collaborative leadership and to provide loving pastoral care to the congregations. He/she will need to have the skills to establish a new vision for St. Michael’s and to unite the congregation behind it.

ICS will be working closely and carefully with the diocese to discern the right person for this major post.

If you would like an informal discussion about the role please do contact ICS or Archdeacon Meurig Williams in Brussels.

+Robert Gibraltar in Europe