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BECOMING ARCHDEACON OF GIBRALTAR, ITALY AND MALTA

THE times they are a changing' as Bob Dylan sang way back in the '60's! Last Sunday I was able to announce that I am stepping down as Anglican Chaplain for Majorca and taking up the new post of Archdeacon of Gibraltar, Italy and Malta. I thought a word of explanation and background might help here!

The Church of England is a funny old place to work in and with! For most of us we see the C of E in the flesh, as it were, in the local parish or chaplaincy. We see a church building, populated on a Sunday morning by a diverse crowd of punters. We see a 'Vicar' or as we call these folk here in Europe 'Chaplains', that is someone who is given the leadership role in such a local community. You might catch a glimpse of your Chaplain at a wedding or funeral or scurrying about the countryside visiting his or her 'flock'.

But the 'Church' is primarily the Diocese. That is, it is that wider family of communities which is led by a Bishop. So Bishop Robert (for our Diocese in Europe) is in fact the chief minister here for Mallorca as he is for all the different chaplaincies throughout Europe. Over the last seven years I have had the privilege of sharing in his ministry as the person acting on his behalf here in Palma, (acting 'vicariously' – hence the title!).

I tell you all of this because its my Bishop who says when I get to tell people about my new appointment and being a good little Chaplain, I do what I'm told (mostly!). So back in early October I travelled to Brussels for interview and was offered the post. Since then I've had to 'sit on' that information while references were taken up, my Safeguarding credentials were checked and a medical letter from my GP was provided. Its not easy keeping a secret like that of course as I was really very pleased to have been offered this opportunity to serve in a different way. So, that process largely completed Bp Robert and I agreed on a date to announce this information. That was last Sunday.

So what is an Archdeacon and what will I be doing in that role? The Church has a relatively flat management structure. In charge at the top is our Bishop and, in every parish, or chaplaincy, there is a chaplain who leads the local ministry. The Diocese is divided into Archdeacons and in the case of Europe there are seven of them. Each of these subsections has an Archdeacon who acts as the senior priest for that part of the whole Diocese on behalf of the Bishop.

So I will be that person for the Archdeaconry of Gibraltar which is our part of the world. This is made up of Portugal, Morocco, Spain, Andorra and Gibraltar. I'll also be the Archdeacon of Italy and Malta – a title that is a little more self-explanatory of course!

I will be primarily responsible for supporting the life of every chaplaincy within those areas

and countries and doing that first and foremost through encouraging the individual clergy in their ministry. It's a rather different prospect being a chaplain or parish priest out here in the Diocese in Europe than it is in England. There you have another colleague in the next door parish, perhaps just a mile or so away down the road, or in the next village. Here my nearest colleague is an hour's drive away, and for many clergy in Spain that trip might also involve a flight. Isolation is therefore one of the biggest factors for us Chaplains working in Spain (although this will apply elsewhere too).

So to have a senior colleague who's task it is to try to care for all of these clergy, to encourage them in their work, to help them reflect on why they chose to do this in the first place – well that's an important role. I will very much enjoy being this person for my colleagues in the areas that I am going to be Archdeacon for.

On a personal level it will be hard to move on from being Chaplain at Palma as this has been (mostly) a lovely post to have held. I will continue to live on Majorca as the Bishop has recognised that of course its not just me that is involved in this move, but my wife as well. While she will not be taking on aspects of my work of course she has her own life and existence as a person living here in Palma.

So often in clergy life the person that you are married to ends up being dragged around the country from parish to parish as the priest gets successive new posts. If you think about it that

makes sense because you have to move to live in your new parish. But it does mean that a spouse has to 'start again' each time. Making new friends, perhaps getting a new job and so on. For this new post for me, well we already live in the Archdeaconry so there is no need for a big move. While we will no longer live at the house attached to the church in Palma, we will live somewhere near Palma here on the island. My wife will therefore be able to carry on her current work as an educational consultant and mindfulness coach while I do my new thing as well! A 'win win'.

So my last official Sunday at Palma will be 5th January, The Feast of the Epiphany, and if I have my way there will be cake and cava after the service that day! It will be a day of mixed emotions for me as the outgoing chaplain. It's good to look forward to new challenges but sad to say goodbye to people and a community which I have loved being a part of and leading. I remember saying to a colleague when I first arrived that I felt I'd been given 'the best post in the Church of England' and I still feel that to a great degree.

There will be the inevitable process of seeking to appoint a new chaplain for Palma but that's for the future and for another *Bulletin* article at some point. In the meanwhile I ask for your prayers as I look towards taking on my new role and as my wife and I get to grips with all the practical stuff involved in moving homes and starting afresh somewhere new.

The Anglican Chaplain