

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

## **New Rector for the National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham**

12 July 2023

The Reverend Dr Robert Billing has been appointed the new Rector of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk. He will serve for a five-year term and will take up his new responsibilities from 1 September 2023.

Fr Billing is a priest of the Diocese of Lancaster and served as Bishop's Secretary to three successive bishops over a period of thirteen years. He is currently parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Carnforth, some seven miles north of Lancaster.

As Rector, Fr Billing will oversee the mission of the National Shrine and will be responsible for the pastoral and spiritual care of pilgrims, the Shrine Chaplains and visiting clergy. The Rector also promotes the message and work of the Shrine nationally and internationally.

Fr Billing expressed his surprise and joy at his appointment:

"My appointment to serve as the new Rector of the Catholic National Shrine and Basilica of Our Lady of Walsingham comes as a big surprise. Of course, it is also a huge joy and honour.

"Only a year ago, I was appointed, after a number of years in diocesan administration, school chaplaincy, and, more recently, engaged in canon law studies, to pastor three small parishes north of Lancaster, each under the patronage of Our Blessed Lady. I had never expected my time in these parishes to be so short, though in this year I have learnt much and received so much encouragement. Now, I take the faithful of these parishes with me in prayer to the heart of Our Lady's Dowry, to Walsingham.

"As I take up this further service to the Church, this time nationally, I venture, first, as a pilgrim, eager to learn and to serve closely with those who dedicate themselves to make Walsingham 'England's Nazareth' today. I hope to share and confirm that commitment.

The Bishop of Lancaster, the Right Reverend Paul Swarbrick, welcomed the news:

"It is an honour for the Diocese of Lancaster for one of our priests to be chosen as Rector for the National Shrine to Our Blessed Lady at Walsingham. I am delighted that Fr Billing has accepted this appointment.

"When I was first asked to release him, I must confess that I said 'no' because I believed the need of the Diocese could not spare him. Further reflection followed and I sensed that this request was actually coming from Our Blessed Lady, and I decided that I did not want to get on the wrong side of her!

"I have every confidence, given Fr Billing's considerable talents and experience, that he is a good choice for this significant position in the national church. The work of the Shrine will be safe in his care. Our Lady of Walsingham, pray for us."

As Bishop of the Diocese of East Anglia, it was the Right Reverend Peter Collins' responsibility to appoint a new Rector for the National Marian Shrine:

"I am immensely grateful to Bishop Paul Swarbrick of Lancaster for his generosity in releasing Fr Robert for this important role.

"Fr Robert brings with him a wealth of talent and experience that will stimulate our vision of the future. His spiritual, pastoral and administrative abilities will undoubtedly bear abundant fruit within the national and international mission of Walsingham.

"I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Fr James Mary OFM Conv. for his contribution over recent months as Acting Rector at the Shrine. As we look forward to welcoming Fr Robert let us be united and committed in praying for him in the weeks ahead. Our Lady of Walsingham – Pray for us."

Bishop Alan Hopes, Chair of the Walsingham Trust and Bishop Emeritus of East Anglia, said:

"I am delighted that Fr Robert Billing from the Diocese of Lancaster has been appointed as the new Rector of the National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. With his undoubted spiritual and pastoral gifts, Fr Robert will bring renewal and fresh vision to the mission and work of the Shrine, promoting its message, both nationally and further afield.

"We entrust him to the prayers of Our Lady of Walsingham as he prepares to take up this important task."

## **Contact**

You can contact the communications team at the Bishops' Conference by emailing [communications@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:communications@cbcew.org.uk) or phoning 020 7901 4800.

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