

**The Revd Prebendary Roderick Thomas will be the next Bishop of Maidstone.**



Downing Street has today announced that the next Bishop of Maidstone will be the Reverend Prebendary Roderick Thomas, currently Vicar of Elburton in the Diocese of Exeter.

The appointment of Rod Thomas follows a meeting of the Dioceses Commission in December at which unanimous agreement was given to a proposal from the Archbishop of Canterbury to fill the see, which has been vacant since 2009, with a bishop who takes a conservative evangelical view on headship.

This flowed from the public commitment given by the Archbishops and the House of Bishops, in the run up to the final approval by the General Synod of the legislation to allow women to be admitted to the episcopate in July 2014 (see paragraph 30 of House of Bishops Declaration and the Archbishops' note of June 2013- GS Misc 1079). In agreeing with the proposal to fill the see, the Commission was conscious of the needs of the national church for a member of the College of Bishops to be able to act as an advocate for those who hold a conservative position on headship.

The See of Maidstone is in the Diocese of Canterbury and Rod Thomas will be available to take his place in the Foundation of Canterbury Cathedral. However, given his potentially wide geographical remit, he will not otherwise be expected to participate in the life of the Diocese of Canterbury.

Rod Thomas's specific duties as Bishop of Maidstone will include: fostering vocations from those taking a conservative evangelical position on headship; undertaking episcopal ministry (with the agreement of the relevant diocesan bishop) in dioceses in both Provinces where PCCs have passed the requisite resolution under the House of Bishops' declaration; and being available to act (again by invitation) as an assistant bishop in a number of dioceses.

The date of Rod Thomas's consecration is yet to be confirmed. He succeeds the Rt Revd Graham Cray, who was Bishop of Maidstone from 2001 to 2009 and Archbishops' Missioner and Team Leader of Fresh Expressions from 2009 to 2014.

Welcoming the news, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "I am personally delighted that Rod Thomas has agreed to take up the post of Bishop of Maidstone. Rod has served the church tirelessly, both as a parish priest and as a member of the General Synod, and engaged constructively and graciously with those of differing theological views. It is my hope and prayer that Rod's distinctive ministry as Bishop of Maidstone will enable those with a conservative evangelical view of headship to flourish and to be assured that the Church of England has a respected place for them."

The Reverend Prebendary Rod Thomas said: "It is both a privilege and a challenge to be asked to become a Bishop in the Church of England. The prospect of serving as the Bishop of Maidstone is similarly both exciting and daunting, and so I ask for prayer that God will give me the necessary strength and wisdom. My hope for the Bishop of Maidstone's new role is that it will help to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ; encourage church members in their faith and witness; and generate widespread confidence in our commitment, as a church, to mutual flourishing."

The Bishop of Rochester, the Rt Revd James Langstaff, said: "In arriving at the arrangements which have now led to three women being nominated as bishops, it was clear that the voice of those taking a conservative position on male headship also needed to be honoured. This was in the context of the five guiding principles which seek to make space within the Church of England for those of differing theological convictions to continue to flourish. It was this concern which led to the identification of the See of Maidstone for a bishop who holds to that conservative position.

"Having chaired the Steering Committee which produced the legislation and accompanying arrangements, I am very pleased that Rod Thomas has been nominated for this appointment. Rod was himself a member of that Committee; he played a very full and constructive part in our discussions, and spoke generously about the outcome in the crucial General Synod debate in July 2014. I look forward to working with Rod again, this time within the fellowship of the College of Bishops."

The Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell, said: "Wherever possible, and so that our divisions may not get in the way of the world seeing and receiving Christ, the church needs to learn a new spirit of generosity where different views on some issues are able to live alongside each other in as much communion as possible. I therefore welcome the appointment of Rod Thomas as the new Bishop of Maidstone and look forward to working with him in the Chelmsford diocese where I hope he will serve as an Assistant Bishop. His presence and ministry will give confidence to many in the church and show that it is possible to disagree well."

## **About the Reverend Prebendary Roderick Thomas**

The Reverend Prebendary Roderick Thomas, aged 60, studied at the London School of Economics and subsequently became the Director of Employment and Environmental Affairs at the CBI. He trained for the ministry at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He served his Curacy at Plymouth St Andrew with St Paul and St George in the Diocese of Exeter from 1993 to 1995. From 1995 to 1999 he was Curate at Plymouth St Andrew. From 1999 to 2005 he was Priest-in-Charge of Elburton and has been Vicar of Elburton since 2005. He has been a member of the General Synod since 2000 and a Prebendary at Exeter Cathedral since 2012.

Rod Thomas is married to Lesley and they have three children. His interests include boating, walking the South West Coast Path, and carpentry.

## More about the Bishop of Maidstone

- Part of the normal statutory process for filling suffragan sees is for the Dioceses Commission to consider, on behalf of the national church, whether to agree to a proposal from a diocesan bishop to fill such a see.
- Suffragan sees are normally filled within a short time frame but the See of Maidstone was left vacant following a diocesan decision to appoint an additional archdeacon.
- This conservative evangelical view on headship is summarised on pp 149-151 of Women Bishops in the Church of England? The Report of the House of Bishops' Working Party on Women In the Episcopate 2004 [GS 1557]. View the report [here](#).
- The House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests of 19 May 2014 [GS Misc 1076], which includes the five guiding principles can be read in full [here](#).

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