

The next Bishop of Bath and Wells has been announced. The announcement from Downing Street was made at 9am and confirms the next Bishop of Bath and Wells will be the Rt Revd Peter Hancock. His current role is Bishop of Basingstoke in the Diocese of Winchester, which he has held since September 2010.

Bishop Peter says he is "delighted" at the prospect of becoming the 79th Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Before his ordination to the episcopate, Bishop Peter served two curacies before serving as a parish priest for 13 years in the Diocese of Portsmouth. Later he became Archdeacon of the Meon - a position he held for 11 years.

Speaking in advance of today's announcement, Bishop Peter said he was looking forward to leading the Diocese of Bath and Wells and joining and supporting the strong Christian voice already present across the region.

He says: "I am delighted to be coming to Bath and Wells; it's a wonderful part of the country. It will be a great privilege to meet all who live and work here in Somerset, to hear people's stories and to discover all that God is doing in their lives. The mission of the diocese is 'Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities'. The good news of Jesus is life-changing and I look forward to seeing the lives of individuals and communities continuing to be transformed by his grace and his love."

Bishop Peter is familiar with life in rural, coastal counties after spending much of his ministry on the south coast of England. He has never lived far from the sea and describes the countryside as "a real passion". He is often out walking with his wife, Jane and their two Golden Retrievers.

Bishop Peter's love of the countryside translates into a strong interest in rural and environmental issues. This, alongside encouraging children and young people, and supporting the homeless and most vulnerable in society, forms what Bishop Peter describes as the "three threads" of his ministry.

As a parish priest in Portsmouth, Bishop Peter was involved in youth work and setting up venture holidays for young people. He was also district scout chaplain and his long association with Scouting and Guiding is something he will look to continue.

Bishop Peter says: "Supporting our children and young people has long been central to my ministry and I'm delighted to be visiting Marksbury primary school today. I'm encouraged by the work that the diocese does to support our 180 church schools and engaging with our schools, colleges and universities will be one of my priorities."

On care for the most vulnerable, he adds: "When ordained, Bishops are called to have a special care for the poor, the outcast and those who are in need. They are called to proclaim the gospel boldly, to confront injustice and to work for righteousness and peace in the world. That's why I am so pleased to be able to visit the charity Lifeline in Bath today and see first-hand some of the many ways that St Paul's in Weston-super-Mare is supporting those in need. This work is at the heart of what it means to be Christian."

The visits to Marksbury School, the Lifeline Centre and St Paul's are three stops on a short tour of parts of the diocese today, where Bishop Peter will meet business owners, communities, church leaders, school children and the media.

His first visit will be to Prockter's Farm outside Taunton to meet the owners of the family-run farm and to hear first hand of their successes as well as the challenges they face. He will then head north along the M5 to St Paul's Church in Weston-super-Mare. He will meet church leaders who are working to transform the town by offering a number of outreach services to individuals in the community. Bishop Peter also plans to visit the historic seaside pier.

In the afternoon Bishop Peter will travel to Marksbury to visit school children in their final rehearsals for this year's nativity play. Finally he will visit the Lifeline Centre in Bath - a drop-in centre offering advice and support for the homeless, ex-homeless and vulnerably housed.

The Rt Revd Peter Maurice, Bishop of Taunton, has warmly welcomed the announcement. He says: "We all very much look forward to welcoming Bishop Peter and Jane into the life of the diocese.

"Bath and Wells has a culture of partnership in ministry, and Bishop Peter takes up the leadership here with the prayers of us all as we work together to face the challenges that await us.

"We strive to be an outward-facing church, and Bishop Peter's background in mission and ministry will be an encouragement to us in our parishes, schools and chaplaincies. I know he will also want to engage with the wider communities of Somerset when he takes up his new role with us."

The Rt Revd Peter Hancock will be formally enthroned at Wells Cathedral in 2014. He will work at the Bishop's Palace alongside the Bishop of Taunton.

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