It is with regret and sadness that I have decided that I am unable to take up the nomination as Bishop of Sheffield. The news of my nomination has elicited a strong reaction within the diocese and some areas of the wider Church. It is clear that the level of feeling is such that my arrival would be counter-productive in terms of the mission of the Church in South Yorkshire and that my leadership would not be acceptable to many.

I am grateful for the love, prayers and care that have been shown me over recent weeks by numerous people, especially the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Blackburn and the clergy of the Blackburn Diocese. In particular I would like to thank the Bishop of Doncaster and the diocesan team in Sheffield for their support.

I apologise to the many for whom this decision will come as a disappointment. There is clearly much to be done on what it means to disagree well and to live with theological difference in the Church of England. The highly individualised nature of the attacks upon me have been extremely hard to bear. If, as Christians, we cannot relate to each other within the bounds of love, how can we possibly presume to transform a nation in the name of Christ? I hope though that this conversation can continue in the future without it being hung upon the shoulders of one individual.

I do not doubt for one single second the Lordship of Christ or his call upon my life, but the pressures of recent weeks have left me reflecting on how He is calling me to serve him. I am grateful to the Bishop of Blackburn for allowing me a period of leave to reflect on and pray about the events of the past few weeks and would ask for this space to be respected. I hope that, as we continue on the Lenten journey, we will each be able to hear God's voice speaking to us in the wilderness, drawing forth order and beauty from the messy chaos of our lives.

Notes to editors:

- A statement from the Bishop of Blackburn: http://www.blackburn.anglican.org/events_more.asp?events_id=2291

The Bishop of Burnley, The Rt Revd Philip North will not be available for any interviews.