



## **THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD**

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SI

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Dear friends in Nürnberg,

We write to you with difficulty, and in distress and shame, about our country's decision in the recent Referendum to leave the European Union. Please forgive us for writing in English for the sake of our non-German speaking colleagues, and also because it is easier to express what we want to say in our mother tongue.

As the Bishops of Hereford and Ludlow and the members of our Partnership Committee we were all convinced of the need for Britain to remain in the EU, not only for economic reasons but principally for the sake of peace and reconciliation on our continent. We campaigned for this, and hoped and prayed for a different outcome. But we were unsuccessful: 55% of the voters in Herefordshire and 57% in Shropshire voted to leave. Among them will have been many of our church members, and not a few clergy.

It was, of course, the decision of the Government to call the Referendum which has led to this result. But we cannot simply blame the politicians, who have been under enormous pressure for decades on the European issue. The sustained anti-EU campaign over many years in much of the British press has played a significant part. And it is the people themselves, from many different political and economic backgrounds, who have expressed their alienation, disillusionment with the European project, and indifference to the warnings of the economic and historical consequences of leaving. One of the most troubling aspects is the strength of the "Leave" vote in the traditional Labour strongholds of North-East England and South Wales which have benefitted substantially from EU structural and regional funds and from EU-related inward investment following the closure of the mining industry.

We now face an uncertain future, and it would be a perversion of the Gospel to offer our people any easy reassurances. In addition to the economic fallout we have three particular anxieties. The first is the hostility to migration which has played a key role in this decision. It is difficult to see how the demand for tighter control of immigration can be met without injustice and the risk of increased racial and religious prejudice. In our own part of England this will particularly affect migrant workers from Eastern Europe who have only recently been able to travel beyond the Iron Curtain. We are painfully conscious of the contrast between the British attitude and Germany's generous and exemplary resettlement programme for refugees and migrants at the present time.

The second concern is for the unity of the United Kingdom itself. Leaving the EU may well trigger another Referendum for independence in Scotland, and there are dangers for the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The third worry is that Britain's decision will encourage those in other European countries who are hostile to the EU, and thus destabilise the peace, prosperity and freedom which have been so painfully constructed since 1945.

For all these reasons we now need your continuing fellowship and prayers even more, dear friends. We hope that you will wish to reaffirm our partnership, and we assure you that, despite the majority attitude to the European Union in our country, we are as committed as ever. We know that Judy Dinnen is looking forward to coming to Hilpoltstein in the autumn, and that a group of our curates and Readers are planning a visit at the end of October. And we will be joining you in spirit, and hopefully also in person, for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's Reformation next year.

The United Kingdom now faces an unknown future, as to some extent does the EU itself and all its members. This brings home to us the fragility of peace and prosperity in this world, and reinforces our regret at the Referendum decision, which many have compared to a divorce. Robert Bridges' free translation of the hymn "Meine Hoffnung stehet feste" by Joachim Neander is well known in our Church, and offers us a Lutheran perspective which we treasure, and which sustains us in our troubles:

*Pride of man and earthly glory,  
Sword and crown betray his trust.  
What with care and toil he buildeth,  
Tower and temple, fall to dust...  
God unknown, he alone  
Calls my heart to be his own.*

With our prayers, thanks and best wishes,

*+ Cranbrook*

*+ Michael Bourke*

*+ Alistair Ludlow*