

# New bishop's consecration highlights Bahrain's harmony

By STANLEY SZECOWKA

SOME of the Anglican church's leading clergy will be arriving in the kingdom shortly to attend the first ever consecration of one of its bishops in Bahrain.

The Rev'd Sean Semple is currently a parish priest in the UK and will become the first bishop of the diocese to be African by birth ... another first.

The event will be one more milestone in Bahrain's renowned achievements as a celebrated global centre of religious tolerance, friendship and diversity.

The Bishop-Elect told the GDN: "I have chosen to be consecrated and begin my ministry at St Christopher's Cathedral, Manama, knowing of the respect for faith and the desire for peaceful coexistence that is enshrined in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

"I come with great awe at the weighty responsibility that will be bestowed upon me, but know that the gentleness and warmth of the Bahraini people will strengthen me and remind me of God's grace without which I can do nothing."

The Bishop-Elect added that one of his first acts as bishop will be to visit the poor.

A series of ceremonies will take place on Friday, May 24 and Fr Richard Ferner, Dean of St Christopher's Anglican cathedral in Manama, said: "We are very excited, because it is the first time that someone will be consecrated an Anglican bishop in Bahrain."

Among the leading clergy attending are The Most Rev'd Dr Hosam Naoum. He is coming as the Archbishop of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, of which the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf is a part.

He is a Palestinian Christian and recently was interviewed by international broadcasters and spoke of the heartache and trauma witnessed during the war in Gaza.

The Right Rev'd Anthony Poggo, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, will also be travelling to Bahrain.

Just as Islam has different branches, so too Christianity has various denominations, explained Fr Richard.

The Anglican Communion is a family of 42 autonomous and independent-yet-interdependent national, pan-national and regional churches in communion with the ancient see of Canterbury. It currently has around 85 million members, active in more than 165 countries. It is the third largest Christian denomination in the world.

A South Sudanese bishop, Anthony was forced with his family into exile before he was one year old.

Also present will be The Right Rev'd Dr Robert Innes, Bishop in Europe, geograph-



Rev'd Sean Semple



St Christopher's Cathedral



Father Richard leads the vigil for victims in Gaza, which was attended by representatives of different faiths last year

and is a mentor figure to him. He is also 'Clerk of the Closet', head of the College of Chaplains of the Ecclesiastical Household of King Charles III.

Also attending will be Archbishop Samy Fawzy Shehata of the Anglican Province of Alexandria and Bishop of Egypt. He is Primate of the Province which extends over 10 countries - Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. He is a native Egyptian and was part of the Anglican delegation to COP27 in 2022 and also attended COP 28.

"Two things will happen on the Friday, May 24, at 6pm," said Fr Richard.

"First Sean will be ordained and consecrated a bishop by the laying on of hands of the Archbishop and bishops present and by anointing.

"After this Sean will be given the symbols of his office - a Bible, an Episcopal Ring, a Stole, a Chasuble (like a clerical 'poncho', which originated as a Roman raincoat), a Pectoral Cross (a large cross that hangs on the chest), a Mitre (the bishop's headgear, originating from a cap used by officials of the Imperial Byzantine court, and also the Greek translation for the head-dress of the Jewish high priest in Exodus 29:6) and the bishop's pastoral staff or crozier (which recalls the staff of Moses, and takes the form of a shepherd's crook, as bishops are considered as the shepherds of their 'flock'

## Archbishop urges all parties to desert language of violence

ONE of the most high profile and respected Christian leaders who has witnessed the devastation being inflicted on Gaza has praised Bahrain as a glowing example of peaceful coexistence.

The Most Rev'd Dr Hosam Naoum, Archbishop of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, will be visiting the kingdom for the first ever Consecration and Enthronement of a new Anglican bishop in the Province.

"This is the first time I have travelled to Bahrain and I am very honoured to visit a sister country and looking forward to my short visit," he told the GDN exclusively.

"Bahrain represents the Arab culture of the region and the tolerance and coexistence between different religions and peoples.

"As Anglicans, we identify with this ethos and celebrate such ministry within our local churches in the Middle East.

"Indeed, the Kingdom of Bahrain represents and sets an example of peace-building and reconciliation for the whole region, if not the whole world. "Its values of peace, mutual respect and love are inspirational.

"Under the wise leadership of His Majesty King Hamad, Bahrain continues to thrive and reflect the values of Islam and the Arab nation, not only to its citizens, but also to all visitors and partners around the Gulf area.

"This visit comes with glad tidings and news of the reception of our new Bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf. For the first time, the Consecration and Installation takes place outside Cyprus. I am very delighted that our new bishop has chosen the cathedral in Bahrain to be the place for such a happy and sacred occasion.

"As a fellow Arab, I am delighted to be hosted in Bahrain and our cathedral in Manama. "We are proud to be joining our sisters and brothers

of Christians, following the metaphor of Christ as 'the Good Shepherd'".

"This leads to the second half of the Service. Sean will leave the church and seek re-admission by knocking on the closed West Doors of the Cathedral.

"The new bishop will be welcomed by the Dean and Bahraini dignitaries, and led to the 'cathedra', which is Greek for throne, where he will be installed or enthroned bishop of the diocese.

The ceremony will be taking place in Bahrain because the bishop's seat or cathedra in Greek, resides in Bahrain. St Christopher's Church houses the cathedra, which is why it is a 'cathedral', the Mother Church



Palestinians gather to receive meals cooked by World Central Kitchen after the charity resumed operations, at a school sheltering displaced people, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip



of the Anglican Congregation in Manama. However, first and foremost, to be accompanied by fellow bishops, clergy, and by representatives from around the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East and beyond, it is a God-given moment and a joy to gather as a community of faith and celebrate God's love

within the Church." As a man from Palestine, he also shared his thoughts about the current crisis. A reflection on the current crisis and the war on Gaza, he added, needs much more than a paragraph or even an article.

"I believe that the time has come for a just and lasting peace

**The only way forward is the two-state solution. There is no other way where both people can find a peaceful future without acknowledging the right of Palestinians for a vital and free state side by side with the state of Israel.**

between Palestine and Israel," he said.

"As a churchman and a leader, I urge all parties to desert the language of violence and resort to negotiations and focus on a future where both nations can thrive.

"As the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, we have urged all

parties to an immediate ceasefire and adopt non-violent solutions."

But how can peace ever be achieved? This is the most important question to ask, and at the same time the most difficult to reflect on, he admitted.

"In my opinion, the only way forward is the two-state solu-



A wounded Palestinian man, with his injured son, reacts at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the conflict in Rafah



Archbishop Hosam Naoum



Flashback to the GDN's report of the Archbishop's Sky News interview

tion," he said.

"There is no other way where both people can find a peaceful future without acknowledging the right of Palestinians for a vital and free state side by side with the state of Israel.

"I hope that my visit to Bahrain will be an experience which will inspire me to go home and

taking with me something of the values and way of life that Bahrain represents.

"May the Lord bless His Majesty the King of Bahrain, His government, and His people, and may their light of love and peace shine through the region. Looking forward to being with you all."

### Each of us has a responsibility to make peace

THE Rt. Rev'd Anthony Poggo, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, will also be making his first visit to Bahrain and was full of praise for the 'beautiful kingdom of kindness'.

He is responsible for the leadership and management of the work of the Anglican Communion Office (ACO).

"An important part of my role as the Secretary General is to visit the member churches of the Communion widely to encourage, listen and for fellowship," he said.

"Therefore the consecration and enthronements of new bishops provide this opportunity to visit, meet the new bishops and meet the congregations.

"The Episcopal Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East are facing many challenges and I want to stand in solidarity with them, and assure them that they are not forgotten.

"I offer my heartfelt greetings to His Majesty King Hamad, his family and ministers, and all the people of Bahrain. I wish to thank you for welcoming me in advance of this visit, and for your generous hospitality towards people of all faiths as they live and worship in your country.

"I hear from my brothers and sisters in the Anglican churches of Bahrain how much they value this land and the welcoming spirit of its people. It is at the heart of your national practices and policies, and is present in personal interactions on a daily basis.

"To me, this is a beautiful sign that we are all made in the image of God, worthy of respect and dignity. I look forward to experiencing this when I visit, and to learning more about your hopes for the future.

"There is a great deal that I celebrate in His Majesty King Hamad's declaration about faith and peace.

"I also celebrate that it is put into practise by the people of Bahrain.

"I am struck by the careful work done to distinguish teaching that is healthy and the freedom of choice as a divine gift, acknowledging the responsibility of all people, and particularly those in leadership, while rejecting harmful practices, including abuse of women and children. When this kind of wisdom reaches into our hearts, it can inspire our actions on personal, local and national levels.

"I think it can be particularly powerful at a time internationally when divisions between peoples, cultures and nations is very high. "Creating understanding with those who are different from us, and building trust with those of the opposite of divides must be a priority for us all. It is on this basis that we can be honest about our differences, make amends for wrongs, and work together in

hope for the common good.

"In our work as an Anglican Communion, we are pleased to support a number of important ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues. All are important opportunities to learn from and appreciate perspectives from different traditions.

"Ecumenical dialogue, as well as inter-faith work, is another important part of the work we do at the ACO.

"Parts of the Middle East are in turmoil at present: How can we be peacemakers? How can healing come out of conflict and the discourse changed from hate to peace?"

"Jesus Christ said 'blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God'. Peace is something that is made - it requires effort and is often very difficult.

"But as we pursue peace, I believe we come to resemble God more closely. Jesus says we are recognised as His children. I know this myself as a South Sudanese: I was born, grew-up, married and was enthroned as a bishop, all during a civil war. Yet, I have also

seen firsthand that communities and neighbours can be reconciled, even after great pain and trauma, through the care and courage of just a few people.

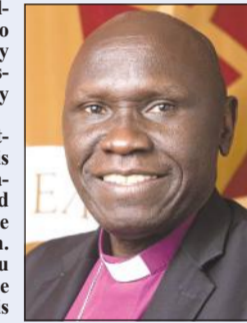
"Each of us has a responsibility to make peace and to bring healing - in what we say, in how we listen and in how we respond to what we know of God.

"That responsibility is very great for leaders, and particularly leaders in the Middle East now. We must pray for them. And, whilst there is a right time for lament - naming and grieving the loss and injustice experienced - we must also continue to act as if this turmoil is not all there is, maintaining our trust that justice, truth, mercy and goodness are there, because they are the very nature of God.

"My brother Archbishop Hosam Naoum, the Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Primate of the Middle East, often speaks of healing and hope in the land around him, even as he acknowledges that it might be easy to be 'overcome by the stench of war and destruction'.

"The Anglican-run Al Alhi hospital in Gaza, for example, is still offering medical treatment despite severe damage to the building, being surrounded by military and evacuated multiple times, and having many of their medical staff forcibly relocated to Rafah in the south - where they nevertheless have recently taken the initiative to open an outreach clinic to serve the 1.4 million refugees there.

"We join with others in the Anglican family to raise awareness of the realities and needs on the ground, to provide humanitarian support where possible and to re-imagine a different future."



Right Rev'd Anthony Poggo



Anglican-run hospital staff still offering help in Gaza

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