

# Church praises Anglican leader

BY ED WEST

ARCHBISHOP Vincent Nichols of Westminster has paid tribute to Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, after it was announced that he was stepping down in December to become Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge.

Archbishop Nichols said: "In the last three years I have grown to appreciate more and more the fine qualities of Archbishop Rowan: his kindness, his sharp intellect, his dedication to striving for harmony between peoples, especially within the Christian family, his courage and his friendship. These will be much missed when he steps down from his demanding office in December. I will miss him."

Dr Williams announced last Friday that he will step down after 10 years of leading the troubled Anglican Communion.

During his time in office Dr Williams attended the funeral of Blessed Pope John Paul II, the first Archbishop of Canterbury to attend a funeral of a pope since the Ref-

ormation. He also attended the inauguration of Pope Benedict XVI and the two men have had warm relations, as was evident during the papal visit in September 2010, when the two led a service together at Westminster Abbey.

Mgr Keith Newton, head of the Personal Ordinariate, paid tribute to a man who, he said, had tried to hold the Church together.

He said: "The Anglican Communion will miss him, he is an inspirational person, and a very spiritual one. Personally he has always been very courteous to me and to everyone in the ordinariate."

"It's a very difficult job to hold the Communion together. I think it's difficult because if you take a firm line in anything people fall out. His strategy is to keep people talking everyone around."

"It is a gruelling job being Archbishop of Canterbury. You're always available to people, and they often think he has more authority. In reality he has very little area to manoeuvre. He kept the Lambeth Conference to-



Dr Rowan Williams and Pope Benedict XVI embrace during a prayer service at Westminster Abbey

PA photo

gether in 2008 through sheer force of his holiness," Mgr Newton said. "Relations with the Catholic Church depend on the individual Archbishop of Canterbury. I don't think ecumenical relations would have got any further under any other archbishop. And his personal relations with Pope Benedict are extremely cordial," he said.

Born in 1950 near Swansea to a Welsh-speaking family who had converted from Presbyterianism, Dr Williams studied theology at Christ's College, Cambridge,

and received his DPhil from Oxford. He was elected as Bishop of Monmouth in 1991 and Archbishop of Wales in 1999, leading the disestablished Welsh Anglican church that separated from the Church of England in 1920. He therefore became the first Archbishop of Canterbury since Cardinal Pole to be appointed from outside the Church of England, when he became the 104th man to hold that position. At 52 he was the youngest Archbishop of Canterbury in nearly 200 years, with children living at

Lambeth Palace for the first time in 130 years.

Regarded as an Anglo-Catholic, Dr Williams had once considered crossing the Tiber and has written on St Teresa of Avila. He is also a patron of Affirming Catholicism, the liberal Anglo-Catholic movement within the Church of England, a member of the Anglo-Catholic Jubilee Group, and has contributed to a book of essays to mark the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Movement called *Essays Catholic and Radical*.

Politically on the Left, while chaplain of Clare College, Cambridge, he was arrested on a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament demonstration at Lakenheath. Last year he guest edited the *New Statesman*, writing an editorial that was highly critical of the Government's welfare reforms.

Dr Williams supported women's ordination and is thought to hold liberal views on homosexuality, the most divisive issue in the Church.

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