

My Same-Sex Marriage Thinking Is Evolving, Says New Archbishop of Canterbury

A former oil executive with experience in conflict resolution has been chosen to lead a global Anglican Communion riven by sharply divided views on gay people and their place in the church.

Prime Minister David Cameron announced Friday that Justin Welby, 56, a fast-rising priest with only a year's experience as a bishop, had been picked to succeed Rowan Williams as **archbishop of Canterbury**, head of the Church of England and spiritual leader of the world's 77 million Anglicans.

Welby, the 105th holder of a post that stretches back to the 6th century, will take over after Williams retires in December.

Welby said he felt privileged, and astonished, to be chosen to lead the church at "a time of spiritual hunger."

"It's something I never expected," Welby told reporters, saying he had been "overwhelmed and surprised" to be offered the job.

"My initial reaction was 'Oh no,'" he said.

Welby said he supported the ordination of women as bishops, and indicated his thinking on **same-sex marriage**—which he has opposed—was evolving.

"We must have no truck with any form of homophobia in any part of the church," he said, adding that he planned to "listen to the voice of the LGBT communities and examine my own thinking."

Cameron welcomed the selection of Welby, who was chosen by a church commission and formally approved by Queen Elizabeth II.

“The Church of England plays an important role in our society, not just as the established church, but in the provision of education, help for the deprived and in furthering **social justice**,” Cameron said. “I look forward to working with the Archbishop in all of these areas and I wish him success in his new role.”

Welby, appointed last year as bishop of Durham, worked for 11 years in the oil industry, rising to treasurer of Enterprise Oil, before deciding he was called to the priesthood.

Even before formally becoming archbishop, Welby could face a test of his mediation skills later this month when the church’s governing General Synod votes on allowing women to serve as bishops. Welby supports that change, but the latest proposed compromise has drawn fire from activists on both sides of the issue—either as being too weak or going too far.

He was recently appointed to the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, which is examining possible reforms of the industry, and he serves as ethical adviser to the Association of Corporate Treasurers.

Welby has denounced multi-million executive pay packages in big British companies as “obscene” and has said the Occupy movement “reflects a deep-seated sense that something is wrong.”

His views on corporate responsibility, he has said, “came out of working in an extractive industry often in developing countries where ethical questions were very frequent.”

Before seeking ordination, Welby spent six years with French oil company Elf Aquitaine and then as treasurer of exploration company Enterprise Oil in 1984. He resigned in 1989 to study for the priesthood.

“During my time there I came to realize there was a gap between what I thought, believed and felt was right in my non-work life and what went on at work,” he said.

Following ordination in 1993 he was a parish priest for nine years before moving to Coventry Cathedral, as co-director of international ministry. In 2005, he became co-director of the cathedral’s conflict reconciliation ministry in Africa, where he had experience in the oil industry.

He has spoken of having to “establish relationships with killers and with the families of their victims, with arms smugglers, corrupt officials and more.”

In 2007 he was appointed dean of Liverpool Cathedral, Britain’s largest church. He caused a bit of controversy there by allowing the tune of John Lennon’s “Imagine” to be played on the cathedral bells.

Welby was schooled at Eton College and Cambridge University. His mother was a private secretary to Winston Churchill. But his father went to the United States during Prohibition and became a bootlegger, the Mail on Sunday newspaper quoted Welby as saying.

Welby and his wife, Caroline, have two sons and three daughters. Their first child, a 7-month-old girl, was killed in a traffic accident in 1983.

Associated Press Writer Jill Lawless contributed to this report.

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