

# News Release

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AND THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF SCOTLAND,  
ENGLAND AND WALES**

**16 March 2010**

## **UK Government and Catholic Bishops welcome state visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom**

The UK Government and the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Scotland, England and Wales today welcomed the forthcoming visit to the United Kingdom of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. At a joint press conference, they said that the Papal Visit represents an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen ties between the UK and the Holy See on global initiatives, as well as the important role of faith in creating strong communities.

Her Majesty The Queen announced earlier today that the visit will take place from 16-19 September. It will be the first ever official Papal Visit to the UK – the visit by Pope John Paul II in 1982 was a pastoral visit only.

The Pope will be received at the Palace of Holyroodhouse by Her Majesty The Queen. His Holiness will give a major speech to British civil society at Westminster Hall. He will also visit the West Midlands to beatify the nineteenth century theologian and educationalist Cardinal John Henry Newman at a public mass in Coventry.

Other key elements of the visit will include a public mass in Glasgow, a prayer vigil in London and an event focusing on education. Relations between the Christian Churches will be a theme of the visit as will the relations between

the major faiths. The Pope will visit the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace and pray with other Church leaders at Westminster Abbey.

Full details of the Pope's itinerary will be announced nearer the time.

Rt Hon Jim Murphy MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, is the Government Minister leading the preparations for the visit. He said:

"This is an historic visit at an important time. The Pope will receive a very warm welcome from Catholics and people of all faiths.

"As well as providing spiritual leadership to over a billion Catholics around the world, including six million in the UK, the Pope and the Holy See have great influence on global policy in areas such as international development, sustainability and the relationships between religions.

"The Papal visit represents an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen ties between the UK and the Holy See on action to tackle poverty and climate change as well as the important role of faith in creating strong and cohesive communities. We aim to build further on the positive relationship we have developed in recent years."

Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh and President of the Catholics Bishops' Conference of Scotland, said:

"I am thrilled that the Pope has accepted the UK Government's gracious invitation and I am sure he will receive a heartfelt welcome from Catholics as well as members of other faiths and people of goodwill.

"A defining feature of Pope Benedict's teaching has been to remind Europe of its Christian roots and culture and to give us guidance on the great moral issues of our day and it is my hope that we all open our hearts to his words."

The Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and

President of the Catholics Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, said:

“As Catholics we are delighted to welcome Pope Benedict. We thank Her Majesty The Queen and her government for extending this historic invitation to His Holiness.

“We are confident that the presence and message of Pope Benedict will encourage everyone to aspire again to a vision of life in our society marked by mutual trust, compassion and truth. The great Christian tradition of faith and life, which has so shaped our culture, has so much more to offer. This gentle yet profound teacher of his faith will encourage and strengthen all who receive his words.”

#### **Notes to Editors**

1. The visit to the UK by Pope John Paul II in 1982 was not an official Papal Visit. The visit in September 2010 will be a Papal Visit with the status of a State Visit. As such, the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Scotland, England and Wales will contribute to the organisation and the costs.
2. The UK and the Holy See restarted diplomatic relations in 1914 and agreed full ambassadorial relations in 1982. Information on relations between the two countries can be found on the website of the UK Ambassador to the Holy See: <http://ukinholysee.fco.gov.uk/en/>
3. The Holy See has taken a great interest in many of the same foreign policy priorities as the UK. As well as backing the UN Millennium Development Goals for aid to the developing world, Vatican City was also the world's first state to become carbon neutral. In 2006 the Pope bought the world's first International Finance Facility bond on immunisation, a UK initiative to raise over \$1bn to immunise people in 70 of the poorest countries of the world against diseases such as yellow fever, polio, measles and tetanus (see <http://www.iff-immunisation.org/> for more information). The Pope has supported the actions of the UK government to encourage reform of the international financial institutions and establishment of an arms trade treaty, while the UK government supports and encourages the Catholic Church's proactive stance on climate change.
4. The Catholic Bishops' Conferences have set up the official website with more information on the Pope's visit to United Kingdom: [www.thepapalvisit.org.uk](http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk)

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