



ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

12th November 2012

To friends and co workers for peace in the Hindu communities

On the occasion of Diwali, I offer you my greetings and my warm wishes that this will be again a time of joyful celebration for you and your families. As we watch the seasons change, festivals like Diwali help us to take the time to step back from work, reflect on the past and pray for the future. I understand that within Hinduism the four ashramas or stages of life set out a pattern through which life's changing seasons can be understood. As Winter approaches, it leads us to reflect on the final Forest phase; when the individual renounces the life of the householder, gives up all their possessions and goes into the forest to pray. There is a division in the ashramas between stages of work for the world and stages of spiritual work which take up the majority of energy in later life. We can find a similar pattern of increasing spiritual commitment in the Christian community.

In the media, Churches are sometimes described as 'full of old people'. However, this need not be taken negatively but rather as an affirmation that older people often give more time to prayer than they may have been able to in their earlier life. This is unlikely to change as the generations grow up; religious buildings will always offer a particular sanctuary to the elderly, to those who may have fewer worldly responsibilities.

As I prepare to move on from Lambeth Palace, I look back with gratitude over all I have learned from my dialogues with the Hindu community over the past ten years. One recent highlight was interacting with the young people trained by Krish Raval's 'Faith in Leadership' programme. Another was a visit to the Sri Vallabha Nidhi temple in Leytonstone to meet people working on the co-operation between the government, Churches and other religious communities called 'Near Neighbours'. Other memorable events at Lambeth Palace this year included seminars on Hindu theologians such as Sri Vedanta Desika and Ramanuja by Professor Chakravarthi Ram Prasad and Professor Francis Clooney. All these events have involved both Hindu and Christian leaders and we have shared many reflections on the continuities and differences between Christian and Hindu models of leadership and the ideal way of life.

In 2010, I met with the heads of five major Hindu monastic orders in Bangalore and learned something about the experience of the Forest ashrama as it is lived when chosen (by a monk or sanyasin) at the start of life, rather than in later life. As I prepare to move on in January to a new role in Cambridge I would like to thank you all for all the conversations we have had and I assure you of my prayers as I move forward with the help of God's grace to a place that is, if not a forest, a bit more forested than Lambeth.

Wishing you the very best for your Diwali celebration.

+ Rowan Cantuar :

Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU