

St Paul's service for Falklands

By Clifford Longley, Religious Affairs Correspondent

The Prime Minister is expected to tell the House of Commons today that a national "Service of Thanksgiving" to mark the end of the Falklands conflict will be held in St Paul's Cathedral on Monday, July 26.

Mrs Thatcher and the Cabinet will attend, though with arrangements designed to make it as non-political as possible. It is also understood there has been no question of combining it with a big military victory parade through the capital, as some Conservative MPs are said to have been urging privately.

A meeting to discuss preliminary arrangements reportedly took place yesterday under the chairmanship of the Dean of St Paul's, the Very Rev Alan Webster. The Ministry of Defence are believed to have put the idea to him a fortnight ago and private soundings have been made since then to discover what kind of event would be most appropriate.

The Queen and other Members of the Royal Family

will take part, though it is not yet known whether Prince Andrew will have returned from the South Atlantic. Some of the readings during the service will be undertaken by servicemen from the task force.

The outline of the service already seems clear, with two proposals in particular symbolising the basic approach. The Lords' Prayer would be read both in English and in Spanish, as a gesture towards the people of Argentina. And the Order of Service would contain the Pope's address on war and peace delivered at Coventry a month ago. His image of "a cathedral of peace" is thought to be particularly appropriate to this service in St Paul's.

The main address would be delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie. Cardinal Hume has also been invited by the Dean to take part, but the nature of his contribution would be left to him to decide.

Another tentative proposal is for St Paul's to be lined by

uniformed representatives of the three services, and the services to be allotted about 1,000 places in the congregation. Another 500 would be reserved for the next of kin of those who died, and the same number for members of the general public.

The Church of Scotland and the Free Churches are also reportedly being asked to share the conduct of the service. Dr Kenneth Greet, a Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, was a leading public critic of the sending of the task force and it is expected that the content of the service will be designed to take account of the difference of opinion in the nation which his participation would represent.

● The Prime Minister threw a "thank you" party at 10 Downing Street yesterday evening for the 200 or so "back room boys" who ran the Falkland Islands war from Whitehall (the Press Association reports).

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