

Faith in the North: Launch



The Most Revd and Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell
Archbishop of York

Sisters and brothers, it's a great joy to be with you this morning. And for me personally a particular joy to be back in Dewsbury on St Paulinus' Day, a church I knew well, from when we lived up the road in Huddersfield. And I was working in this bit of West Yorkshire for what's now the mighty Diocese of Leeds as missionary. And this was a church that for me was always a place of great inspiration, for the renewal of its building, the renewal of its mission, the service that it offered to this community, so I can think of nowhere better than to launch, well, I don't want to call it an initiative. I've got really nothing new and nothing original to share with you today. I've just got this feeling that we would be a better Church, the world will be a better place, if we could get out of our church buildings alongside the communities we serve, share the gospel and teach the faith and build the kingdom. And in other words, the stuff that you're already doing. But to give that new energy, new focus, some fresh resource, and a bit of fresh impetus - that's really all this is about.

Earlier this year, I visited the church of *San Gregorio Magno al Celio* in Rome. And I saw the head of the crosier that Pope Gregory the Great would have been holding when he blessed Augustine, and sent him to England in 597. And in the cloister of the church, I saw the plaque that listed the names of all those who accompanied him on the first and then the second waves of this mission. And there, setting off to the unknown lands of these islands in 601 you find the name Paulinus, a monk in Rome, part of the holy people of God, which is the church of Jesus Christ, coming here to bring us the good news of the gospel and the offer of eternal life.

Well, I haven't arrived here this morning from Rome. My journey started this morning in Wakefield, then we went to South Ossett, then we've been to visit the bus ministry in Chickenley, to the Orchard School. And then we've walked along the

river, here on this feast day of St Paulinus for this launch of Faith in the North. Because here in Dewsbury legend has it that Paulinus baptised new believers just over there in the River Calder. And basically, we long to do today what he did then, we long to share the Christian faith with people today. Because we believe that the Christian faith is good news for every person, for every community, for the whole of our society, and for our very, very troubled and hurting world. We believe that the values of the Christian faith can shape our nation again, and also help the world face the enormous challenge of climate crisis, fractious division, short term fixes, and a kind of cynical hopelessness. And we believe this, because we see it in Jesus Christ. We see in Jesus Christ, a vision for what it means to be truly human, fully human, as God intends it. And we believe that Jesus shows us, this is what humanity is meant to look like. And we believe that Jesus's vision of restored relationship with God enables all of us in our great diversity to be what the Bible calls a new humanity.

And Paulinus came here to do this by baptising and preaching and teaching. And the other great Anglo Saxon saints of the North - Cuthbert, Ced, Chad, Hilda, Aidan, often they went about on foot across the North, sharing the gospel, bringing hope, bringing comfort in what were dark and difficult times. And that's why I wanted to come here to Dewsbury this morning on foot. Others of you have been here for longer, thinking about how we renew the life of the church and plant new churches. And just sitting for 10 minutes on the bus ministry in Chickenley, and talking to Mandy, whose son was admitted to a secure unit this morning because of the hard times that he's having in his life. And holding her hand for a moment and praying for her. All of that reminds me and tells me that we have work to do as the Church of Jesus Christ in bringing the good news of Jesus to this generation. And we can learn from those who have gone before us.

So across the North, the plan of Faith in the North is to simply add capacity and get alongside the dioceses, cathedrals and parishes of the North with our ecumenical partners to revitalise the church in its mission. And we hope it will be simple and

inspiring. Much of it will be about revisiting the very basic texts of the Christian faith, such as the Lord's Prayer. I have a slightly crazy idea that I would like to teach the North the Lord's Prayer, it just seems to be so blindingly obvious and simple thing to do. I just wonder whether it's a place to start. Teach people that God is our Father, teach people that we need to share our daily bread. Teach people that we need to seek God's will and God's kingdom. This seems like a good thing to do. I don't know why God has asked me to do this. But I believe it might be something about trying to revitalise and encourage the life of the church in the North. Getting alongside you in what you're already doing. Trying to add capacity, add resource. And in some small way, pray that God will open doors of opportunity for me to be a resource, to preach, and to teach.

We've got our logo. And I like the logo. I like the logo because it suggests to me about trying to create a pathway to Jesus and to the cross. But it also suggests to me something flowing from the cross, that this is a place where we long to bring others to Jesus. But at the same time, we know that we can't do anything without the replenishing grace that comes from Jesus.

So please watch this space as this work develops. We're building a small team at Bishopthorpe with the help of some seriously able people, some of whom you've heard from this morning.

We want to refresh the roots of the Christian faith in the North. We want to make deeper connections with our history and with place. We want to take advantage of the big anniversaries coming up such as the 1400th anniversary of Paulinus in 2027. We want to share resources for prayer, for church planting, for evangelism and for pilgrimage and in all this with confidence, humility and joy. We want to make Jesus known.

