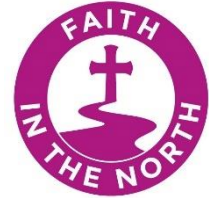


Paulinus 2027

Stephen Cottrell
Archbishop of York



In June 2023, scholars and Christian leaders gathered at an event held at Bishopthorpe to discuss how to mark the anniversary in 2027 of the baptism in York by Bishop Paulinus of King Edwin, the first King of Northumbria to profess the Christian faith. They discovered multiple challenges and encouragements for teaching, preaching, church planting, prayer, and renewal.

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell sets out how he intends to preach, encourage the church in missionary discipleship, teach the faith, and form a network of church planting and church revitalisation communities across the North in the coming years.

The 2027 anniversary of the establishment of the Church of Saint Peter in York and the baptism of King Edwin by Paulinus in 627 provides us with an opportunity to learn from, reconnect with, and compellingly communicate the heart of the Christian faith, and its message of good news, freedom and purpose for all people; the faith that inspired Gregory to send Augustine to Canterbury in 597 (the same year that another great missionary, Columba, died); that inspired Augustine to send Paulinus to York around 30 years later, and for Aidan to establish a church on Holy Island some eight years after that, and then all the other missionary journeys and endeavours ever since then, and right up to our own day, inspires us today.

In other words, the purpose of our marking the mission of Paulinus in 627 is not to look back, but to look forwards. And we can learn from some of the particular features of his mission and the Anglo-Saxon spirituality which shaped it.

There are three main strands to this –

1. Church Planting (as part of what it means to be a mixed ecology church)
2. Evangelism

3. Discipleship, particularly focusing on spirituality, prayer, pilgrimage and the arts. Also remembering that one of the best ways of evangelising in our culture may well be the sharing of our spirituality in as many creative ways as possible.

So, inspired by my first predecessor, and in the years that remain to me in office as the 98th Archbishop of York, I intend to make this work my priority.

New Christian Communities

Paulinus came to plant churches where there were hardly any and where faith had been and gone.

Our situation is slightly different today. In many respects, we have too many churches. However, I've come to believe that the answer to the problem of too many churches, is to plant more!

Let me explain. We need to re-imagine what we mean by church. For too long in the UK, we have thought that church always means building, Vicar, and defined geographic area.

Paulinus would not have seen it this way. He would have had the same regard for place and building that we have, but his primary focus was *people* and *community*.

The great challenge of our day is to reimagine church as worshipping and witnessing community, and at the same time, honour, cherish and develop the inherited models of church we have received, then, unapologetically and tenaciously, plant new churches, which will mean new worshipping and witnessing communities. Sometimes this will mean new buildings. Often it will mean revitalising the church that meets in existing buildings. Sometimes it will mean churches worshipping in new and diverse ways.

This has already been one of the most significant movements of the Spirit in the last 40 years, but with the appointment of Mark Powley, who you will be hearing from later today, as Missioner in the North, the idea is to build capacity for planting and developing new worshipping and witnessing communities, for the revitalisation of our parishes and to provide new Christian communities, new places of belonging, and therefore new opportunities for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Or to put it very simply: we wish to do in our day, what Paulinus did in his, but we have to make it a priority.

People of prayer

Secondly, none of this will happen, unless there is a deep renewal of faith and prayer, what the Church of England calls in its Vision and Strategy for the 2020s, a call to be a more Christ centred church and to be shaped by Jesus Christ, and the five marks of mission, which can also be seen as five marks of discipleship, what sisters and brothers in other parts of the Anglican Communion, call *a Jesus shaped life*.

In this endeavour, we also have much to learn from Paulinus, and by uncovering the treasures of Anglo-Saxon spirituality, and the part it played in the establishment of the Church in the north. Today, Dee Dyas, Michelle Brown, Sarah Foot, and Joyce Hill will begin to open some of this up for us. But in the coming years, it is my hope that in each of our dioceses we will place a much greater emphasis upon spirituality, theological renewal, liturgical renewal, prayer, and what the Roman Catholic Church (and we have borrowed the phrase) calls missionary discipleship, i.e. a discipleship that is not only about *following* Jesus, but is alive to the full apostolic vocation to be *sent out by Jesus* to be his presence in the world.

I am particularly interested in the simplicity of the Anglo-Saxon vision when it comes to prayer and discipleship. I think it can really help us today.

Let me read you a short extract from a letter from the Venerable Bede to a certain Bishop Ecgbert, written in 734 -

“... above all else... endeavour with all diligence to see that the catholic faith which is contained in the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, which is taught us in the Scripture of the Holy Gospel, be rooted deeply in the memory of all which belong unto your rule: It is true that it is most sure that these things have become perfectly known to those who have been taught to read the Latin tongue; but do you cause them to be known and constantly repeated in their own tongue by those that are unlearned, that is, by them who have knowledge only of their proper tongue... For the which reason I have myself too oftentimes given to unlearned priests both these things, to wit, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer *translated into the English tongue.*”

As I have thought and prayed about what my contribution to all this might be, I feel called to place a similar emphasis upon teaching people the Lord's Prayer and the basics of the Christian faith. In fact, an idea is beginning to emerge that I might spend some significant time over the next few years teaching the Lord's Prayer across the North - if that is an idea that receives your blessing.

I like this idea because of its simplicity. If people already know the Lord's Prayer, i.e., those who are already part of the church, the Lord's Prayer provides a framework upon which we can learn how to live out the prayer we say. But for those who don't know the Lord's Prayer, or who hardly know it, the prayer offers what is probably the one last accepted connecting point between the culture and the Church, and therefore the simplest, gentlest and most acceptable means for evangelising the culture.

In other words, focusing on the Lord's Prayer in these ways enables us in our day to do what Paulinus and those who followed him did in theirs: evangelising and teaching. I could say more.

But for the time being, this is simply a signal of what I imagine myself doing across the North – but with your help. I'm thinking of calling it the Lord's Prayer tour!

Pilgrimage

We might also note at this point, a renewed interest in pilgrimage in the wider culture. This may be another connecting point with regard to our wider evangelisation.

In the north-east, there has been a very successful opening up of new pilgrimage routes in recent years. The rest of us have probably got things to learn from that. A group is working on a Paulinus pilgrimage, and I very much hope that will be open by 2027.

We want to make the experience of visiting holy places across the north a more prayerful, impactful and gospel inspiring experience. This is another area where Dee Dyas and her colleagues have much to teach us.

The arts

The standing crosses, cairns and Anglo-Saxon church buildings that survive to this day; the poetry of Caedmon; the elegant prose and story-telling of Bede; the beautifully illustrated manuscripts of the Lindisfarne and York gospels, all tell us how the Christian faith was expressed and communicated through art and craft.

We must do the same today, enabling people to encounter the beauty of the gospel as well as its truth and goodness. We must help all Christian people give creative expression to their faith and even to begin to understand evangelism as sharing the fruits of their contemplation and wooing people with the beauty of Christ himself.

In this work we should enlist the help of poets and artists as well as releasing those gifts in the church itself.

Missionary Journeys

Finally, I note that Paulinus famously baptised in the Colne and Wharfe and that he and Aidan and Cuthbert and many of the great saints of the North communicated the Christian faith on foot by making missionary journeys. Also inspired by the great apostle Paul, whose missionary journeys were not just to share the gospel and plant new churches, but to encourage existing ones, I intend to make further missionary visits and missionary journeys across the North, with a particular hope to also do these four things: preach the gospel; encourage the church; teach the faith; and build capacity and open doors for new initiatives, particularly with Mark's help, and with the formation of a network of church planting and church revitalisation across the North, establish new communities of faith. These have already started, and I have hugely enjoyed my visits to Salford, Rochdale, Bury, Burnley, Blackburn and the Isle of Man. Last week I was in Cumbria at the Appleby Fair launching an initiative for ministry with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. This weekend I will be in Sheffield diocese.

Today

Today, we will begin to dig into all of this a bit more deeply, seeing how we can all play our part, and seeing how this fits in with and provides a particular northern focus for the Church of England's national Vision and Strategy, which is to be a Christ centred and

Jesus Christ shaped Church of missionary disciples, building a church which is younger and more diverse, and which pays attention to the whole ecosystem of the Church, where parish, chaplaincy and new expressions of Christian community grow up alongside each other and are of mutual benefit to each other.

Moreover, we must be mindful that here in the north we serve many of the very poorest communities in the land. All renewal of the Church, in Paulinus' day and in ours, usually comes from the edge and through service to those who are most in need.

Therefore, in all this work there must be a special emphasis on working in and with our most deprived communities.

For church planting we will work alongside the Estates Evangelism Group.

The beauty and simplicity of focusing on the Lord's Prayer, on pilgrimage and on the arts and crafts will make what we do accessible, especially for communities who may not necessarily turn to books for their learning.

We will probably hear quite a bit about Anglo-Saxon spirituality today, it's relevance for us, and possible ideas of how our engaging with it can provide opportunities for outreach and witness.

I really imagine this having a huge impact on children, families, young people and particularly in our schools. The Paulinus anniversary gives us a peg upon which to hang a number of teaching and missional initiatives through our churches and through our schools. As I've intimated, the Lord's Prayer might offer us a way into schools. But as the day unfolds, we will not just be hearing from people speaking from the front, but inviting you to engage with one another to see what other ideas emerge, and then to go with the energy that I believe God will give us.

Later this year, we will be putting together a 2027 group to coordinate some large celebrations and gatherings for the anniversary year itself. These may, I suppose, have more of a Yorkshire focus than some of the other things we're exploring today, but I hope this can be an occasion where the whole Province can celebrate its inheritance of faith and see how it can be shared more effectively today.

Finally, it's strangely reassuring to recall that Paulinus wasn't really a great success. He did some great things, but found the North a tough mission field and withdrew after a few years. In honouring him, we honour his faithfulness, not necessarily his success, and therefore look to Christ, the author and architect of our faith to guide us by the Spirit in continuing this mission and finding fresh ways of communicating its truth and beauty, with simplicity, wit and passion.

Let's make 2027 a great celebration of the life of the Church in the North and the years leading up to it an opportunity to focus on teaching, preaching, church planting, prayer and pilgrimage.

And the thing that I believe more than anything else might make a difference - let's do it together across the North because this really will give the devil quite a fright!

