

## **Come, Follow Christ in the Footsteps of St Chad: First Steps**

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I hope your meanderings over the last hour have sown some seeds in your heart as you think and pray about discipleship, vocation and evangelism in your own situation. I hope that you will feel encouraged to work out what these would look like for you and for the people in your place, to discern a vision for you and for your church.

We are a very diverse diocese, serving a wide range of communities, and we know that there is no one size that will fit all. My fellow bishops and I would really like to know what discipleship, vocation and evangelism mean for you in your place. There are some questions to trigger your thinking about that on pages 14–15 of the booklet, and we will soon be offering some diocesan resources to help with that thinking. But the main resource will be the gifts that God has given to you, the calling that he has spoken into your life and the life of your church. Between now and Advent Sunday, we want to gather your stories of where God is leading you to.

We are a very diverse diocese, and we have several different ways of being church: parishes, Fresh Expressions, schools and chaplaincies are the four that I think of in particular.

As we set out to discover where God is calling us in our own place, I am going to commission four mission projects which, I hope, will encourage us in that journey of discovery. One project is about parishes, one about chaplaincies, one about schools, and one about Fresh Expressions. These projects will each make a difference for those among whom they will work directly, but they will also be experiments from which all of us can learn, wherever we are in the diocese. There is one from each of our three episcopal areas, and one which will operate across the whole diocese.

*[Commissioning of mission projects]*

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I do hope that this morning has given you energy and encouragement to set out on our journey of following Christ in the footsteps of St Chad. We have called this event 'First Steps', because it is only the start of the beginning: the road stretches out ahead of us inviting us to travel, full of promise, challenge and opportunity.

Like true Christians throughout the ages, Chad knew that he could only walk the way of Christ by relying on the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He also knew that he could only receive the gifts of the Spirit if he prayed for them; so that is exactly what he did, Bede says.

For us too, all our journeying must be begun, continued and ended in prayer; without prayer, we do not stand a chance. So it is really good that the next thing we will be doing together on our journey is to join in the season of prayer, *Thy Kingdom Come*. This begins next Thursday, Ascension Day, and continues until Pentecost, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June: ten days of asking expectantly for the promised gift of the Spirit. You can read more about what is going on in your booklet, in the literature in this Cathedral, and on our website. Please do pray, not only then but all the time, for the Spirit to direct, correct, strengthen and purify all that we are trying to do together.

And let us begin now by asking for God's blessing on us all. After that, we will sing a cheerful song at the very top of our voices, and then we will share in picnicking together.

Let us pray ...