

SEE OF LANCASTER: SPEECH BY REV. DR JILL DUFF. March 13, 2018

I am thrilled and humbled to be appointed the eighth Bishop of Lancaster.

I was born and brought up in Bolton, Lancashire, so the region has been on my heart in prayer for many years.

I'm honoured to be joining Bishop Julian's remarkable team and it is such a privilege to be announced here in Marsh Community Centre today.

I'm looking forward to meeting you as I serve across the sheer variety of parishes in Blackburn Diocese: urban areas, rural communities – a university city; the whole range of church traditions; nearly the largest number of church schools per head in the country.

I look forward to working with you to see our Vision 2026 come to fruition. I'm excited by the Bishop of Lancaster's brief to build up confident witnesses of the gospel and see at least 50 new or renewed congregations over the next eight years.

A particular inspiration for me is St Hilda who encouraged cattle herder Caedmon to sing the gospel in the local Anglo-Saxon language. What if children and adults, in all the different contexts across Lancashire found their own voice to speak the gospel in their everyday language?

We'd have renewed and planted congregations as a wonderful by-product; and I have faith that the Spirit of God can enable this to happen across all our traditions. Vision 2026 is impossible without God – and that's a good place to be. I'm up for the ride.

But if there's one word to sum up my hopes as Bishop of Lancaster it's this: beacons!

Lancashire is a county where historically there are beacon sites on top of the hills. What if we were to see a re-lighting of beacons in our days?

Jesus said: "You are the light of the world". What if people from all ages, backgrounds, races were set on fire like beacons and became lights spreading out from churches to transform their communities?

In the film *The Lord of the Rings*, they're in the middle of a terrible battle, there is disappointment on every side, but against the odds, a little hobbit manages to climb up and light the beacon. Then you see this amazing cinematography of a chain of beacons being lit across the hills... and Gandalf says this: "Hope – has – come!"

How interesting it's a humble hobbit who lights the beacon in *The Lord of the Rings*.

I firmly believe that the renewal of our church and country in our day will come from the some of the forgotten places and the most unlikely people.

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Isaiah 61 suggests it's the poor, broken-hearted, the captives who will "rebuild... restore... and renew the ruined cities".

And here's another dimension of hope that I trust will well up in the Diocese of Blackburn and light beacons elsewhere ...

There are certain aspects of my episcopal ministry that some won't feel able in all good conscience to recognise. I understand and respect the position of my brothers and sisters in Christ who do not accept the ministry of ordained women in leadership, whether sacramental or teaching.

There is so much more that unites than divides us, and I am committed to working together for mutual flourishing. May this bring hope to our church at this time.

I've loved being ordained in the Church of England, serving as an urban parish priest, pioneer minister church planting, a school chaplain, vocations work, and most recently as the founding Director of St Mellitus College North West – the first full-time ordination route in the NW for over 40 years.

But the most important thing on my CV is being a mum. It's been the one of the most fulfilling, exhilarating and fun things I've ever done.

I am deeply blessed by the persistent encouragement of my husband Jeremy and sons – Robbie (13) and Harry (10). They are excited by my news and are looking forward to meeting you too in due course.

My consecration as bishop will take place on the 29th June. By a lovely coincidence, this will be exactly 15 years to the day since my ordination as deacon in Liverpool Cathedral.

It's also the Feast Day of St Peter and St Paul. Paul is my all-time hero from the Bible – theologian, church planter, evangelist, man of incredible prayer and courage - but I notice (educated as he was in the Oxbridge of his day) he was 14 years in the wilderness before God used him.

Whereas Peter, the unschooled fisherman, was the one Jesus trusted with preaching on the day of Pentecost. Peter was the rock on which Jesus built his church. I would love to see more Peters called out from the underground into church ministry & leadership.

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I've loved working with Bishop Philip over the last year and just three weeks ago, at Bishop's Philip's invitation, I had the privilege of meeting with clergy and lay ministers from urban parishes across this Diocese, as we discussed and prayed for the School of Urban Leadership to be overseen by Rev. Tim Horobin in Lower Darwen.

Although this all took place before today's announcement I was so impressed by meeting future colleagues who were up for seeing Peters released in our day.

I follow in the footsteps of Bishop Geoff Pearson, to whom I was already deeply grateful for being instrumental in enabling the partnership between the North West bishops and St Mellitus College. I know so many who owe a great debt to Bishop Geoff for bringing them to faith, or faithfully discipling and encouraging them. I only hope, in my own way I can take up his baton to "proclaim every day the good news that God longs to save us".

It seems more than a coincidence that my announcement is being made just a month after Pope Francis has appointed Canon Paul Swarbrick as Bishop of Lancaster. He has been much in my prayers this last month and I look forward to meeting him in due course.

So - here I am. This has been a rollercoaster journey of obedience. Like Mary, I say "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said".

May the Father, who runs out to meet us, call many loved ones home to his incredible banquet.

May the Son, who endured the cross and hell in order to know resurrection, be the pioneer of our faith.

And may the Spirit pour out God's love into our hearts, so that we may overflow with hope, joy and peace by the power of the One who raised Christ from the dead. Amen.