



THE  
DIOCESE  
OF  
BLACKBURN  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

**The Bishop of Blackburn**  
*The Rt Revd Philip North*

Licensed and PTO clergy  
Headteachers  
Churchwardens  
PCC secretaries  
Vision Champions  
DBF/DBE Staff Teams  
*Sent by email only and placed on website*

*18<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

Dear Friends,

In 2026 the Diocese of Blackburn will be 100 years old and the Centenary will be an opportunity for us to recommit our lives to the mission and ministry of the Church in Lancashire. I wanted to notify you in good time of some plans that are being developed to prepare us for the Centenary and to celebrate it worthily.

### **Life after Vision 2026**

Vision 2026 has brought tremendous coherence and transformation to our Diocese. It has resulted in around 200 new local congregations, it has enabled a recent £25.5m SMMI grant and it has driven our commitment to renewing parishes and maintaining clergy numbers.

However in 2026 it expires. This means that in the Autumn we will need to start a lengthy process of listening to our parishes, our schools, our chaplaincies, our children and indeed to Lancashire as we consider what comes next. Above all, of course, we will need to commit ourselves to deeper prayer and to the study of the Scriptures as we discern God's will for the Church of England in our county.

In **Autumn 2024** Carolyn Barton, who will lead this work, will circulate a list of questions to every PCC as we begin this process of discernment. The DBE will similarly work with schools to ensure their voice is heard and input is given.

In **Spring 2025** there will be meetings of Deanery Synods to which Churchwardens and Vision Champions will be invited in which this conversation is continued. During the course of the year we will listen to other key partners as we continue to discern.

In **2026**, the listening will become planning as we frame goals and objectives ready to launch a fresh Vision in November 2026.

One of the joys of our current vision is the level of commitment there is to it from across traditions. So I am fascinated to see what comes out of these process of consultation as we bring our imaginations to bear and listen deeply to what God is saying to us.

## **2025: A Year of Prayer for Growth and Renewal**

One of the key learning points from our Parish Renewal Programme is that, when parishes pray consciously for growth, growth usually happens. So what would happen if we did that not just as parishes but as a Diocese?

Therefore we are inviting our parishes to observe 2025 as a Year of Prayer for Growth and Renewal. The way this is lived out will be up to each Parish. Resources will be made available on Fruitful, our Diocesan Discipleship app, and on the website. But rather than big central events, the invitation is to every Church to put aside half an hour a week for small groups to gather and pray for growth in depth or number in their local church. Prayer will also be the focus for the Lent Devotional and for the Diocesan Lent Course in 2025.

Please do have a think in your PCCs about how you might respond to this invitation.

## **All for Jesus: Celebrating 100 Years of the Diocese of Blackburn**

Then in 2026, we will celebrate our centenary under the title All for Jesus, one that carries us to the very heart of our common life.

The plan thus far is as follows:

### ***Local Launch***

This will take place on Sunday January 5<sup>th</sup> (the Feast of Epiphany) and the following week. Every school and parish will be given liturgical and other resources to mark the launch of the Centenary year during Sunday/midweek worship or (in schools) during Collective Worship.

### ***The Big Whit Walk***

Lancashire has a fantastic tradition of outdoor worship in which public witness of the Gospel is brought onto the streets. And so as the centrepiece of our celebrations we will be holding a major outdoor celebration on Blackpool.

We will walk as Deaneries along the prom and gather at the square outside St John's Blackpool for an act of outdoor worship.

Blackpool Borough Council have warmly welcomed this plan and negotiations are under way to agree a date.

### ***Mission Weekends***

Imagine every parish in the Diocese on mission at the same time! The centrepiece of our Centenary will be a mission weekend held from September 11-13 2026. This will be locally focused, so the invitation will be for each parish to put on one or two events to which people can be invited and the Gospel proclaimed in a simple way. Such events will be appropriate to

the context and of a size and scale that the parish can manage. The idea will be to celebrate the Gospel with joy, not exhaust ourselves!

Steve Haskett will be leading on this and from the middle part of 2025 training will be offered to every parish during a Deanery Synod meeting. This will cover areas such as planning an event, preaching for a response and running a nurture group.

### ***Diocesan Conference***

This is booked for July 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> 2026 at Liverpool Hope University and, as in previous years is open for clergy and laypeople. The venue also makes it possible to host day delegates.

Bishop Jill has written separately about this.

### ***Centenary Service***

2026 is of course the centenary not just for the Diocese but for the Cathedral. And so on Thursday November 12<sup>th</sup>, the actual date in which the diocese of Blackburn came into being 100 years ago, we will gather in the Cathedral for a joyful Service of Celebration.

### ***Launch of the new Vision***

On the morning of the following Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, an Open Meeting of the Diocesan Synod will take place at which the new Vision and Strategy will be formally launched. This will be livestreamed across the Diocese.

Of course more information of all this will appear in the coming months. But I wanted you to see it all in one place as you make plans for your own parishes.

This comes with my love and prayers,

+ Philip Blackburn