

## At the Crossroads



Between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September, I had the privilege of being part of a

team led by Bishop David taking part in the Crossroads Mission in Blackburn Diocese. The idea for this came from a meeting in 2015 of the Northern Province Bishops with Archbishop John Sentamu on Holy Island, Lindisfarne, off the Northumbrian coast, to pray and take counsel together about their shared calling as bishops and teachers of the Christian faith. They had travelled from their dioceses to Holy Island, that wonderful centre of prayer, worship, and witness founded by St Aidan, from which the early evangelist monks went out in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ across the north.

Aidan, Cuthbert, Hilda, Cedd, Chad, and their contemporaries learned the Psalms by heart and recited them as they walked from community to community, teaching and sharing. Their life was rooted in Sanctuary, (the holy place), the Road (the venture and journey of faith) , and in Hospitality, (the loving welcome given to all by God).

The Archbishop of York explains: “Their story really inspires me and there is something very special about Lindisfarne. Just crossing the causeway from the mainland you feel you are embarking upon an amazing journey. This was our experience as we visited Holy Island for a 24 hour retreat. The first day we heard from young people from all over the region about how they saw the challenges of sharing the Christian faith today – then spent the rest of the time in prayer, in reflection on the Psalms and in conversation. And as we prayed, listened and talked together we realised that we in the north have inherited this most amazing treasure, the good news of God’s transforming love and power. More than anything, as bishops, we realised we wanted to share this treasure of great price and make it freely accessible to people across the North today. It seemed good to us. We needed to do it – not just talk about it. From the young people

we had heard of God transforming lives and communities with love. Could we as bishops start to do mission in a new way together?" And so the first of these missions took place in Sheffield diocese a year ago, to be followed by the one this year in Blackburn diocese. Our team was based in the Blackburn & Darwen deanery and I got to know the motorway between Ashton and there well, travelling up each day. We began with a service at Blackburn Cathedral led by the Archbishop and ended with a Celebration at the Preston Flag Market. In between, I attended a school, a toddler group, a schools' event at Ewood Park, a family event, a Quiz night, children's party, a parish tea, hoedown and preached and presided on Sunday morning. Lots of conversations, leading activities, listening...

Missions are hard work but exhilarating too with the privilege of helping a large number of people to encounter God's love in different ways and in different places. There isn't time to prepare much in advance for each event so all I could do was trust in God's grace to give me the right words at the right time, and get me to the right place! It was an exhausting but wonderful opportunity and I feel blessed to have been part of the Mission.

There's inevitably lots to think about from my experiences and, as with all the work that do for the wider diocese, there are things to learn that can inspire my ministry among you and that can help us in this place to share the good news of God's love more effectively. As we look at Mission Action Planning over the coming months, I hope that my time in Blackburn is of some help. However, in the meantime, I'd like to encourage you to reflect on the verse of Scripture which underpinned the Crossroads Mission and which I think should underpin are hopes and plans for the future:

*This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient path, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16*