

## THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

The Rt Revd Dr David Walker



Dear sisters and brothers,

Back in my days as a suffragan, a fellow bishop reportedly said of me, "That David's not like a normal bishop. He believes in evidence". And it's true. I do. My Christian faith came alive in my late teens, when I found the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus to be compelling. I tested it out by trying to pray. Wonderfully, I found the same Jesus I read of in the scriptures meeting me in my prayers.

2026 sees us moving in Manchester Diocese to implement the strategy we have spent the last couple of years consulting on and refining. We hope that we have made a convincing case to the national church institutions and, when the next round of grants is announced later this month, will receive a sizable sum, enough to provide major support for our work over the next few years.

Arriving at our four strategic priorities, hasn't simply been a matter of our parishes, schools and chaplaincies engaging in theoretical discussion. It has been underpinned by the evidence of where we have seen the Holy Spirit active amongst us. We have witnessed God blessing various projects in particular parts of the diocese, and of our work. These can, over the next few years, be scaled up to impact all of us.

We've seen how even modest one-off grants can be the catalyst for a local church to begin a new piece of outreach or ministry, renewing lay people and clergy in their discipleship and calling.

Our training programmes have not only equipped us with a committed cohort of ALMs but have proved, for many, the first step on a continuing vocational journey. The diversity of those now entering ordained ministry, many of them full time, demonstrates that investment in forming missional leaders bears fruit.

Our work with schools, parishes and young people, piloted initially in Bolton, has proved groundbreaking. Not only has it exceeded our hopes and expectations, it has given birth to two unexpected, and nationally recognised, blessings - Wiggle Worship and the Shades Project.

Meanwhile, our church plants and revitalisations have reached out into parts of the population we have otherwise been struggling to reach, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to inner city communities, outer estates, suburbs and the city centre. These too are producing a healthy flow of new candidates for ministry.

These plans for the future build on the efforts and learning of so many people across our diocese in recent years, for which I thank you all.

Cutting across all four of our priorities lie our commitments to sustaining God's creation by radically reducing our carbon footprint, making a healthy safeguarding culture central to our ministry, and promoting racial justice in all aspects of our common life. All of this is, of course, underpinned by prayer.

Manchester, as we know, contains a higher proportion of parishes among the poorest populations in the country than any other diocese. We are fortunate that this is recognised in the grants we receive from the Church Commissioners each year. But national money, whether to address poverty or support mission, will only ever be a fraction of our income. Parish Share remains the bedrock of our finances. We will not sustain a growing church unless we can also grow our main source of money. Nor can we pretend that financial growth over the next few years will come predominantly from new people coming to faith. Today's new Christians are younger, more ethnically diverse, and from wider social backgrounds than before. What these demographies have in common is that many are struggling to get by, in a society where standards of living have, at best, stagnated in recent years. The call to generosity needs to be heard by those of us mature in the faith.

My ordination as deacon took place in 1983 on St Thomas's Day. Thomas famously demanded evidence that Jesus really had risen from the dead. Presented with that evidence, he was the first to declare Jesus as his Lord and God, and later took the Christian faith to India. We have, here in Manchester, the evidence of what God is raising up in our own generation. Like Thomas, the challenge for us is now to act on it.

God bless you and your ministry in this year newly begun.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+David Walker'.

Bishop David Walker

Feast of the Epiphany 2026