



**THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN**
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

The Bishop of Blackburn
The Rt Revd Julian Henderson

An open letter to the Diocese of Blackburn
Sent by email only

25th July 2022

Dear friends,

As always the diocese of Blackburn has excelled itself and Heather and I have been overwhelmed by the kind words and messages and gifts we have received in recent days.

I said at the beginning of the service on 16th July, it is quite an ordeal to extricate oneself from a place and a people you have come to know and love. In the nearly nine years we have been in Lancashire, we have been embraced and supported by love, faith and prayer throughout. And as we leave and step down after 43 years of formal stipendiary ministry in the Church of England, there is a sadness in our hearts, that what has been a massive joy is coming to an end, but we also have a peace that this is God's time. We will continue as disciples of Jesus, will attend Christian worship, to begin with to be ministered to rather than to minister, and try to play our part in encouraging those without faith to come to faith.

I am very conscious of several pieces of work still in progress, emails not answered, visits not made and am sorry I have been able to tie up all the loose ends and have had to hand them on to others. As everyone tells me, there is never a good time to leave and the work is never finished, but please forgive all that has been lacking in my role as your Bishop.

Having said that, I am so grateful to God for the team He has assembled and am confident in Him that the work of implementing Vision 2026 will continue apace during the vacancy. God has brought together for this particular moment an extraordinarily gifted group of men and women in the central team and dispersed around the diocese in parishes, chaplaincies, and schools.

We have really enjoyed the many messages that have been passed on to us on cards and in letters and want to thank you all for your kindness and generosity. We will read them again in our leisure in the days ahead and be reminded of what a special diocese this is. Events in the Tent were also special moments of meeting and greeting, not least Bishop Jill's song at the BLT dinner!

We were very touched by those able to come to the Cathedral on July 16th for what was my last opportunity to preside and preach as the Bishop of Blackburn. Thanks to the Cathedral team and Bishop's House for masterminding the logistics and refreshments. Thanks to the choir and organists and to Lou and John Hunter for leading the two songs after the sermon. And thanks to those who read and prayed and those who shared at the end of the service, Sam Cheesman, David Barlow, Carolyn Barton, Bishop Philip and Peter Howell Jones. I was beginning to wonder who they were talking about!! I hope those who were unable to be present will have had the opportunity to watch/listen in to the service either at the time or since. Our thanks also go to Joe Wilson for an extended series of clips during the Sunday faith programme on Radio Lancashire on July 17th.

May we thank you all for a series of gifts, and in particular for the picture of the Queen's visit in 2014, the extremely generous cheque and the power drill. The cheque will help with the removal expenses and the drill kit with the DIY that awaits. How kind and thoughtful you have all been. Thank you.

We head this Tuesday to Canterbury for the Lambeth Conference of Bishops from around the Anglican Communion. Following that, we head back to Sussex to continue unpacking and have holiday time. Formally I step down as Bishop of Blackburn on 31st August and the Vacancy in See begins. And though we will not be here in Lancashire, you will not be far from our thoughts and you will always be in our prayers, especially for the diocesan conference and the process of appointing a new Bishop of Blackburn.

God has blessed the diocese in more ways than we can imagine. Let me use the words of the Apostle Paul as he left Ephesus, Acts 20.32, as my final word to you all:

'And now I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.'

May the work go from strength to strength and bring to Jesus the glory He deserves.

With our love and prayers and thanks

As ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+Julian". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.