



Bishop Stephen Wright

Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle

Pastoral Letter – World Mission Sunday. “One in Christ, united in mission.” Sunday 18th October 2026

Today is the 100th World Mission Sunday. Pope Leo has chosen its theme, "One in Christ, united in mission." Worldwide prayers and second collections are gathered at Masses today to support impoverished dioceses and missions across the world. Recalling his personal experience as a Missionary Priest and later Bishop in Peru, Pope Leo tells us "I saw first-hand how the faith, the prayer, and the generosity shown on World Mission Sunday can transform entire communities."¹ So, thank you for your prayers and generosity this day. We also pray that Pope Leo makes a full recovery from his surgery.

Closer to home as a Diocesan family we have been reflecting on being "One in Christ and united in mission." Thank you for your participation. We are one. Our parishes do not live in isolation from one another. Together we form the one Body of Christ. We have been discerning our mission to build the Kingdom of God now. Pope Leo writes in his Message for World Mission Sunday, "I wish to encourage the whole Church to continue its missionary journey with joy and zeal in the Holy Spirit. This requires hearts united in Christ, reconciled communities and, in everyone, a willingness to cooperate with generosity and trust..." "Let us allow ourselves to be guided and inspired by divine grace, to renew in ourselves the fire of our missionary vocation and advance together in the commitment to evangelization."²

In recent months I have invited all our parishes to reflect on what our priorities for mission are. Then I invited parishes to come together as local partnerships and prayerfully reflect on how we can work more closely together and what the future use of our resources may look like. Thank you for your participation. I realise this was a challenge for us all and especially for some communities who may be fearful of the future. Contemplating change is never easy, even if we know it is necessary. Despite the challenges, your spirit-filled responses were humbling and inspiring to read. Almost all our parishes, over 90%, were engaged in both stages of reflection. 100% of our partnerships reported. You have spoken in the Spirit which happens when we come together in prayer. As Pope Leo reminds us, "Truth is sought in community."³ Individual parish responses, isolated from others, do not address the reality we face. We must discern and work together.

Now is a period of prayerful listening to what has been shared, before I can report back more fully in the New Year. However, not to lose momentum in this time of discernment I wish to share with you early reflections on what you have said to me. Firstly, on mission and then our use of resources.

Mission. There is a striking degree of shared discernment across the Diocese about the kind of Church we feel called to be. Although expressed differently in different places, the returns repeatedly point towards greater lay participation and adult formation, deeper engagement with

¹ Message of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the 100th World Mission Day [18 October 2026]

² Ibid.

³ Drawing New Maps of Hope 3:2



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children, young people and families, stronger sacramental pathways and relationships with schools, better communication, and an outward-looking Church attentive to people in need. What is significant is that these priorities are not confined to particular areas; these mission priorities are present across all our Diocese. The challenge now is about working together as communities to turn those shared priorities into lived practice. Every partnership response may be seen as an agenda of next steps for parishes and partnerships to take. I encourage us all to be bold and take those steps.

Resources. There is now widespread recognition that our present patterns of buildings, finances, clergy provision and structures cannot continue unchanged. Change must happen. It is better to plan that change rather than fall into it. Quite understandably though local partnerships of parishes are at different stages in translating that recognition into practical proposals. Some have developed very realistic scenarios for the future or a clear local process for reaching recommendations; others understand the issues but are asking for better evidence, clearer criteria or accompaniment to help them discern difficult choices. A small number have reached the limit of what they believe can reasonably be discerned locally and are looking to my leadership to make final decisions. Final decisions do rest with me as Bishop, however Church teaching and Law insist on proper processes, so that consultation and listening takes place before decisions are made. I am not prepared to rush such important decisions.

Between now and the New Year, together with others, both clergy and lay people, I will reflect on what you have discerned and told me so that practical steps can emerge for both mission and resources. I ask for your prayers. My intention is to provide realistic practical scenarios for each part of our diocese that give clear paths of direction for the next 5-10 years. I realise I cannot meet every expectation nor satisfy everyone's wishes. I recognise changes can cause distress.

I know full partnership reflections have been shared in many parishes. Feel free to contact your Parish Priest if you wish to read your return in full. Due to the volume of paperwork, faithful summaries of the returns will be available on the diocesan website in the next days.

In her history, Jesus' Church has both grown and been pruned. Gardners know both give life. We are discerning how to be the Lord's missionary disciples today. The final hope filled words belong to Pope Leo: "I therefore encourage all institutions in the Church to strengthen their sense of ecclesial missionary communion and to develop creative and concrete ways of cooperating with one another for and in the mission."⁴

We pray we will be "one in Christ, united in mission."

+ Stephen
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⁴ Message of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the 100th World Mission Day (18th October)