

GROWING TOGETHER

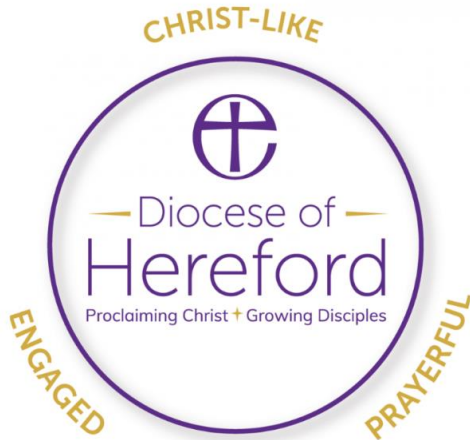
**Year of Faith 2024**



# Year of Faith 2024

## Our Diocesan Values

The vision, mission and ministry of Hereford Diocese is focused on living out our values in every church, home, school and community across our diocese: Christlike, prayerful and engaged:



In 2024 we will be exploring faith – living a Christlike life.

## A message from Bishop Richard Jackson

Wherever we are on our journey in prayer, faith and engagement in our churches. Living out our faith is a significant part of it.

As part of living out our values in every corner of our diocese, I have called us all to join in a **Year of Faith in 2024**.



We hope through faithful engagement across many communities, villages and towns of our diocese that lives will be transformed and that more people will come to know Jesus Christ.

The Rt. Revd Richard Jackson  
Bishop of Hereford



Perhaps, you feel a stirring in your heart to 'living a faithful life'. If you do, we hope that this information might help you a little bit.

## What is faith?

The dictionary describes faith as:

*“complete trust or confidence in someone or something”*

Most of us have faith in many things, whether we realise it or not:

- The chair you will next sit on will hold you up.
- That people will follow the rules of the roads as they drive so you, hopefully, will not come to any harm.
- You will live ‘three score years and ten’.

Christian faith is saying that ‘I put my faith into someone greater than me’. As Christians, we believe, that someone is God, the father of Jesus Christ.

The Bible, God’s word, tells us that, *“Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it”*.<sup>1</sup>

This reminds us that faith is based on a ‘conviction’. For example, a chair might look solid but until you try to sit on it you will not know! So, there is an element of personal trust and belief that we all have to make for ourselves.

Sometimes the journey of faith is a gradual process that happens over time; when a person looks back, they can see the ‘hand of God’ at work in their lives. At other times people seem to have an ‘experience’ of God which, to them, is irrefutable. And often life is a mixture of both.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11.1

## What is Christianity all about?

According to the Bible, long ago when God made the world, he made people who were able to love him, and receive his love in return.

The trouble was, we ignored God's love and chose our own way. As a result, we live in a world where most people are looking after themselves; we never quite seem to be satisfied; we become trapped in our own pride, greed and violence; it can feel like we are on a treadmill getting nowhere. Or worse, heading for disaster.

And where was God while all this was going on? Like any good parent, he did something. God sent Jesus Christ to help us out of the mess we'd got into. Here's how he did it. Jesus lived a human life, like ours, except that he did it as God had always intended it. He never gave into temptation or did anything wrong.

He taught people how to get on with God, and how to live in his world. He said God had to come first; that serving others mattered more than serving yourself; that relationships were more important than possessions.

People flocked to hear Him, and to see the miracles he did. But some found him a threat. He challenged their comfortable self-centred ideas, so they decided to kill him.

He could have avoided it, but chose not to, because by living a human life, and dying a human death, he dealt with a barrier between people and God. He cleared it away, along with all the rubbish in people's lives that stops them knowing God.

But it didn't end there. Suddenly his friends started meeting him again. He was alive, and it was true. The tomb was empty. Jesus smashed through the biggest barrier of all, death, and God brought him through the other side to give his followers, a new start, and a new power to lead their lives, what Christians call the Holy Spirit.

He told them before that he was the way to God. Now they could see he was. He didn't just point them in the right direction. He went with them and showed them the way. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Based on 'First Steps – a parent's guide to baptism'. Produced by CPAS.

## Why do we want to grow in faith?

Simply put:

1. Christians want to **draw as close as they can to Jesus**; they are drawn to want to know him more and more.
2. And as we meet him, **we want to become more and more like him.**
3. And then **we want to share what we have experienced with others** too.

There are so many ways to **draw closer to God**. Some include:

- Reading your Bible and asking God to reveal himself to you as you read it. Perhaps you might want some bible reading notes to help you make sense of the bible as you read it?
- Praying.
- Coming to church and attending some of our services.
- Being part of some of the groups running in the five churches of our benefice (a group of churches).
- Talking to other Christians to ask questions and hear about their experiences.
- Reading some good Christian books.
- Going for a walk outside and asking God, who created everything, to be with you?

In the gospels (the first four books in the New Testament) we get a picture of the 12 disciples (followers of Jesus) wanting to be with Jesus as much as they could, so that they learnt from him. Some call this **discipleship** (*learning to do what Jesus did*). Others call it '**becoming Christlike**'.

The strange thing about spending time with Jesus is that it does start to change us – often from the inside out. It often helps us realise that God is at work in us and, perhaps, how much we need his help.

So, God is at work changing us. But we also have to want to cooperate with the Holy Spirit; it requires both God's power and our willingness to play our part too. Not that it is by our own human effort we win favour

with God. God offers it all by his grace (i.e. we can't earn it for ourselves) and through his love.

Finally, we want to share our experience of God, and the things we are seeing him do, with others. This isn't meant to be a heavy 'you must' ... but is because we like to share the good experiences we have with other people.

For example, if I have a good experience from a shop, I will probably tell others so that they can enjoy it too. This is no different for Christians sharing who Jesus is and what he is doing.

## Living out our faith

Living out our faith basically means that we try to live a life based on the teaching and love of Jesus.

We are all on a journey of doing this. This isn't a ten-step process, with person X at step 9, meaning that they are better than you! Jesus works with us all at the right speed for us, doing the things that he wants to do in each of our hearts ... so that we can become the person that he wants us to be.

We will all have times when this feels easy. And times when it feels more challenging. (That is one of the reasons we support each other as a church).

So how do we do live by faith? Well, there is no quick answer. But it might be helpful to think about the following suggestions:

- Follow the Word of God – we regularly read our bible and try to listen to what Jesus is saying to us as we read.
- We put God first in our lives – thanking him for all that he has done for us.
- We humble ourselves – recognising that all the good things we have are given by a loving and caring God.
- We find ways to worship him in our hearts each day, in a way that is suitable to each of us.

Of course, this is a starter for ten, and I am sure you will discover many other ways that are important to you and to Jesus.



## Being thankful ...

One of the things that I have noticed is that people wanting to grow in faith tend to discover that **thankfulness** plays an important part.

Somehow, as we recognise the good things that we receive daily, our hearts become more aware of all that we have, and it helps us remember that all that we have comes from God.

Surprisingly, people often discover that they have small things to say thank you for even when life feels hard or difficult. [I am not saying we make stuff up when we are really down – there are definitely times I have needed people to support me when I have been in difficult spots; and that is okay].

Perhaps we can take time each day/week to reflect on the good things happening around us ... and thank God for them?

Perhaps we will then notice that we see more of the good things naturally ... and our faith will be raised as we see more of God at work around us.

## Sharing our story ...

I bet you that if you have a good experience, you will naturally want to tell people about it. Whether it is a lovely place to holiday; a great restaurant or coffee shop; or a shop where the people go above and beyond to look after you. We do it. Others do it. And very often when you hear these stories you get excited too ... or can't wait to experience it yourself.

And you and I have the best story to share with our friends, neighbours, and family. Because we have met with God ourselves. And as a result of this, our lives have changed.

You and I might not be perfect – yet. We might very well be ‘works in progress’. But we have something that is exciting, real and positive which I think others would like to hear about.

Our Lent course this year will be taking a new bit of research that showed that those who don't go to church like us and some of them are open to learning more about Jesus. Our course will help us think about the opportunities we have as churches and think about what small steps of faith we might take together.

Don't worry, this is scary for most of us to get our heads around. But if we look at it in a safe way which encourages us and helps us work through our questions, we might learn something.

Please do pray about joining us. You never know, God might surprise us and we might have some fun too.

## But what if my faith feels so wobbly ...

**FANTASTIC** – because you are in very good company! It is actually how we all feel most of the time including most of the people we read about in the bible.

Feeling wobbly is probably what our lives should feel like because it means we are learning not to trust in our own abilities and are trying to step forwards to be and do what Jesus would have us do.

Being wobbly reminds us that we are human, but we trust in a God who uses everyone (even me!) as we learn to step forwards. I begin to think that God delights in our faltering steps forward in ways that we can't imagine.

So don't let feeling wobbly hold you back. Perhaps it is reminder to ask God to help us ... and then to inch forwards ... and see what happens!

*Maybe this year we should spend some time in our services sharing what happens when we inch forward .... we might be very encouraged and might encourage each other. What do you think?*

### A final thought ...

Jesus didn't say '**if** we pray' but he did say '**when** we pray' (Matthew 6.5-8). There is a clear 'call' for Jesus' disciples to pray and spend time talking to him.

Prayer isn't necessarily meant to be 'hard work' but it is meant to help us draw closer to him and grow in our relationship with him.

If you would like some suggestions of how to pray and read your bibles, please do let one of us know.

### Further help ...

If we can help you further, please do speak to one of our minsters (Tim, Jill, Penny or Helen) who will gladly meet with you and talk more about faith; chat with you; or pray with you.



**wyereaches.org**