

## Seek the welfare of the city

Today we mark and celebrate the centenary of the consecration of Liverpool Cathedral. It is a significant moment, a time to reflect on what this magnificent place stands for, and its role and place in the world.

The cathedral community are taking this time to reflect on their history in the context of their current work and future plans.

So what is a cathedral for? As Bishop of Liverpool it is the seat of my teaching - the cathedra - a place where I can offer spiritual and moral guidance to both our diocese and the wider city and region. That is the inherited, ancient purpose of a cathedral. A centre of worship, a safe space, a holy place.

However, it is more than that. The biblical book of Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 7 gives a command: *“seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you”* and Liverpool Cathedral fulfils that exhortation in so many ways.

We talk about a cathedral built by the people for the people. That is a strong statement and encapsulation of the Jeremiah verse, and our desire and reality that we are rooted deeply here in this great city.

When Liverpool Cathedral was conceived and built it was to be a spiritual place for the city. The imposing impressive structure Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designed has been an iconic presence that has dominated Liverpool's skyline since it was constructed. It grew and changed as the city grew and changed. Its story is interwoven into the lifeblood of the city.

So how does Liverpool Cathedral seek the welfare of the city? First and foremost, as a place of worship. A community steeped in the rhythm and patterns of daily services. A place with a world class choir and magnificent organ expertly played by maestros such as Ian Tracey, who is playing for us today.

Liverpool Cathedral seeks the welfare of the city when Liverpool is in pain. The countless moving funerals we have hosted, Rhys Jones, PC Dave Philips, Ashley Dale to name a few, have provided comfort and solace to those who mourn. The cathedral prayed for the city during the coronavirus pandemic and brought many together when we started to re-emerge from those dark days. And it was entirely right that in 2012, my predecessor, Bishop James Jones, chose to reveal the truth about the Hillsborough tragedy in a place which could absorb the pain and support those affected.

Liverpool Cathedral also seeks the welfare of the city when Liverpool has joy. We have recently seen hundreds of Liverpool John Moore's University students mark their academic achievements with celebrations against the backdrop of the cathedral's fine architecture. We host celebratory awards dinners, great cultural exhibitions attracting the world-renowned artists, such as Anish Kapoor for an exhibition this summer. Cathedral worship and events have been

implanted in so many families' Christmas traditions with the building packed out for so much of the time. The cathedral played its part in city celebrations such as Eurovision and the capital of culture. In doing this the cathedral also supports the economic welfare of the city bringing tourism and visitor income.

Liverpool Cathedral seeks the welfare of the city through seeking out the least and the lost. Working with our sisters and brothers at the Metropolitan Cathedral and other local churches, we established Micah Liverpool, a charity providing emergency food provision and employability programmes as we work to help people's lives improve. Mindful of the city's migrant population, the Farsi speaking service brings a disparate community together.

Liverpool Cathedral does not do this in isolation. It is striking that the inscription on the memorial for one of my predecessors, Bishop David Shepherd carries that very verse from Jeremiah. Along with [the then Roman Catholic](#) Archbishop Derek Worlock, Bishop David sought the welfare of the city through healing division, forging unity and focusing on the poor and needy.

On Hope Street, the road so appropriately named, which joins this building with the Roman Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral, you'll find a statue of the two leaders, portrayed as two bronze doors which look at

both cathedrals. The doors are decorated with symbols and newspaper headlines, as the two men attracted attention for their efforts to break down sectarian barriers in the city in the 19780s and 80s. In 1982, this partnership culminated when Bishop Sheppard welcomed Pope John Paul II into this building. The pair were awarded the freedom of the city in 1994. Their inspiration lives on through the work, mission and ministry of a cathedral that stands for the welfare of the city, and paints a picture of hope for anyone who sees a need to bring communities together in this country and around the world.

Our New Testament reading this morning came from Ephesians chapter 2, where St Paul introduces the people of God as a building, where Jesus is the Cornerstone and believers are held together through him. And as Sheppard and Worlock worked to bring unity to the church and this city, Paul leads that call here, giving everyone the assurance that they all equally belong to God's house, and no one is a foreigner or stranger there. But unlike this grand Cathedral where we sit today, which took 74 years to complete, God's holy temple is still being built. Later, Peter reminds us that Christians are living stones, being built as a spiritual house. Liverpool cathedral is rightly a place of worship, refuge and reverence. When you look at this Cathedral, and the wonder and incredible workmanship, may it speak of the work of God building us together as one body for eternity, transcending space and time.

And as we seek the welfare of our vibrant and resilient city, may we be reminded that we are joining in God's work of building a city with eternal foundations, where all are welcome, all are equal, and all are cared for.

As we celebrate the centenary of its consecration and reflect on what a cathedral is for, we can see that over the last hundred years the activities of the cathedral have grown and changed. However, its purpose and values remain constant, to be here for the people, to seek the welfare of the city. We pray that this cathedral that serves God and the people will continue to thrive to celebrate future centenaries; and remain a blessing to our city and our communities. Amen.