

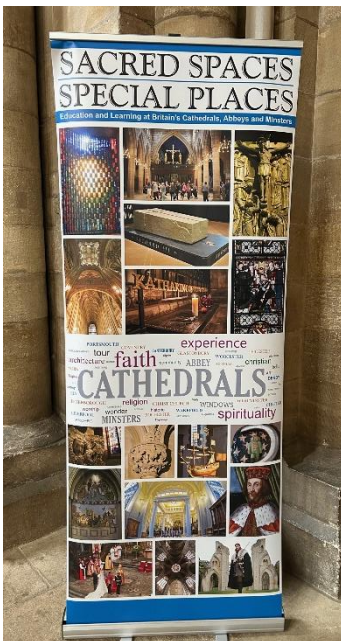
## Conference Report - Cathedrals Plus

### JOURNEYS: travelling together through faith

14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> January 2025

held at Peterborough Cathedral

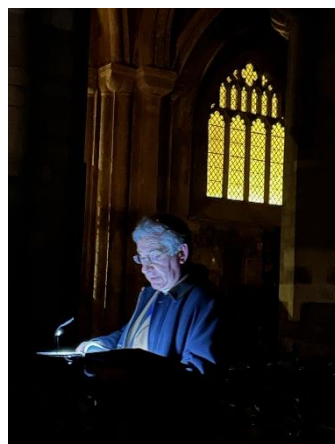
***This conference aimed to explore the theme of Journeys and how we can travel together through faith, bringing together people from different religions, denominations, backgrounds and beliefs. Through shared practices such as pilgrimages, we explored parallels and partnerships with a focus on community and heritage.***



Our annual conference this year was hosted by Peterborough Cathedral. There were 52 delegates in total, including the organising team and Council members, and we were joined by a total of 14 speakers, guests and sponsors. It was heartening to realise that 73% of our membership were represented at the conference. Most of our delegates stayed at The Bull Hotel in Peterborough city centre where we were very well looked after by the management and staff.



The conference was opened by our Chair, the Very Revd Dr Anthony Cane, Dean of Portsmouth. He led us all in expressing our thanks to the hard-working Peterborough team, led by Alex Carton with Toni Morgan-Ray. They were supported by a delightful team of volunteers who helped with registration, excellent catering and refreshments, and guided tours. They all ensured a smooth running of our activities and transitions between different areas of the cathedral spaces. The Dean, the Very Revd Chris Dalliston, and Vice Dean, Canon Tim Alban Jones, gave everyone the warmest welcome and displayed great generosity towards the conference events and all participants. One of the highlights was a tour of the cathedral by night, a *Sons et Lumières* experience in which Canon Tim took us through centuries of history and political turmoil.



Revd Michelle Dalliston kindly hosted several sessions in the nearby St John's church, so we enjoyed a wide range of comfortable spaces, even if the ambient temperature in the cathedral was occasionally a challenge. No wonder the wonderfully tuneful Peterborough choristers wear a snug winter cloak at Evensong!



This year, once again, we were able to offer a delegate bag with contents supplied by generous donors (such as Westhill Endowment Trust and the Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham) and the delegates themselves, who brought examples of materials from their own sacred spaces or souvenirs from their gift shops. Ecclesiastical Insurance kindly sponsored the printing of the tote bags this year and our thanks go to Scott Hayes for arranging this, and for his continuing support for our work. A short booklet highlighting the work of Cathedrals Plus was also distributed, sponsored by McCabe Travel with the support of Revd Paul Ellerby, with 10 copies given to each delegate to distribute to colleagues in their organisation and to their diocesan teams.

During the conference, Sarah Page relaunched the exciting Resources Hub, our members-only resource base hosted through Dropbox on our website. Additional contributions are requested and very welcome so that colleagues can share their fabulous ideas and learn from one another.

Laura Arends coordinated the Regional Hub sessions once again. These hubs have proved very helpful to colleagues, providing a useful network of support within each region and an opportunity for a CPD day when meeting too.

Diana Ives encouraged people to join the Education teams' WhatsApp group and coordinated another inspiring Sharing Ideas Session for those in learning or education roles.

Owen Towndrow did the same for the Visitor Experience colleagues and led discussions on volunteers, visitor donations and the different types of engaging and profitable activities that those present have run and recommend.

As usual, everyone's contributions at these sharing sessions, with practical examples of successful initiatives, was greatly appreciated. Ideas/notes from both are uploaded to the Resources Hub for our members to download, and especially for the benefit of those who were unable to join us for the conference this year.



The workshops were also very successful. Delegates were able to attend 2 out of 7 choices (see Conference Programme) and Cathedrals Plus is very grateful to all the workshop presenters who prepared and so effectively contributed to the event.

Workshops included sessions by:

- Phil Stephens and Hilary Young from Ely Cathedral who presented their innovative work with **providing sensory spaces** for the needs of neuro-diverse students;
- Stacey Burman presented the work of the RE Hubs (<https://www.re-hubs.uk/>);
- Charlotte Nobbs of the Diocesan Youth Trust ran a workshop on Growing Faith, connecting school, home and church;
- Dave Cramp explored Banning the 'F' (for FREE) word, the dynamic donations journey at Peterborough, with useful lessons for other churches and cathedrals;
- Jen Stratford of Chester Cathedral shared how science experiments can engage children to explore spiritual concepts, using electricity, light and materials;
- Toni Morgan-Ray, of Peterborough Cathedral and Steve Clarke of St Alban's led colleagues through their Cathedral Classroom, sharing creative teaching ideas and resources;
- Canon Tim Alban Jones described Peterborough Cathedral's Eventful Journey, moving from running 2 income-generating events per year to over 60.



On the second day, we held an Interfaith panel discussion on spiritual journeys / pilgrimages, chaired by Canon Tim. One of our panel unfortunately had to drop out but Stacey Burman, of RE Hubs, kindly agreed to contribute the perspective of Judaism. She was joined by Mr Chowdhry of the local mosque; Revd Paul Ellerby of McCabe Travel, one of our sponsors; and former Cathedrals Plus Chair, Revd Canon Jane Brooke. Delegates had submitted questions in advance which gave a framework to the very interesting discussion about individual and collective journeys of faith.



Our conference dinner, sponsored by Ecclesiastical Insurance, was enjoyed at The Bull, and was preceded by a talk by Helen Gray of The Benefact Trust. Helen presented several opportunities for our cathedrals and other sacred spaces to apply for funding or support through the different Trust categories. After dinner, Revd Steve Benoy, Bishop's Chaplain, spoke about his pilgrimage journeys over the years, with good humour and good grace!

All three of our plenary speakers spoke powerfully on the conference theme of journeys and travelling together through faith.

- Our first speaker was Revd Professor Dee Dyas, a long-time ally of Cathedrals Plus, whose department at York University has contributed much hugely valuable research into cathedrals and other sacred spaces.
- Our second speaker, Dr Renie Chow Choy, who is based now at Westminster Abbey, outlined her very personal journey from Hong Kong to the UK. Her research into contested heritage and challenging church monuments gave everyone a great deal to consider.
- Dawn Champion of the British Pilgrimage Trust gave the final plenary session. Her powerfully illustrated overview of what pilgrimages and faith journeys can offer groups and individuals brought the conference to a meaningful close.



To find out more, there are detailed summaries of these talks on the Conference page of our website.



Council held an informal meeting over a working lunch and everyone attended the AGM in St John's Church. Minutes of the AGM are available on our website. The conference feedback forms have been summarised and are also available on our website. In brief, the feedback was VERY positive with the overall average mark being 9.3 out of 10 (Last year it was 8.6) The planning group, which meets once a month throughout the year, are delighted to see that 100% of the delegates thought the conference was Excellent or Good and 97% delegates felt the content of the conference was relevant to their work. It was also heartening to read the acknowledgements of our response to last year's feedback.

Another conference, for 2026, is being planned. Two offers to host it have been received by Council who will decide the venue by the end of March. Several ideas for themes have been suggested for the planning group to consider.



Report by Jackie Holderness  
Secretary, Cathedrals Plus