

## **Summary of Keynote speaker 1: Revd. Professor Dee Dyas**

### ***Pilgrimage, People and Places: enhancing our offer; enhancing visitor experience***

Our first conference day was enhanced by a presentation by Dee Dyas, in St John's Church, opposite the Cathedral. Dee reminded us that pilgrims coming to our sacred spaces are not only journeying TO us but also journeying AROUND the space once they have arrived, and then hopefully RETURNING enriched to their everyday lives.

Dee's research over many years, has revealed great differences in the way we welcome visitors and pilgrims. It may be helpful to review our current practices. For example, is our external signage clear and welcoming? How do our volunteers and staff greet people? Words, attitudes and body language are all vital! Which messages are we giving to our visitors? How do we view them? Dee asked key questions about the Who, What and Why of pilgrimage: "I am a pilgrim, *you* are a visitor, *he* is a tourist". There is a danger that we mentally 'triage' our visitors and make judgements which can serve as barriers.

Instead, Dee suggested we should think of inviting ALL visitors to come on a journey WITH us, conscious of the fact that we and our churches represent God, and this experience may be vital for a visitor's wellbeing and possibly someone's first encounter with Him. Dee pointed out the excellent and free Volunteer training which is available via the AEC website and referred us to examples of good practice where prayer chapels are not roped off or signed as private or exclusive but are open and inclusive. She also suggested that the hourly prayers which often punctuate the day might begin with a recording of the choir. In all cases, Dee advocated appealing to both external and internal senses.

Our visitors may not hold specific religious convictions, but everyone will have their own beliefs and may be seeking meaning and direction. Many people see our churches and cathedrals as places of comfort, perspective, peace and reflection.

Sometimes we can be hesitant about managing perceived tensions between the needs and desires of 'heritage visitors' and our cathedral's Christian identity and pattern of life. But if we look at the heritage sector more widely, we see that this does not need to be the case. Research into the reactions of those who visit cathedrals shows clearly that when worship, mission, hospitality, and heritage are woven together, a richer, deeper response and relationship develops.

Our sacred spaces are designed to engage and transform anyone and everyone. They offer three important opportunities: for Revelation, Encounter and Transformation. They are multivalent spaces with multiple functions, where many activities co-exist but where worship is a golden thread that runs through everything else. A tourist may come to learn about the building from a heritage point of view but stay on for Evensong and feel sound-washed and spiritually recharged by listening to the choir. Dee spoke about the concept of ADJACENCY which involves allowing people to become familiar with activities such as worship gradually so they can build understanding, confidence, and benefit from joining in if they wish to do so.

Dee also mentioned the Faith in the North initiative which involves the cathedrals and parish churches of the Northern Province. It will culminate in 2027, the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the baptism of King Edwin, the first Christian King of Northumbria. To find out more about the resources and events, and using our church buildings, congregations, heritage, and storytelling for mission, see [faithinthenorth.org](http://faithinthenorth.org). Its key theme is 'Light from the past; Hope for the future', a fitting message which could be said to have underpinned our conference as a whole...

The Cathedrals Plus Council is very grateful to Dee and to CPO for donating for each delegate, a full pack of the Explore Prayer Cards which Dee developed. Clearly, they have met a need because over 2 million cards have already been taken by visitors at churches, abbeys and cathedrals. A set for children and young people is also available, together with another set of prayer cards for baptisms, wedding, funerals, Remembrance, Christmas and Easter. [www.explorechristianity.info](http://www.explorechristianity.info)



*Summary written by Jackie Holderness  
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