

Lights for Christ

**Released
to Shine**

**Being Lights
for Christ**



**THE DIOCESE
OF SHEFFIELD**
Renewed | Released | Rejuvenated

www.lightsforchrist.uk

"I am the light of the world."

John 8.12

"If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed."

John 8.36

"You are the light of the world"

Matthew 5.14

"All of us recognize how much the light of Christ needs to illumine every area of human life: the family, schools, culture, work, leisure and the other aspects of social life. It is not a matter of preaching a word of consolation, but rather a word which disrupts, which calls to conversion and which opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flowers."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, p. 91

As members of the Diocese of Sheffield, we re-affirm our calling to be Christ-like, living as lights for Christ in our everyday lives by:

- » *receiving Christ's light as his friends*
- » *walking in Christ's light as his followers*
- » *reflecting Christ's light to those around us.*

“*Lights for Christ* is an important part of the **Released** strand of our diocesan strategy. Its aim is ambitious – it’s to liberate the whole people of God for the whole mission of God.

In baptism and confirmation, we are encouraged to walk in the light of Christ all the days of our life and shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father. *Lights for Christ* picks up on this theme, helping us to recognise that it is Christ’s light that we receive and reflect, and not our own.

This booklet looks at some practical ways in which this can become real in our lives. It reminds us how God releases us from what obscures the light of Christ in us. It goes on to outline how a **Personal Rule of Life**, drawing on our *Lights for Christ* vision, can help us to experience, release and reflect more of Christ’s light in our everyday lives.

It’s not just about personal release. The church needs to be released as well so *Lights for Christ* is also about worshipping communities that reflect the light of Christ to the people they serve.

Whether you are just curious about *Lights for Christ*, or wanting to understand it more, or committed to engaging with it more fully, this booklet will outline what you need to know and how *Lights for Christ* contributes to the life of our churches and the vision of the Diocese.

May God draw you to experience release and to shine as a light for Christ in the world. ”

+ Peter + Sophie



Released?

Freedom is at the heart of the Christian message.

"The truth will set you free ... If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed"
(John 8.31, 36).

And *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* (2 Cor 3.17).

The central message of the Cross is about bringing freedom. So, the second strand of our Diocesan strategy seeks to release – but from what, and for what?

Most of us want to be released from regulations and anything that looks like bureaucracy. So, the Diocesan strategy seeks, as far as possible, to free up parishes from external constraints such as administrative and compliance demands and inherited structures and buildings.

But, in many of our parishes we're aware of rather bigger constraints on us. Many are trapped by circumstances, such as poverty, debt, abusive relationships, past trauma or neglect, justice denied, homelessness or poor health.

Then there's the deeper, more hidden layer, within ourselves – experienced in our struggles with feelings like fear, anxiety, shame, guilt or inferiority. We develop different habits as ways of coping but they can restrict us more rather than free us. We are left feeling that there must be more to life and more to following Christ.

Whilst our strategy was being developed the national church was developing its project, *Setting God's People Free*. There is so much that overlaps and *Lights for Christ* is our response. Our desire is for all God's people in the Diocese to be released to live the lives that God intended for them. It can be a lifetime's process and we are committed to supporting all those in our churches who are working to help people discover this freedom – in their individual lives, their churches and their communities.

Where it begins

The beginning of this endeavour is marked by baptism. One of the most powerful images of baptism is the release of the Hebrew people from captivity through the water of the Red Sea and into freedom. In the service the candidate is signed with the Cross. The water of baptism and the Cross are both signs of our liberation.

Another powerful baptism image is of being released from darkness into light. Light is the image we take with us as we leave the service, in words repeated at our confirmation:

*“God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and has given us a place with the saints in light.*

*You have **received** the light of Christ;
walk in this light all the days of your life.
Shine as a light in the world
to the glory of God the Father.”*

Common Worship, *Archbishops’ Council*, 2000, p. 363 (emphases added)

Our baptism is the sign of the promised light and freedom. We’re then called to live it out and make it a reality in the years that will follow. The call starts with receiving the light of Christ. But then we are told to walk in that light and then to shine as a light ourselves. The freedom promised in our baptism is not just for ourselves but to be seen in the world and to the glory of God.

These words are the commission to all who are baptised. Our vision in the Diocese is for all our members and all who are baptised to experience the release promised in baptism and to re-affirm our calling to be Christ-like and living as *Lights for Christ* in every aspect of our lives.

A Stream of Light

As *Lights for Christ*, our inspiration goes a long way back – and also looks forward. In the opening lines of Genesis, “God said ‘let there be light’ and there was light” (Gen 1.3). In the closing chapter of Revelation the vision is of “no more night ... the Lord God will give them light” (Rev 22.5).

It was a blazing light that launched Moses’ mission as God revealed his identity. Centuries later, Saul of Tarsus was overwhelmed by an intensity of light that revealed Jesus whom he was persecuting.

The ancient priestly prayer for the people was that the light of God’s face would shine on them. The confidence of the psalmist was that the Lord was their light and in God’s light they would see light. God’s word was a lamp for their feet and a light for their path.

Light was what the prophets looked forward to. “Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you” (Is 60.1). “On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Is 9.2). The Gospels went on to apply such prophecies to Jesus.

So Jesus himself declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8.12). Paul experienced it, “for God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4.6).

Jesus foresaw just that – amazingly he said, “You are the light of the world” (Matt 5.14). But even those extraordinary early churches would still need reminding. “Now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Eph 5.8).

We, too, seek to live as children of light – as *Lights for Christ*, receiving, walking in and reflecting the light that he shines.

Releasing the Light of Christ in our Lives

Throughout the ages, Christ's followers have discovered that his light revealed the means and power to release and change them.

But we have to respond. Paul summarised the two sides of the coin, “... *work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you*” (Phil 2.12-13). We work out what God works in.

That working out needs some kind of framework, rather like a trellis, that gives shape to our lives, freeing and enabling us to grow stronger and more fruitful. It can help us form new patterns and rhythms of life and release us to become more Christ-like.

We're calling the framework a **Personal Rule of Life**. But, it's not another set of regulations or constraints on us. It is a freely chosen rule *for* life that is life-giving, not life-limiting, and replaces our efforts at self-regulation. With God working in us, simple commitments to specific actions become doable and we begin to find more freedom from the things that frustrate our lives and that obscure Christ's light in us.

If, eventually, we no longer need the trellis it will have served its purpose. It will have been a support and a gift.

In its monastic form, a rule of life is observed by whole communities, subject to vows and formal accountability. But, a **Personal Rule of Life** is more flexible, with a different kind of accountability.

The following pages suggest some specific ways to receive, walk in and reflect the light of Christ. You may wish to return to these when you can relax, be quiet and reflect on your current rhythm of life. When you do so, ask, how is Christ affirming you, and how is he inviting or challenging you to grow? Then, for each of the three aspects, identify **one specific thing** you might affirm or introduce in your life – a daily, weekly, monthly or annual pattern or discipline.

Receiving Christ's Light

It all begins with Christ. He declared, *"I am the light of the world"* (John 8.12). We receive his light as we remain close to him, open to him and 'in him'. Receiving his light in baptism is the beginning to which we keep returning as we (re)discover our ongoing need for his presence and love and all that brings. We receive it afresh from him in our confirmation. And he goes on inviting us back to receive, as his friends.

We receive the light of Christ by:

- **Praying and seeking God's will**, which releases us from lives turned in on ourselves (the essence of sin) and releases us to be the people God made us to be. Praying is not just asking God for things but it's time with God and becoming part of the answer to the prayer, 'Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven'.
- **Participating in the life and worship of the Church**, which releases us from individualism and releases us to flourish as part of the Body of Christ, united in him and with each other.
- **Reading and reflecting on the Scriptures**, which releases us from the blind spots of our understanding, upbringing or culture and releases us to think with minds transformed as we discover more of the mind of Christ.
- **Receiving Communion**, taking bread and wine, which releases us from a spirit of self-sufficiency and releases us to experience Christ's filling, cleansing and sustaining, of body, mind and spirit.
- **Opening our lives to the Holy Spirit**, which releases us from superficiality and unfruitfulness and releases us into a deepening awareness of God's presence, love, enlivening and empowering.

Different parts of the church have different emphases on how we receive. Different people 'tune in' in different ways. But whether it's more through sacrament or word, or through charismatic or contemplative worship, the common core is that we receive Christ and Christ's light.

There may be times when the experience of light eludes us and we're more conscious of greyness or darkness. We may then find more resonance in Paul's words about life being a matter of faith rather than sight. But there are times when God's light is outside the spectrum we perceive, yet it penetrates unseen depths in our lives. Our part then is to remain faithful and to go on being open to receiving the light of Christ by faith, with thanksgiving.

Here are some questions we might ask as we reflect on receiving the light of Christ as his friend.

- » How and when do I pray?
- » How do I listen to God?
- » What nourishes and energises me?
- » Which of these aspects of receiving do I experience least?
- » What stops me from receiving God's grace?

We invite you to identify one specific thing that could become part of your **Personal Rule of Life** over the next three or six months.

There are many resources to help you reflect and to act on your chosen rule. You will find some on the *Lights for Christ* website at www.lightsforchrist.uk/receiving-the-light-of-christ.

And we encourage you to join with others in our Prayer Community – see www.sheffield.anglican.org/renewed.

Walking in Christ's Light

We shift from a focus on receiving as we move out and follow Christ in our everyday lives. As receiving the light of Christ is life-changing it will show in our walking. In Christ's words, *"whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8.12).

We walk in the light of Christ by:

- **Enjoying God's gifts with gratitude**, which releases us from cynicism and taking things for granted and releases us into contentment and appreciation of all we've received from God.
- **Living by the teaching of Jesus**, which releases us from ingrained habits and releases us to be more Christ-like. The Beatitudes are a great starting point. It may mean U-turns from old ways (repentance) – the good news is the freedom to rethink, unload and make a new start.
- **Giving generously**, which releases us from possessiveness and releases us to be generous with our possessions and attitudes.
- **Giving and receiving forgiveness**, which releases us from resentment and releases us to love those who trouble us.
- **Balancing rest and work**, which releases us from both lethargy and workaholism and releases us into peace of mind, or shalom.

"In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Saviour opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."

Cornelius Plantinga Jr, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Eerdmans, 1995, p. 10

This walk will not always take the obvious directions and we've been warned that the way is usually narrow. Which is why we need to start by receiving the light.

Walking in the light of Christ may also show up aspects of our lives that we'd prefer to keep hidden. But this is part of our journey of becoming real with God and, because we are walking in Christ's light, we keep discovering there is grace and forgiveness. So, far from needing to hide, we discover a deeper fellowship with our companions on the journey, as we learn to receive and offer forgiveness.

We don't need to impress or win God's or others' approval. Walking in the light of Christ becomes the way of authenticity and integrity. And it's the way we walk whether or not anyone else is looking.

Here are some questions we might ask as we reflect on walking in the light of Christ as his follower:

- » What difference does being a follower of Jesus make in my everyday life and relationships?
- » How might I take a step closer to the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles?

We invite you to identify one specific thing that could become part of your **Personal Rule of Life** over the next three or six months.

You will find some resources on the *Lights for Christ* website at www.lightsforchrist.uk/walking-in-the-light-of-christ

One indicator of our walk in Christ's light is our relationship with the created world, which might be the subject of a pledge – see www.sheffield.anglican.org/the-church-and-the-environment

Reflecting Christ's Light

Jesus also declared, "**You** are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before others" (Matt 5.14, 16). We are called to reflect his light – in every place, from Sunday to Saturday and in every aspect of our lives, in our serving and telling in the wider world.

If we're receiving and walking in the light of Christ, it will show. Lives and churches characterised by forgiveness, generosity, humility and a witness that rings true will all reflect the light of Christ whether we're aware of it or not. When Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world*" he was not calling us to generate more light, just not to hide the light that is already there.

We reflect the light of Christ by:

- **Loving and praying for those we live and work with**, which releases us from the confines of Sunday-only Christianity and releases us to be Christ's people in all aspects of our lives.
- **Sharing Jesus in our communities**, which releases us from a privatised and muted faith and releases us to share in God's ongoing mission of making Christ known in the world.
- **Serving those in need**, which releases us from a spirit of entitlement and releases us to be like Christ in loving those whom we expect will give us nothing in return.
- **Challenging injustice and promoting peace**, which releases us from indifference and complacency and releases us to be channels of God's justice and shalom peace, changing the world.
- **Caring for God's creation**, which releases us from greed and self-indulgence and releases us to enjoy and cherish God's world.

However, much more important than how this releases us, is how it brings freedom to others. The longing for release goes well beyond our churches to all the people around us with their many experiences of being trapped, whether economically, socially, psychologically or spiritually. The ultimate vision in the Bible is of the whole created order being released, “brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8.21). The light of Christ is for the world.

This is not about emitting our own light (any glory would then stop with us). It is not about looking virtuous (Jesus said that those who did so already had their reward). It comes from the integrity and authenticity of Christ’s friends and followers who are already receiving and walking in his light. This will catch the attention of people for whom Christian faith may otherwise seem meaningless.

Here are some questions we might ask as we reflect on reflecting the light of Christ to those around us.

- » What do my everyday life and words say about my faith to my family, colleagues, friends and neighbours during the week?
- » How does my life contribute to God’s kingdom of love and justice?
- » How far is my life in harmony with the natural world?

We invite you to identify one specific thing that could become part of your **Personal Rule of Life** over the next three or six months.

You will find some resources on the *Lights for Christ* website at www.lightsforchrist.uk/reflecting-the-light-of-christ. Some may want to consider the current challenges of the Living in Love and Faith initiative, see www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith

Next Personal Steps

We're encouraging you to begin by identifying one specific action under each of the three main headings above. Whilst the themes identified under each heading indicate some broad areas you might consider, they won't cover everything and there are overlaps.

Don't rush a decision. And don't take on more than you can follow through. In discerning, you may find it helpful to talk through your thoughts and feelings with a spiritual accompanier, minister, trusted friend or group.

We're creating resources to help people explore and develop their own **Personal Rule of Life** and you can find details on the *Lights for Christ* website – www.lightsforchrist.uk/ruleoflife. These include sessions on *Exploring a Personal Rule of Life Together* both online and in-person.

When you've decided on your responses you might like to record them on a *My Personal Rule of Life Commitment Card* (available from the website with the *Introduction to the Personal Rule of Life* leaflet). As you do so, commit your intention to God and continue to ask for God's help and grace.

As you experience living by your rule it is helpful to be open about it with God in prayer. As you reflect, give thanks for the encouragements, share honestly about any struggles and go on asking for God's help.

A **Personal Rule of Life** can be most liberating when you share your experience of living by it with another person. Again, this might be with a spiritual accompanier, minister, trusted friend or group.

As your rule becomes part of your natural pattern and rhythm, helping you to grow, you will begin to notice the freedom that it brings. It will be good to review how it is going from time to time. You might then want to modify or extend it accordingly.

Next Steps for the Church

Changed personal lives reflect the light of Christ. But the words ‘*You are the light of the world*’ were spoken by Jesus to the community of his followers. We reflect the light in our life as a church.

However, it’s not just for the church when gathered – we’re released and sent out as the church into the wider world, where we reflect the light of Christ. Our faith is not only for Sundays but for our whole lives. We may receive something of the light of Christ in church but if we spend too much time there its walls will have the very effect Jesus warned about – concealing the light.

In fact, most of us spend the vast majority of our lives, not in a church, but being the Church in the world. Yet 59% of Anglicans surveyed 10 years ago said that their church does not equip people well for life in today’s world at home, work, or elsewhere (*Setting God’s People Free*, Archbishops’ Council, page 4).

So *Lights for Christ* aims:

- to equip and encourage **all baptised people** in living for Jesus in their everyday lives - Monday-Sunday, whole-life discipleship
- to release the **whole people of God** for the whole mission of God.

This is not to make more work. ‘Released’ means lifting excessive workloads. But, it does mean changing the way we think. It’s about living differently, as churches as well as individuals, and being a more genuine and effective Christian presence in the world. So here are some suggestions about how we might do it.

Getting People Talking About It

Changing the way we think about it may begin with talking together about it. The course *Shining as Lights* will help groups to explore what it means to be a *Light for Christ* and how they can develop their personal rules of life.

It could be in Lent, as it includes a focus on renewing our baptismal promises, something traditionally done at Easter. It is also suitable for use at other times as people seek to grow as *Lights for Christ*.

Although designed for groups it can be also used for personal study and reflection. It can also be done online.

The course has five parts:

1. Drawn to the Light
2. Receive the Light
3. Walk in the Light
4. Reflect the Light
5. Light of the World

Each session has opportunities to share and to explore a range of helpful Bible passages. At the end of each session group members are encouraged to try out something that is unfamiliar to them in the days that follow. This grounds the course and thinking about the **Personal Rule of Life** very much in everyday life and faith.

Shining as Lights is the first in a number of courses that are being produced to help people engage with the *Lights for Christ* vision.

For more information, see www.lightsforchrist.uk/resources

Introducing Everyday Faith in the Church

Here are some suggestions, particularly for church leaders. And if you're not a leader you could still suggest them for your church. You'll find more about them in the introductory guide *Lights for Christ*. This suggests a number of small shifts in church that can make a big difference to the way we worship, pray and support each other, so that we can be released to be *Lights for Christ*.

Be curious – ask questions about where members spend their time during the week – about the joys and challenges and what they might like prayer for.

Visiting people where they are during the week – if you can. For those who preach and lead groups it can help see the congregation in a new light.

Sunday Praying for Monday to Saturday Living – we pray for the things we most care about. Intercessions should be a bridge between God and the wider world. Let's pray for teachers, bus drivers, call centre operatives, factory workers and so on.

This Time Tomorrow – a short interview with a church member of any age about what they'll be doing the following day – then pray for them.

Our Notice Boards – what do they say about our church's wider concerns?

Commissioning People – not just for ministries in the church but for their lives beyond as they start new jobs or schools or retirement, for example.

Preaching for Whole Life – that connects with people's everyday lives and helps inform their values and relationships where they spend most of their lives.

You will find an introduction to *Lights for Christ* at www.sheffdio.org/lightsforchristintro.org

Help in Changing the Culture

We are running a series of Learning Hubs to help churches in creating a culture that encourages God's people to live confident and fruitful lives wherever they find themselves. This is a joint venture between the Diocese of Sheffield and the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC).

These Hubs help churches to go on an exciting and challenging journey by coming together for a number of sessions over a period of months. Hubs involve sharing experiences, learning from others and being supported as they introduce change in their churches. Core teams from each participating church explore different ways of helping church members to live as *Lights for Christ* in the whole of their lives, not just on Sundays, but Monday-Saturday as well. Sessions include opportunities to learn how churches that are intentional about supporting people as they follow Jesus have modified the things they do, including how individuals are valued, supported and taught. Core teams are encouraged to apply the lessons learned in ways that are appropriate to their context; for instance, introducing the idea of a **Personal Rule of Life**.

Members commit to putting their learning into action with the support of the Hub teaching and online resources. So each time it meets, church groups share how they have been getting on and plan their next moves.

Members have valued hearing what is happening and learning from other people's experience, having time to reflect as a team and away from the parish, looking at new things and trying to implement them, and getting confirmation when they're going in the right direction!

If you think your church might like to be part of a future Hub please email - lightsforchrist@sheffield.anglican.org

Liturgy from the Reaffirmation of our Baptismal Calling

In baptism, Jesus calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light so that we may shine as lights for Christ in the world today.

Brothers and sisters,

Will you continue to receive the light of Christ and grow into friendship with Him as he comes to you in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in prayer, and in the fellowship of his Church?

With the help of God, we will

Will you continue to walk in the light of Christ, seeking to follow Him at home and at work, in rest and in activity?

With the help of God, we will

Will you continue to reflect the light of Christ to those around you by serving those in need, making Him known in your communities, and working for justice, peace and the good of all creation?

With the help of God, we will

You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.

We will shine as a light for Christ in the world to the glory of God the Father.

May God, who in baptism has enlightened you with his grace, continually stir up his gifts within you. **Amen**

For more information and resources

Visit the *Lights for Christ* website: www.lightsforchrist.uk where you can download the following...

- *Lights for Christ*, introductory guide leaflet
- *Introduction to a Personal Rule of Life*
- *My Personal Rule of Life Commitment Card*

Printed copies are available from

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Tel. 01709 309100 or email lightsforchrist@sheffield.anglican.org

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