# Bishop Stephen Wright

## Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we gather on this Youth Sunday, we celebrate the wonderful contributions of young people in the life of our Church. Today's Gospel, from John, reminds us of Christ's kingship, which is not of this world. In His exchange with Pilate, Jesus declares that His kingdom is founded on truth, and He calls us to bear witness to that truth in our lives. Our young people, too, are called to live as witnesses to this truth, following the example of Christ the King.

In the spirit of the upcoming Jubilee Year 2025, proclaimed by Pope Francis with the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," The Youth Ministry Team (YMT) have been exploring this call to hope and journey with Christ throughout their work with young people. Their retreat programs have encouraged young people to consider what it means to be pilgrims of hope, and we all eagerly look forward to participating in Jubilee events over the next year, bringing our diocesan community into this global celebration of faith and renewal.

This year, we have been blessed with the presence of seven interns serving with the YMT. These young men and women have dedicated a year of their lives to leading retreats at the Youth Village and inspiring their peers to encounter Christ. Through their service, they are preparing to visit schools and parishes across the Diocese, sharing their faith and bringing the message of the Gospel to life for others. They are a reflection of the Church's mission to evangelise and lead others to Christ. Please keep these young people in your prayers as they continue their journey of service and leadership.

Our youth ministry has also seen incredible participation this year. YMT's summer festivals were a great success, with over 3,000 Year 6 students and 600 secondary school pupils coming together to celebrate our faith. Also, The Source gathering has returned, welcoming young people to encounter God through prayer, music, and fellowship. The next Source gathering is set for May 13th at St. Mary's Cathedral, where we hope even more young people will join us.

However, it is important to remember that the ministry to young people is not something they undertake alone. Adults play a vital role in supporting, guiding, and mentoring the young people in our Diocese. Whether as catechists, parishioners, or helpers at events and pilgrimages, their involvement is essential. For example, at the last Flame event, 10,000 young Catholics gathered at Wembley for a powerful day of worship and celebration of our faith. It was not just the young who made this possible; it was also the dedication and support of countless adults who made this experience possible. As we look ahead, the Diocese hopes to take 1,000 young people and parishioners to Flame. Together, young people and adults are journeying in faith, supporting one another, and building a Church that is alive with the energy of all generations.

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This year, YMT also led the Youth Section of the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, where 36 young people served with dedication, walking alongside pilgrims and offering a vibrant witness to the Gospel. Their journey began with a retreat at Emmaus Village, where they prepared spiritually for this important pilgrimage. In Lourdes, their faith was deepened through prayer and service, and their presence was a true gift to all who participated. We look forward to taking even more young people next year and encourage adults to join us as helpers on the Hospitalité team. Pilgrimages like Lourdes are not only opportunities for the young but for the entire Church community to come together in prayer, service, and healing.

The JPII and Faith in Action Awards are also central to the mission of our Diocese, offering young people the chance to put their faith into action by serving in their parishes and local communities. These programs encourage young people to be active members of their Church, and they offer a way for them to live out the Gospel message in practical ways. Whether they are assisting at Mass, helping with community outreach projects, or working with the vulnerable, these young people are living as disciples of Christ.

Although our churches may not always be filled with young people, there are those who are deeply committed and active in their faith. These young people are not afraid to get involved, to serve, and to make a difference in their parishes and communities. It is crucial that we continue to support them, to invest in their faith journeys, and to reach out to others who are still on the path of discovery, particularly those in our schools and local communities.

As you leave today, you will find a poster at the back of the church highlighting the many ways youth ministry has flourished this year. This has been made possible through your prayers and generous support. Today, there will be a special collection for Youth Sunday, and gift aid envelopes are available for those who wish to contribute. Your financial support is vital to the continued success of our youth ministry programs, helping to fund the work of YMT, the JPII and Faith in Action Awards, and our outreach to schools and parishes. Through your generosity, you are helping to provide young people with opportunities to grow in their faith, to serve their communities, and to become leaders in the Church.

Please continue to pray for our young people, especially the interns who have given so much this year. Pray also for the adults who mentor and support them, ensuring that the ministry to young people continues to flourish. Together, as a community of faith, we are striving to build a Church where young people can encounter Christ and be witnesses to His truth in the world.

May Christ the King inspire us all to live as witnesses to His truth, and may we continue to support and encourage our young people as they take up their call to discipleship.

With assurances of prayers

Bishop Stephen