

FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF LIVERPOOL 19TH JANUARY 2017

As Delivered

Check against delivery

In 1998 when I became the bishop of Liverpool the Waterfront was just being regenerated. We decided to hold the Press Conference there as a symbol of the renewal of the City. But the photographer from a leading national newspaper took me aside and said that instead of the Albert Dock his editor wanted a picture of me standing in a derelict site!

One of the challenges for leaders of this city is resisting and rejecting the stereotypes that others project upon us.

Yes, there are still areas of challenge that merit investment from the public purse but at the same time there is huge potential and reward for inward investment by the private sector.

From the outset, and building on my experience in Hull, I immersed myself in the regeneration of the City. When others wondered about a bishop being so engaged I pointed out that as a pastor a bishop is committed to the welfare of the people, and that good public services and successful businesses provide security for families and hope for young people.

Chairing the New Deal for Community programme in Kensington taught me how local people really do know the solutions to the problems that afflict an area through low self-esteem and low aspiration. I was constantly inspired by the tenacity of the community to make it a better place to live and to work.

Chairing the building of the Academy of St Francis of Assisi showed me how improving the life chances of young people is key to transforming a neighbourhood. Today not only is it a school connected to its local environment it is also a sanctuary for students of 40 different languages.

Three Academies have been jointly sponsored by the Catholic and Church of England Dioceses telling a world still divided by religion that where there is a will there is still a way of working and living together in hope.

The future stability of local and international relationships depends upon harmony between the religious traditions. That is why it was so good to see every year at the Remembrance Day ceremony all the religious leaders standing on the steps of St George's Hall reading from their own sacred scriptures.

Chairing Faiths4Change showed that different faith communities can work together harmoniously when standing on the common ground of caring for God's Creation and transforming their local environment.

Chairing the North West Constitutional Convention I found that across the complete spectrum of public life there was agreement that the more decision making could be done at a local and regional level the better the people would be served. Although formal regional governance has not been implemented the argument has been won with the creation of city regions and metropolitan mayors.

Chairing Liverpool Echo's Stop the Rot Forum showed how if developers, council planners, heritage bodies and communities could work together in partnership much could be done to transform the fabric of the City and restore a sense of pride in the place.

One of the finest examples of that was the restoration of the Florrie of which I was proud to become a patron.

The regeneration of the City is not just about buildings. It must also touch the soul of the people which is why Liverpool becoming the European Capital of Culture was such a triumph. It gave expression to the music, the muses, the mystery and the madness of Liverpool and confounded the sceptics.

That changing of hearts and minds is, of course, an aspect of faith. It was a source of great pride to me and other Faith leaders to see local churches and faith groups thoroughly immersed in serving their local neighbourhoods.

The two Cathedrals grace the skyscape of the City. One crowns its resurgence, the other stands like an Angel of the North West with arms out stretched keeping watch over its soul knowing that in the City's eight centuries it has known both triumph and disaster.

Chairing the Hillsborough Independent Panel became the climax of my time as Bishop of Liverpool. It wove together the three foundational values of my ministry – compassion, truth and justice.

But although Phil Scraton and I have been singled out and honoured and humbled to join the 96 in being granted the Freedom of the City I am in no doubt that the achievement of the Panel was that of a team.

Phil's contribution, of course, began with his earlier research leading to the ground-breaking book 'Hillsborough: The Truth' which together with Jimmy McGovern's defiant documentary drama sustained the Families and Survivors in their struggle for justice.

Katy Jones worked with Jimmy McGovern and her presence on the Panel inspired us all not least me with her forensic research, her courage and sparkling personality. How we mourn her loss.

Christine Gifford took on the enormous responsibility of getting documents out of over 80 organisations. Her tenacity and diligence in reading all the documents brooked no opposition and she secured over 400,000 papers including the files of South Yorkshire Police.

Paul Leighton's professional experience as a senior policeman enabled us to understand the culture of policing and to negotiate our way successfully in dealing with the police, their practices and processes.

Sarah Tyacke, one of the nation's leading archivists, guided us expertly through the complexity of handling historic cases and steered us in the archiving of the files online which gave the Families, the media and the public immediate access to the substance of our Report.

Raju Batt, a renowned lawyer specialising in providing help for people seeking accountability from the state, delivered invaluable insights and perspectives as we sought to unearth and unravel what had happened at the original inquests.

Throughout the life of the Panel we were aware that the Hillsborough narrative was already in the domain of the media and that we needed the expertise of a respected media professional to guide us. Peter Sisson's advice was unfailingly sound and protected the Panel's work and the integrity of our Report.

None of us will ever forget the day the Panel reported to the Families in the Cathedral. And here I must honour the extraordinary forbearance of the Families and survivors. Dr Bill Kirkup made a presentation of his analysis of the pathology reports which changed everything. It made a deep impact on the Families. Indeed, it was this section of the Report that led the Attorney General to apply to the High Court to quash the verdicts of the original inquests.

But none of us on the Panel could have done his or her work without the others, or without the exceptionally dedicated Secretariat. It was led by Ken Sutton whose ingenuity in both devising the Terms of Reference in consultation with the Families and in recruiting the appropriate experts for the Panel was ultimately responsible for securing truth and justice for the 96.

Each member of the Panel had a specific role. The Panel's Report expressed our shared enterprise. Everyone who knows our work will know that we came to it with an open mind. We looked forensically and agnostically at what the documents actually said. This was the foundation of our Report. And in the end it was the documents disclosed by the Panel that vindicated the Families and restored the reputation of the 96.

So, you see, although I stand before you as Chair to receive this honour it really was the work of a team. And I am grateful to the Lord Mayor for giving me this opportunity to put on record each of their contributions.

And, of course, if you dig deeper you will see the roots go further and each of us is dependent on a host of others that enable us to do our work. I want to pay tribute to my colleagues in the Diocese of Liverpool, including my successor Bishop Paul, my friends at Bishop's Lodge and my ecumenical colleagues not least Archbishop Patrick who supported me throughout.

Yet most of all do I thank Sarah and with her Harriet, Jemima and Tabitha who have faithfully and generously journeyed with me wherever God has called us.

I have loved being a partner in the regeneration of this City. From the other side of the Pennines I love hearing news of its progress as one of the nation's great cities.

Young people see themselves today not just as English or British or European. They see themselves as global citizens, rooted in a locality. The ambition now must be to promote 'Liverpool the Global City' which will continue to be home to citizens of the world who value enterprise and equity, culture and compassion, justice and truth.

So, as an honorary scouser and as a Freeman of the City of Liverpool, with hope in my heart, 'God bless Liverpool'.

The Right Reverend Bishop James Jones KBE

(Bishop of Liverpool 1998 – 2013)

19th January 2017