



# ANCIENT APOSTOLIC CATHOLIC CHURCH

Office of the Primate and Presiding Archbishop

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*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)*

11<sup>th</sup> September 2025

*Feast of St Deiniol of Bangor*

## A Pastoral Letter on the Charism and Global Mission of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church: Embracing the Future through the Witness of the Saints

**Dearest Bishops, Clergy, Religious, and Beloved Lay Faithful of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church**

Grace, mercy, and peace in abundance from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As Primate and Presiding Archbishop of the Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church (AACC), I, Felix Gibbins OSB Cam, write to you on the threshold of a decisive decade for our communion. This letter is offered after deep prayer, reflection, and consultation with many—so that each member of the AACC, wherever you dwell, may hear the Lord's call addressed to your heart, and so renew the fire within your communities to serve Christ with "courage and enthusiasm," trusting that the Lord will provide great gifts to us if we answer that call.

### Our Charism: Tradition Renewed in Mission

The Ancient Apostolic Catholic Church stands as a living witness to **the ancient faith**, rooted in the apostolic tradition and shaped by the Spirit's ongoing action among us. Ours is a charism that draws from the wellsprings of the Roman Catholic heritage while embodying inclusivity, family, and compassionate service for all. We are a Church **where tradition meets mission, and community flourishes**, called not only to preserve what has been handed down, but also to answer the signs of the times by bringing this treasure to a world that yearns for the love of Christ.

Our charism is fundamentally **ecumenical and missionary**. The AACC recognises that our calling is not uniform; within our unity, there is space for different giftings, vocations, and



approaches: some may feel drawn to a more sacramental life, others to evangelistic outreach, still others to works of justice and reconciliation. We are called to adapt, to discern the movements of the Spirit, and to support all those thirsting for God—whatever their background or spiritual temperament. The deepest sign of our vocation is that longing to be wholly given to Christ and His people, and to communicate His reconciling love to every person, “especially where the light of Christ is absent or dim.”

This is not a charism for passive nostalgia or mere maintenance; it is a dynamic call to ongoing renewal, communion, and bold apostolic initiative. The **global and inclusive nature of the AACC**, its structured governance and safeguarding policy, and its proactive stance on data protection and spiritual formation, all serve our chief purpose: to prepare candidates for a life-long journey with Christ, inspired by the wisdom of the saints and attentive to the diverse needs of our era.

## Learning from the Early Christian Saints: Simplicity and Courage

To articulate our vision for the next ten years, let us draw from the **simple and effective evangelistic methods of the saints of Wales, England, Ireland, and Scotland**. Their legacy is a beacon for the AACC’s global mission, showing how the foundation of vibrant, indigenous dioceses is forged amid diverse circumstances, and how the heart of Christian life is always accessible to all peoples, in every age.

### Saints of Wales: Simplicity and “the Little Things”

**Saint David (Dewi Sant)**, patron of Wales, exemplifies a spirituality of radiant simplicity and gentle fortitude. Renowned for his monastic foundations and missionary zeal, he counselled, “Be joyful, keep your faith, do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about” (“Gwnewch y pethau bychain mewn bywyd”). His monks refrained from excess, living on bread, salt, herbs, and water, pulling the ploughs themselves, and holding all things in common. They spent their evenings in prayer, reading, and writing, thereby “illuminating the world not with words alone, but by the light of their lives”.

St David’s approach—simplicity, communal living, prayer, service, and the refusal to be deterred by hardship—serves as a framework for us. His monastic settlements became centres of both spiritual renewal and evangelistic outreach, sending forth communities to bring the Gospel to Wales, Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany. Through “doing the little things,” the transformation of society was achieved: practical, sustainable, and utterly Christ-centred.

### Saints of England: Missionary Frameworks and Tribal Engagement

The saints of England, such as Augustine of Canterbury, Cuthbert, Hilda, and Aidan, reveal to us the profound fruitfulness of **adaptable, relational mission and the tribal or migratory system of evangelisation**. In those early centuries, the diocese was often tied to a people-group or tribe, with cathedrals that could be migratory—able to “move with the people,” meeting them where they lived and speaking to their unique histories.

The frameworks established by these saints teach us to prioritise:

- Formation of small communities around prayer, hospitality, and works of mercy.
- Adaptable structures that serve rather than dominate the life of the people.



- Integration of pastors, monastics, and the laity in both governance and mission.
- Respect for local cultures, customs, and languages, blending them with the Gospel.
- A balance of monastic stability and missionary movement, rooted in prayer and openness to the Spirit.

The methods of the English saints—contact and relational evangelism, creative proclamation, steadfastness in adversity—are enduringly relevant. This “web of relationships” in both rural and urban contexts, empowered by transformed lives, remains the pattern for the AACC’s current and future endeavours.

### **Saints of Ireland: The Celtic Monastic Charism**

The Irish saints—**Patrick, Brigid, Columba, Columbanus, and many others**—stand as giants of missionary innovation and cross-cultural sensitivity. St Patrick’s mission was marked by a **deep respect for local spirituality**, integrating Celtic customs into Christian practice rather than erasing them. He insisted the Gospel “take root in the soil of the people,” transforming from within.

Celtic monasticism flourished not as a reactionary escape from the world but as the **spiritual engine of conversion, education, and cultural renewal**. Monasteries became hubs of art, learning, hospitality, and mission. The Irish model emphasised:

- Prayer, manual labor, the study of scripture, and the pursuit of ascetic simplicity.
- Team-based evangelism (twelve companions as with Christ), each empowered for leadership and local witness.
- Adaptation to tribal structures, allowing the faith to be “inculturated” into existing bonds and customs.
- A spirituality that prized not only red martyrdom (blood), but also green martyrdom (asceticism) and white martyrdom (missionary pilgrimage).

From these roots, waves of missionaries like Columba and Columbanus transformed the continent, kindling “lights in the darkness” and preserving the treasures of faith and civilisation for generations to come.

### **Saints of Scotland: Community Engagement in a Land of Diversity**

The Scottish Christian tradition, shaped by figures such as **Ninian, Kentigern (Mungo), and Columba**, reminds us that mission is as much about presence and hospitality as it is about proclamation. Monasteries and priories, often in remote or tribal territories, became “hospitable sanctuaries” for the local people, the poor, and sojourners alike. The work of **St Ninian at Candida Casa (Whithorn)**, still revered across the Lowlands, and Columba’s ministry among the Scots and Picts, are examples of how communities can be both contemplative and outward-looking, engaging their surrounding cultures with humility and deep listening.

Such saints modelled **adaptability, intercultural dialogue, and endurance** even where faith seemed all but extinguished. Their dedication to contextualising the Gospel for the diverse peoples of Scotland is a powerful illustration of missionary flexibility and pastoral wisdom.



# A Framework for Establishing New Dioceses

As we look to the future, the AACC is called to plant new dioceses and Christian communities in regions where the Gospel is least known, or where the Church has been weakened. This requires a strategic, spiritually grounded approach—rooted in the lessons of our forebears and open to the creativity of the Holy Spirit.

**Canonical Requirements** A new diocese, in canon law, is “a portion of the People of God entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd with the cooperation of his presbyterium... gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the gospel and the Eucharist” (can. 369). The canonical process requires:

- Petition to and discernment by the Synod of Bishops, including consultation with local bishops where appropriate.
- Clear territorial or cultural demarcation, allowing space for parishes to reflect both unity and local expression.
- Provision for adequate clergy, lay formation, and material support, including sustainable resources and places of worship.
- Commitment to safeguarding and the inclusion of all the People of God, especially the poor and vulnerable.

**Spiritual and Pastoral Essentials** While legal frameworks are critical, the soul of each new diocese must reflect:

- Intensive prayer and discernment.
- A focus on relationship over mere structure: fostering small, engaged communities before imposing hierarchy.
- Commitment to “doing the little things” of service, study, hospitality, and friendship.
- Openness to local leadership and lay empowerment, with well-formed parish and diocesan pastoral councils for collaborative discernment.
- Contextual adaptation—embracing the languages, customs, and “festivals of the peoples,” provided these are not contrary to the faith.

**Sustainable and Inculturated Mission** Drawing from the saints, we recognise that a diocese is truly established when the people themselves “own” the faith, and when Gospel values take root in their homes, stories, and daily lives. Our approach must always be twofold:

- **Ressourcement**—a return to the sources, the essentials of faith, prayer, and scripture.
- **Aggiornamento**—a bringing up to date, seeking forms and expressions that resonate locally while remaining faithful to Christ.

## Cross-Cultural Mission for a Global Mission Church

### The Biblical and Theological Foundations of Cross-Cultural Mission



The mandate to “make disciples of all nations” governs the heart of the Church’s vocation. From the beginning, conversion meant more than individual change; it was the transformation of whole peoples, without erasing their God-given diversity. The New Testament (particularly the Book of Acts) showcases the Spirit’s work in crossing every barrier: linguistic (Pentecost), cultural (Peter and Cornelius), ethnic, and religious. St Paul exemplified this universality, adapting his witness to Jews, Greeks, Romans, and “becoming all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22).

### **Principles of Inculturation and Mutual Hospitality**

**Inculturation**—the gentle wedding of the Gospel and local culture—means affirming all that is good, true, and beautiful in the lives of a people, while challenging that which is contrary to Christ. As articulated in Vatican II and subsequent teaching, the Gospel “must take flesh in every culture,” but also “bring the necessary purification and healing whenever a culture is dehumanising”.

Mutual hospitality—a genuine willingness to listen, learn, and empower—demands that new dioceses not import pre-packaged forms from elsewhere, but collaborate with indigenous leaders, honouring their agency and creativity.

### **Practical Considerations: Building Bridges**

Effective cross-cultural mission requires:

- Preparation in language learning and cultural immersion.
- Commitment to listen long before teaching or correcting.
- Partnership with existing local Christians and community leaders.
- Flexibility and courage, accepting that some methods will fail, but the Lord will open new paths.
- A humble willingness to serve in the most ordinary, even hidden, ways.

The testimony of missionaries like Amy Carmichael, who “became as a Tamil,” or the networks of saints who travelled as humble pilgrims, demonstrates that the Gospel advances through authentic relationships marked by patience, humility, and sacrificial love.

## **The Next Decade: Facing the Future Together**

### **The Global Mission Field: Key Regions and Trends**

The coming decade will see rapid change—demographically, spiritually, and culturally. Certain trends are clear:

- Decline of traditional religiosity in many “heritage” Christian countries, necessitating creative re-engagement and new forms of witness.
- Explosive growth, curiosity, or potential for evangelisation in Africa, parts of Asia, and immigrant communities in Europe and North America.



- Deepening spiritual hunger and desire for meaning among young people, who increasingly seek authentic community and sacrificial service, not mere institutional maintenance.
- The need for the AACC to foster unity among cultures, ethnicities, and Christian confessions, especially in societies fractured by division or anxiety.

Our mission focus must *not* be defined by nostalgia or boundaries, but by prayerful responsiveness to where the Lord opens hearts and doors. This means boldness to go where Christ's name is little known, to sustain the faith where it is threatened, and to renew it where it has grown cold.

### **Courageous and Enthusiastic Leadership**

We must recover the fearless, Spirit-filled leadership of the saints. **Courage** is not bravado but rootedness in Christ's victory; **enthusiasm** is the contagious joy of those remade by grace. The coming decade will require leaders—clergy, religious, and lay—who are both steadfast in faith and creative in approach; courageous in confronting obstacles yet childlike in trust; humble enough to delegate and co-create, yet unafraid to “cast out into the deep” at the Lord's command.

Remember the words to Joshua, as he bore a calling too great for one man: “Be strong and very courageous. Do not be terrified, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). The saints remind us that bold action, rooted in prayer and humility, brings forth fruit that endures.

### **Communication with Diverse Cultures: Lessons and Testimonies**

There are beautiful testimonies from local churches in the UK, such as the Network Church in St Albans and Harpenden, which has grown as a vibrant intercultural community by **embracing new residents from Hong Kong**—learning hospitality, the value of “doing things differently,” and integrating traditions and languages in worship and service. Their journey reminds us that real inclusion is a two-way street: receiving new gifts, adapting structures, and being willing to learn as well as teach.

Case studies across the globe—from missionary settings in India to urban parishes in multicultural cities—teach that effective communication is less about technique than about **patience, relationship, and respect**. The contemporary Church, like the earliest Christian communities at Antioch or Jerusalem, is called to be a “laboratory of unity”, a family where “all the gifts of all the members are needed”.

## **Living the Mission: Spirituality, Prayer, and Community Life**

At the heart of the AACC must be a revitalised spirituality: **rooted in scripture**, daily prayer, conscious sacramental participation, and ongoing formation. The saints show us that renewal begins with “returning to the sources” (*ressourcement*)—not to fossilise, but to rediscover the wellspring of faith and let it flow anew.

### **Pillars for the Next Decade of AACC Spirituality**





- **Intensive practice of prayer**—personal and communal—with deep trust in the Holy Spirit’s leading.
- **Sacrificial service** to the poor, the lonely, and those on society’s margins.
- **Serious catechesis** and scriptural study, equipping every believer for witness in daily life.
- **Vibrant, transparent small communities** (cells, Bible studies, prayer circles) where belonging and faith are nurtured.
- **Regular periods of renewal and sabbatical** for clergy and leaders, to prevent burnout and foster ongoing discernment.
- **Reverent yet inculturated liturgical life**, welcoming local music, art, customs, and language where fitting.
- **Collegial Expressions of Leadership**, creating a ‘buddy system’ where two deacons, priests and bishops are partnered in the same way that the Twelve were partnered in twos for their first evangelising missions.

Let us also recall the wisdom of frequent confession, spiritual direction, and mutual accountability—in all things, keeping Christ at the centre.

## Overcoming Challenges and Receiving the Lord’s Gifts

The decade ahead will not be without adversity. We anticipate obstacles—financial uncertainty, secular hostility, demographic change, even internal tension about direction and priorities. Yet, if we accept our mission with courage and enthusiasm, the Lord has promised to “do more than we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

**The gift we receive is quadruple:**

1. **Renewed depth of faith within our communities.**
2. **Missionary fruitfulness—new disciples, new leaders, new parishes and dioceses.**
3. **A prophetic witness of unity, compassion, and reconciliation, shining amid division.**
4. **A share in the “joy that no one can take from us,” belonging to Christ who is victorious over all darkness.**

The Lord supplies all we lack. If we “do our part”—praying, serving, building up the Body in humility and truth—He will provide the harvest.

## A Call to Action: Marking Where We Stand and How We Go Forward

**We stand as a church rooted in apostolic faith, open to the Spirit, and committed to mission.** We claim as our own the charism of the saints: simplicity, prayer, community, and a love that wins over the hardest hearts. We commit, as a Church, to:



- Proclaiming Christ boldly and clearly, in word and deed, without fear or favour.
- Welcoming all peoples and cultures, discerning the Spirit's gifts in each.
- Equipping our leaders, clergy, and laity for creative, courageous mission.
- Establishing new dioceses and communities, shaped by local needs and charisms.
- Prioritising the poor, the outsider, and the least, in imitation of our Lord.
- Living "the little things" with humility, as St David instructed, day by day.
- Trusting that the Lord will do great things if we take only the next faithful step.

### **Concluding Blessing: Let Us Walk this Path Together**

Dearest brothers and sisters, I am convinced that "the hope of the church in all times, whatever mistakes may be made in any period, is that the Body of Christ not neglect the high call of making Christ known to the world". I ask you each, in your homes, parishes, ministries, and hearts, to receive anew this beautiful, demanding mission.

Let us "be joyful, keep our faith, and do the little things" as the saints did. Let us plant widely, pray deeply, adapt creatively, and love steadfastly, so that in every land, the light of Christ may shine undimmed. Let all peoples, in cultures new and old, know the embrace of God, and find in the AACC a welcome, a home, and the unquenchable joy of the Gospel.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, fill you with courage, grant you wisdom for every decision, patience for every trial, and renew in you the joy of your first love for Jesus Christ. May the saints of these isles—David, Patrick, Brigid, Columba, Ninian, Hilda, Deiniol, and all others—pray for us as we begin this new decade of mission. The Lord is ahead of us. Let us walk where the fathers and mothers of faith have already trod, confident that "wherever the Spirit blows, new life will spring forth."

With deep affection and continual prayers,



**The Most Reverend Dr Felix Gibbins OSB Cam**  
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**"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

**May all our steps be for the building up of Christ's one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, for the blessing of all nations. Amen.**

