

NEWS FROM WAKEFIELD DIOCESE

Transforming Lives : Transforming Congregations : Transforming Communities

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For immediate release

PRIEST IDOL goes back home to kick start congregation



Rev'd James McCaskill, star of the Channel 4 hit TV series, Priest Idol, is to leave his church in Barnsley to try and rejuvenate a failing congregation in his native America..

James McCaskill who won over the nation as the idealistic young American who came to the former mining community of Lundwood, Barnsley to turn the failing congregation round will say goodbye this weekend – with a little help from the Voices in Praise

Gospel Choir who sang at one of his very first services filmed for the 2005 television series.

James said he had not taken the decision lightly to leave but said he was looking forward to using the skills and insights learned in Barnsley to help rebuild the congregation at St Paul's Episcopal Church, Bailey's Crossroads in Washington DC - just down the road from the White House.

Said Fr James: "The past five years in Lundwood have offered some of the most challenging and I think some of the most rewarding experiences I have ever faced. I believe we have compressed at least 10 years' worth of ministry into five.

"Again and again, people ask me 'if it has worked' and my response is that I leave behind a church that is completely transformed compared to the one I first visited in September 2004.

"The building, the grounds, the congregation, and importantly, the community perception of the church have risen from depths of bleakness to new heights of possibilities and hope for the future," he said.

James answered an advert placed by the Wakefield Diocese in The Church Times seeking a dynamic young priest to make a difference at St Mary Magdalene Church in Lundwood which was struggling to survive at the time with an ageing congregation of around eight people.

Cameras from Channel Four followed his progress over a 12month period as he hooked up with marketing gurus Propaganda and comedian Toby Foster in his bid to connect the church with a community scarred by pit closures, high unemployment and poverty.

And it worked. At his first Christmas service over 150 people filled the church and he soon saw a regular congregation of around 60.

Said James: "As much as St. Mary Magdalene Church has been moulded through my ministry by God's grace, so has my understanding of ministry and sense of self been shaped by the experience of rebuilding this church, the perseverance and generosity of many people and the amazing answers to many prayers.

"I move to my next parish with greater personal confidence and a keener sense of challenging the pitfalls of institutional religion in order to invite our neighbours into a lively experience of Christ's love rather than into a static social clique," he added.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

James is available for interview – contact him on: 07525 029172
Or email at lundwood@churchlite.co.uk

FINAL SERVICE in church Sun 11 October starts 10.30am.

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