

# Back to Church Sunday goes global 6th May 2008

*Thousands of churchgoers across the world to invite their friends to return to church*

People in churches all over Britain, and for the first time, in other parts of the world, will be backing *Back to Church Sunday* this September 28th and inviting a friend back to church with them.

Thirty eight Church of England dioceses from Cornwall to Newcastle will join with Churches Together in Scotland, the Church in Wales, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed churches nationwide, Elim Pentecostal churches and Anglican churches in New Zealand and Canada.

This represents exponential growth for *Back to Church Sunday*, which began in Manchester in 2004 with the message 'Missing You', and spread to Wakefield in 2005, nine Church of England dioceses in 2006 and 20 in 2007, when 20,000 people came back to church in one day.

Research by the Diocese of Lichfield after last year's *Back to Church Sunday* suggested that 6,000 people came back to church on that day and that, six months later, between 700 and 900 (12-15 per cent) had become regular members. About a further 3,000 are still in touch with their inviting churches and may have come at Christmas or to a social event.

The Archdeacon of Walsall, Bob Jackson, said: "People invite their friends on Back to Church Sunday with no strings attached. We know many people will gladly respond to this. What we've proved is that up to 15 per cent like it so much they want to come back for good. No wonder Back to Church Sunday has been such an encouragement. This year we want to work hard on improving our welcome even more."

Ian Bunce, Head of Mission for the Baptist Union, which represents more than 2,000 churches, trialed *Back to Church Sunday* last year in the North West and is now promoting it nationally: "We are delighted to be part of Back to Church Sunday. We believe the concept of a personal invitation really works. For people to have the opportunity to try church again with a friend is a great concept."

The 2008 resources centre on a special and personal invitation, with a place card bearing the emblem 'VIP'.

The venture is supported by Traidcraft, which produces fairly traded and environmentally friendly resources for churches to advertise their invitation and welcome. Local churches buy a Back to Church pack, with invitations, posters, prayer cards, balloons, welcome team tshirts, with 'friendly feedback' cards for newcomers. Participating dioceses and denominations are additionally supported with multimedia training resources and 'top tips' style factsheets to use in 'welcome workshops' over the summer.

**ends**

**Further information please contact Ben Wilson at the Church of England Communications Office, telephone (020) 7898 1326**

## **Notes to editors**

The participating dioceses, denominations and provinces are:

Bath and Wells; Bradford; Blackburn; Bristol; Carlisle; Chelmsford; Chester; Chichester; **Coventry**; Derby; Exeter; Ely; Guildford; Hereford; Leicester; Lichfield; Lincoln; Liverpool; London; Manchester; Newcastle; Norwich; Peterborough; Portsmouth; Ripon and Leeds; Rochester; St Albans; St Edmundsbury and Ipswich; Salisbury; Sheffield; Sodor and Man; Southwark; Southwell and Nottingham; Truro; Wakefield; Winchester; Worcester and York. Other dioceses are planning similar events of their own in September 2008.

Churches Together in Scotland including the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Salvation Army Scotland; the Church in Wales; United Reformed Church; Methodist Church; Baptist Union of Great Britain; Baptist Union of Wales; Elim Pentecostal Church.

The Anglican Dioceses of Wellington in New Zealand and Algoma, Canada.

For more see: [www.backtochurch.co.uk](http://www.backtochurch.co.uk)