



The Archbishops of Canterbury and York today are meeting with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people advocating for a new initiative aimed at reaching out to people within these communities. The Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) Friendly Churches will encourage and signpost churches to do more to welcome people into worshipping communities.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby will spend time with GRT communities in Poole today as part of his mission visit to the Diocese of Salisbury. The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, walked with the Bishop of Carlisle James Newcome to the Appleby Horse Fair, the biggest annual gathering of Travellers in the country.

Archbishop Justin said: "I'm deeply grateful to be spending time with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in Poole later today, and acknowledge the pain and rejection felt by the GRT communities both now and in the past. We can and must do so much more to welcome, support, include and advocate for them. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church is about reconciliation, and it is my hope that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches initiative will enable a bridge between settled people and Travellers and be part of this reconciliation process. I am fully supportive of this initiative. Every country has distinct cultures amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The common feature that I have seen across Europe and most recently in Romania is the suffering and marginalisation they have had to endure."

Archbishop Stephen said: "I was delighted to be at Appleby Horse Fair today and to support the launch of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches. I have seen and heard of the prejudice and racism the GRT communities face in their daily lives. As a church we need to do more to stop this. And making a positive step to actively welcome them into our worshipping communities will help to bring about change."

The GRT Friendly Churches initiative is a result of the work of different churches led by Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and non-Travellers who have been reaching out to GRT communities. Churches can befriend and work alongside Gypsies and Travellers, which could include offering to pray with a family, offering water to people who are camping on the roadside, signposting people to services they need, or accompanying people to an appointment or engaging in more complex advocacy.

Ivy Manning, a Romany Gypsy said: "I'm delighted to be part of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches, it's something that gives hope to my people. For too long we've felt scapegoated by wider society. Today marks a positive beginning of something new."

There is a vibrant Christian faith amongst these communities, but Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people encounter extreme prejudice. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches seeks to reach out and break down centuries of marginalisation and fully welcome all into the full life of the

church.

The Church of England has acknowledged it has often failed in supporting GRT communities. In the second biannual report of the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, the Commission noted that since a resolution was passed at General Synod in 2019, condemning discrimination against GRT people, at least 12 chaplains have been appointed to Church of England dioceses whose work includes pastoral, advocacy and educational activity.

The Right Honourable Lord Paul Boateng, Chair of the Archbishops Commission for Racial Justice, said: "The GRT community continues to experience virulent and pervasive racism and suffers real disadvantage in so many ways, not least in education and in a lack of respect for their culture and way of life. This initiative of the Church of England is a welcome response to that and hopefully will inspire further action to address the historic and current wrongs inflicted upon this hard-pressed community."

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