



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM
ONGOING FORMATION for CLERGY

"I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you"



NEWSLETTER

Issue 4 - December 2023

Welcome to the Christmas edition of our *Ongoing Formation for Clergy* Newsletter!

In this edition, I thought it would be useful for me to share with you the members of the Ongoing Formation for Clergy Committee, which meets quarterly to plan the engaging calendar of events. Following the pandemic, it was necessary to reform the committee and this seemed a good opportunity to include members with varied experiences and knowledge of the Archdiocese, whilst also ensuring that clergy welfare, together with safeguarding, form an integral part of all Ongoing Formation events.

As the Director for Ongoing Formation, I am Chairman of the committee, and the other members include:

Dcn. Tim Anthony - representing the Permanent Diaconate team.

Fr. Simon Baker - an elected representative of the Fraternity of the Recently Ordained.

Prof. Judith Champ - for her experience as a member of formation staff at St. Mary's College, Oscott and her breadth of knowledge of the Archdiocese.

Bishop David Evans - member of the Archbishop's Council with responsibility for Ongoing Formation.

Mrs. Paula Mitchell - Clergy Social Welfare Advisor for the Archdiocese.

Mrs. Claire Reay - Head of Safeguarding within the Archdiocese.

Mr. Peter Smallwood - Human Formation Coordinator at Oscott and Saint John Paul II Network Coordinator.

Dcn. Owen Gresty - Administrator for Ongoing Formation for Clergy (Secretary).

I have recently invited a priest with care for retired priests to be a member of the committee.

I commend to you the main event for priests in the coming year, The Synod for Priests, which will be, once more, at Woodland Grange, as this has proven to be a popular venue for you.

Please be assured of my ongoing prayers for you as we approach the season of Christmas.

Fr Craig

Rev. Fr. Craig Szmidt

DIOCESAN PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

**Heavenly Father,
we ask you to send labourers
into your harvest.**

**Inspire, in the hearts of your people,
vocations to the priesthood, diaconate
and religious life.**

**Bless our families with a spirit of generosity,
so that those whom you call
have the courage to give themselves
to your Church in faith.**

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation



'ACCOMPANIMENT' IS NOT 'TEACHING'

The presence of Jesus in authentic accompaniment

An event that comes easily to mind when people think of accompaniment within the enterprise of catechesis is the encounter between Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is an example of the disclosure of truth undertaken by Jesus himself in order to open the understanding of the disciples to the reality that they had lived through without grasping its meaning. Until Jesus came up with the disciples they had been accompanying each other, though without being able to see through the darkness of Calvary that still enveloped them. The reaction of the disciples to witnessing Jesus breaking the bread at Emmaus is well known. It brings Jesus' accompaniment of them to a successful and joyful conclusion.



But does that mean that the catechist who accompanies others, either as individuals or in groups, takes the part of Jesus in whatever is happening there? Put like that, any aspirant catechist, or anyone engaged in ongoing formation, is given food for thought. By itself a title or a vocation is not going to be enough to justify such a bold claim. When the Emmaus disciples returned to Jerusalem ready to pour out their good news, they found that the disciples who had stayed in Jerusalem had already heard from the women and Saint Peter that Jesus had appeared to them. Only after the Jerusalem disciples had made known their experience did the Emmaus disciples share what had happened to them. Moments later Jesus appeared to all the disciples gathered in the room and opened the minds of them all to understand the scriptures.

These two apparently separate events are really a single episode. They are united by the presence of Jesus, even though not all the disciples who had heard from the women and Saint Peter had had a personal encounter with the one who had risen from the dead. This then is a matter of mutual accompaniment in which the experience of each group enriches the experience of the other. The outcome is the foundation of a community of faith on a central experience that no one present on the road to Emmaus or in Jerusalem can claim to have initiated or been the origin of. The teacher of them all is Jesus who appeared to different people in different ways so that the proclamation of each individual or group could benefit all the others.

It would be anachronistic to call everything that happened on Easter Day as recounted by Luke 'ongoing formation'; however, that event shows that apostles, women, and disciples of other sorts, all learned together that Jesus had risen from the dead and what his rising meant. Nor did things end there, as we know. The mystery continues to present itself to many different people who all have their contribution to make to the continuing formation of the faith and understanding of the communities to which they belong. Accompaniment is a gift given to many and to be accepted by all. We have been taught to call no one on earth our teacher for our teacher is Christ. One aspect of authentic accompaniment is to live this directive, to be ready to follow other believers as much as to lead, and first of all to follow Jesus, who is the only one who can show everyone the way to journey's end.

Bishop David Evans

**Ongoing Formation Day for Deacons - Sept 2023**

We gathered for our annual day together at Oscott on the theme of our continual formation. As deacons, we come from varied backgrounds and have different expertises. We may have experience of professional development or inservice training in our work lives, but we explored how Ongoing Formation goes beyond this: it is vital to help us nurture a diaconal heart as we serve others in our parishes and other ministries.

It was refreshing to be asked for input on the advancement of our own Ongoing Formation, through round-tables discussions. These were respectful and positive, drawing on our wealth of knowledge and the varied experiences we have.

Fr. Craig Szmidt ensured the day was a positive one, leaving us encouraged. As always, it was good to catch up with brother deacons and to spend time in prayer together. I look forward to next September!

Dcn. Daniel Hurd

Afternoon Gatherings - Autumn 2023

I attended two of the afternoons, on Spiritual Direction and Looking After Yourself (it was a shame the third by Dr. Sarah Boss had to be postponed, due to illness).

We received a warm welcome at Oscott, and it was great to be invited to have lunch with the seminarians and staff.

Both afternoons were relaxed, not just being talked at, but a chance to discuss and ask questions. Being just for the afternoon, it was easier to make time to be away from the parish for these sessions - and it was definitely good to do that, especially to spend time with brother priests.

Thanks to Fr. Rob Taylerson's input, I'd feel more confident agreeing to be a spiritual director and Paula Mitchell's afternoon helped me think about how I can be more proactive with my health. Thank you to those who organised them.

Anonymous

Days of Recollection for Priests & Deacons

We commend to you these Quiet Days, providing an opportunity for prayer, spiritual reflection, confession, fraternity and mutual support, led by **Fr. Andrew Byrne** (Opus Dei).

The venue is **St. Mary's Convent, 98 Hunters Road, Handworth, Birmingham, B19 1EB.**

The programme is as follows:

11:00 a.m.	Coffee
11:30 a.m.	Spiritual Conference
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m.	Exposition
2:30 p.m.	Spiritual Conference
3:00 p.m.	Benediction, followed by tea & departures.

The dates for 2024 are:

Tuesday 23rd January
 Tuesday 27th February
 Tuesday 23rd April
 Tuesday 28th May
 Tuesday 25th June
 Tuesday 24th September
 Tuesday 22nd October
 Tuesday 26th November

The cost of each day is **£30.**

Please note these days are not organised by Ongoing Formation for Clergy.

For more information and to attend, please contact:

Fr. Philip Griffin
01384 395308
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Book Reviews Wanted!

We are looking for reviews for future issues of the *Ongoing Formation for Clergy Newsletter*. To contribute 200-250 words on any book you think would be of interest to others.

Send them to: ongoing.formation@rcaob.org.uk



MAIN EVENTS

Tuesday 11th - Thursday 13th June 2024 - THE SYNOD FOR PRIESTS - Woodland Grange *
Forming Ourselves and Others Together

Saturday 28th September 2024 - ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS - St. Mary's College, Oscott *

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2024 - MORE WILL BE ADDED IN THE NEW YEAR

JANUARY

- Sat 20th - **DEACONS UNDER 5s: PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT** (Mr. Pete Smallwood)
- St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £30 *

MARCH

- Weds 6th - **LENT DAY OF RECOLLECTION** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £45 *
- Weds 27th - **CHRISM MASS** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX *

JUNE

- Sat 8th - **MASS TO RENEW DIACONAL COMMITMENT** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX *
- Tues 11th - Thurs 13th - **THE SYNOD FOR PRIESTS** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN
- £395 residential / £200 day delegate *
- Sat 29th - **DEACONS UNDER 5s: SOCIAL OUTREACH** (Mgr. Cn. Timothy Menezes & Abigail Martin)
- St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX - £30 *

JULY

- Mon 15th - Fri 19th - **RETREAT FOR PRIESTS** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £395

SEPTEMBER

- Sat 28th - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - Cost TBC *

OCTOBER

- Fri 18th - Sun 20th - **RETREAT FOR DEACONS** (Bp. David Evans) - Douai Abbey, Reading, RG7 5TQ - Cost TBC

* Attendance at these events is highly encouraged by His Grace, the Archbishop.

11th - 13th June 2024 - THE SYNOD FOR PRIESTS

Building on the themes of our last gathering at Woodland Grange in 2022 and The Conference for Priests at Newman University this year, we will once again be gathering at Woodland Grange in June for our **Synod for Priests**. The title for the gathering is *Forming Ourselves and Others Together* and it will be a chance for priests to spend time together.

More information will be shared in the next *Newsletter*. For the first time, we are offering two options for attendance: residential for £395, or a rate of £200 (which does not include bed and breakfast). **Places are limited, so book now!**

For further details on these events and to book, visit:

www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation



We are able to accept payments online by debit or credit card, via BACS, or by cheque. All Ongoing Formation for Clergy events are legitimate parish expenses. They are free-of-charge for retired clergy.