



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 1 - February 2023

**Welcome to the first Ongoing Formation for Clergy Newsletter!**

I am thankful to the Ongoing Formation Committee for their continuing help in planning this year's calendar of events. Rather than the usual programme of events, however, we have decided that it would be good to share Ongoing Formation opportunities with you in a regular newsletter. In addition to listing what will be happening in 2023, it will be a way for us to share our experiences of recent events.

The main dates in this year's calendar are **The Conference for Priests** on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June at Newman University and the annual **Ongoing Formation Day for Deacons** on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September at St. Mary's College, Oscott. Attendance at these days is highly encouraged by the Archbishop.

In addition to the usual **Days of Recollection**, this year we are also restarting the **Discovery Days** for priests led by Prof. Judith Champ (see the next page for more information). We are also hoping to try something new by planning three informal **Afternoon Gatherings** for priests at St. Mary's College, Oscott. For this first year, topics will explore how to be a spiritual director, preaching, and looking after ourselves.

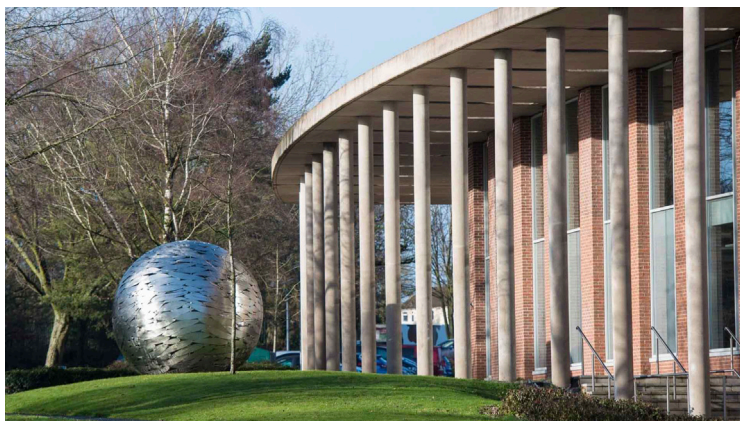
Finally, as Vocations Director, I would like to encourage us all to continue praying for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life.

Please be assured of my ongoing prayers for you.

God bless,

*Fr Craig*

Rev. Fr. Craig Szmidt  
Director for Ongoing Formation



Newman University, our venue for The Conference for Priests in June.

**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](http://www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation)



## UPCOMING... DISCOVERY DAYS FOR PRIESTS



*Our first Discovery Day of 2023 begins with a visit to Harvington Hall on the Feast of the English Martyrs.*

**Discovery Days** offer an opportunity for priests to enjoy a relaxed day out, in the company of other priests, exploring places of interest within, and beyond, the Archdiocese, accompanied by myself. We anticipate that each day will attract a small group, and they are limited to priests only.

The schedule for each day will include a visit to one or two places of interest, and a pub lunch. We will organise our own transport (perhaps sharing a car with a fellow priest), and meet at the first venue. There is no charge for the day, but each of us will pay any entry fees, lunch costs and parking etc.

The days are designed to avoid the need for too much advance planning and booking, but numbers will be limited, and a lunch booking will be needed. For this reason, please book through the Vocations Office website, or by email or phone, at least a week before each of the Discovery Days, if you plan to join us.

A detailed schedule for the 2023 days will be included in the next newsletter, but the first Discovery Day is on **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May**. In honour of the English Reformation Martyrs, we will visit **Harvington Hall**, and have lunch nearby, with an afternoon venue to be confirmed.

If you have suggestions for possible places of interest to visit, please get in touch.

**Professor Judith Champ**

**Day for Priests - June 2022**

*Last June, the priests of the Archdiocese gathered for a few days of time together. The focus of the meeting was to discuss our experiences of pastoral ministry and our lives as priests. This all took place in a synodal way, with the Archbishop listening to and reflecting on our feedback. Having been ordained in 2020, my early years of priesthood were marked by COVID restrictions, so this was the first opportunity I had to attend such a gathering. Together we reflected on the joys and challenges of ministry, but most importantly, it was a valuable chance to meet priests I didn't know and catch up with those I did. I gained a lot from the days away and look forward to the next gathering.*

Fr. Benedict Skipper

**Day for Deacons - September 2022**

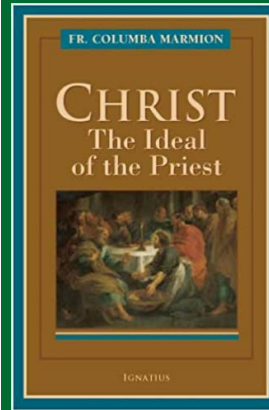
*A number of deacons of the Archdiocese gathered at St. Mary's College, Oscott for our annual formation day. The day followed a theme of our common stewardship, in line with Pope Francis' encouragement to "pray in the great cathedral of creation" as the 2022 Season of Creation began. There were engaging conferences on our theme from both CAFOD and Aid to the Church in Need, and a lively debate following an update on the implementation of the synodal pathway. We were able to join the seminary community for Holy Mass, lunch and the Rosary, and of course the simple networking and informal discussions with fellow deacons proved to be an unintended but valuable fruit of the day.*

Dcn. Martin Casey

**Advent Day of Recollection - December 2022**

*To go or not to go? Would it be worth the effort of travelling into Birmingham for a short day of prayer and reflection? In the event, I was glad I went - despite the cold weather and the heavy traffic on the way home. The welcome from the sisters at Selly Park was very warm, as were the meeting room and the chapel. We had two encouraging talks from Bishop William on Advent themes, either side of an excellent lunch. There was a holy hour in the beautiful convent chapel, with the opportunity for confession with the convent chaplain. I think we all went away with a new sense of Advent joy and expectation in our hearts!*

Fr. Stephen Squires

**Book Review: Christ the Ideal of the Priest**

In 1950, as I left Cotton College to start my journey to the priesthood, Fr. (Dr.) Jones gave me a copy of *Christ Our Life*. Quite recently, I have taken it up, together with the other companion volumes - *Christ the Ideal of the Priest* and *Christ in his Mysteries* - and have found them very helpful.

*Christ the Ideal of the Priest* by Bl. Columba Marmion, the Irish priest who became Abbot of Maredsous in Belgium, is full of material for meditation. "He bequeathed to us an authentic treasury of spiritual teaching, a way of holiness, simple and yet demanding," said St. John Paul II at his beatification. Bl. Columba reflects on Christ as the source and model of priestly sanctity and takes us through the path of the virtues required of a priest. He stresses the idea of a priest's faith and love of God as the measure of heavenly glory, giving practical advice, as well as the reassurance that the path to sanctity is a step-by-step journey. He takes us through the Mass and the Office and prayer life with ideas to help us celebrate more effectively. A chapter on sanctification by means of ordinary actions is very helpful. Reciting the Canticle of Daniel, ("O all you works of the Lord, O bless the Lord") might start the day, as we open the curtains and continue with washing and shaving. A final reflection of the Transfiguration suggests that the spiritual life of the priest is a grace and a work of transfiguration.

The frequent quotations in Latin, though always translated, and the footnotes with references to Scripture and the Fathers, though brief and at the foot of the page, may for some be off-putting. *Christ Our Life*, freshly translated, and *Christ in His Mysteries* are also to be recommended.

Canon Edward Stewart



## THIS YEAR'S MAIN EVENTS

**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June - THE CONFERENCE FOR PRIESTS - Newman University, Birmingham \***

*The Gift of Priestly Vocation: Forming Ourselves to Form Others*

Led by Bishop David Oakley, Bishop of Northampton

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September - ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS - St. Mary's College, Oscott \***

*The Importance of Ongoing Formation in our Service of God and our Neighbour*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2023

### MARCH

- Weds 22<sup>nd</sup> - **LENT DAY OF RECOLLECTION** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £45
- Sun 26<sup>th</sup> - Mon 27<sup>th</sup> - **FRATERNITY OF THE RECENTLY ORDAINED** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN - FREE \*

### APRIL

- Weds 5<sup>th</sup> - **CHRISM MASS** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX

### MAY

- Thurs 4<sup>th</sup> - **DISCOVERY DAY 1** - Harvington Hall, DY10 4LR *(This is an event for priests only)*

### JUNE

- Tues 6<sup>th</sup> - **DISCOVERY DAY 2** - Details TBC *(This is an event for priests only)*
- Sat 10<sup>th</sup> - **MASS TO RENEW DIACONAL COMMITMENT** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX \*
- Sat 24<sup>th</sup> - **DEACONS UNDER 5s** - Harvington Hall, DY10 4LR - £30 \*
- Mon 26<sup>th</sup> - **THE CONFERENCE FOR PRIESTS** - Newman University, Birmingham, B32 3NT - £80 \*

### JULY

- Weds 5<sup>th</sup> - **DISCOVERY DAY 3** - Details TBC *(This is an event for priests only)*
- Mon 17<sup>th</sup> - Fri 21<sup>st</sup> July - **RETREAT FOR PRIESTS** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £350

### SEPTEMBER

- Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> - **AFTERNOON GATHERING: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION** (Fr. Rob Taylerson - Spiritual Director at Oscott) - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £15 *(This is an event for priests only)*
- Sat 30<sup>th</sup> - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £35 individual/£50 with wife \*

### OCTOBER

- Sun 1<sup>st</sup> - Tues 3<sup>rd</sup> - **FRATERNITY OF THE RECENTLY ORDAINED** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN - FREE \*
- Thurs 12<sup>th</sup> - **AFTERNOON GATHERING: PREACHING** (Bishop David McGough - Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus) - St. Mary's College, Oscott B73 5AA - £15 *(This is an event for priests only)*
- Sat 21<sup>st</sup> - **DEACONS UNDER 5s** - Venue TBC - £30 \*

### NOVEMBER

- Fri 3<sup>rd</sup> - Sun 5<sup>th</sup> - **RETREAT FOR DEACONS** - Wistaston Hall, Crewe, CW2 8JS - Cost TBC
- Thurs 9<sup>th</sup> - **AFTERNOON GATHERING: CARING FOR YOURSELF** (Paula Mitchell - Diocesan Social Welfare Advisor) - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £15 *(This is an event for priests only)*
- Tues 28<sup>th</sup> - **ADVENT DAY OF RECOLLECTION** - Venue TBC - £45

\* Attendance at these events is highly encouraged. If you are unable to attend, please write to the Archbishop explaining your absence.

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

[www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation](http://www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation)

All Ongoing Formation for Clergy events are legitimate parish expenses. They are free-of-charge for retired clergy.