



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 6 - July 2024

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

How quickly time flies. The last edition of our *Ongoing Formation for Clergy* Newsletter was in Holy Week, and so much has happened since then! Last week, a number of priests of the Archdiocese were on retreat led by Archbishop Kevin McDonald. It was good to celebrate with Archbishop Kevin as he gives thanks for 50 years of priestly ministry.

It has also been a week of ordinations! On Sunday 14th, Andrej Rusnak, Tony Hartley and Andrew Foster were ordained to the permanent diaconate. On Tuesday 16th, many of us gathered in the Cathedral for the joyful Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Richard Walker and Bishop Timothy Menezes. And on Saturday 20th, we celebrated the Presbyteral Ordination of Fr. David Bench. We continue to pray for them all.

Last month, it was a real joy to welcome over a hundred priests to the familiar setting of Woodland Grange in Leamington for the residential Synod for Priests. As you will read later in this *Newsletter*, this was a most enjoyable gathering, which reflected on the positive experiences of our last two events which were held in 2022 and 2023, before then looking to the future. It was an opportunity to reflect upon the joy of the priesthood, whilst nurturing the heart of the shepherd.

The next event in the calendar is the annual **Conference for Deacons**, which is taking place at St. Mary's College, Oscott on Saturday 28th September. This issue contains an article on our diaconal programme of ongoing formation.

We are also finalising a couple of informal **Afternoon Gatherings** at St. Mary's College, Oscott in the autumn. One will reflect on the new Lectionary; another on *Laudato Si'*, with a practical session looking at the care of creation: theology, useful initiatives and prayer.

Please be assured of my ongoing prayers as we – hopefully! – find time to rest a little over the summer.

Fr Craig

Rev. Fr. Craig Szmidt - Director of Ongoing Formation for Clergy



www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation



DIACONAL COMMITMENT TO ONGOING FORMATION

"The continuing formation of deacons is a human necessity which must be seen in continuity with the divine call to serve the Church in the ministry and with the initial formation given to deacons, to the extent that these are considered two initial moments in a single, living process of Christian and diaconal life."



Fra Angelico - Saint Lawrence Giving Alms

The *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* place an "indispensable obligation" on the Archdiocese to provide adequate, integral formation to its permanent deacons.

In the early years of his ministry - at least the first three - a permanent deacon in the Archdiocese of Birmingham is expected to avail himself of the three-a-year sessions offered on Saturdays, which aim to provide insight and food for thought on the scriptural (autumn), spiritual (spring) and practical (summer) aspects of our ministry. With the ordination of three new deacons last month, there are now six brothers who fall into the category of 'Under 3s'.

However, a number who have been ordained for a longer period of time have indicated an enthusiasm

to attend some of the sessions which are of particular interest to them. Accordingly, these sessions are to be retitled **Ongoing Formation Days for Deacons** and publicised to all permanent deacons of the Archdiocese, who should consider themselves (together with their wives) very warmly invited to attend them if desired.

The sessions for next academic year will be held on 9th November 2024, 1st February and 21st June 2025. There is a small charge for each event, which is an allowable parish expense for all deacons and should be claimed back from his parish. The agenda for each event is sent out a couple of weeks in advance.

Of course, in attending such events, we also open ourselves to the mutual support and fraternity of our brother deacons across the Archdiocese, and it should be noted that the two prime opportunities to do this each year are the **Mass of Renewal** at St. Chad's Cathedral in June (the 7th in 2025) and what had previously been known as the 'In-service Day', now to be known as the **Conference for Deacons** at St. Mary's College, Oscott each September (the 28th this year). These should be seen as a high priority for every deacon to attend - above other requests for our time and ministry. Please have a conversation with Deacon Leo or Archbishop Bernard if any attempt is made to prioritise any event above these two.

Finally, each deacon is expected to attend a regular retreat for his spiritual renewal, at least once every two years. Many different opportunities and venues exist for this, but the Archdiocese provides one such opportunity each autumn, usually alternating between venues at different extremities of the Archdiocese. This year's **Retreat for Deacons** is from Friday 18th to Sunday 20th October 2024 at Douai Abbey, to be led by Bishop David Evans. There are a small number of places remaining.

Further details are on the Calendar of Events on the back page of this Newsletter and can be booked through the Ongoing Formation for Clergy page on the Vocations Office website.

Deacon Tim Anthony



The Synod for Priests - June 2024

By invitation, I write as a priest who has, by force of circumstance, operated outside the Archdiocese for many years and is now also retired – and resident again outside the Archdiocese. I am 57 years ordained. But in that time, the reason I've been located outside the Archdiocese for so long is that for 19 years I was, at the behest of Archbishop George Patrick, an Army chaplain, and then for 27 years (so far) I have had a little retreat house in Cornwall, my own foundation, with a special eye on the needs of those whose faith hangs by a thread or who are bruised in their faith.

Making 46 years together, that's a large chunk out of my 57 as a priest. So a lot has inevitably happened in the Archdiocese which I will not know too much about, and there are a lot of priests I don't know. And that is the fundamental basis for my regularly coming the 230 miles to Woodland Grange to join with many of the priests of the Archdiocese, some of whom I know, but most of whom I don't. The Archdiocese is where my priesthood began, and I have never wanted to be rooted anywhere else.

This year at Woodland Grange, we had our usual fraternity and I received my usual warm welcome from Archbishop Bernard. We approached priesthood via the route of the moment – it was synodal. We were invited to speak of our priesthood without interruption, and to listen without interruption to others speaking of theirs. Maybe we were doing that as a relatively novel thing. And we were listening to fellow priests doing the same. We were very different in age and character and experience – maybe all three.

Did any of it inspire any of us to think one or two things a little differently? It might have done, of course. And maybe something a little different, further, too: reassuring us when we might feel disillusioned about the way we were doing things, and whether those ways were right or adequate.

Well done, the spirit – indeed the Spirit – making some of these things happen, or at least bringing them to mind.

Fr. David Mead

Personally, I enjoyed the experience, being new to the Archdiocese. The number of attendees was very good – I have never attended a seminar or retreat with such a big number of priests together with all their bishops like this, sitting so friendly in such a way and ends so peaceful in that way. It was really a blessing.

The Synod sessions and the sharing of the topics contributed to my deeper knowledge and growth as a religious priest. The last address from the Archbishop made me learn humility, after listening to all and gave such a humble conclusion and the appreciation to all the priests was so impressive. I thank God for this opportunity, which was given to me by this conference, to come more closer to each priest as we had from the sessions. We need such gatherings frequently. It was the best meeting of this year and a very fruitful one for me. I will live to remember it for a long time!

Fr. Reginald Tarimo AJ

A few weeks ago, I attended the Synod for Priests at Woodland Grange. Together with Archbishop Bernard, some 100 priests spent time listening to each other, sharing our experiences of priesthood, and enjoying each others' company. Now, I have to confess that in 11 years of priesthood, this is the first three-day gathering that I have attended. In the past, I have always had a ready excuse as to why I could not go – "I am too busy", or my favourite, "a priest who can afford to take four days out of the parish (day off included) isn't doing what he should be doing". This year, however, I finally decided to give it a go, and how glad I am that I did.

At this gathering, the Ongoing Formation team had decided to use, as its model, the methodology of the Synod. This meant that, with only two sessions' dedicated to input from the Director of Ongoing Formation, every priest, in small 'working groups', had an opportunity to share their understanding of the priesthood, its joys and challenges, and how we can, with joyful hearts, continue to shepherd Christ's Church into the future. With priestly fraternity at the heart of the gathering I walked away all the better for having been there. So if you, like me, have every excuse in the book at hand to give when the next gathering comes along, have a rethink and give it a go yourself.

Fr. Craig Davies



MAIN EVENTS

Saturday 28th September 2024 - THE CONFERENCE FOR DEACONS - St. Mary's College, Oscott *
Heralds of the Gospel: Preaching the New Lectionary Worthily and Well

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2024-2025

SEPTEMBER

- Sat 28th - **THE CONFERENCE FOR DEACONS** - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £40 individual/£60 with wife *
- Sun 29th - Tues 1st Oct - **FRATERNITY OF THE RECENTLY ORDAINED** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN
- FREE (*For diocesan priests ordained fewer than 10 years*) *

OCTOBER

- Fri 18th - Sun 20th - **RETREAT FOR DEACONS** (Bp. David Evans) - Douai Abbey, Reading, RG7 5TQ - £185 single/£115 sharing
- Thurs 31st - **AFTERNOON GATHERING: THE NEW LECTIONARY** (Fleur Dorrell - CBCEW)
- St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £15

NOVEMBER

- Sat 9th - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS: PREACHING** - TBC - £30
- Thurs 21st - **AFTERNOON GATHERING: LAUDATO SI'** (Fr. Rob Taylerson) - St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £15

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.



FEBRUARY

- Sat 1st - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS**
- TBC - £30

APRIL

- Weds 16th - **CHRISM MASS**
- St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX *

JUNE

- Sat 7th - **MASS OF RENEWAL FOR DEACONS**
- St. Chad's Cathedral, B4 6EX *
- Sat 21st - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS**
- TBC - £30

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

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.