



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 10 - January 2026

Welcome to the winter edition of our *Ongoing Formation for Clergy* Newsletter.

As I write, the grounds of St. Mary's College, Oscott are blanketed in snow and resemble a true winter wonderland. Having celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we now enter the weeks of Ordinary Time, a moment that invites us to continue reflecting on the mysteries we have celebrated throughout the Christmas Season.

This time of year also marks the beginning of a new calendar year, and we are currently planning a number of opportunities for Ongoing Formation throughout 2026. There are already two important events scheduled for priests, and two for deacons.

The Synod for Priests will take place at Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, from Tuesday 16th to Thursday 18th June. Building on the Conference for Priests held last June, this residential event will be an opportunity to explore the Diocesan Plan 2030 together, recognising that the changes ahead of us are not always easy, but are part of our shared discernment of the future of our Archdiocese.

The Plan calls for us to work co-responsibly, a theme that is strongly emphasised in the Final Synod Document: *"The experience of the Synod can be a response to this reality [that of isolation, loneliness and a feeling of being overwhelmed], helping Bishops, Priests and Deacons to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry, which includes collaboration with other members of the People of God."*¹ More details will follow, but booking is now open for this event. As in 2024, there are both residential and day-delegate rates.

The Retreat for Priests will take place at St. Mary's College, Oscott, from Monday 6th to Friday 10th July. Further information will be available in our next newsletter.

The next of the regular **Ongoing Formation Day for Deacons** will be held on 20th June and will explore chaplaincy roles. The **Retreat for Deacons** is also in the calendar: Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th October, led by the Benedictine Community at Belmont Abbey.

I greatly value seeing so many of you at these gatherings, as we continue to pray for and support one another. Please do check the calendar of events at the end of this newsletter for a full list of upcoming opportunities. Booking is essential to avoid disappointment.

Finally, I continue to encourage us all to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life.

Please be assured of my ongoing prayers for you.

Fr Craig

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

¹ *Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission, 2024 §74*

www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation



FATHERS IN FAITH

An occasional series on the lives and legacy of priests of the Archdiocese of Birmingham

A PASTORAL PRIEST: ANOTHER DRINKWATER

FATHER JOHN DRINKWATER

(27th April 1888 - 10th November 1964)

Fr. John Drinkwater was born in 1888 into a Catholic family in St. Mary's parish, Wednesbury (then in Staffordshire). He was educated at Cotton College, and in 1909 went to Oscott College to study for the priesthood, one of three brothers to do so. Harold was ordained, and became an eminent author and speaker on a wide range of topics (*He was featured in Issue 3 of this Newsletter, July 2023*). Oscar left the seminary and married, but was killed in the first World War.

John was ordained on February 27th 1915. His ordination card was unusual as he chose a picture of Pope Pius X, who had lowered the age of communion to include children, and who was known for his simple lifestyle.

His first appointment was as curate at Burton-on-Trent. By 1923, he was in south-west Wolverhampton, planning with the diocese to establish a new parish. He first celebrated Mass there in the Carmelite convent in Poplar Road. In the same year, a site was obtained on Coalway Road. He said it was the "most exciting week I have ever had." Boundaries of the new parish were established, after some counterclaims by the Rev. Sammons of Ss. Mary and John's, and the site was fenced. The new parish was named St. Michael's. At that time, Fr. John was living at Rowan cottage, Poplar Road, and was already instructing a convert preparatory to marriage, and seeking to establish the Guild of the Blessed Sacrament.

Donations came in from the Archdiocese and from individuals, and during 1924 a church hall was built from designs by G.B. Cox and opened on 10th April 1926. Here, Mass was said and soon Fr. John was saying two Masses a day. Fr. Grimaldi, a refugee from Mussolini's Italy, came to the parish. A comfortable presbytery was built with a house keeper, Evelyn Callaghan.

The numbers at Mass continued to grow, but the years 1939-1945 were dominated by the Second World War. Fr. Grimaldi was interned. Soldiers from an army camp nearby came regularly to Sunday Mass and when they were subsequently deployed at the Front in Europe, Fr. Drinkwater received letters from them.

After the war, there was much housebuilding in the neighbourhood of the parish, including a large council house estate. Fr. John (as he was always known) had a new hall built, enabling the existing hall to be used exclusively as a church. Notable members of the parish were the Ashcroft, Connor, McClean and Pargeter families. A harmonium did duty for an organ, the organist was Mrs. G. Rowlands, and there was a small choir. The Annual August Bank Holiday Bazaar in the grounds attracted large numbers.

In 1956, Fr. John had another church hall built at Castlecroft, which he dedicated to St. Pius X. By then, there were four Sunday Masses at St. Michael's, and two at St. Pius X. There were evening services at both churches. Sunday Mass was also said in Womborne, which soon became a separate parish with its own priest and a church built in 1961.



Fr. John had a gift for catechising children. This took place every Sunday afternoon in church, and sessions ended with Benediction. The children acted out Scripture – for example, throwing (imaginary) nets over the altar rails for a “miraculous draught of fishes”. Fr. John promised that he would throw his biretta up to the ceiling when a hundred or more children attended. This was achieved several times, accompanied by loud cheering and clapping.

Fr. John Drinkwater died suddenly in 1964 at the age of 76. He had ministered at a time of growth in the population in England as a whole, and particularly in the population of south west Wolverhampton.

The Second Vatican Council had opened in 1962 and very soon after Fr. John’s death, a magnificent new circular church was completed, the first in the Archdiocese to incorporate the liturgical changes, with fine statues by modern Wolverhampton artists, including one of St. Michael on the exterior.



The current church of St. Michael, Penn, Wolverhampton - now part of the Parish of St. Carlo Acutis.

Although he did not live to see it completed, it was an eminently appropriate outcome of his 40 years of ministry, and his dedication at ordination to St. Pius X.

Dr. Marie Rowlands

This account of Fr. John Drinkwater, and his role in creating a twentieth-century parish in Wolverhampton, was written by the late Dr. Marie Rowlands (R.I.P. July 2025), who grew up in St. Michael’s parish. She became an eminent historian of Catholicism, and was widely admired as a catechist, following the example set by the parish priest she had so admired.



A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PRIESTS AND DEACONS

In his recent Apostolic Letter, *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, Pope Leo XIV offers a thoughtful and hope-filled reflection on ordained ministry today. Written on the 60th anniversary of *Optatam Totius* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the letter speaks directly to the lived experience of priests and deacons, inviting us to rediscover the grace of fidelity amid changing pastoral realities.

With a deeply pastoral tone, the Holy Father reflects on priestly and diaconal identity, communion with the Church, and the quiet fruitfulness of a life given in service. Rather than offering abstract theory, he encourages a renewed confidence in the daily faithfulness of ministry — prayer offered, sacraments celebrated, people accompanied, and the Gospel lived with humility and joy.

This letter is well worth a prayerful reading. It offers encouragement, perspective, and a reminder that our fidelity, rooted in Christ, truly does help generate the future of the Church.

The letter can be accessed via the Vatican Website: tinyurl.com/5a64bfpf



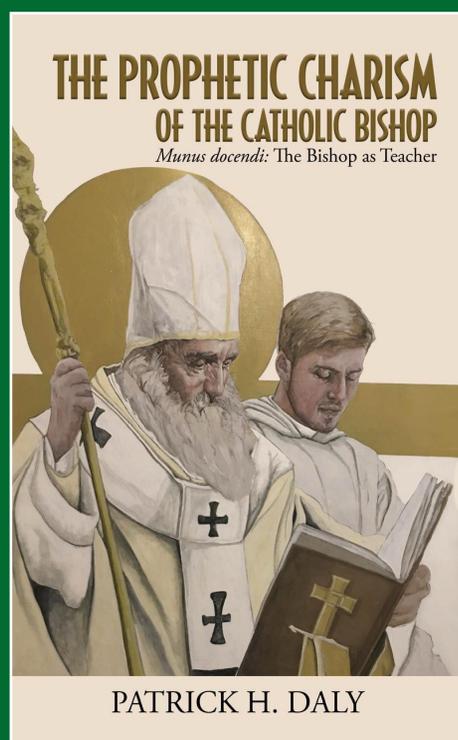
THE PROPHETIC CHARISM OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOP

Mgr. Patrick H. Daly, a priest of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, has written a book exploring the prophetic dimension of the bishop's mission, focusing on the *munus docendi* — the bishop as teacher.

Through an in-depth study of thirty bishops across two millennia of Church history, the author highlights their exceptional ability to communicate the truths of the Catholic faith. Their profound erudition, theological insight, and moral courage in proclaiming an ethic rooted in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are presented in a manner both accessible and compelling.

This work offers valuable reflections on the enduring resonance of the episcopal voice, not only within the Church but also in the public sphere. It shows how, ever since Jesus commanded the apostles to "teach all nations," bishops in every age have displayed remarkable creativity and conviction in preaching, teaching, and living the Christian faith.

The book is published by St. Paul's Publishing.





INTELLECTUAL FORMATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Distance Learning Programme MA in Catholic Theology run by the **Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham** is now in its third year, and recruitment is steadily increasing with 24 new students this year.



In addition to completing an MA, PG Diploma or PG Certificate, it is possible to take single standalone modules. This may be of particular interest to clergy as part of their ongoing formation. In addition to the core module: 'Catholic Theology: A Preliminary Tour', from 2026-27 it will also be possible to study 'Catholic Social Thought and Practice' and 'High Medieval Franciscan Theology' as single modules.

www.durham.ac.uk/study/courses/

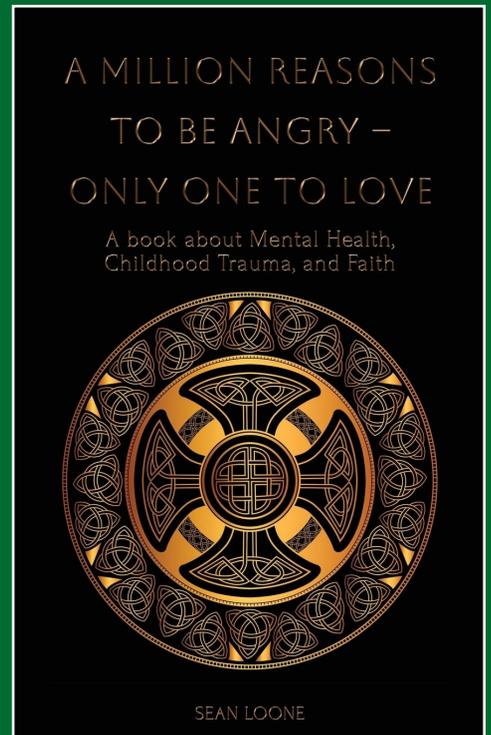
A MILLION REASONS TO BE ANGRY - ONLY ONE LOVE

Dcn. Sean Loone's tenth and final book is a personal reflection on three highly important topics: mental health, childhood trauma and faith.

Whether you are grappling with your own wounds, supporting someone through hardship, or seeking to deepen your understanding of faith and mental health, this book offers solace, guidance and inspiration.

Once again, any profits from sales of the Dcn. Sean's book are being donated to charity.

Available from all good bookshops, including Amazon (amzn.eu/d/5zqC9kk).



SAVE THE DATE! 2026 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR PERMANENT DEACONS

Every four years, the National Diaconal Conference holds a National Assembly for permanent deacons, diaconal aspirants, men in formation and deacons' wives.

The 2026 Assembly will be held in the Archdiocese of Birmingham at **Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa**, and will run from **late afternoon on Friday 4th until lunchtime on Sunday 6th September**.

More details will be shared by Dcn. Leo Poole, Diocesan Director of the Permanent Diaconate.

www.vocations.org.uk/ongoing-formation



MAIN EVENT

Tuesday 16th - Thursday 18th June 2026 - THE SYNOD FOR PRIESTS - Woodland Grange *
"Helping priests to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry"¹

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2026

FEBRUARY

- Sun 22nd - Tues 24th - **FRATERNITY OF THE RECENTLY ORDAINED** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN
- Free *

APRIL

- Weds 1st - **CHRISM MASS** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX *

JUNE

- Sat 6th - **MASS TO RENEW DIACONAL COMMITMENT** - St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, B4 6EX *
- Tues 16th - Thurs 18th - **THE SYNOD FOR PRIESTS** - Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa, CV32 6RN
- £395 residential / £200 day delegate *
- Sat 20th - **ONGOING FORMATION DAY FOR DEACONS: CHAPLAINCY** - Venue TBC - £30 *

JULY

- Mon 6th - Fri 10th - **THE RETREAT FOR PRIESTS**
- St. Mary's College, Oscott, B73 5AA - £395

OCTOBER

- Fri 23rd - Sun 25th - **THE RETREAT FOR DEACONS**
- Belmont Abbey, Hereford, HR2 9RZ
- £200 individual / £300 married couple

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

Fraternity of the Recently Ordained events are for diocesan priests ordained under 10 years.

Deacons ordained under 3 years are expected to attend **Ongoing Formation Days for Deacons**, but all are welcome.

¹Pathways for the Implementation of the Synod 2025-2028, §2.1a, quoting the Final Document, §74

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.



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM

DIOCESAN VOCATIONS OFFICE

Ask · Invite · Pray



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.