

the

# SOWER

News from



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SPOTLIGHT







By ARCHBISHOP

**BERNARD LONGLEY**

## *To our Diocesan family,*

HELLO and welcome to this Pentecost edition of *The Sower*, your Diocesan magazine.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you blessings for this very special season, which commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady and the Apostles.

Many of you will be joining in the Pentecost Novena, which offers several days of intercessory prayer for evangelisation and renewal of the Church in the days from Ascension to Pentecost. I hope you find this spiritually uplifting.

We pray that the Gift of the Holy Spirit we receive through Baptism and Confirmation is once again poured upon us as we celebrate Pentecost this year on Sunday, 23 May.

Over the last 12 months the power of the Holy Spirit has been ever more evident in our daily lives as people have stepped forward to support foodbanks, make PPE, become stewards at their church to ensure it can open safely, checked on neighbours and many other countless acts of compassion and goodwill – the transformation of words into actions.

I hope and pray that this strong sense of community continues as we navigate our way through the 'new normal' and that it helps to reignite our spiritual fire.

Although the devastation caused by the pandemic continues to affect us all, it has focused our minds on what really matters and offers the chance for change.

Even though our church buildings haven't been fully open, the communal life of our Church has continued with the support of so many people across the Archdiocese. We have kept going.

Now, as we make a fresh beginning in a very different setting, and as we celebrate Pentecost, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us and



# Power of the Holy Spirit is evident in countless acts of compassion and goodwill

inspire us as we rebuild our church communities.

We have an opportunity to focus on renewal and be open to change. A key part of this is our Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan. Over the coming months I will be sharing much more information on where we are with this important piece of work, and how we want you to be involved.

I have commissioned a number of groups who are looking at how we work in our parishes and in the Archdiocese to increase the opportunities that enable us to do God's work and to fulfil the promises of our baptism.

I want us to look at how we will individually respond to God's call to be missionary disciples in the Church and in our local communities, working joyfully together to spread the Word and the work of God.

In essence, how will we unfold God's plan for our Diocesan church?

There are four areas I am asking us all to focus on: Evangelisation, Formation, Liturgy and Worship and Social Outreach.

I invite you to join me in looking with fresh eyes at our mission.

We must take this opportunity to do all we can to make sure the Gospel is seen and heard through the example of our daily Christian lives.

For now, in preparation, I will be praying about all that is before us as we step out on this pilgrimage of faith together. I hope you will too.

It is very timely that the theme running through this edition of *The Sower* is evangelisation.

Stories and examples focus on encouraging others to know God's love for them by inviting them to church, to pray and to encounter Christ, and to groups where they can learn about Him.

Many of you will recognise that this is already happening in your

parish community and we hope others will respond positively to the call to evangelise.

I also encourage you, if you haven't already, to complete a Covid-19 impact survey.

Please share your experience of faith during the pandemic with us. This will help us to understand what has been happening in our communities and see the bigger picture of faith in action as we move forward.

You can complete the survey here: [birminghamdiocese.org.uk/C19survey](https://birminghamdiocese.org.uk/C19survey)

As we continue on our faith journey I look forward to the days when more of us are able to gather together in our churches and be reunited in person.

With every blessing for the days ahead.

+ Bernard

With COVID-19 continuing to make overseas travel difficult, this year's annual pilgrimage to Lourdes is, once again, a virtual online event, with everyone invited to tune in and take part...

# Pilgrims to make virtual journey to visit sacred Lourdes site

**P**ILGRIMS of all ages from across the Archdiocese and beyond are invited to take part in the Virtual Lourdes Pilgrimage 2021; taking place from Sunday, 30 May until Friday, 4 June.

The theme of the six-day event is "I Am The Immaculate Conception" and it will include daily Masses, virtual Marian Processions, a Service of Healing, Stations of the Cross, a Blessed Sacrament Procession and a Reconciliation Service; together with visits to key sites in and around the holy site in southern France.

It will also build on the online version of the pilgrimage staged last year, which was a great success.

Kath White, Lourdes Pilgrimage Administrator, said: "It was with a very heavy heart that the Executive Committee had to take the decision to cancel this year's annual pilgrimage to Lourdes.

"But our aim is to offer people the home experience, so that individuals can join in communion with fellow pilgrims

virtually through their TV, computer or smart device.

"We want to encourage as many people to get involved as possible, whether they are seasoned pilgrims or have never joined us before but would like to take part.

"As it is taking place during the half term break, we are hoping many families will want to tune in and watch the events unfold and join us in prayer and maybe even create their own Grotto as a focus for the week."

The virtual pilgrimage will start on Sunday 30 May (Trinity Sunday) at 3pm with a live-streamed Opening Mass from St Chad's Cathedral.

This will be the first of a series of Masses, which will be broadcast from places of worship around the Archdiocese.

Each day there will also be a virtual tour featuring significant locations in Saint Bernadette of Lourdes' life and each evening a virtual Marian Procession.

Monday, 31 May, the Feast of Visitation Mass, will be broadcast from Hednesford (the

destination of the Archdiocese' own annual pilgrimage to the Marian shrine) and people are able to send in petitions to be presented during the ceremony.

Wednesday, 2 June, will be a youth-focused day and will include a Children's Mass from Cannock and a Youth Worship Night, organised by the Kenelm Youth Trust (KYT).

In association with this, the KYT has launched a challenge – encouraging young people and schools to take part in a virtual sponsored walk to Lourdes.

All proceeds raised will be donated to the Diocesan Pilgrimage Sick Fund.

The pilgrimage will draw to an end with a Closing Mass on Friday, 4 June, led by Bishop David McGough – Chairman of the Lourdes Pilgrimage Executive Committee, followed by a virtual farewell to the Grotto with the lighting of candles.

■ People will be able to access the virtual pilgrimage directly from the Diocesan website – [birminghamdiocese.org.uk/lourdes](http://birminghamdiocese.org.uk/lourdes). In the run up to the event more information, including a full timetable of events will also be published on the site. There will also be regular updates on social media under the hashtag **Lourdes2Brum**.

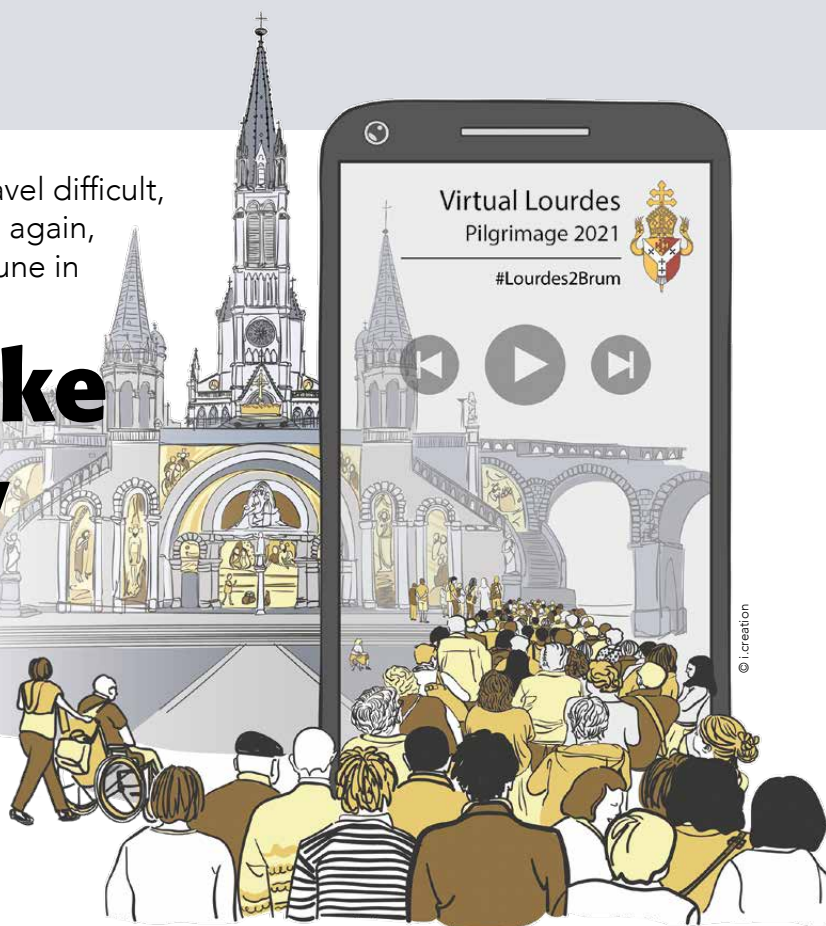
## New MAC welcomes pupils

A NEW Multi Academy Trust has been launched as part of the Archdiocese's Education Strategy Programme.

The formation of Our Lady and All Saints Catholic Multi Academy Company (MAC), took place on Holy Thursday (1 April 2021) following approval

from the Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson.

The MAC has welcomed more than 700 staff and 4,500 children and young people from 13 schools across the Birmingham, Solihull and Warwickshire areas.



**Flashback to 2019...**  
Young pilgrims from the Archdiocese take part in the International Procession.





# Accessible team's work has never been so vital

**N**EVER has the work of evangelisation been more vital across the Archdiocese, and a video conferencing platform is ensuring that essential resources remain available during the Covid crisis.

Despite the restrictions arising from the pandemic, formation and training for clergy and lay parishioners are being provided through a series of monthly webchats.

Evangelisation Zoom Meetings provide materials, networking contacts and a general forum for people wishing to share their faith in their local settings.

Organised by Advisor for Parish Evangelisation, Natalie Orefice, the on-screen meetings are shared by around 20 people at a time with a lunchtime session from 1-2pm and an evening session, which takes place from 7.30-8.30pm.

The virtual attendees hail from all four corners of the Diocese, from Goring near Reading to Coventry, from Thame in Oxfordshire to Stoke, from Stafford to Leamington Spa.

"As hosts, Evangelisation Fieldworker Paul Northam and

*"We want to support people in these challenging and restricting times."*

Natalie Orefice

I are trying to make ourselves as available and accessible as possible to people," said Natalie. "Zoom is allowing us to be in all places in the Diocese at once."

The Zoom sessions, which link up with people in their homes, begin with prayers and include a talk and formation on evangelisation followed by discussion.

"We want to support people in these challenging and restricting times," said Natalie. "We give tips on how people can share their faith on social media, how they can share personal testimony and how they can evangelise in their local parish."

"The meetings are also an



Advisor for Parish Evangelisation  
Natalie Orefice

opportunity for them to share the joys and frustrations of their parish at this time."

As well as encouraging parishioners to reach out by phone to people who are isolated

Natalie is urging parish teams to think about how they will welcome people – some of them newcomers – into church once the restrictions are lifted.

"The pandemic is making some people ask 'is there a God?'," she said. "We need to respond by saying 'Yes there is', and letting everyone know we welcome them."

Paul is supporting individual parishes by helping them to move their evangelisation meetings online.

"We continue to discuss how Catholics can evangelise in their own places, sharing ideas to help them and their parishes, and even offering online retreats," he said.

"The Evangelisation Office posts regular links to evangelisation resources as well as posting and tweeting about conferences and live streamed training sessions which are aimed at growing missionary disciples and parishes."

■ Anyone wishing to take part in the Evangelisation Zoom Meetings should contact Natalie on [natalie.orefice@rcaob.org.uk](mailto:natalie.orefice@rcaob.org.uk)



Evangelisation  
Fieldworker  
Paul Northam.



# Creative encounters with Christ continue to inspire

THE  
GOD  
WHO  
SPEAKS

**T**HE God Who Speaks campaign is continuing to highlight the place of the Bible in the life of the Church.

St Mark's Gospel has been designated for scriptural readings this year and so there is a special section on the Archdiocese website with resources to open up the first of the written gospels.

Visitors to the site can access 'A Whistlestop Tour of Mark' by David McLoughlin, the Scripture Champion for the Archdiocese.

He discusses Mark's style and technique, the astonishing power of his story and his twin emphasis on Jesus's suffering and the disciples' initial misunderstanding of His message.

Also available on the site is David's Echoes of God, a parish-based online resource journeying through the whole Bible, which helps readers appreciate its myriad scriptural treasures.

Meanwhile Fr Dries van den Akker SJ, an art expert and Bible scholar, contributes a series of Sunday by Sunday picture meditations, reading the Gospel in the light of works of art.

*Around the Archdiocese a series of posters have been issued to schools and parishes on the theme of the God Who Speaks.*

One of them, entitled *Fish With Mark*, pictured right, emphasises the parables which are Jesus' way of evangelising. Another, for schools, depicts the Bible as a set of bookshelves with all the separate texts displayed.

At St Chad's Cathedral, the Festal Bronze Lectern which was positioned at the front of the sanctuary during 2020 is set to reappear at key points throughout the year (Covid restrictions permitting).

Parishes are being encouraged to organise virtual Bible reading groups using Zoom or WhatsApp, to help Catholics read the scriptures with greater facility, devotion and enjoyment.

The Bible Society is collaborating with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to celebrate, share and live out faith through deeper scriptural engagement.



David McLoughlin stood at the Bronze Festal lectern at St Chad's Cathedral.

Its Catholic Scripture Engagement Manager Fleur Dorrell, the National Co-ordinator of the God Who Speaks Campaign, said: "Through the campaign we've seen how creative encounters with Christ inspire our dioceses. By making the Word of God visible and dynamic in our evangelisation, education, creative arts and social action, we deepen our love of the Gospel and its power to transform our Church."

■ The Bishops' Conference decided to extend 2020's Year of the Word until January 2022



under the umbrella of The God Who Speaks campaign.

To find out more, visit the God Who Speaks section on the website: [birminghamdiocese.org.uk/god-who-speaks](http://birminghamdiocese.org.uk/god-who-speaks)





# Parishes sign up to quick and easy way to donate

**A** GROWING number of parishes have signed up to a contactless payment scheme which provides more options for people who wish to give money to the Church.

The electronic Tap and Go system allows parishioners to donate quickly and easily by card when they come to celebrate Mass.

The roll-out of contactless devices within the Archdiocese, led by the Development Team, recognises that the UK is increasingly becoming a cashless society with around 70 per cent of transactions now made by card.

More than two-thirds of Diocesan income came in via cash before the Covid outbreak and the "new normal" has necessitated the introduction of a cashless model.

Parishes wishing to move over to Tap and Go are urged to contact the Development Team for advice on the different options available for making the best investment.

At the time of writing contactless devices have been set up in 14 parishes and a further 10 are in the process of setting up an account or ordering devices.

*To donate, parishioners can choose from one of a number of pre-set amounts and then just tap their card.*

The devices can be configured for general use around Mass and they can also be used for clergy collections, other charity collections or to take payment for a wedding or room hire.

"Tap and Go will not replace cash donations, but will give parishioners more options when it comes to giving – and their donation will go straight into the parish bank account," said Steve Baylis, Head of the Development Team.

"Our team will help every step of the way and easy-to-follow guidelines are provided.

"We're asking parishes to please give serious consideration to hosting this facility. It's quick, easy and accessible."



Parish Secretary Andy Walker demonstrates contactless giving at St Mary Immaculate, Warwick.

Meanwhile regular giving by big-hearted parishioners is greatly appreciated and valuable information about standing orders is available at [birminghamdiocese.org.uk/support-our-work](http://birminghamdiocese.org.uk/support-our-work).

Legacies are also really important to the Catholic church and after a lifetime's worship people are being encouraged to think about what

difference a legacy can make.

The Development Team's new legacy programme will ensure that parishes have access to a new suite of relevant materials including an updated legacy booklet as well as guidance on how to leave instructions for a Funeral Mass, the importance of writing a will and organ donation from the perspective of the Catholic Church.

## Team is here to help...

THE role of the Development Department is to support the mission and work of the Archdiocese, its parishes and entities.

The team raises funds through an active, comprehensive and professional programme of fundraising and support activities including contactless giving, promoting legacies, writing trust and grant applications and supporting parish giving activities.

### Steve Baylis, Head of Development

Steve has been running the Development Team since 2016 and in the intervening years the team have brought in some £8.6m in new funding for a range of capital and revenue projects. Coming from a community development and business background and with extensive experience in the voluntary sector, Steve leads the team to offer a range of support functions.

### Jane Bamber, Senior Development Officer

Jane has been with the Development Team

since June 2019. Previously employed by Father Hudson's Care, she has a background in charity management and volunteer management with organisations such as Oxfam, Alzheimer's Society and British Red Cross. Jane's work across the charity sector has provided her with invaluable experience of building successful relationships between funders, businesses and the wider community. In her spare time Jane is a trustee of a local charity supporting local people in the community of all ages who find themselves disadvantaged or disengaged due to learning disabilities.

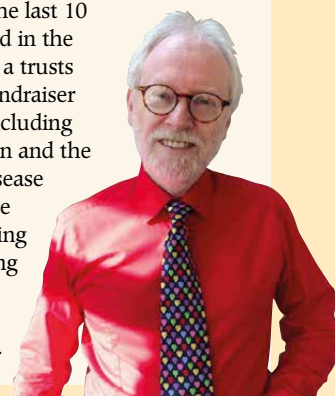
### Kevin Baugh, Funding Officer

Kevin, who has been in post since 2018, assists with the bid writing of grant applications. He spent the first part of his career in finance, specialising in investment

management. For the last 10 years he has worked in the voluntary sector as a trusts and foundations fundraiser for organisations including The Leprosy Mission and the Children's Liver Disease Foundation. Outside his work he is helping to secure fundraising to rebuild his own local Anglican church in Dorridge.



Steve Baylis and Jane Bamber.





**Toby Duckworth** and **Steven Fleming** are both preparing to enter the diaconate this summer and are set to become priests next year. Here, they tell *The Sower* how immersing themselves in parish life has helped to stand them in very good stead for their continuing faith journey...

# Sharing faith is at heart of role for new 'HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL'

**T**WO seminarians who are set to be ordained as Transitional Deacons have a similar history – and are both looking forward to becoming “Heralds of the Gospel.”

Toby Duckworth and Steven Fleming are preparing to enter the diaconate this summer on the way to their ordination to the priesthood in 2022.

Evangelisation is at the heart of their mission and early in their faith journey they both worked as volunteers at the Catholic youth retreat centre at Alton Castle in Staffordshire.

Both have also taken the opportunity to immerse themselves in parish life in an inner city setting along the way to entering seminary life.

Sutton Coldfield-born Toby is currently in the fifth year of his formation at the Venerable

English College in Rome.

After school, aged 18, he spent two years working as a full-time volunteer youth minister at the Soli centre at Alton Castle.

He was involved in helping to lead retreats, largely for 14–18-year-olds, trying to answer their questions of life through the eyes of faith as their peer.

In order to inform this ministry, he studied firstly for a foundation degree in Youth Ministry and then for a BA(Hons) in Theology (at Newman University, Birmingham).

“It was a busy but blessed time when I learnt a lot, both in terms of faith and life more generally,” he said. “My relationship with the Lord deepened during these years, to the point that others and then, as I perceived it, the Lord himself began asking me to consider becoming a priest.”

Before applying for priestly



Steven Fleming in the chapel at St Mary's College, Oscott, Birmingham, where he has been studying.

*“For me my passion is to bring the Gospel to people through whatever means I can.”*

Steven Fleming

formation, at the age of 20, Toby spent a year helping with parish work in inner-city Wolverhampton. During his formation he has undertaken pastoral placements back in the Archdiocese.

“Being ordained as a deacon really means that I am finally being commissioned by God to go out into the world as his willing friend and servant, being an extra pair of his hands able to make him present through the Word and His Sacraments.”

STEVEN, who was also born in Sutton Coldfield, was an altar server in St Anne's Church, Streetly, when young and he took a full-time post as a youth leader at Alton Castle in his gap year from college.

“Our job was to bring people from the inner city into the nature of the Churnet Valley and communicate to them the beauty of God's creation,” he said.

After subsequent work as a missionary with the Divine Love Community in Hungary and Romania he spent time with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

in the Bronx and Harlem, New York, sharing their “zeal for evangelisation” amongst the poor and needy.

“For me my passion is to bring the Gospel to people through whatever means I can,” said Steven.

Returning to Europe he took his Pontifical Degree in Ireland and is now in the fifth year of his formation at St Mary's College, Oscott. “It is a privilege to feel that God has called me to this mission,” said Steven, who also had a life-transforming experience on a Diocesan visit to Lourdes when he felt the overwhelming presence of the Lord.

“Jesus will work through me and come through to people so that they know he is truly alive and present.

“Being a deacon in its essence is about service – it is a complete laying down of my life so that when I go into priesthood I am so conformed to Christ that he can work through me.”

Steven hosts a weekly show on YouTube called Catholic Kickstarter Live.

Watch at: [bit.ly/3gZGvH3](https://bit.ly/3gZGvH3)



Toby Duckworth at the Venerable English College in Rome.





## Performer joins forces with pupils to record 'peace' song

PUPILS at a school in Coventry have worked with a recording artist, who is also a former pupil, to create a powerful song promoting non-violence in an urban setting.

Adam Hedge, a music mentor at Cardinal Newman Catholic School, which belongs to the Beacon Peaceful Schools network, held student workshops to develop Pray for Peace on an anti knife crime theme.

The song has been watched more than 10,000 times on YouTube and is set to be widely aired during this year's Coventry City of Culture celebrations (see article on

page 22). At the time of the song's release assemblies were arranged so that all year groups could listen to Adam and the students performing it, posters and banners around the school backed up a social media publicity campaign and peace hoodies were designed for the pupils.

Adam and the pupils performed at the school Awards Ceremony and went on to work with one of Cardinal Newman's feeder schools in further

workshops featuring the song.

"Our song Pray for Peace was featured at a live event in February for the City of Culture launch. We are very proud that the song continues to deliver such a powerful message within our wider community," said Head Teacher Emma O'Connor.

The school's anti knife crime project was inspired by the arrival of the Knife Angel sculpture at Coventry Cathedral and the message of peace on the streets is

the driving force behind the song. Adam, who performs as ShadowCV, said: "After working with many students and talking to them about their anxieties and fears growing up, I thought it would be a great idea to put together a song that really represents these feelings and to create something that resonates with the whole country, to spread a message of peace and hope."

The official music video can be viewed at [bit.ly/2PRhF0V](https://bit.ly/2PRhF0V)



Adam Hedge, aka ShadowCV with pupils, left to right, Lee Masih, 14, Keira Kabama, 16, and Maka Dodo, 16, pictured in front of the peace garden at the Cardinal Newman Catholic School.

**A** RECORDED weekly Mass filmed by a tech-savvy Cannock priest is being shared by thousands of schoolchildren and their families across the Archdiocese.

Father Peter Weatherby, of St Mary and St Thomas More in Cannock, makes colourful, fast-paced videos of Mass especially for primary children and their families.

Fr Peter invites schools to provide feedback and ideas, and includes readings, music and artwork from the children in the recordings.

"We also have 'shout outs' to a growing number of schools across the Archdiocese each week," he said. "Currently there are about 25 schools watching the Masses."

The 'Family Mass' is posted on YouTube each Wednesday in term time and is based on the Gospel and Mass of the following Sunday.

A 'Graphic Homily', lasting 2-3 minutes is also available for download separately.

Fr Peter records the Masses in his church in Cannock. The format and content take inspiration from the Directory for Children's Masses. "The Mass is aimed at children of primary school age (5 to 11 years) and their families," Fr Peter said. "However at least a couple of secondary schools are also using the videos in class."

The seed for the video project was sown last year when Fr Peter and Fr Jeremy Howard (of Our Lady of Lourdes, Hednesford) were asked to provide a recorded Leavers' Mass for Year 6 pupils at the Catholic schools of Cannock Chase.



Father Peter Weatherby records one of his online Masses at his Church in Cannock.

## Online Mass for children

"For many years there has been a Leavers' Mass celebrated by the Bishop in one of the Cannock Chase parishes but this could not happen in 2020 due to the pandemic," he said.

"We worked with the schools to provide a recorded Mass. It was well received and it became very clear that there was a need for something like this in the circumstances."

Fr Peter then began recording and posting a Mass each week. The numbers watching these have grown rapidly: "I record the Mass entirely alone," Fr Peter said, "and do all the video editing myself, but I am massively helped by all the schools, staff and children who provide

recorded readings, artwork, music and some lovely feedback.

"The children especially enjoy the special effects and I have also introduced some interactive elements into the Liturgy."

Fr Peter was specially asked to celebrate a 'Family Mass' for the feast day of St Thomas Aquinas Primary School in Stoke, and there will also be a 'Family Mass' which will form part of the programme for the virtual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes this year.

■ The Family Mass can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/FamilyMass>



**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**, who is Co-ordinator for the Ethnic Chaplaincies, Eparchies and Missions in the Archdiocese, looks at the recent 'virtual' celebrations surrounding the Intercultural Mass and examines how the Archdiocese is supporting its own diverse communities in their faith journeys...

# Unity not uniformity is mission of the Church

**I**n my role, I am seeing first hand how Evangelisation is approached in different communities.

Themes like youth work, handing on the Faith, involvement of women and lay people and support for new arrivals are important.

An initiative everybody is invited to is the Intercultural Mass, initially launched in the 1970s to mark United Nations Day. During the pandemic, it migrated online with music, dance and song, together with Scripture readings, prayers and a reading from Pope Francis' 'Fratelli Tutti', drawing on the teaching of the Scripture and the Church to promote unity and fraternity among all peoples and faiths.

Two of the many Catholic Ethnic Communities participating in the International Celebration this past year were the Cameroonian and Eritrean Chaplaincies. Fr Julius-Simomia Ngunjwo of the Cameroonian Chaplaincy speaks of the importance of music and dance for African people. He says: "African people sing and dance for joy at every moment in life".

*The Ladies' Committee he founded a few years ago emphasises this through the special contribution the women make to the Liturgy, bringing their own culture to bear in worship, underlining the key role of women in family and community. He says: "Women see what needs to be done, and do it!"*

Father Solomon Tesfamichael Ghebray in the Eritrean Chaplaincy celebrates Mass in the Alexandrian Rite and has been particularly successful in involving young Eritreans.

The drawing together of music, especially with drums in worship, and a focus on justice and peace back home in Eritrea and across the world is inspirational.

Fr Solomon emphasises the importance of prayer for the young people in his community; they have regular days of Adoration which sustain their faith life. He is now working on creating a television channel for the Eritrean community.

Pope Francis' visit to Iraq gave us opportunity to see the Chaldean Rite and to experience the joy of the Gospel even in places where there is so much suffering.

The support of Ethnic communities in the Archdiocese and their having their own

priests, rites and languages, is resulting in their playing a greater part in our Diocese, parishes and schools.

Sustaining and promoting worship according to their traditions and having support of their communities among different ethnic groups, enables and strengthens them to play a part in the wider Church and society.

In these days, the Ethnic chaplaincies are focusing on how they can reach out to bringing the Faith to the wider world.

Most recently, the Ukrainian Eparchy has been involved translating into English the Byzantine Liturgy for the whole Church. The Syro-Malabar Eparchy is translating their Rite into English and also creating a new programme of catechesis.

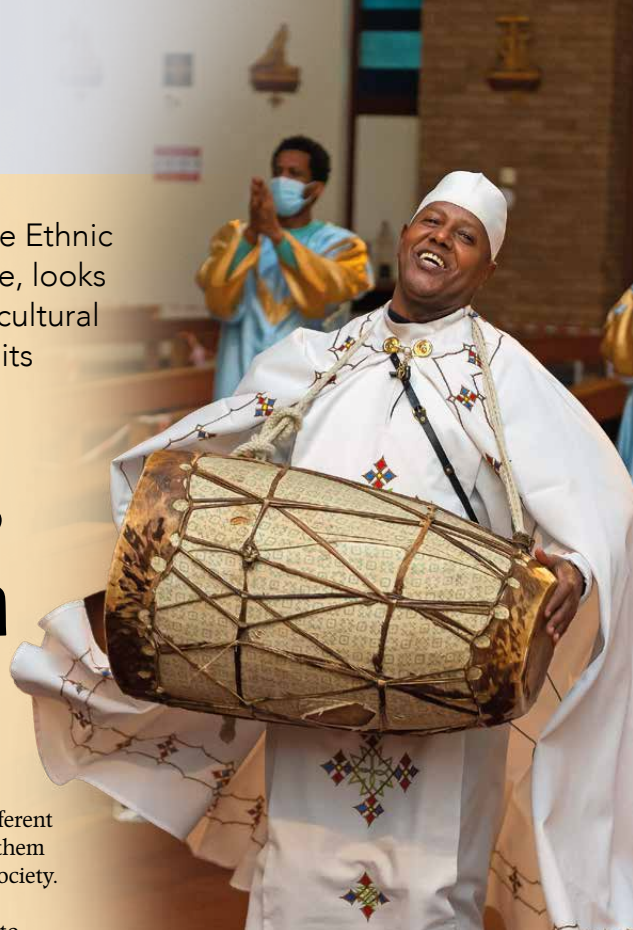
For all of us in the Church of Roman and Eastern Rites, from different nations and colours, with our various languages and customs, there is the challenge of communicating and living our Catholic faith.

We are called to come together to celebrate all that we have that is good in our cultures, and to connect the answer to be found in Christ to the needs and aspirations of people today.

That is what St Paul was so successful in doing, building bridges between peoples' current experience and the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead.

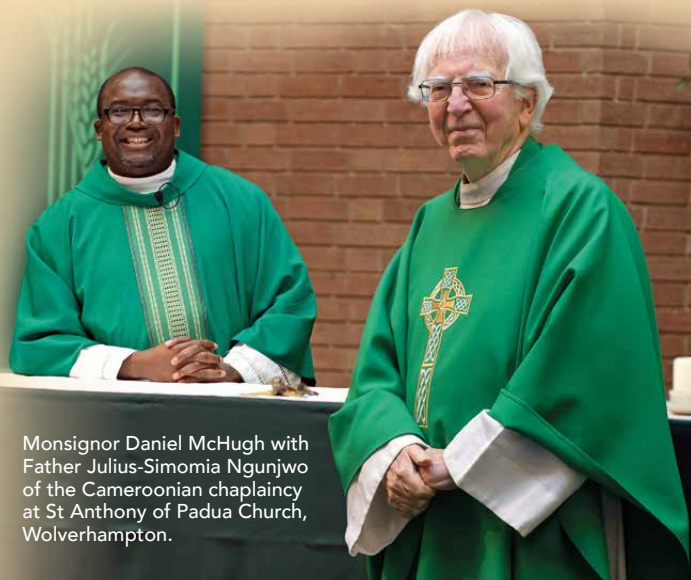
On Pentecost, the first outreach with the Gospel to the wider world is celebrated; we remember how St Paul reached out to the people of Athens, seeing their altar to the unknown God, and bringing to them the good news of the Resurrection, the story of the God they did not know.

For more details about ethnic chaplaincies please visit: [ourladyofgoodcounsel.org.uk](http://ourladyofgoodcounsel.org.uk).



Efrem Tesfamariam plays the drum during Mass at St Vincent's Church, Birmingham – music has proved successful for the Eritrean Chaplaincy in involving young people in worship.

Members of the Cameroonian Chaplaincies Ladies' Committee take part in last year's Intercultural Mass celebration.



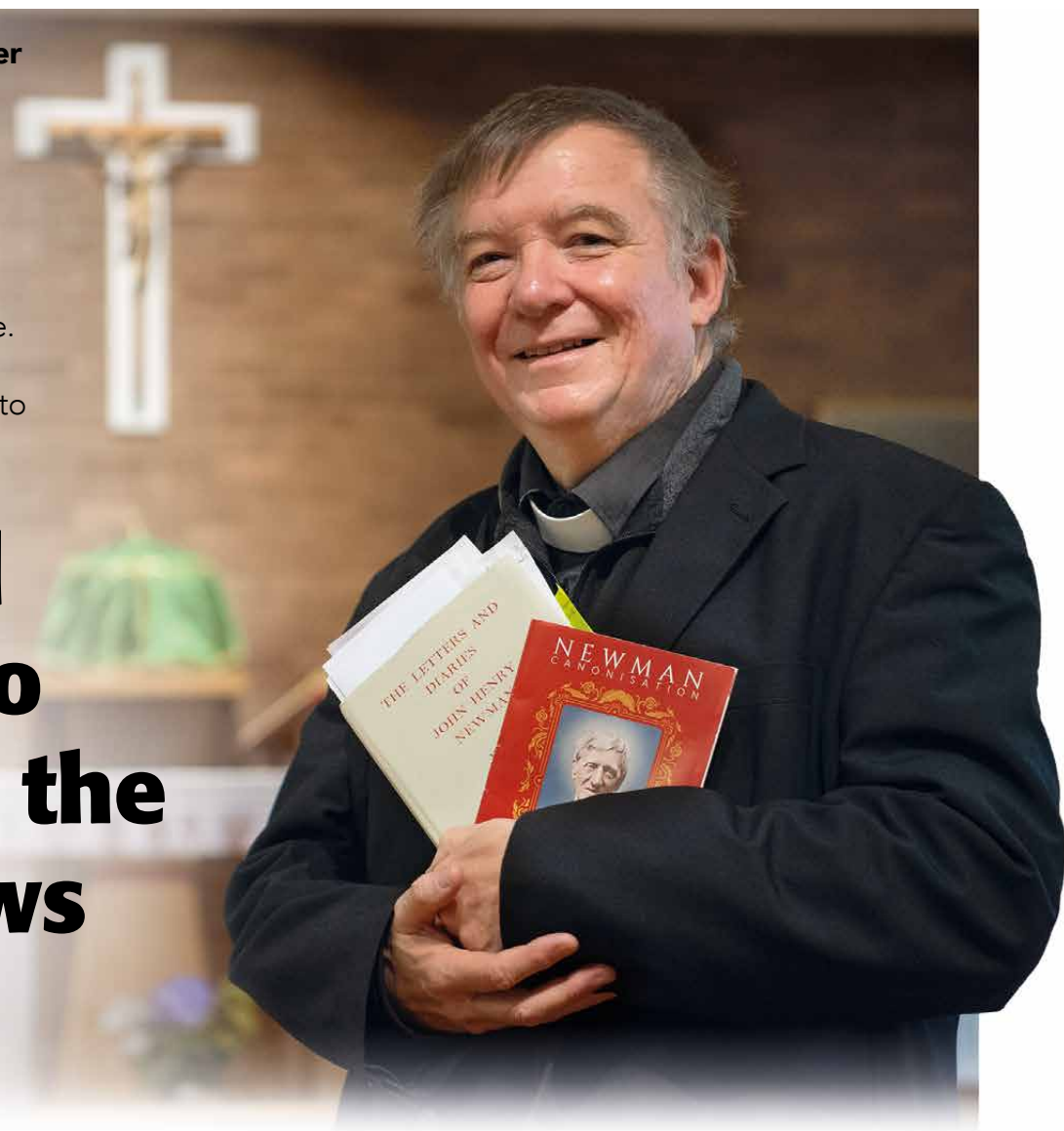
Monsignor Daniel McHugh with Father Julius-Simomia Ngunjwo of the Cameroonian chaplaincy at St Anthony of Padua Church, Wolverhampton.





In a regular feature, **Father Peter Conley**, Assistant Priest at St Joseph The Worker, Coventry, and author of *Newman: A Human Harp of Many Chords* reflects on Saint John Henry Newman's life. Here, he focuses on how he engaged with people to spread the Gospel

# Our local saint who lived out the good news of Jesus



**E**VERY spreader of Gospel seeds seeks what St John Henry Newman longed for:

*Ah! If I had any portion of St Paul's true zeal in my heart, I should have some portion of gentleness in my words. (Letters and Diaries XV, p.227).*

Our local saint strolled along the streets of Oxford and Birmingham, chatting about the message of Jesus when the opportunity naturally arose and calling on his parishioners on foot or horseback. He invites us, in our own areas, to proclaim the risen Lord each day by:

*...thinking habitually and constantly of Him and His deeds and sufferings. It is to have Him before our minds as one whom we may contemplate, worship, and address when we rise up, when we lie down, when we are at home or abroad, when we are working or walking, or at rest, when we are alone, or again when we are in the company; this is meditating. (Parochial and Plain Sermons VI, 4).*

Newman was dedicated, as an Anglican clergyman and Catholic priest, to pastoral visiting. He lived out the good news of Jesus, the bridegroom of the Church, whether people were richer or poorer, in sickness or health, joy or sorrow.

Newman was faithful to them in this life and offered Masses for the repose of their souls in heaven. His commitment was total. He aimed at being non-judgemental and sensitive, given the varying degrees in which they practised their faith. He explains this approach, born of experience, to his father:

*...I have told them all, 'I shall make no distinction between you and Churchgoers – I count you all my flock, and shall be most happy to do you a service out of Church, if I cannot within it'. (Letters and Diaries I, p.184).*

Twenty-five years later in 1849, Newman revised his first Alcester Street homily, given in the former gin factory he converted into a chapel, in a series of talks delivered to Catholics, non-Catholics and those with no particular faith affiliation.

Speaking on behalf of his Oratory community, we can imagine he would want us to offer these words to those we are hoping, like them, to reach:

*We come to you in the name of God; we ask no more of you than that you would judge for yourselves whether or not we speak God's word; it shall rest with you... (Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations, 1).*

Pope Francis alludes to Newman's reflection

entitled 'St Paul's Gift of Sympathy' when he remarks that pledging to be missionary disciples means:

*...we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others committed to building a new world. (Evangelii Gaudium, 269).*

Newman engaged with Victorian culture. Fascinated by the "magnetic telegraph" he would recognise the strength and weaknesses of websites, Twitter and blogs to promote religious teaching. He always strove for clarity, accuracy and simplicity.

St John Henry emphasised the urgency of the Gospel message. In doing so he advises us not to jump to conclusions about where the 'trace of providence' is going, because there are various ways of looking at the same scene. Rather, to wait patiently (something he admits to struggling with) for the Lord's guidance, while avoiding "getting into a way of muddling away (our) time; shuffling through the day." (Letters and Diaries III, p.118).

May he pray with and for us in all we will speak and do in Jesus's name.



# Aiming to share a clear Diocesan vision with all

New COO  
Eric Kirwan  
in his office at  
Cathedral House.

**T**HE Archdiocese of Birmingham's new Chief Operating Officer (COO) Eric Kirwan is set to play a key role in the unfolding of the Diocesan Vision.

Lifelong Catholic Eric, who takes up the post following the retirement of David Brooks, has wide experience in both the business and charity sectors.

As chair of the Steering Group supporting Towards a Diocesan Vision - Unfolding God's Plan, he will co-ordinate resources for clergy and the lay community as they embark on a new chapter of working co-responsibly in liturgy, evangelisation, formation, and charitable outreach.

Eric's day-to-day role as COO sees him overseeing the management of the Archdiocese's main departments including finance, property, human resources, safeguarding, communications, IT, development (or fundraising) and legal.

But he is also keen to get out and about to act as a conduit between deaneries and parishes, ensuring they feel connected and part of the Diocesan family.

"I intend to visit as many parishes as possible to meet with clergy and laity to understand how we can best support them in the unfolding of the Diocesan Vision and to share experiences," he said.

"Whilst change can be a little frightening at times, it can also be empowering and exciting if the outcomes are shared and clear to all."

Born in Coventry to Irish parents, Eric took a degree in town planning but embarked on a career in sales and marketing.

He progressed to become Managing Director of the UK subsidiary of Danish-based Modulex, a member of the LEGO Group, supplying products to the construction industry.

*"The immediate challenges are to prepare and ensure support is in place to enable the Diocesan Vision to move forward in the parishes..."*

New COO Eric Kirwan

Working all over Europe, the USA and Asia he later became Group CEO before retiring in 2019. Not long afterwards he was invited to join Holy Family Catholic Multi-Academy Company (MAC), a group of six Catholic schools in Warwickshire where he is currently Chair of Directors.

He enjoyed working within the Diocesan Education Service so much that he applied for the COO role in the hope that he could contribute at a wider level to the long-term future of the Catholic community.

"The immediate challenges are to prepare and ensure support is in place to enable

the Diocesan Vision to move forward in the parishes, starting with the reshaping of the deaneries later this year and secondly to manage the financial challenges as we hopefully recover from the impact of the pandemic," he said. "I am hoping to make a positive contribution towards the long-term security and growth of the Catholic community in the Archdiocese, helping to create an environment where we can develop future Catholic leaders in our parishes, schools and the wider community.

"Having spent the last 18 months as chair of one of our local MACs I am very excited by the potential for forging even closer relationships between our schools and our parishes and using this as a platform to involve more young people and their families in the work of the parish."

Eric will seek to ensure that all the resources available are used in the best possible way and are aligned with the Diocesan Vision while encouraging and motivating people to make the most of their God-given talents.

Eric is a church warden and reader at St Francis Catholic Church in Kenilworth. He and his wife Liz, who have two children, moved to the Warwickshire town more than 30 years ago.

## Religious figures move a step closer to sainthood

TWO well-known religious figures, with close connections to the Archdiocese, have moved a step closer to sainthood.

Father Ignatius Spencer was declared Venerable by Pope Francis at a ceremony earlier this year.

Fr Ignatius, who lived from 1799 to 1864, was born into one of the wealthiest and most influential families in England.

He was originally ordained

an Anglican priest but was later received into the Catholic Church.

He worked predominantly in the Midlands, where he built churches and nurtured the faith of people he served. For a time he was Spiritual Director at St Mary's College, Oscott.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis has approved the promulgation of a decree formally recognising that Sister Mother Elizabeth Prout,

who was born in Shrewsbury, lived the life of heroic virtue.

The Catholic Church will now seek two miracles as signs from God that Mother Elizabeth is a saint.

If discovered, these will lead to her beatification and, subsequently, her canonisation.

Mother Elizabeth, who lived from 1820 to 1864 founded a congregation of religious women called the Sisters of the

Holy Cross and of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. She is often referred to as the 'Mother Teresa of Manchester'.

The Diocese of Shrewsbury, where she was born, is one of two suffragan dioceses of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the other being Clifton.

Fr Ignatius and Mother Elizabeth are buried beside one another in Sutton St Helens, in Lancashire.





# HIDDEN GEM of an attraction...

## ...aiming to spread the story of Catholicism even wider

**H**ISTORIC Harvington Hall is a shining example of the power of Catholic evangelisation – and its new-look management team aims to tell its story to a wider audience.

The Tudor manor house in Worcestershire, owned by the Archdiocese, was closed for a year for conservation purposes.

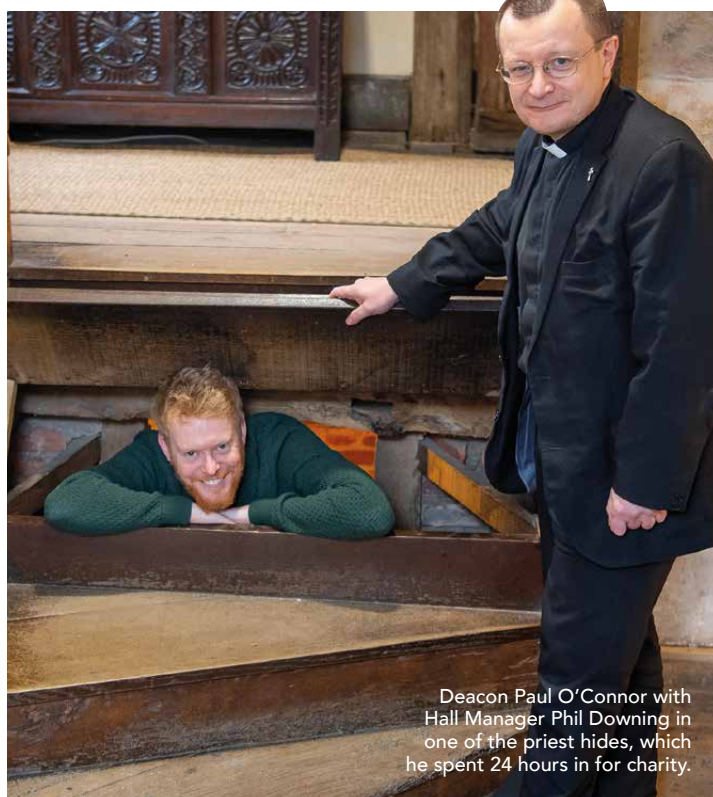
When it reopens a new guided tour will present an enhanced – and sympathetic – interpretation of the house's unique history.

*During the reigns of Queen Elizabeth 1 and King James 1 the Catholic faith was outlawed with harsh penalties including imprisonment for those who defied the call to attend Anglican ceremonies.*

Faced with a country-wide ban on Mass, Catholics needed to hide a priest in their house so that they could worship in secret.

At Harvington Hall, around 1590, devout Humphrey Pakington instigated the building of seven priest hides, secret chambers where recusant clergy could take refuge from the pursuivants who might be hunting them.

Deacon Paul O'Connor, Chair of the Hall's Management Committee, said: "St Francis is said to have said, 'Preach the gospel and if necessary use words.' That message is at the very heart of evangelisation. It is not so much what we say, but the



Deacon Paul O'Connor with Hall Manager Phil Downing in one of the priest hides, which he spent 24 hours in for charity.

example we give that shows the importance of Christ, our faith and the Church to us is at the heart of evangelisation.

"Harvington Hall is a fantastic example of that message of evangelisation right here in our Archdiocese.

"As a place of recusant defiance to the realm, the people who lived

here demonstrated through their commitment to the Mass and the sacraments and their acceptance of the draconian fine system, that they witnessed their love of Christ."

The Hall was closed in October 2019 when a vaulted ceiling in the withdrawing room was found to be insecure.

Removal of the ceiling has

ensured the venue is now safe for visitors to return when Covid restrictions allow.

With Deacon Paul in place since December 2019 the process of recruiting a new management committee is ongoing and a bright future for the house is being mapped out.

The decision has been taken to rebrand the visitor experience as "Discover the House of Secrets," with an increased focus on telling the recusant history of the house as part of a great family day out.

*Visitors will learn how Harvington's residents lived in a perpetual state of nervousness, fearing the arrival of the priest-hunters, yet still kept steadfastly to their faith.*

They would have been aware that St Margaret Clitherow had been executed in York in 1586 for harbouring Catholic priests.

"They evangelised through their defiance and kept the faith alive in this country so that it could grow in later times," said Deacon Paul.

"Our job is to ensure that their story is told faithfully so that people of our day can understand the trials and tribulations they experienced, their deep faith and their love of the Mass that meant that they would be prepared to harbour priests which was a criminal act.

"We look forward to being able to

show more and more visitors, from schoolchildren to students and adults, the way of the faith in Tudor times that will revitalise or bring forward devotion in our day."

Phil Downing, the Hall and Programmes Manager, said: "Harvington is a unique house, a hidden gem. We plan to give people a better understanding of the darker side of the Elizabethan period by telling the Catholic side of the story.

"Our long-term aim is to create a totally new customer

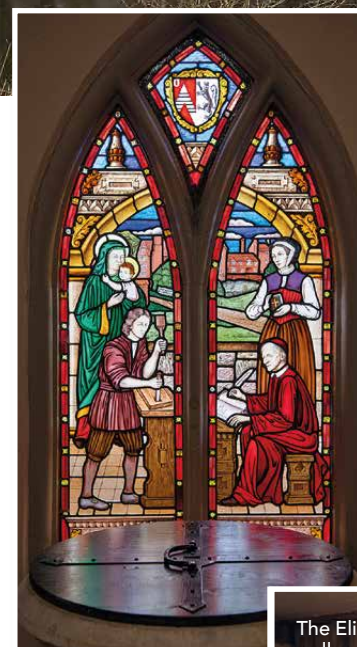
experience and make the property one of the most well-known UK attractions."

The moated property, which was gifted to the Archdiocese in 1923, has the greatest number of priest hides of any house in the country.

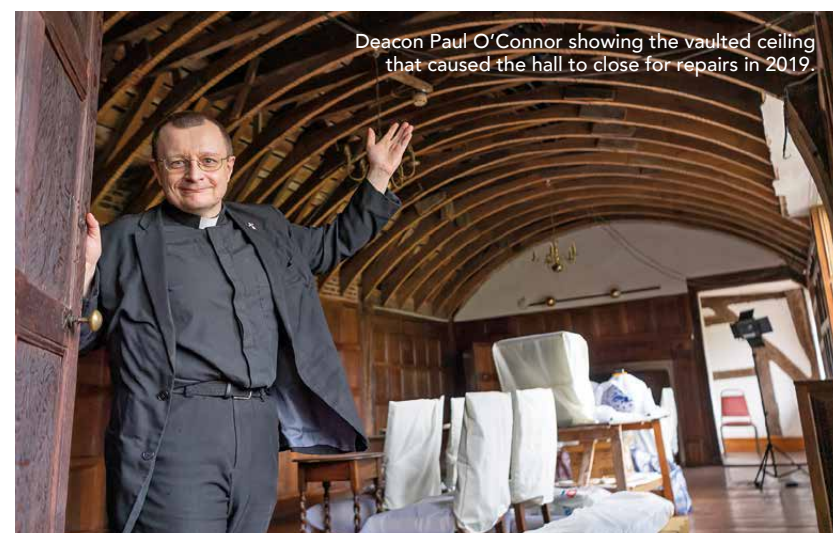
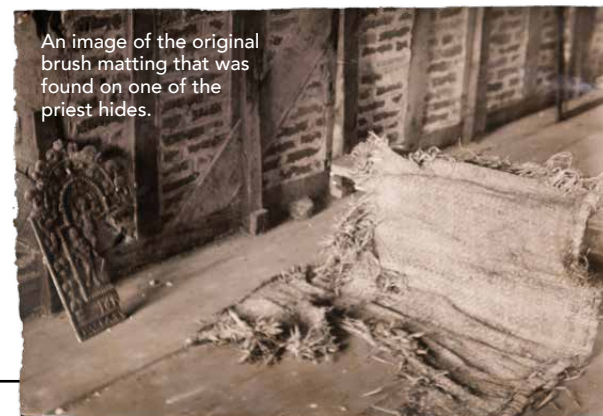
Master builder St Nicholas Owen, believed to have been the creator of four of them, is remembered during the Archdiocese's annual pilgrimage to commemorate the English Martyrs at Harvington Hall.



Mrs Ellen Ryan Ferris who purchased the hall in 1923 for £1,100 and gifted it to the Diocese.



A stained glass window featuring St Nicholas Owen, found in St Mary's Church, across from the hall.



School children in front of the hall circa 1900s.







# My favourite SAINT

In a regular feature, *The Sower* asks people to name their favourite saint and explain why. Here, **Deirdre Finucane**, former Head Teacher at St Edmund's, Wolverhampton, and a former Director of St Nicholas Owen Catholic MAC (which includes Hagley Catholic High School) chooses St Nicholas Owen.

**M**OST of us know little or nothing about St Nicholas Owen, even if in the Midlands his name is well-known. Some of us may be familiar with the fact that in a period of our regional history (early 17th century) when life was grim for Catholics and priests were often on the run, Owen designed and put together priest hides.

These offered the clergy refuge and, even under torture in the Tower of London, Nicholas did not reveal their whereabouts. Born and active in the Midlands, Nicholas Owen is one of us.

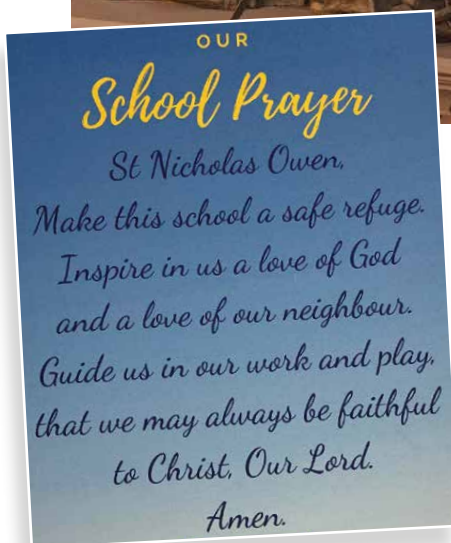
That Midland bond with Owen was highlighted for me by a visit to Harvington Hall during which I realised the extraordinary risks he and others took in practising the faith in such dangerous circumstances. To them credit must be given in large measure for the survival of Catholicism in our area.

Nicholas was born into a staunchly Catholic family in Oxford in about 1562.

He was the second of five children: four of them were boys and two, John and Walter, trained for the priesthood. Nicholas was diminutive – possibly no more than five feet – and was therefore considered unsuitable for Holy Orders.

He needed to acquire a trade. 'Little John', as he was called, rather than be apprenticed to a carpenter as his father had been, opted to train as a joiner. He might well be suggested as the patron saint of those whose life dreams never quite worked out the way they wished. Or the patron saint of those who discover hidden talents and apply them to the highest level of skill and commitment. This makes Owen's vocation exceptional, at least in my view.

In 1588 Nicholas Owen met



Father Henry Garnet SJ, leader of the Jesuits in England, and entered his service. This decision to 'relieve, comfort, aid [and] maintain' a Jesuit meant that, were he captured, Nicholas would face certain execution as a traitor.

On the first occasion he was caught, in 1594, sent to prison in Cheapside and tortured, the civil authorities thought he was a mere servant and, once a ransom was paid, he was released. This experience must have lent renewed urgency to Owen's construction work. The better the hiding holes he could create,

the fewer priests would be captured and the longer they might live to continue their ministry.

The most fascinating story about Nicholas Owen is not that of making priest hides at Harvington, Hindlip, Coughton and Huddington, those Midland places of refuge associated with his name, but rather his involvement in the spectacular escape of Father John Gerard SJ from the Tower of London.

Owen had horses at the ready at Spitalfields so that Gerard, having shinned down the Tower and been rowed up the Thames, could ride to safety in Uxbridge one October morning in 1597. Owen was not just an ingenious craftsman.

He was very resourceful, of good cheer, and utterly trustworthy. He was a man of deep faith. His body had begun to feel the burden of the years when, in 1599, his horse fell on him, causing such injuries to his leg that, having been broken, it

had to be broken a second time in order for it to set properly. Father Gerard tells us that everyone at the inn to which Nicholas was taken after his injury admired his patience and virtue, expressing the view they would love to see him again. He was caught a second time in 1606 and was sent to the Marshalsea prison where he insisted on keeping a very low profile lest any careless conversation be overheard by spies. He devoted his time to preparing for his coming ordeal.

Nicholas remains hidden to this day because his service to the Church of his time made it essential that he operate out of sight. He was there to arrange, to support, to build places of refuge so that others were able to celebrate the sacraments, preach and transmit the Catholic faith.

His steadfastness, his quiet, unseen diligence and his personal integrity make Nicholas Owen a sterling example of faith and virtuous living and a truly appropriate patron saint for Hagley Catholic High School, Worcestershire.





# Shining spotlight on a vital resource for faith teachers

ICT Controller Dr Tony Brown pictured in the Drinkwater Library at Maryvale taking part in the first session of the virtual conference.

A virtual conference organised by Maryvale Institute shone a spotlight on the new Directory for Catechesis and its value for faith teachers and evangelists.

A variety of expert speakers from the UK and around the world explored the document which is a vital resource for all engaged in the Catholic Church's work of proclaiming the Gospel.

The Directory, published in March 2020, is set in the context of Pope Francis' 'Evangelii Gaudium' which sets out clearly that Evangelisation is the task of the Church.

The conference took place across four sessions over three months, focusing on different aspects of the Directory and examining how it sets out essential elements in teaching and personal formation required by the mission of catechesis.

The themes of the first three sessions were: "Dynamic Continuity: the purpose and distinctive emphases of the new Directory," "Key Emphases/Foci of the new Directory" and "Growing in Faith: A Lifelong journey of Catechesis," while a final academic session was hosted by the St John Henry Newman Centre for Pastoral Theology at Maryvale.

The conference was open to curia, bishops, priests and deacons, religious and lay people and keynote speakers

included Archbishop Bernard Longley, Bishop David Evans and Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation.

*For Deacon Dr Harry Schnitker, Director of the Pastoral Theology Centre, who chaired the final session, the Directory identifies the key challenge of the global Church, the need to identify the wide range of cultures to which it preaches the Gospel.*

"With our speakers and respondents coming from England, Kenya, the US, India, Lithuania, Holland and Belgium we set out to examine the underlying philosophy for catechesis and the challenges of catechesis in totally different environments and cultures," he said.

For Fr Jan Nowotnik, Director of Mission and National Ecumenical Officer at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, who spoke at the second session about the vocation of being a catechist, the new Directory

calls each believer to focus on their relationship with the Lord and asks us all to be creative in finding new ways to proclaim Christ in our own day and age.

"The Directory reminds us that this is a journey that we take together, so a conference where we listen and share together is a good way to model what the Directory asks of us," he said.

Dr Tamra Fromm, Instructor at the Catholic Bible School of Michigan, who spoke in the second session on her specialist subject of Evangelisation of the Digital Continent, describes the main focus of the Directory as the ever-deepening link between catechesis and evangelisation.

"The Directory champions for groups of people who have perhaps been more on the peripheries in the past in terms of catechesis," she said.

"The catechist is called to be less of a teacher or expert and more of a witness to the faith, showing forth God's mercy, and using dialogue as a means of proclaiming the Gospel."

*"The Directory reminds us that this is a journey that we take together, so a conference where we listen and share together is a good way to model that."*

Father Jan Nowotnik



Deacon Dr Harry Schnitker.



Dr Tamra Fromm.



Father Jan Nowotnik.

Photo courtesy of Marcin Mazur of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.





# FOUR of a kind

Continuing a series of regular features, *The Sower* asks the same questions of people connected to the Archdiocese. Here, we put the questions to four priests and their mums.

**Father Marco Egawhary**, Assistant Parish Priest at Holy Trinity, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Sacred Heart, Silverdale, and his mum **Clemencia** whose parish is St Thomas More in Kidlington.

**Clemencia, can you tell me a little bit about your background and family as well as the role the Catholic faith has played in your life?**

I grew up in Colombia and my parents were both Catholic (I also have five siblings). I went to a primary and secondary Catholic school run by nuns (Las Hermanas Rosaristas). The Catholic faith taught me morals and principles (which I also learnt from my parents of course). Religion for me has always been a guideline for making any decision. Of course we make mistakes but at least with the Catholic faith I have had a great guide to live by.

**Looking back, what influence do you think you had on developing and deepening your son's faith?**

I made sure that Marco was baptised, had first Holy Communion and was Confirmed. I also taught Marco how to pray the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be and I taught Marco to pray at night before going to bed.

**When did you first find out that your son had received the calling to be a priest and how did you feel about that?**

I found out when Marco finished his first degree in Biology. I advised him to continue with another career and see if after that he still felt the calling to be a priest. When he went on to study Medicine I was proud that he would be a doctor, but when he told me that he would not continue to practice I felt a bit sad at first. But I'm happy for Marco because it is what he wants to do and it is his choice and his life.

**What attributes do you think your son brings to the role that help him perform his duties?**

Marco is conscientious, responsible, dedicated and hard-working, he has always been a good student. He organises his day to make the most out of it, not to waste time. I think a priest needs to have these qualities to be loyal to what he has learnt in seminary and to help carry out all their duties.



**Fr Marco, what is the best piece of advice your mum has given to you and how have you employed that in your day-to-day duties?**

My mother has always encouraged me to be faithful to the truth and open and faithful to the Gospel, never changing the Gospel out of convenience to myself or others. I have tried to apply that by being faithful to the Church's teachings, even if the message is sometimes difficult and I would rather preach an "easier" Gospel! But I think the best lesson my mother has taught me has been by her example as a deeply-loving, caring mother who is willing to make any sacrifice for the sake of my sister and me.

**Father Chris Yule**, parish priest at Christ the King in Coventry, and his mum **Christine Yule** whose parish is the Holy Name of Jesus, in Great Barr, Birmingham.

**Looking back, what influence do you think you had on developing and deepening your son's faith?**

We had Christopher baptised into our Catholic faith when he was a baby and he attended Catholic schools. We attended Mass every Sunday and holy days as a family. I tried to teach him the importance of praying every day and receiving the sacraments regularly.

**When did you first find out that your son had received the calling to be a priest and how did you feel about that?**

Christopher was only three when he announced his vocation to us. (He said he was going to be a bishop when he grew up). We thought at first it was just a childish notion but we came to realise that he did have a vocation. I prayed that God would give him all the help he would need on his journey.

**What attributes do you think your son brings to the role that help him perform his duties?**

His experiences working as a learning mentor

and inclusion unit manager in an inner city high school taught him a lot about the difficulties that many families face and this has been a help to him in his parish work.

He is a good communicator and is very caring and willing to help people.

He has had problems with his health in the last couple of years, even during the most difficult times, he looked on this as a blessing as it made him better able to help others. He has a good sense of humour (except when his beloved Aston Villa lose).

**Fr Chris, what is the best piece of advice your mum has given to you and how have you employed that in your day-to-day duties?**

I have been given many pieces of advice over the years, though mum is adamant I only follow them when I think they are my own idea!

But I think the best is to believe in myself.

Mum's advice reminds me that God has called me to my vocation as a priest and so he has given me everything I need to meet the demands of parish ministry, and so, yes, I should do as mum advises me!

**Father Craig Szmidt**, parish priest at St Christopher in Codsall and St Thomas of Canterbury in Tettenhall, and his mum **Susan Szmidt** whose parish is St Wulstan in Wolstanton, Staffordshire.

**Susan, can you tell me a little bit about your background and family as well as the role the Catholic faith has played in your life?**

Born to Leonard and Amy in 1953, I was Baptised in the Church of England but converted to Catholicism in 1976. I suppose I was drawn to the Catholic faith because Edwin, my future husband, was already a practising Catholic and we attended Holy Mass together.

To obtain a greater understanding of what it meant to be a Catholic we both had the pleasure of attending several weeks of instruction with Sister Patrick, one of the parish sisters.

**Looking back, what influence do you think you had on developing and deepening your son's faith?**

Being part of the Catholic community it was only natural that we should wish Craig to attend the local Catholic nursery, primary and later secondary schools. I feel that the schools and attendance at Holy Mass deepened his faith. He began serving on the altar after his First Holy Communion and was MC when he started his priestly training.

He even developed his role in the parish in a number of ways: giving talks to the parish primary school children, instructing new altar servers and preparing older servers for their St Stephen's medals when appropriate.

Throughout this period, Canon

Matt Corrigan, our Parish Priest at the time, was a great support and encouraged him in his involvement. It is also important to mention the dozens of supportive parishioners who were following his journey in faith.

**When did you first find out that your son had received the calling to be a priest and how did you feel about that?**

After finishing university, Craig had apparently been speaking to our then Parish Priest, Father Anthony Dykes, about his sense of vocation.

We believe his sister, Karen, was the first member of the family he confided in regarding his sense of calling. Maybe he was testing the water temperature, but we can't imagine why.

Shortly afterwards he spoke to me and I told him I was not surprised in the least. I feel very privileged to have a son who always puts others before himself.

**What attributes do you think your son brings to the role that help him perform his duties?**

In today's society, being a priest, it is certainly not an easy vocation. He has a vast range of skills at his fingertips: patience, being a good communicator, the ability to cope under extreme pressure and problem solving. He is caring and always puts others before himself. He does not let things go to



his head. An example of this was when he was asked to be a deacon at Cofton Park for the Papal visit of Pope Benedict in September 2010.

**Fr Craig, what is the best piece of advice your mum has given to you and how have you employed that in your day-to-day duties?**

Since the day that I had the difficult conversation with my parents about the possibility that God might be calling me to the Sacred Priesthood, they have been so incredibly supportive. I remember my mum telling me that they would support me whatever I decided to do. This was a real joy to hear, and a great comfort, particularly when things are difficult. On the day of my Ordination, after my hands had been anointed with the Oil of Chrism by the Archbishop, I wiped them on a special cloth called a maniturgium. At my First Mass I presented this cloth to my mum as a joyful sign that she has given her son as a Priest of Jesus Christ.

I am truly thankful to God for my mum and dad, and their immense support and guidance that they have always to offer to me so freely. I will always remember them both, along with all of my family, at the Altar each day.

**Father Paul Smith**, Parish Priest at St Mary's, Brewwood, and his mother **Josephine Smith** whose parish is St Ambrose Barlow in Hall Green in Birmingham.

Most of my activities revolved around the parish – junior Legion of Mary, Young Christian Workers, the parish youth club, church choirs and then the Catholic Women's League.

**Looking back, what influence do you think you had on developing and**

**deepening your son's faith?**

Difficult to say – we sent our children to Catholic schools and took it for granted they would attend Mass etc. My husband probably was more influential.

**When did you first find out that your son had received the calling to be a priest and how did you feel about that?**

I think about the year 2000, not long before he went to St Mary's College, Oscott. I was

delighted of course, but a bit apprehensive. It's such a big step and priests need a lot of prayers.

**What attributes do you think your son brings to the role that help him perform his duties?**

A friendly, caring disposition.

**Fr Paul, what is the best piece of advice your mum has given to you and how have you employed that in your day-to-day duties?**

It's hard to pin-point one piece of advice from my mum. Overall, if I meet any challenges in my priestly ministry I'm inspired by her selfless vocation as a mother to seven children; especially after the death of our dad while some of us were still quite young. She has also given a lot to her local community.

As a child I was often in trouble and one piece of my mum's advice I'll try not to follow is when she'd say: "Find out what Paul's doing and tell him to stop it!"



**Josephine, can you tell me a little bit about your background and family as well as the role the Catholic faith has played in your life?**

I come from a working class background but we were encouraged to be ambitious and make the most of our talents.

My parents were always practising Catholics and apart from when we were evacuated; I went to Catholic schools and a Catholic college.





# A Parable for our time

## Support for each other is lesson we will all take from the pandemic

**I**n early 2020, the UK was introduced to a deadly virus, continually pushing the NHS and its workers to unimaginable limits.

To date, over 450,000 people have been hospitalised with COVID-19 in the UK, placing NHS workers in unfamiliar and scary situations.

Every member of the multidisciplinary team, from consultants to cleaners, united to face the greatest threat to mankind in our lifetime. In the NHS, in normal times, the emphasis is on providing 'Gold Standard' care for its patients; staff have been humbled by providing basic but life-preserving care for patients.

In this parable, Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to the growth witnessed from a mustard seed. The Kingdom of God started small, with Jesus and the disciples and it, like the mustard seed, grew across the world, providing shelter and comfort to unlimited numbers of followers.

In a similar way, in this pandemic, the NHS can be likened to the mustard plant, acting as a refuge and shelter for those inflicted by the virus.

Through the acts of healthcare workers in the ongoing pandemic, the Kingdom of God grows. Redeployment to new areas and working with new teams, although scary and a definite

test of professional resilience, has opened the door to new conversations, new opinions and new opportunities for modern-day evangelisation.

The opportunity to display the teaching of Jesus in every day work, to remember and practice the vocation given by God.

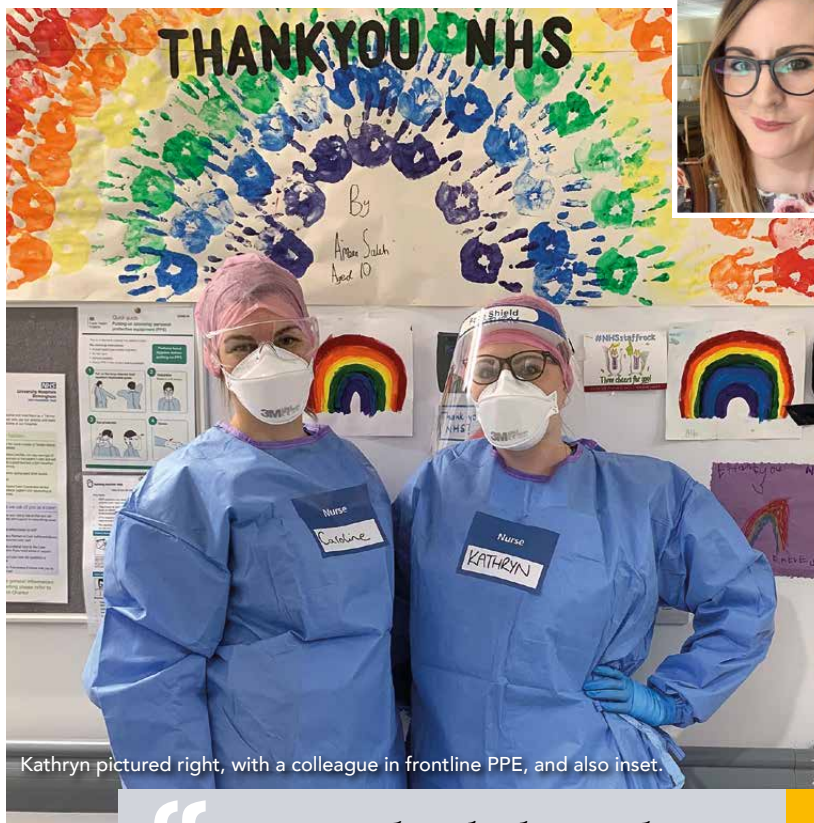
The pandemic has emphasised that a job in healthcare is much more than a job and has highlighted the importance of holism on a human level.

Healthcare workers have had to not only act as the professional, preserving life, but have also had to take on the role of friends and family to patients unable to see their own.

*To be the cheerful, familiar face beneath layers of PPE, the optimist when in need of a lift, the cheerleader when rehabilitating, the shoulder to cry on when things are hard and the hand to hold when they can fight no more.*

Within this parable, Jesus is teaching that the Kingdom of God will grow to include all nations and not just God's chosen people. The provision of holistic care for patients, encompassing their faith and belief, particularly at the end of life, has been one of the greatest privileges of working on the frontline within the

Advanced Clinical Practitioner **Kathryn Hewitt** has been redeployed to the ICU frontline at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, she looks at the relevance of the Parable of the Mustard Seed to healthcare workers.



Kathryn pictured right, with a colleague in frontline PPE, and also inset.



**“** How can I describe the Kingdom of God? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with large branches where birds can come and find shelter. **”**

Mark 4:30-32

pandemic. Communicating with family and friends to ensure their needs are met as well as they can be, utilising prayer, music and meditation to help patients and relatives through their darkest moments.

Furthermore, the Kingdom of God has encompassed and united healthcare workers across the world, providing comfort, support and belief in a time of hopelessness. This is witnessed through the acts of the healthcare workers, no matter their belief, united together through acts of God; love, kindness, prayer, and the need to support and be there for one another.

Jesus chose to teach the

parables and Word of God to ordinary people in everyday circumstances. Here, God is speaking through each and every one of us to not only provide support for patients and their families, but to support each other, a lesson healthcare workers will undoubtedly take forward in their continuing practice. It is important for us to remember that often, God is doing something big in moments that seem small.

■ Kathryn would like to acknowledge the support of her sister Samantha Ash, an RE teacher, who helped her develop the theological link running through the article.



**M**EMBERS of the Jesuit community have been welcomed into a temporary residence at St Mary's College, Oscott.

Four novices and five priests from Manresa House, the novitiate home in Harborne, Birmingham, are enjoying a 20-month stay while their building is being upgraded and extended.

The unusual circumstances are mutually beneficial since there are occasional opportunities to meet and strike up friendships informally.

At the same time, two of the Jesuit fathers are taking the opportunity to contribute to the Oscott formation programme and one gave a day of recollection at the beginning of Lent.

"For Jesuits to form parish priests these days is unusual – as it is for the seminarians to have the Jesuits living with them – and we are being enriched by the experience," said Father Paul Keane, Acting Rector of Oscott College.

"Though we are quite separate, for us it is a great blessing, simply knowing they are in the house.

"Both groups can chat in the cloister and novices have been working in the grounds with the maintenance team during their formation.

"We get on very well and there has been great harmony. Great care and sensitivity has been shown by both communities to each other."

The members of the Jesuit Novitiate ("place where novices are trained"), who are of British, Dutch, Irish and Czech heritage, were invited to relocate to Oscott in summer last year.

*Their stay will last until the completion of works at Manresa House which include the building of a residential wing, library, new chapel, guest wing, kitchen and dining room.*

At Oscott the novitiate occupies a separate accommodation wing, dining room, oratory and library/classroom.

"We feel very much at home here and are most grateful for the warm welcome we have received," said Father Kevin O'Rourke SJ.

"The formation programme for novices continues largely as if the novitiate were still at Harborne, with its rhythm of prayer, liturgy, study, apostolic placements, housekeeping and work in the grounds.

"There are benefits for both Jesuits and the Oscott community: it gives us an opportunity to know staff and seminarians in a way that would not usually happen.

"There are formal and informal occasions when we are together for meals, prayer and social occasions. Friendships are formed which, God willing, will last into the future.

**A NEW HOME:** Father Kevin O'Rourke SJ, left, and Father Simon Bishop SJ, right, at the entrance to Oscott College.



## Extending a very warm welcome...

Jesuits move to Oscott College while Manresa House is upgraded

*"We get on very well and there has been great harmony. Great care and sensitivity have been shown by both communities to each other."*

Father Paul Keane

Our sense of being together in the universal Church is strengthened all round."

Manresa House is in normal circumstances the place where applicants to join the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) spend the first two years of their formation as novices. It is the home of the novitiate for the Provinces of Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and North Belgium.

■ A new Rector has been appointed at St Mary's College, Oscott. Father Michael Dolman will take up his role on 1 July.



Above, the statue of Our Lady outside the private quarters of the Jesuits at the College.





# Pools jackpot generosity helped support football disaster fund

**T**HE 50th anniversary of the 1971 Ibrox football disaster caused many parishioners in Walsall to recall a remarkable act of generosity by their priest at the time.

Football-loving Fr James Curtin landed a £109,000 win on the pools on the same weekend that hundreds of Celtic and Glasgow Rangers fans were caught up in a horrific crowd crush.

*His eight score draws included the 1-1 result in the fateful Old Firm game – so he decided to donate a big part of his windfall to the disaster fund.*

Parishioners of St Thomas of Canterbury still talk about Irish-born Fr Curtin's selfless act which was widely reported in the media.

As well as giving £25,000 to the Ibrox fund he donated most of the rest of the money to the church and charities including cash for a football pitch in his home village in County Kerry where he played the game as a boy.

But it was his response to

the tragedy in Glasgow that made the headlines.

The disaster happened on January 2, 1971, when 66 people were killed and more than 200 injured as supporters tried to leave the stadium.

The crush on the exit stairway at Ibrox Park happened as thousands of people were leaving the ground at the end of the match, which culminated in a last-minute equaliser.

Because the score draw was the last on his coupon and effectively secured his pools win, Fr Curtin felt strongly that he had to respond to the tragedy in some way.



June Power, a close friend of Father Curtin, with a scrapbook documenting his pools win.

"He was a great man, the most humble person I have ever known," said Tony Bradbury, 79, former head teacher at St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School who knew the parish priest well.

"His donation to the Ibrox fund was a typical gesture, you could have predicted that

was what he would do. He was compassionate, hard-working and wise – a selfless person who served God.

"The only money he spent on himself out of his winnings was for a Mini."

Fr Curtin, who has now sadly passed away, was appointed priest to a newly-formed parish for the Coalpool and Harden area in 1958. At first he used a school or library for Sunday Mass but by his untiring efforts – including raising cash through a football tote – funding was raised to build the present church on Dartmouth Avenue. "Fr Curtin never thought about himself," said parishioner June Power, 78. "Everybody loved him, and we were all amazed at what he decided to do with his winnings. I remember that once he was visiting a hospital and a woman called him over to tell him she couldn't go home because her electricity had been cut off. He went and paid her bill for her."

## Third Day of Reflection held by Women of the Diocese

REFLECTIONS on the global pandemic formed a central theme of a virtual Day of Recollection held by the Women of the Diocese group on Saturday, March 20.

Online attendees came from the Archdiocese and across the UK, with singer-songwriter Jo Boyce hosting the proceedings.

It's the third formal occasion on which the group, formed in 2015 following the Proclaim 15 National Evangelisation Event, has come together to be inspired and affirm each others' good works.

Jo, who is the co-founder of CJM, a UK-based Catholic music ministry, led the participants on a journey from Job to the Synoptic Gospels telling of the "calming

of the storm" and including a clip from *The Shack*, the 2017 American Christian drama film. The attendees then shared their journeys through the Covid crisis, highlighting the positives and negatives of the experience.

On the minus side were fear, sense of isolation, separation from family and friends, the lack of human touch, the exposure of inequality in society, and the increase in domestic violence and mental health issues.

Positives included a slower pace of life, quietness, appreciation of nature, the acknowledgement of the value of key workers – such as carers, bin collectors and bus and train drivers – the housing of the

homeless and the successful UK vaccination programme. The meeting closed with a look forward to the future, "trading sorrows for joys" and with a call to mission.

Jo described Jesus preparing His disciples for their mission and then asked the participants if they were also prepared to "get out of the boat" and take on their own mission. The Women of the Diocese Group was set up for women in the Archdiocese who are committed to living out the Gospel in their homes, parishes and workplaces.

Members support, encourage and uphold one another and share best practice. To find out more about the group, email:

[Threeparishespartnership@gmail.com](mailto:Threeparishespartnership@gmail.com)



During the Coronavirus pandemic, prison chaplains have had to look at alternative and innovative ways to be there for residents. Here, **Deacon Bob Charles** gives an insight into how collaborative working has helped him achieve that goal...



# Ingenuity required to help provide SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

**P**RISON chaplains are currently facing tough challenges in their vital role of offering spiritual support to those who are behind bars.

During normal times they find themselves variously comforters, pastors, teachers, counsellors, advisors, administrators and confidants.

But the Covid-19 pandemic has placed restrictions on worship and social gatherings on prison premises and chaplains are having to be ingenious in finding other ways to be there for residents.

For Deacon Bob Charles, who works as chaplain for 20 hours a week at Swinfen Hall in Staffordshire, the prison's culture of collaborative ministry is crucial to his endeavours.

He works alongside two Imams and an Anglican chaplain at the jail and he knows he can rely on them to help him ensure an accessible chaplaincy service at all times.

The Saturday morning Masses which are usually held at Swinfen have been put on

hold for safety reasons and all religious classes have been cancelled.

The postponement is unfortunate because residents who may have been bereaved or deprived of family visits find themselves more than ever in need of spiritual support.

However Deacon Bob is supplying the Catholic residents with printed literature including Mass sheets when he makes his regular tour of the cells.

*He is also providing pastoral care to residents who have lost loved ones and helping them to resolve crisis situations arising from the Covid-19 crisis.*

"The pandemic has put a strain on our ministry that has had to involve ingenuity, patience and team work from many directions," said Bob, who is based at St John the Baptist church in Tamworth.

"We have not had a religious service since last March and that is just one of the changes that the residents have had to adapt to.

"Our walking on the prison wings and personal contact by knocking on cell doors

*"The pandemic has put a strain on our ministry that has had to involve ingenuity, patience and team work from many directions."*

Deacon Bob Charles

have always been important but never so much as in the pandemic.

"Of course all of the pastoral work cannot be done as an individual, especially in a multi-faith environment such as a prison.

"The culture at Swinfen is one where the true sense of collaborative ministry is realised and where the focus is on the person and not on the person's belief.

"Our common goal is focused on service and well-being and our triumphs and short falls are experienced as a collective."

As the Catholic chaplain, Bob serves mainly Catholic residents but he and his colleagues provide pastoral care for all, irrespective of faith or tradition.

By working in a multi-faith context he believes he is acting in the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', which calls for more human fraternity and solidarity.

Bob's regular duties include giving chaplaincy induction for every new arrival, visiting residents in the segregation unit daily, and supporting the prison staff and their families.

## Take part in Covid-19 survey

PARISHIONERS are being encouraged to share their faith journeys and experiences during the Covid-19 crisis.

They have been invited to complete an online survey, which will help discover what effect the pandemic has had on local Catholics and how

the Church has responded.

The survey, which takes around 10 minutes to complete, can be accessed from: [birminghamdiocese.org.uk/c19survey](http://birminghamdiocese.org.uk/c19survey) alongside a personal message from Archbishop Bernard.

■ The deadline for submissions is Sunday 4 July.





# Code change promotes equality and provides new opportunities



Readers Anthony Hunt and Linda Stokes at the lectern of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Hednesford.

**A**N experienced liturgical advisor is welcoming Pope Francis's change to the Code of Canon Law which enhances the status of lay readers and altar servers.

Over many years, following the reforms of the Liturgy in the light of the Second Vatican Council, both men and women have been welcomed by the Church to proclaim the Word of God or assist in the distribution of Holy Communion during liturgical celebrations.

However these lay volunteers have usually been serving in a temporary capacity rather than performing instituted ministries, with only lay men being instituted and only if they were preparing for ordination.

Now Pope Francis, in a 'Motu Proprio' (a document issued on his own initiative), has proclaimed that the ministries of lector and acolyte will be open to men and women.

As well as promoting equality, the ruling provides the opportunity for the ministries

to take root in the Church and enrich liturgical life.

Fr Allen Morris, who is to serve on the newly-formed Birmingham Liturgy Commission and was formerly Chair of the Liturgy Commission in the Diocese of Westminster, indicates that the canonical change is likely to strengthen the formation of lay people undertaking the role of reader and acolyte.

"This change in canon law means that formation will be provided for a potentially life-long service to the Liturgy of the Church, not only enabling ministers to build on the skills and abilities and understanding that they are already likely to have, but also providing a trained and committed resource to help develop and extend that ministry amongst others," he said.

"The intention of the Church after Vatican II was to introduce the ministries of lector and acolyte as instituted ministries exercised by lay people who would train and

commit themselves to these ministries on a permanent basis.

"However – for one reason and another – until now Church law permitted only lay men to be instituted. Bishops held back on instituting even suitable lay men to this ministry because in the meantime it was seen that it was a ministry that could be equally well exercised by men and women.

"Generally, the only exception made was for those men who were preparing for ordination as deacon or priest who were required to receive first these instituted ministries.

"So a stand was taken against inappropriate discrimination, but the opportunity to allow these ministries to take root in the Church and enrich our liturgical life was rather lost."

Fr Allen, a priest of the Diocese of Westminster, and presently serving as parish priest at St Nicholas Church, Boldmere, looks forward to the time when he will be discussing the implementation of the change with his colleagues on the commission.

## Celebrating culture and faith

**CATHOLICS** are taking part in the celebrations for Coventry, UK City of Culture 2021.

The city's year of culture starts on May 15, with an official launch event, Coventry Moves, planned for June 5. Already Coventry parishioners have created stained glass artwork for their house windows, as part of Window Wanderland where people are being encouraged to light up their streetviews to create attractive walking trails.

The 16 Catholic churches in the city are looking forward to participating in a faith-themed initiative which

is to be launched later in the year as part of the festival and which will involve a faith trail. "We are happy to be part of the City of Culture celebrations," said Canon Tom Farrell, of Christ the King Church.

"It's a good opportunity to open up our churches and see them as representing the culture and history of the city."

■ See associated story on page 8.



Canon Tom Farrell pictured at his church, Christ The King, in Coventry, which will be taking part in the Coventry UK City of Culture celebrations.





# Setting a shining example through key partnership

**P**ARTNERSHIP working is an important part of the Archdiocese's commitment to be present in the modern world – and relations with the West Midlands Combined Authority are a shining example.

The WMCA, which consists of seven local authorities and three Local Enterprise Partnerships, works collaboratively to deliver its vision of a more prosperous West Midlands.

The Archdiocese began liaising with the Authority in 2017 when Birmingham-based Fr Nicholas Latham was asked by Archbishop Bernard to take a bridge-building role. Father Nicholas keeps a watching brief on its policies and outcomes – and flags up areas where the Church can become involved to his Diocesan colleagues.

"The Authority's webpage, [www.wmca.org.uk](http://www.wmca.org.uk), is my first source of daily information," he said. "When I see or hear of work being initiated by the WMCA, my first questions are, 'Can we help here? Does this overlap with the Church and its many

organisations?'

"I will pass on information to our groups, often on a 'just checking' basis in case they have not already heard; everyone is encouraged to look at the website! Contact will then be made with whoever is heading the scheme in the WMCA to tell them of our interest and expertise."

Father Nicholas maintains regular contact with the Authority's Policy Advisor (Faith and Communities) who works with its Chair, the Mayor of the West Midlands.

*The Mayor launched a Faith Action Plan in 2018 to enable strong interaction between his office, the West Midlands Combined Authority and the region's faith groups.*

Facilitation work by Fr Nicholas has led to Diocesan involvement with the Homelessness Task Force, input by the Catenian Association into the Mayor's Mentors project supporting young people and the first steps towards becoming a member of the Living Wage Foundation.

Father Nicholas also has

contact with various other local authority officials and he takes part in webinars and Zoom meetings as well as a monthly 'Faith Conference Call' with the Mayor in attendance.

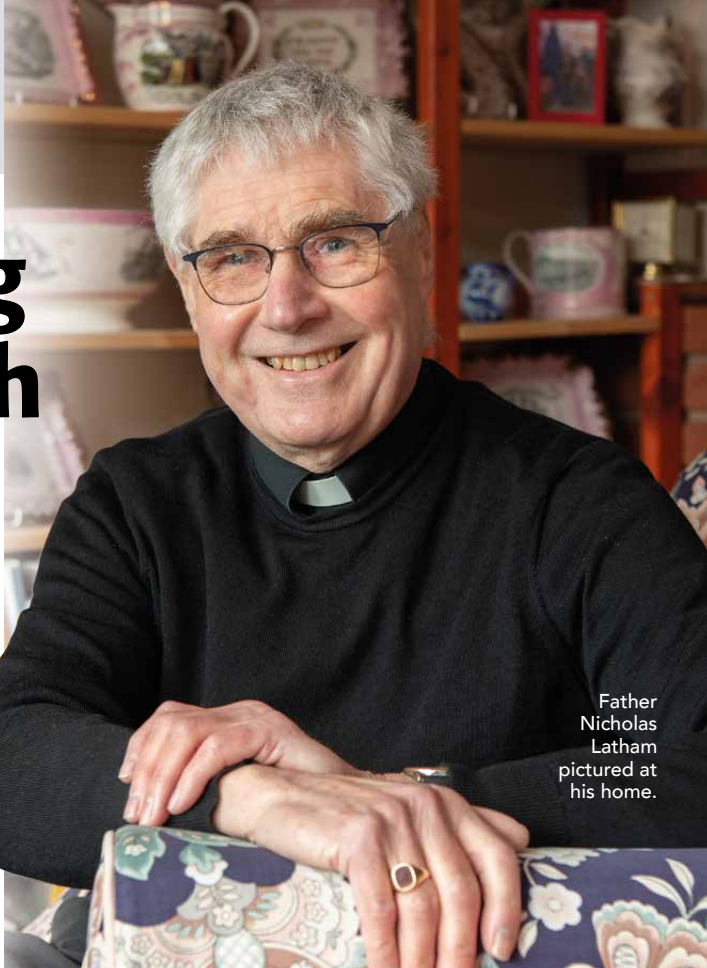
During the online sessions Father Nicholas takes the opportunity of voicing the Catholic point of view and presenting the Christian message where possible.

"We are not setting out to proselytise, but to share the Good News," he said. "One should give an opinion which includes what Jesus or God has said or done in the Bible.

"Cardinal Vincent Nichols sums it up in his book *Faith Finding a Voice*: we 'should know that Christ must be at the centre of any statements or pronouncements that we make.

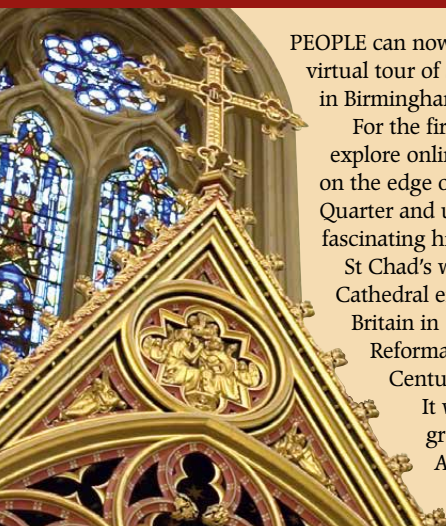
"We should present the Christian message with love and in a spirit of openness in order that all humanity might experience justice and peace and the love of Christ"

Until 2014 Father Nicholas was parish priest of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Birmingham, and he is a former Catholic Chaplain to the University of Birmingham.



Father Nicholas Latham pictured at his home.

## Visitors invited to take virtual tour of St Chad's Cathedral



PEOPLE can now take a 360 degree virtual tour of St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham.

For the first time, visitors can explore online this hidden jewel on the edge of the city's Jewellery Quarter and uncover all its fascinating history.

St Chad's was the first Catholic Cathedral erected in Great Britain in 1841 following the Reformation of the 16th Century.

It was designed by the great Gothic Revivalist Augustus Welby Pugin, who was

also responsible for the Palaces of Westminster and the iconic clock tower of Big Ben.

The new virtual tour is suitable for all ages and is packed full of information.

Those preparing to begin the tour can watch welcome videos from Archbishop Bernard Longley and the three Area Bishops: David Evans, William Kenny and Stephen Wright.

Among the many fascinating insights, Archbishop Bernard recalls his First Holy Communion (with a particular memory of the breakfast afterwards of cake, jelly and ice cream!) and reveals what it was like to travel

in the Popemobile when Pope Benedict visited Birmingham in 2010.

Once visitors virtually enter the doors they can explore every aspect of the cathedral, including the organ loft, crypt and side altars.

Cathedral guides Maureen Dadd, Angela Blackwood and Barbara Peel talk about each and every aspect on the virtual tour.

The photography was done by Jack Gutteridge from Lightyear Productions and the tour features organ music by Professor David Saint, cathedral Organist and Director of Music.

To access the tour visit: [stchadscathedral.org.uk](http://stchadscathedral.org.uk)





For editorial enquiries about *The Sower*, please contact our publisher on **01782 829850** or email **thesower@i-creation.co.uk** – the next issue is at Advent. *The Sower* is produced in conjunction with the Archdiocese Communications Team.



# 'One Heart, One Spirit' motto resonates with Holy Ghost Fathers

## THE SPIRITANS FAMILY:

Pictured at Holy Cross Church, West Bromwich are, left to right, Fr Fabian Adindu, Fr Stan Nwanunobi, Fr Josephat Ezeanolue, Fr John Baptist Baalaboore, Fr Damian Ozokwere, and Fr Eduardo Ushe.

**P**ENTECOST has a special meaning for seven evangelising members of a Catholic Religious Missionary Congregation who are based at churches across the Archdiocese.

They belong to the British Province of the Spiritans family, otherwise known as the Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which was founded in Paris on Pentecost Sunday 1703. Thus, Pentecost Feast is the Patronal Feast of the Congregation.

Their motto, "One Heart, One Spirit," remains profoundly significant for more than 3,000 Professed Members and Lay Associates carrying out their mission globally.

The members of the Congregation who are based in the Archdiocese meet about three times a year – though during the pandemic they have had only one virtual meeting, with their British Provincial Leadership Team led by Fr Kenneth Okoli C.S.Sp. resident in Manchester.

They are **Fr Josephat Ezeanolue** C.S.Sp., Regional Superior of the Spiritans, Midlands Region and the Parish Priest of St Michael's and the Holy Angels Church, West Bromwich, **Fr Fabian Adindu** C.S.Sp., Provincial Secretary of the Spiritans, British Province and the Parish Priest of St Mary and St Modwen Church, Burton-upon-Trent, **Fr Eduardo Ushe** C.S.Sp., the Assistant Parish Priest at St Mary and St Modwen Church, Burton-upon-Trent, **Fr Stan Nwanunobi** C.S.Sp., Parish Priest of Holy Cross Church, West Bromwich, Chaplain, Nigerian Catholic Chaplaincy, West Midlands and also Chaplain, Sandwell and West

Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, **Fr John Baptist Baalaboore** C.S.Sp., Parish Priest of St Patrick's Church, Birmingham and Chaplain of the Birmingham City Hospital, **Fr Damian Ozokwere** C.S.Sp., Regional Secretary of the Spiritans, Midlands Region, and the Parish Priest of St Philip Neri Church, Smethwick as well as the Chaplain of the West Indian Catholic Chaplaincy Aston, and **Fr Stanislaus Chukwube** C.S.Sp., Parish Priest of Sacred Heart Church, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent.

Inspired by the charisms of their Founder, Claude Poullart des Places, a noble Frenchman who turned his back on a career as a lawyer to become a priest and help the poor, and Venerable Francis Mary Paul Libermann, all of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers (as they are also popularly known) adhere to the "apostolic life," the life of love and of holiness lived by Jesus Christ.

Their consecration includes the proclamation of the Good News, the practice of the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity

and Obedience, and a life of fraternal and praying community. The Spiritans in the West Midlands typify the Congregation's international and missionary flavour.

Fr Ezeanolue said: "When I started the journey to the missionary priesthood, the choice for me was between being a Holy Ghost Father or none. The life of witness by the Irish 'Holy Ghost Fathers' in Igbo land, Nigeria, must have been responsible for this."

Fr Adindu said: "In joining the Congregation I desired to be like the Irish Spiritan missionaries who literally sustained my people during the Nigeria-Biafra War."

Fr Ushe said: "I read about the Spiritans in the Catholic Ordo and I was attracted by their simplicity." Fr Nwanunobi added: "I provide support to often struggling families, accompanying ethnic minorities and fostering a sense of identity and nourishing them with the Word and sacraments."

Fr Baalaboore said: "I joined the Spiritans because I was attracted to their spirit of community life, openness, sharing and prayer. It was like family life away from my family."

Fr Ozokwere said: "My admiration and inspiration to join the Spiritans started when I was an altar server in our parish administered by the Spiritan Missionaries. They attracted my attention by their love and zealously to reach out to all – hence, I decided to apply to them after my high school"

Fr Chukwube added: "My studies in religious education and my teaching experience in the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isieniu, Nigeria, are a great help to me in my parish pastoral work."

*"I joined the Spiritans because I was attracted to their spirit, openness, sharing and prayer... it was like family life away from my family."*

Fr John Baptist Baalaboore