

the SOWER

News from



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM



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By ARCHBISHOP

BERNARD LONGLEY

*To our
Diocesan
family,*

WELCOME to the Advent edition of *The Sower*. I hope you and your families continue to keep safe and well.

Although we have left periods of lockdown behind, our lives remain subject to some restriction. This is the new normal we are all having to adapt to.

But we have hope, and the continual love of Our Lord to guide us and comfort us.

As more and more of you are returning to your parishes I want to take this opportunity to thank all those volunteers who have kept our churches open and ensured they are safe places to visit.

Without their continued efforts some of our churches would never have been able to reopen as quickly as they did.

Volunteers, stewards, cleaners – whatever name you take in your parish – thank you!

My gratitude to all who have stepped up to serve their parishes and communities in some way over the last 18 months remains steadfast.

As we enter the wonderful season of Advent we have time to reflect as we await the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking back on what we as individuals, families, communities have been through, but also looking ahead with renewed hope and vigour we can ask: "what will the New Year bring?". Let us pray that 2022 will be better for all.

A highlight of our festive season will be the celebration of Midnight Mass at St Chad's Cathedral. This year I am delighted the Mass will be broadcast live on television by the BBC.

This will be a very special occasion for the Archdiocese of Birmingham as we welcome the coming of Our Lord at our diocesan mother church in front of a television audience. It is a great opportunity to share a



We look ahead with renewed hope and vigour, let us pray 2022 will be better for all

message of hope and joy with so many people.

Just recently we have embarked upon a two-year Synodal process. We are all invited to journey together. Our Synodal pathway continues at the Diocesan level into 2022, during which time every member of the Church is invited to speak.

This time of discernment and reflection echoes our own *Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan* and so the outcomes of the Synodal process will allow us all to reflect on how we can invigorate our faith in the Archdiocese.

By now your parish priests will have outlined more about this process and how you can be involved. Our aim is to have a Synod representative from each parish. You can read more on page 9.

The last 12 months have seen a number of personnel changes amongst the clergy.

The Holy Father has accepted Bishop William Kenney's resignation from office as Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham and I have appointed Canon Paul Fitzpatrick as Episcopal Vicar for

the Pastoral Area of Coventry, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire.

I am most grateful to Bishop William for his care for the Pastoral Area over the last 15 years.

He will continue to be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation and for other liturgical and ceremonial duties as required within (and on occasion beyond) the Pastoral Area, and I thank him for his readiness to serve in this way.

I am delighted to say that we have also ordained five permanent deacons in 2021 and that we anticipate the ordination of two priests in 2022.

Former Vocations Director Fr Michael Dolman has been appointed the Rector of St Mary's College, Oscott, with Fr Craig Szmidt taking his place as Vocations Director. You can read all about recent appointments on page 6.

This year has also seen a significant increase in our commitment to Care for Creation and challenge climate change. We have divested from companies whose income comes from fossil fuel and our electrical energy was

certified as 100% renewable. We have commissioned a Climate Action group and moving into 2022 we hope to see further great improvements in our response to the Gospel of Life. Read all about our environmental action on pages 16 and 17.

I speak of hope for the year ahead and one physical sign of hope will be the Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer. This piece of public art is due to be built within our Archdiocese, at Coleshill, next year.

It will be constructed using one million bricks, with each brick featuring an answered prayer. The Eternal Wall mission is to make hope visible. Find out more on page 7.

As we prepare to say goodbye to 2021 please accept my very best wishes for the Advent and Christmas season, and thank you for your continued support of the Archdiocese.

With every prayer and blessing.

+ Bernard

Charity project helps provide for homeless

MINI Vinnies Rebecca and Daniel Sheridan are helping homeless people in their latest charity initiative showing how they have welcomed Jesus into their lives.

The selfless siblings, based in St Peter's parish in Bromsgrove, have received a £500 grant from the Million Minutes charity to provide people without a roof over their head with winter essentials.

Their outstanding efforts to donate to a foodbank and make sandwiches for the homeless had already made an impact in supporting their local community.

Teresa Kehoe, Parish Catechist and Vincentian Co-ordinator, said: "Rebecca and Daniel are an inspiration. They truly live out their Catholic faith by being SVP Mini Vinnies in our parish.

"As young members of the St Vincent De Paul Society, they live out a life of Christian prayer, relying on the grace of

God, inviting the Holy Spirit into their lives and serving Christ through those living in poverty."

The young parishioners' latest outreach began with them collecting donations for their Vinnie Packs for the Homeless around their parish.

As a result they gathered thermal gloves, hats, scarves, socks, hand sanitiser, sanitary products and female underwear.

After assembling the packs in the parish centre they will spend December and January going out into the community with their mother to distribute them. They will hand packs to parishioners, encouraging them to take them on shopping trips in the winter months.

The University of Birmingham SVP 1833 students' conference will also support Rebecca and Daniel by helping hand out the Vinnie Packs.

"Rebecca and Daniel's selfless example of living a life of prayer and charity is something which draws all of us to do the same," said Teresa.



Mini Vinnies Rebecca, left, and Daniel outside St Peter's Church, Bromsgrove, with some of the donations they collected for homeless people.

"Winter is such a difficult time for those who are homeless and their Vinnie Packs will mean that many more vulnerable people will be warmer and treated with dignity this winter.

"In addition, their initiative will empower all of us as parishioners to have a Vinnie Pack on us when we are out shopping, and to be able to give it to someone in need.

"In this way we are all helped to serve those in poverty and

most importantly to have a simple chat. Rebecca and Daniel aren't just helping the homeless, they are helping us to know how to respond."

Rebecca, 13, and Daniel, 11, previously received the Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati Award from Million Minutes for organising a collection for Catshill Food Bank, growing fresh vegetables for the needy and making sandwiches for the homeless.

Volunteers lay on hot showers and meals

A caring initiative has been set up for homeless people in Oxford providing food, hot drinks and the chance to get a shower.

The Shower Project takes place every Saturday at St Giles' church hall in Woodstock, Oxford. Guests who attend also receive snack bags, toiletries and clothes if they need them.

It is run by the Oxford branch of The Companions of the Order of Malta. It is part of a network of volunteers that contributes to the work of the Order, which serves the poor and sick in 120 countries around the world.

The Oxford Companions branch was set up in 2011 as a way for students and employees at the University of Oxford to serve in the spirit of the Order's Charism.

The Shower Project is one of several operated by the Companions. Others include breakfast runs and evening soup and sandwich runs to people who sleep on the streets.

Stefania Monterisi, who is a Post Doctoral Research Scientist at the university and a companion volunteer, said: "Our guests are mostly middle-aged people with very different stories, although many young people also make use our service. And lots of them become regular guests, so we get to know them rather well.

"Now, perhaps more than ever in recent memory, Catholics need to take a stand to uphold the dignity of every human being. The instructions of Christ to, among other things, feed the hungry



and clothe the naked, are key parts of that, and so our work is an essential part of the work of the Church in upholding the dignity of the most vulnerable in society."



St Dunstan's parishioner Sue Allen and New Life Baptist Church Minister David Barber collecting items for food bank donations.



All Saints Church Deacon Tariro Matsvers and St Dunstan's Church Deacon David Fairbotham with the cross used for the Good Friday Walk of Witness.



St Dunstan's parishioner Nuala Bielby and All Saints Church parishioner Margaret Healy-Pollett prepare vegetables for a 'Christmas get-together' meal laid on by the Churches Together group.



Canon David Warbrick, vicar of All Saints Church, and Ralph Pollet, parishioner at both All Saints and St Dunstan's churches, research the route for the Walk of Witness.



Group is unified in helping others

Members of the Ecumenical group meeting at the St Dunstan's Conference Room. Standing, left to right, New Life Baptist Church Minister David Barber, All Saints Church Deacon Tariro Matsvers, Deacon at St Dunstan's Church David Fairbotham, St Dunstan's parishioner Mina O'Neill, All Saints Church parishioner Margaret Healy-Pollett and St Dunstan's parishioner Miriam Wilcher. Seated, left to right are, All Saints and St Dunstan's parishioner Ralph Pollett, St Dunstan's parishioners George O'Neill, Sue Allen, Owen Roe O'Neill and Nuala Bielby and Canon David Warbrick vicar of All Saints Church.

PARTNERSHIP working between churches in the suburb of Kings Heath in Birmingham is helping to foster Christian Unity – a cause championed by the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

The Catholic parish of St Dunstan's and St Jude's is an enthusiastic participant in the Churches Together Initiative Kings Heath (CtiKH) along with its Baptist, Anglican, Methodist and Quaker counterparts.

Both Father Philip Harrop, parish priest, and Father John Waters, assistant priest, support a range of joint activities echoing the Archdiocese's wish to deepen relationships with other Christian communities.

Christians of various traditions come together to take part in a Good Friday Walk of Witness, attend Lent Study Groups, hold a carol service for Christmas shoppers, put together food parcels for the needy and provide a Christmas dinner for isolated people.

At St Dunstan's and St Jude's Deacon David Fairbotham is a member of the Kings Heath Churches Together Committee that co-ordinates the ecumenical activity in the local area.

He is also Diocesan Ecumenical Officer and a member of the Archdiocese of Birmingham Ecumenical Commission whose aim is to foster the cause of Christian unity across the Archdiocese.

"The main reason for successful ecumenism lies in the will and spirit of parishioners," said Deacon David.

"Over the years in Kings Heath, a few

dedicated individuals recognised the importance of working and praying together, not only to further the cause of Christian unity, but to positively contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

"Geography and demography play a part – Kings Heath is a busy hub surrounded by high density residential areas. There is a lot of beneficial social activity, but also social need.

"The Christian response of social outreach is greatly needed and this brings people, moved by the Holy Spirit, together.

"Having so many places of worship within a few hundred yards of Kings Heath High Street makes a physical connection as well as a spiritual one, and this does make co-operation easier."

Each of the eight churches in CtiKH pays a small subscription towards expenses and affiliation to Birmingham Churches Together.

The annual Good Friday service which precedes the Walk of Witness is hosted by New Life Baptist Church, however, each year, in rotation, one of the local churches prepares and leads the liturgy.

After the service the participants process silently led by a 12-foot cross carried by five or six of the congregation along the High Street to All Saints Anglican Church.

All Saints has previously hosted a Christmas dinner for isolated people and a drop-in surgery for food vouchers, with Christians from partner churches providing practical support. This year's Christmas dinner will be hosted by New Life Baptist Church.

"Having so many places of worship within a few hundred yards makes a physical and spiritual connection."

Deacon David Fairbotham

Canon David Warbrick, vicar of All Saints, is the current chair of Kings Heath Churches Together. All churches have participated in Lent Study Groups meeting in people's homes or church premises for five sessions focusing on the scriptures.

"This is where we have an opportunity to deepen our faith and get to know our neighbours from the different churches," said Miriam Wilcher, of St Dunstan's and St Jude's who is a past secretary of CtiKH and has organised fundraising for the Walk of Witness.

Deacon David added: "Every interaction, prayer and dialogue between churches increases the bond between Christians.

"We acknowledge our differences; however, through increased communion we learn to understand and respect each other's views.

"This enables us to share our journey of faith as partner travellers, united in love for Christ and His message of salvation."

Aiming to share good practice, advice and support

DID you know that the Archdiocese has a Commission dedicated especially to promoting unity between Christians?

The lay and clerical members of the Ecumenical Commission represent designated areas of the Archdiocese. Our aims are to foster the cause of Christian unity across the Archdiocese, and to deepen our relationships with other

Christian communities.

We aim to enable and encourage ecumenical practice within parishes by sharing good practice, acting as a source of advice and support and developing ecumenical leaders.

So why should we bother about ecumenism? The call to seek Christian unity comes from Jesus himself. He prayed the world may be one "as I am one with The Father" (John

17:21). Ecumenism (from the Greek word *Oikoumene* meaning the whole inhabited world) is not complicated; it is simply witnessing, in unison with other Christian communities, to the salvation of Jesus Christ. Christian unity is not a distant prize at the end of our journey of faith; it is a gift from God that we receive on the journey itself when Christians travel in harmony.

All we believe, all we practice, all we love about our faith, has an ecumenical element; instead of doing "ecumenical things" to promote unity, we should seek to do all things ecumenically.

If you wish to know more about the role of the Commission, and/or offer support, please contact Deacon David Fairbotham via dcn.david.fairbotham@rcaob.org.uk or 07948 379545.



A NUMBER of personnel changes have been made across the Archdiocese.

The new Rector of St Mary's College, Oscott, is drawing inspiration from St Joseph for his role as spiritual Father of the House. **Father Michael Dolman**, previously Vocations Director and Director of Ongoing Formation of Clergy, was appointed by Archbishop Bernard following the sudden death of former Rector, Canon Giles Goward.



Father Michael Dolman.

The life of the seminary community is already familiar to him – he regards Oscott as his alma mater, as he discerned his own vocation there and more recently was also a trustee of the College.

Fr Michael is spending his first months in post familiarising himself with the programme of formation at Oscott and “timetabling a new rhythm of life.” “To have previously been Vocations Director is a great help,” he said. “There’s a sense in which I already have a good appreciation of what the work of formation involves though as Rector I will have a new engagement with the process and in much greater detail.”

Born in Wolverhampton, Fr Michael took a degree in Applied and Analytical Chemistry and became a science teacher at Pope Pius X Catholic Secondary School, Rotherham for four years before entering seminary.

He was ordained a deacon in 2001 at St Mary's College, Oscott.

New appointments made to key roles in Diocesan life

A year later he was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood.

Fr Michael served as a parish priest of Holy Cross and St Francis Church, Walmley and St John the Baptist Church, Alton, where he also served as Spiritual Director of the Diocesan Youth Service, the Kenelm Youth Trust.

The new Vocations Director is **Father Craig Szmidt**.

His appointment follows Fr Michael Dolman's move to St Mary's College, Oscott.

Fr Craig has previous experience of accompanying men in the discernment of their vocation, he was Assistant Vocations Director shortly after being ordained.

He subsequently became parish priest of Our Lady of Fatima in Quinton in 2016 and parish priest of St Christopher, Codsall and St Thomas of Canterbury, Tettenhall three years later.

Fr Craig studied as a seminarian at Valladolid and Oscott.

He was ordained to the Sacred Priesthood by Archbishop Bernard in his home parish of St Wulstan, Wolstanton in 2011.



Father Craig Szmidt.

At St Thomas of Canterbury Church he played a key role in the restoration of the building.

Fr Craig, who also takes on the post of Director of Ongoing

Formation of Clergy, said: “Central to my new role is prayer, and I would like to encourage people to keep praying for an increase in vocations in our Archdiocese and beyond.”

Fr Craig also sits on the editorial board of *The Sower*.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick has been appointed as the Episcopal Vicar for the Pastoral Area of Coventry, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire.



Canon Paul Fitzpatrick.

In his new role he will affirm and strengthen pastoral life, represent the Archdiocese locally and help parishes and deaneries to discern and implement the *Diocesan Vision*. Canon Paul is the Chair of the Diocesan Synodal Pathway Committee

Canon Paul will undertake these duties alongside his existing pastoral roles as Parish Priest of Sacred Heart Church, Henley-on-Thames, Dean of the South Oxfordshire Deanery and chair of the Care of the Clergy Committee.

He is also administrator of the Johnson Association which cares for the sick and retired priests of the Diocese.

“I consider the role of Episcopal Vicar to be a great privilege,” he said. “It is wonderful to be able to support the priests and people of this episcopal area.”

Canon Paul is also the Chair of the Council of Priests.

New Data Compliance Manager **Debbie Jones** is responsible for ensuring the Archdiocese meets its obligations with regards to data protection legislation.

Her twin priorities are to ensure all data is secure and to raise awareness of the importance of keeping all personal details safe.

“All organisations have now got a duty to look after the personal data they hold,” said Debbie, who was previously Data Protection Officer for the Archdiocese of Liverpool for three years.

“We have vast amounts of data because of our links with schools, and because parish priests are given information by those preparing for the Sacraments, funerals and other church activities.

“It’s my role to ensure that we keep your data safe, as well as informing you how we do this.

“The electronic storage of data creates its own risks and we need to make sure we are working to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance.”

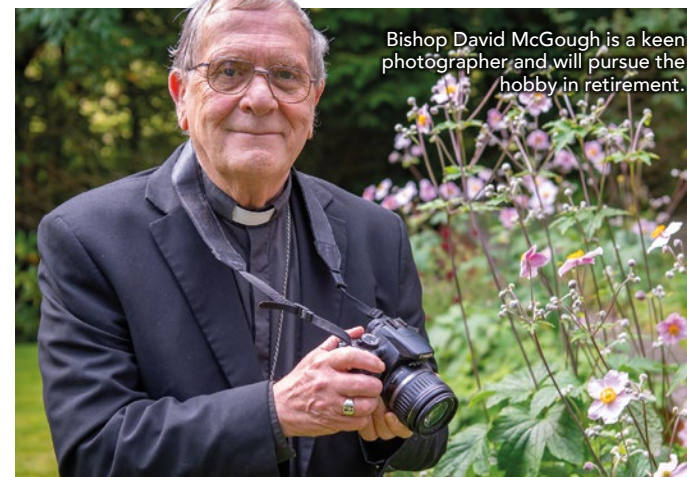
Debbie is organising data security training for Archdiocesan office staff, parishioners and volunteers.

Staff and parishes are welcome to get in touch by emailing debbie.jones@rcaob.org.uk



Debbie Jones.

Praise and gratitude paid to retiring bishops



Bishop David McGough is a keen photographer and will pursue the hobby in retirement.

BEST wishes for their retirement are being sent to two Auxiliary Bishops who affirmed and strengthened Catholic life in their respective pastoral areas.

Bishop David McGough was ordained to the priesthood in 1970 in his home Parish of Sacred Heart, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent.

After a year teaching at the Diocesan seminary he returned to Rome (where he had previously obtained a degree in Theology at the Venerable English College) and took a post-graduate degree in Sacred Scripture. He spent 15 years teaching Scripture to students for the priesthood at St Mary's College, Oscott, specialising on the writings of St Paul, before serving as parish priest at Christ the King, Kingstanding, and then at Our Lady and All Saints, Stourbridge.

Appointed Episcopal Vicar in 2004, he was ordained Auxiliary Bishop in the following year. Bishop McGough, now 77, said: “During my retirement I will continue to help out in the Church where I can.”

Bishop William Kenney, ordained to the priesthood in St Chad's Cathedral in 1969, is a member of the Passionist Congregation.

He served as a Catholic parish priest in Sweden

and was subsequently appointed Auxiliary Bishop for the Diocese of Stockholm.

In 1991 he was elected President of Caritas Europe, going on to serve on the Legal Affairs Commission of Caritas Internationalis. Bishop Kenney, who grew up in Gravelly Hill, was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham in 2006.

He is also member of the International Department of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

Bishop Kenney, 75, said: “I am continuing to do liturgical work for the Church and Bishops' Conference. I'm also a member of the Santa Marta Group, which aims to eradicate human trafficking and modern slavery.”



Bishop William Kenney.



A computer-generated image of how the 169ft Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer monument will look.

Chance to shape public art project

THE Catholic community has the chance to become involved in an extraordinary piece of public art which celebrates the Christian faith.

The Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer, a towering “eternal arch” to be built using a million bricks near Coleshill Manor between the M6 and the M42, will be a landmark visible from over six miles away.

A crowdfunding campaign has been launched to raise money for the project and wellwishers are being urged to donate to help create the monument, while at the same time sending in a personal example of a prayer that has been answered.

Each of the million answered prayers will be assigned to an individual brick and visitors to the structure will be able to call up the details by scanning links on each brick with their smartphone, using augmented reality technology.

The goals of the initiative include encouraging prayer and preserving the Christian heritage of the nation while providing a unique database of hope.

The Archdiocese of Birmingham is supporting the project and Monsignor Timothy Menezes, Dean of St Chad's Cathedral, is a member of the project's Council of Reference.

“It is exciting to think of such a public symbol of Christian prayer in an increasingly secular society,” said Mgr Timothy.

“I believe that as a significant Christian structure being built in the 21st century, and one that acknowledges not only Christian faith and prayer but ‘answered prayer’, it is something that the Catholic community can support by participation in the gathering of answered prayers.”

The £9.3 million project to create the 169ft tall monument – twice the size of the Angel of the North – is led by its founder Richard Gamble, 52, an author and Christian entrepreneur who was formerly Chaplain to Leicester City Football Club.

Richard believes divine inspiration was at work during the process of finding the site on the outskirts of Birmingham which has been donated by businessman Lord Edmiston, an evangelical Christian.

The Eternal Wall will be built in the shape of an “infinity loop” known as a Möbius strip, with the construction phase planned for 2022.

It is designed by Snug Architects, winners of a competition run by the Royal Institute of British Architects.

● To donate to the project, submit your story and be a part of making history, please visit eternalwall.org.uk



Hand of friendship offered to help welcome community back to church



Hospitality Team Leader Lindsay Cooke and Father Michael Glover at St Teresa of the Child Jesus in Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent, holding welcome packs for those returning to church.

AN initiative is underway around the parishes to encourage people to return to attending Holy Mass in person.

The *Something Greater* project helps parishes to extend the hand of friendship to their community and welcome them back.

Parishes are urged to set up online meetings using Zoom, to welcome people into their church.

They are encouraged to include in their meetings an inspirational video which features an invitation from Archbishop Bernard to come and see what the Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Birmingham is all about.

The parishes are urged to end their meetings with a direct appeal to people to come to their church for Sunday Mass or just for a familiarisation visit – they too might find *Something Greater* in Jesus Christ. The aim of the initiative is to reach out to those who have lost the habit of coming to Holy Mass, people who are wondering whether churches are open again and those who may have encountered the Catholic Church for the first time during

the pandemic.

Something Greater has been launched by the Archdiocese's Evangelisation Subgroup helping to develop the *Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan*.

Around 50 parishes have so far requested a materials pack to host *Something Greater*, with St Teresa

The aim is to make sure those who come back to a Catholic Church are really welcomed home.

Father Michael Glover

of the Child Jesus Church, Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent leading the way by posting 2,000 invitational postcards through letterboxes and sending out warm invites on social media.

Parish priest, Father Michael Glover, said: "The aim is to make

sure those who come back to a Catholic church are really welcomed home."

Other initiatives to engage the lay faithful are also up and running. They include a series of Prayer and Life Workshops over a 15-week period.

The programme consists of a weekly two-hour workshop and daily prayer resources, to help to equip people to pray interiorly, but also to apply their spirituality to their lives too.

It ends with a 'desert day' of prayer at a retreat centre, allowing people to reflect.

Prayer and Life Workshops is an international initiative started in Chile by Fr Ignacio Larranaga, a Spanish Franciscan friar, in the 1980s, and has since spread worldwide.

Following a successful pilot, four workshops – two in north Staffordshire, one in Birmingham and one in Wolverhampton – have now been launched.

In addition, a new online course has enabled people to embrace the Holy Spirit.

The Life in the Spirit seminars hosted by The Charis Diocesan

Renewal Group took place from September to November. They explored such topics as God's Love, New Life and Salvation.

More than 60 million people worldwide have found refreshment and regeneration through the Life in the Spirit seminars.

Finally, St Nicholas in Boldmere hosted a series of training days for readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and leaders of prayer. The aim was to provide a good understanding of the day-to-day work of ministry teams in serving their churches and how it relates to what others do, and what we all do as the Church at prayer. Although day to day guidance and support is always available, this kind of broader formation is also necessary.

A particular focus was on leaders of prayer – a category of service which features those with responsibility for prayer as part of the life of a parish group and teachers leading prayer in schools, through to Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion leading services of Word and Holy Communion in the absence of a priest.



Natalie Orefice and Deacon Nick St John with course participants at the Sacred Heart Church in Tamworth.

Positive feedback for leadership programme

A training programme to benefit future leaders within the Archdiocese of Birmingham is being rolled out following a successful pilot.

As part of the *Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan* it has been identified that all parishes both need, and have, leaders and the new training will better equip them to support their parish and the vision. Natalie Orefice, Advisor for Parish Evangelisation, and Deacon Nick St John, from the Parish of the Immaculate Conception in Bicester and a Leadership

Development Practitioner joined forces to create a bespoke programme for the Archdiocese to meet the needs of clerical and lay leaders. They delivered the pilot Leadership Training in Tamworth to a team of eight people including priests, a deacon, parish staff and volunteers. Feedback from the pilot session was overwhelmingly positive. Natalie and Deacon Nick have now delivered the training to Diocesan Trustees and the Archbishop's Council, and they are working to deliver more sessions. The four to five

day training programme covers six modules including: what is leadership; our relationship with ourselves and others; vision into action and skills for working with people.

The programme design comes from a Catholic worldview. It is a vital tool for understanding who we are all called to be in the Church and enable co-responsibility to flourish. The training is of equal value to priests, deacons, religious communities and the lay faithful.

For more information email: natalie.orefice@rcaob.org.uk

People encouraged to take part in a two-year Synodal journey

WE are all called to take part in the Synod 2021–2023 to join the process and speak about the life and meaning of our Church.

The Synod was formally launched in Rome in October by Pope Francis and has since been embraced by every diocese across the world.

Many of you will have watched, or listened to, the Pastoral Letter given by Archbishop Bernard Longley to mark the opening of the Synod in our Archdiocese.

By now your parish priests will have started conversations with you, the laity, about how to get involved and contribute. You may even be taking on the role of Synod representative in your parish.

The overall theme chosen is 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission'.

The Synod process is one of 'journeying together' towards Christ and every member of the Church is invited to speak.

The work to be undertaken across the

Archdiocese during the Synodal process will be done in conjunction with the ongoing implementation of the *Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan*.

The synodal pathway embraces our four diocesan priorities (Evangelisation, Formation, Liturgy and Worship and Social Outreach) and it will work with them.

We are already working towards a Catholic diocese which is:

- Faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ
- Full of intentional disciples in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour
- Where many more lay people are engaged in collaborative ministry.

As His Grace explained in his Pastoral Letter: "The synodal pathway is a call to discern what it means to be the Church – how we live and minister today. This begins with

listening - listening to the faithful in

our parishes, to those who exercise a ministry or fulfil some role in the day-to-day running of the parish, to those who attend Mass and support the parish's work and to people in wider society – often fellow Christians of other denominations or families whose children attend our Catholic schools and who live in our locality."

Please do take part in the Synod. Speak to your parish priest. Have conversations at church.

Find out more at The Synod, 2021 - 2023 birminghamdiocese.org.uk/the-synod-2021-2023 or contact Canon Paul Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Diocesan Synodal Pathway Committee, at: synodalpathway@rcaob.org.uk





FOUR of a kind

Continuing a series of regular features, *The Sower* asks the same questions of people carrying out similar service in the Archdiocese. Here, we pose the questions to four Lay Chaplains...

Allie Mason

Lay Chaplain at St Benedict's in Alcester and Transition Leader and Catholic Life Co-ordinator at St Augustine's in Redditch (both schools are part of the Our Lady of the Magnificat Multi-Academy Company).

Can you tell us about your background and what your Catholic faith meant to you growing up?

I grew up in the seaside town of Eastbourne. I had an idyllic childhood. My favourite memories are from Christmas – we would gather at my grandparents house, open presents, go off to Mass and then have our Christmas dinner.

I went to a private school which wasn't Catholic, but my family's love and support taught me the Catholic values. My whole family were involved in the church, my Grandfather was a Commander Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and my Grandmother a Dame. The Catenians were also a huge part of our family lives.

What led you to become a lay chaplain in an educational setting?

I moved to Redditch in 2002 with my family and needed a job in a school as my daughter was starting school that year and I didn't

have any family in the town. I started off as a school cook and eventually got a job as an administrator for Heads of Year in a high school. This made me intrigued as to why students behaved as they do and I enrolled onto a behaviour management course.

I then moved to a school in Birmingham as a Pastoral Support Officer and eventually the job at St Augustine's came up as Transition Leader and Head of Year 9 in 2015.

Catholic Life Co-ordinator was added to my job description two years later. I was seconded to St Benedict's in September 2020 for two days a week and now I support the transition of students from Year 8 into Year 9.

Can you give us a flavour of your day-to-day role?

It varies enormously – at St Benedict's I organise form Masses, prepare the Catholic Life presentation for the whole school. I also run the Chaplaincy teams, although it has been difficult as most of the time I've been



there, we have been in lockdown.

During the lockdown I also was asked by my Head at St Augustine's to "do something to keep the students engaged at break time". This morphed into Mason's Mission, where I would go live to the whole school doing a variety of things such as exercise classes and live cooking from my kitchen at home.

What inspires you most about working with young people?

I love how students come to school in their first year and they are quiet, shy, then with the support of the staff in school, when they leave in either Year 11 or Year 13, they go out into the world confident well rounded adults who go off to make the world a better place. There is no better feeling!



Tom Machin

Lay Chaplain at Cardinal Wiseman in Coventry.

Can you tell us about your background and what your Catholic faith meant to you growing up?

Faith has always been an important part of my life.

I was raised as a Catholic and always took an active role in my parish; altar serving, reading and being an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. When I was in secondary school I joined a youth group and went on my first residential retreat to Alton Castle.

I came to understand the idea of having a personal relationship with Jesus but also of the importance of sharing that relationship with young people in a way that was fun, relevant and engaging.

After university I realised I was being called to share that faith with others and so I did!

What led you to become a lay chaplain in an educational setting?

After working on team at Alton I moved into chaplaincy in Stoke-on-Trent before working at the Briers in Nottingham and then back at Alton Castle as assistant director. What I missed about

chaplaincy was the longer journeys you're able to go on with young people – seeing the real impact Jesus can have on their lives is the richest of blessings. I felt called back to chaplaincy and saw Cardinal Wiseman as the perfect place for that. It's an incredible community of staff and students.

Can you give us a flavour of your day-to-day role?

One of the great blessings about chaplaincy is that every single day is different! A huge part of my role is being on hand to support students with whatever they need.

Since schools have returned post lockdown we have seen a lot more students struggling with anxiety, depression and just with a general difficulty in getting back to normal – supporting these students is of huge importance.

We also devote time to create digital content that is engaging and relevant, particularly through YouTube.

This is where our young people are, so it's important that we meet them there, it's what Jesus did and so we must do the same.

Pat Sowter

Lay Chaplain at Painsley Catholic College in Cheadle.

Can you tell us about your background and what your Catholic faith meant to you growing up?

I am a mother of four grown up children and I am very blessed to be a grandmother to six beautiful grandchildren. I was brought up in a devoted Catholic family where my father's love and devotion to Holy Mass, the Rosary and Benediction was passed down to myself and my siblings.

My parish priest during most of my early days growing up was Fr Patrick Meagher, a wonderful Irish priest who guided and nurtured my love for God and the Church.

What led you to become a lay chaplain in an educational setting?

After having my children, I was very fortunate to be offered a job as an activity instructor and leader at Alton Castle residential centre.

It was in the very early days of the retreat centre so I felt very privileged to be part of a fantastic team of young, faith-filled volunteers as we experienced the castle evolving and developing under the brilliant leadership of Fr Michael White.

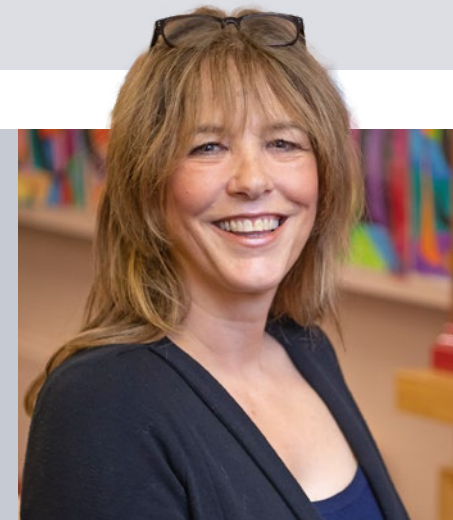
Can you give us a flavour of your day-to-day role?

In 2004, I returned to my high school, Painsley Catholic College, and took on my current position as the Lay Chaplain. My day-to-day role is very varied, but I always begin each day with prayer in the Chapel with a different Emmaus class. We also have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for staff in the Chapel before the school day begins.

This is a great opportunity for myself and staff to get together in prayer and reflection. We have a wonderful school chaplain Fr Eric Kemball, whom I work very closely with to enhance, support and guide all our college community; students, staff and parents on their spiritual journey. We have a group of students from Year 7 to Year 13 who are members of the 'Chaplaincy Crew' who work together with Fr Eric and myself in serving and supporting others through the example of Jesus and His Word.

What inspires you most about working with young people?

Every day I am inspired and in awe of the



young people who cross my path. The students are constantly amazing me with their generosity and love for their fellow brothers and sisters. I was blown away by the display of care and thoughtfulness during the recent lockdown as the students selflessly thought not about themselves but others.

They made, designed and sent out prayer letters, food parcels and cards to all our elderly and isolated parishioners in our feeder parishes. Jesus once said 'that whatever we do to the least of our neighbours, we do to Him'. Our young people are constantly reminding me of this every single day... we are all called to serve, and the best way to do it is in our own unique way.

Hannah Smith

Lay Chaplain at St John Fisher Catholic College in Newcastle-Under-Lyme.

Can you tell us about your background and what your Catholic faith meant to you growing up?

I'm originally from a background in youth ministry, taking my gap year at Soli House in Stratford-upon-Avon. This really sparked my love of working with young people, particularly accompanying young people alongside their journey of faith. This led me to begin my teacher training, after university, originally teaching Biology and later Religious Education, in two exceptional secondary schools in Staffordshire. I've just transitioned into the role of lay chaplain.

I grew up in a practising Catholic family. Having strong positive role models helped to provide the foundation of my faith. I was also supported by my lay chaplain whilst at secondary school. She introduced me to one of my favourite places, Lourdes, which holds a very special place in my heart.

What led you to become a lay chaplain in an educational setting?

When I think about the role of a lay chaplain, particularly within a school setting, I smile. I smile because I know, from first-hand experience, the importance, and efficacy that lay chaplaincy has on young people, and on

the culture of a school. I was blessed to have a lay chaplain for the whole of my secondary school life, and I know that because of her dedication, her joy, and her willingness to walk alongside me in faith, I was brought closer to Christ and was able to grow in confidence.

It was also my lay chaplain that encouraged me to attend retreats at Alton Castle and Soli House. Those were mountain-top moments where I was also accompanied by young adults. Looking back, it is clear to see the impact all these individuals had on my faith life, and on my personal development.

As I journeyed through life, I have felt the call to emulate those individuals who had such an impact on me.

Can you give us a flavour of your day-to-day role?

There is lots of preparation involved, preparing weekly reflections on Sunday's Gospel, prayers specific for any feast days or memorials, I do teach a lovely Year 7 class RE too! I also meet and work with our chaplaincy team, 'The Fishers'. Other things include preparing for Mass, we have weekly Mass with our amazing Chaplain, Fr Marco. Then there are also lots of things that you don't necessarily plan for: being on hand to speak to a young person or



staff member that just needs you to listen, or offering to pray with someone who needs it.

What inspires you most about working with young people?

The young people across all our school communities have such capacity for love, for service, to make a difference in this world, to put their faith into action. This inspires me daily. Seeing the Lord work through them, watching them grow in confidence and in their own faith, these are the great privileges of working with young people; as is being present for their mountain-top moments in faith.



Living Wage accreditation awarded

THE Archdiocese has been accredited as a Living Wage Employer. This commitment will see everyone working at the Archdiocese receive a minimum hourly wage of £9.50. This rate is significantly higher than the government minimum for over 23s, which currently stands at £8.91 per hour.

The Archdiocese is largely based in the West Midlands, a region with one of the highest proportions of non-Living Wage jobs in the country (21%), with around 442,000 jobs paying less than the real Living Wage.

Despite this, the Archdiocese has committed to pay the real Living Wage and deliver a fair day's pay for a hard day's work.

The real Living Wage is the only rate calculated according to the costs of living.

It provides a voluntary benchmark for employers that wish to ensure their staff earn a wage they can live on, not just the government minimum. Since 2011 the Living Wage movement has delivered a pay rise to over 250,000 people and put over £1.3 billion extra into the pockets of low paid workers.

Gerry Dryden, Archdiocese Human Resources and Communications Director, said: "It is extremely important to the Archdiocese that those who work for us are paid a fair wage.

"We value the work of all our employees and I hope this accreditation reflects that adequately.

The Living Wage is not just about money, but about the wellbeing and security of all who work for the Archdiocese."

Graham Griffiths, Director, Living Wage Foundation said: "We're delighted that the Archdiocese of Birmingham has joined the movement of over 8,000 responsible employers across the UK who voluntarily commit to go further than the government minimum to make sure all their staff earn enough to live on."



Puppet Amal is pictured walking through the streets of Coventry on her 8,000km journey to raise awareness about the plight of refugees.

Journey across Europe in support of refugees

THE streets of Coventry and Birmingham were packed as crowds of people gathered to welcome a giant puppet that had "walked" thousands of miles in search of her mother.

Little Amal, a 3.5m high puppet representing a nine-year-old Syrian girl, was at the heart of The Walk, travelling 8,000km in support of refugees.

Little Amal walked across Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and the UK to focus attention on the urgent needs of young refugees.

Little Amal walked from Coventry Transport Museum, around the city centre shops, and ended up at University Square in Coventry. She then moved on to Erdington,

Birmingham. After arriving in the UK she was welcomed at Westminster Cathedral by Cardinal Vincent Nichols.

At each stage of Little Amal's journey she was welcomed by artistic and cultural events created by and reflective of the communities she visits.

The incredible journey finally ended in Manchester in November.

Back to basics approach on worship

THE work of the Liturgy Commission links very much with the strand of the *Diocesan Vision* on Liturgy and Worship, writes **Monsignor Tim Menezes**.

The Church's Liturgy is an area of huge interest to some (dedicated musicians, catechists for the Children's Liturgy of the Word, those who over many years have given their time and gifts to altar serving, reading, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and so on) but something of a passing interest to others.

The back to basics approach leaves nobody out.

Hopefully it helps those who have been Catholics all their life and those who are coming to the Church for the first time, and for whom everything is new, to discover together the riches of our faith expressed through the public prayer

which most people experience at Sunday Mass but which can be known in so many other ways.

The first step to understanding the importance of the Church's worship is to understand that your participation makes a difference: that the encounter with God and his people is for the people, known as the Holy People of God.

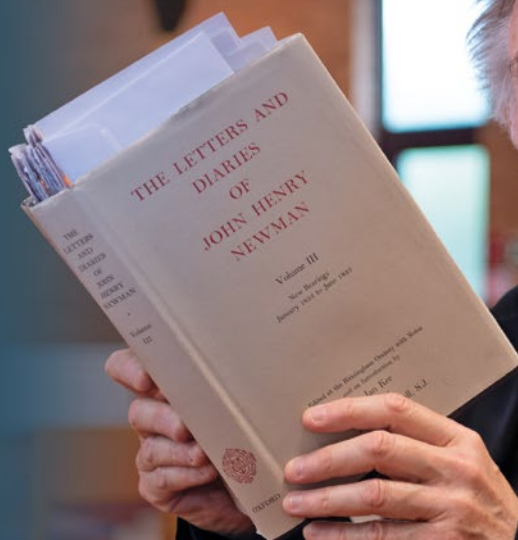
Do you consider yourself to be holy, or do you seek to become holy?

As you attend Mass, or as questions arise when you pray, do not be afraid to ask questions, to search for greater meaning in your faith, and remember that prayer strengthens belief and belief strengthens every area of your life.

● For more details about Liturgy and Worship please visit:

www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/our-vision-liturgy-and-worship

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 his great gift to connect with people, whatever their background.



A true man of the people for whom no task was too trivial

If television had been invented in the 19th century, St John Henry Newman might have appeared, as a special guest, to present the weather! He did, after all, in his *Rambler* article use the example of a barometer to explain the importance of Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.

Amidst the season of what he calls *"the Advent Christ"*, he forecasts: *"Frost and cold, rain and gloom befall us...spring, summer and autumn have brought their gifts."* Then, he lifts our spirits with the long-range outlook: *"Thus the soul is cast forward upon the future, and in proportion as its conscience is clear and its perception keen and true, does it rejoice solemnly that it would soon see the King in His beauty."* (Parochial and Plain Sermons V, 1).

Poetically, Newman advises us to *"watch"* for the Lord's arrival as he *"moves upon the deep harmonies of truth and love and draws us to become holier the closer he comes."* (Parochial and Plain Sermons IV, 22).

Newman's Advent letters and diaries, in the years he was an Anglican clergyman, reveal the attraction of Jesus appealing to him through the faces of his parishioners, especially the poor.

Many people in Victorian cities lived in squalid conditions, with over-crowded housing and impure water supplies which led to cholera outbreaks.

Newman responded immediately to any cases in his area and set up a special parish committee to oversee ongoing support

– anticipating the impact of the national pandemic spreading. The disease was thought to be contagious and also associated with bad smells and not specifically connected with hydration and washing provision, until 1854.

Newman's practical and pastoral approach saw him distribute coal, food vouchers and arrange deliveries of bread, wine and brandy – together with medicine in response to the whooping cough epidemic.

He found a place in an asylum for a woman with mental health difficulties, paid for her care and visited her and the other patients regularly.

From personal experience, having lost his youngest sister Mary on the eve of Epiphany, who he grieved for all his life, Newman recognised that the run-up to Christmas was really painful for the bereaved.

He refers, in his correspondence and appointment books, to a number of tragic deaths.

These include two house fires, a quarry accident and another he witnessed while out riding, involving an out-of-control horse-drawn cart whose driver jumped off and was crushed between a milestone direction marker and the vehicle's wheel.

Newman was seriously ill with shock for a couple of months afterwards, according to friends. He regularly called upon those in grief, especially if they were coming to terms with the passing of a spouse or a child.

His diaries also note his support of the

parents of a young disabled person, who was deaf and dumb. He had celebrated her funeral service. He also provided the finances to enable a family to bury their next of kin.

St John Henry's great gift as a pastor was that he had the ability to connect with people, of all backgrounds and ages, by being himself. In sharing his humanity, he gave those he met the confidence that he understood and could help them to appreciate their own.

The effectiveness of his Advent outreach ministry, as a deacon and vicar in the Church of England, which I have focused on, is revealed by J.A. Froude, a contemporary from his days in Oxford who writes: *"Newman's mind was world-wide. He was interested in everything... Nothing was too large for him, nothing too trivial, if it threw light upon the central question, what man really was, and what was his destiny. His natural temperament was bright and light. He could admire enthusiastically any greatness of action and character, however remote the sphere of it from his own... He seemed better informed on common topics of conversation than anyone else present. He was never condescending with us... never didactic or authoritative; but what he said carried conviction with it... He was interesting because he never talked for talking's sake, but because he had something real to say."* (Merry England, October 1890, p.48-49).

May St John Henry Newman's daily weather chart focus our gaze on the clear-sky brightness of Christ, the morning star.



Deacon Daniel with Dianne Dawson and Susan Moriarty, right, from the Birmingham Cenacolo Support Group.



Deacon Daniel and his wife Azora pictured with Lazarus and his partner and their child.

Extending helping hand to those in greatest need

PERMANENT Deacon Daniel Hurd and his wife Azora took an asylum seeker into their home in response to Pope Francis' call to "welcome the Lord Jesus among the smallest and most vulnerable."

With administrative support from Birch Community Housing, who run a hosting network in Birmingham, they provided accommodation for Lazarus, an Iranian, for two years.

At the end of his stay Lazarus successfully gained refugee status and is currently training to be an electrician.

During the Covid lockdown he and his partner returned to stay with Deacon Daniel and Azora to gain a secure environment for their new baby.

Many friends and family members had cautioned the Sutton Coldfield couple against welcoming a stranger into their home – but the hosting has proved a huge success.

"We tried not to share these fears preferring to trust the common dignity of all people," said Deacon Daniel, a Chartered Architect by profession who is Permanent Deacon at Holy Trinity Church and also

helped set up the Birmingham Cenacolo Support Group – welcoming young people with addiction problems.

"The oversight provided by Birch helped provide the reassurance needed and this together with the fact that Lazarus has always been extremely polite, respectful and helpful made life together very easy.

"The whole experience of extending a hand of charitable outreach to an asylum seeker has been extremely positive and joyful."

Deacon Daniel is no stranger

to helping those in need with his continued work on the Birmingham Cenacolo Support Group.

Addicts are encouraged to take part in sustained prayer with an hour of Adoration at a series of meetings during which they also learn about Cenacolo, a Christian association founded by Italian nun Sister Elvira Petrozzi in 1983.

After a three-day trial stay they enter the Cenacolo community, usually taking around three years to recover and be restored to a substance-free life.

Book explores real meaning of Christmas

DEACON Sean Loone has written 200,000 words and sold well in excess of 1,000 books – and it all began with his literary exploration of the real meaning of Christmas.

Inspired two years ago to write chapters on topics such as the Manger, Our Lady, the Three Kings and Joseph he found a publisher and believed his literary efforts were over.

However, since then, divine inspiration has led him to publish three more works.

After *Born for Us* he has written *Only in the Crucified God*, *Sharing in the Life of God* and *Servants of the Word*. *Born for Us* is issued by Alive Publishing and the subsequent works are available on Amazon.

It means that in four volumes he has written about the Birth, Death and Resurrection of Jesus followed by (in the concluding work) what it means to live out a vocation dedicated to serving Christ and his people.

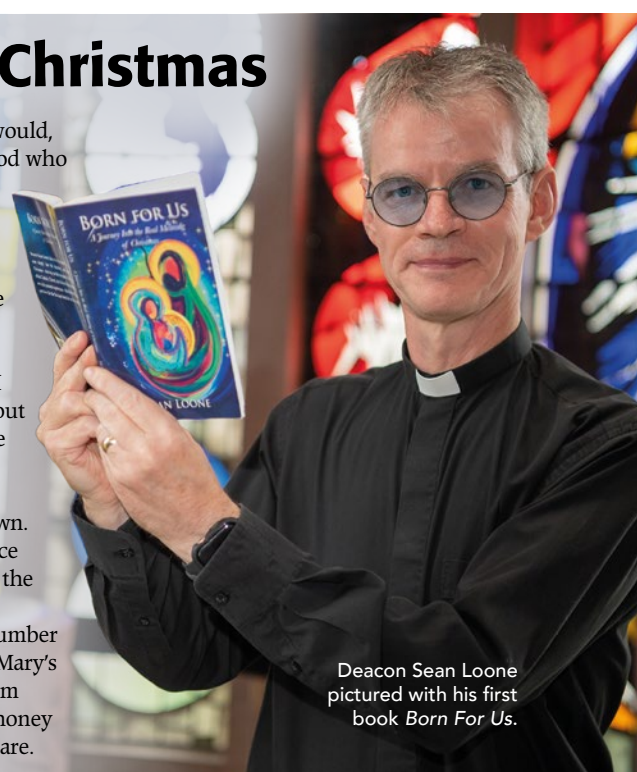
"My initial plan was quite simple – write a book that would take people on a journey into

the real meaning of Christmas which would, at the same time deepen faith in the God who comes in search of us through the birth of his Son," said Deacon Sean, who is a permanent deacon at Our Lady of the Wayside parish in Shirley.

"To achieve this I would use only the Bible and place emphasis on the God of mercy, compassion, forgiveness and above all love. Little did I know, when I sat down in 2019 to write the book about Christmas, that God had so much more in store for me.

"The Holy Spirit prompted me to write two further books during lockdown. I thought that was the end of it but once again God had other plans and I wrote the fourth book."

Deacon Sean, who is chaplain to a number of schools and lectures part-time at St Mary's College, Oscott, has donated profits from the books to CAFOD, the Father O'Mahoney Memorial Trust and Father Hudson's Care.



Deacon Sean Loone pictured with his first book *Born For Us*.



Author pays thanks to Maryvale for support



A young Edna making hay with her sister Martha on their family farm, and inset, Edna as she appears today.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER Edna Hunneysett, who is still writing books at the age of 81, credits the Maryvale Institute for starting her out on her writing career.

Her latest novel, *Greener Pastures and Brown Blazers*, is a heart-warming story of growing up in the early 1950s. But her first published work was developed out of the dissertation she wrote for her Masters Degree at Maryvale.

Her subject was the support available for carers, especially of people with mental illnesses, reflecting Edna's concerns when her daughter became suicidal at the age of 13.

She felt the matter wasn't as understood and supported as she would have liked at the time in the Church and wider society and she went on to publish three books on the theme of mental health.

Edna had applied to study at Maryvale in 1990 because she wanted to learn more about her faith, especially since she was a catechist, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and Reader in the parish of Holy Name of Mary in Middlesbrough.

She built up her scriptural knowledge as she studied for a Divinity degree and then was actively encouraged at the post-graduate level to pursue her passion for writing.

"If it hadn't been for Maryvale encouraging me to do my BA via distance learning, allowing me to do my Masters and then recommending my dissertation be published, I might never have had a book published," said Edna, who lives in Middlesbrough and is still a reader at church.

"Neither would I have been able to use my books

to spread the message about families where there is mental illness, needing church support."

Edna gave numerous talks in her diocese and around the country about mental illness and the support for those with mental health issues.

The mother-of-eight is grateful to Maryvale for giving her the confidence to talk about her faith.

"It is so valuable in helping ordinary people to learn in their adult life about their faith," she said. "Studying there broadened my understanding of the Church and helped deepen my spiritual life. God bless Maryvale!"

Edna's outstanding memories of Maryvale include "some amazing teachers who oozed spirituality," the friendship, love and understanding of her fellow students and the time she spent in prayer in the Sacred Heart Chapel in the early morning before Mass.

Her latest published work continues a semi-autobiographical account of her life following on from her earlier novel *Greener Beyond the Hill*.

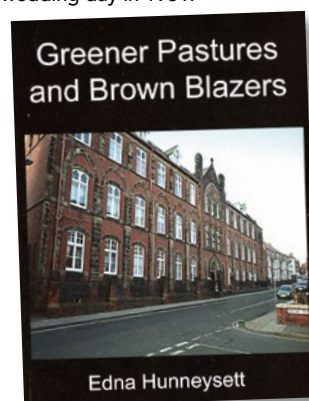
Greener Pastures and Brown Blazers (issued by Chipmunkpublishing.co.uk) tells the story of an 11-year-old girl who leaves her farm and family to attend a convent boarding school in Scarborough.

Edna's published works include *Our Suicidal Teenagers – Where are You God?* and *Pastoral Care Mental Health*. A follow-up novel, *Greener Horizons*, is with the publisher, telling how the protagonist finally meets her Mr Right, a non-Catholic who has never been inside a Catholic Church.

● For more details on Maryvale Institute visit www.maryvale.ac.uk



Edna with husband Ray on their wedding day in 1961.



The cover of Edna's latest novel *Greener Pastures and Brown Blazers*.

Bishop David appointed to Vice-President role at Institute

BISHOP David Evans, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese, has been appointed as Vice-President of Maryvale Institute.

Bishop David has long-standing connections with the Institute and he has an extensive background of teaching and learning in general.

He will continue to be a full Higher

Institute of Religious Science member, and will teach on the BDiv and BA Philosophy courses in the Catholic Tradition.

Meanwhile, the Bridgettine Sisters, who have supported the stay of resident students at the Maryvale Institute since 1999, have now relocated.

With the Institute looking to move more

of its provision online, the Sisters felt they could no longer fulfil their mission of hospitality at Maryvale.

The Sisters will be greatly missed, and the Archdiocese has extended wholehearted thanks to them for their inspirational faith and the wonderful hospitality they have shown.



Pledge to reduce carbon footprint as Care for Creation action steps up

THE Archdiocese of Birmingham is taking the reduction of its carbon footprint very seriously with environmental action and care for creation built into the Archdiocesan vision and planning. We have set a very ambitious target of reaching net zero emissions by 2030 – matching the target set by the Church of England.

A new Climate Action Group was formed in October, marking the start of COP26. The new group, which is made up of clergy, students, teachers, members of the Kenelm Youth Trust and lay environmentalists aim to lead the Archdiocese to its 2030 target, and to inspire and engage parishioners and communities to live the Gospel of Life through our care of our common home and of the poor.

This year the Archdiocese of Birmingham changed its investment policy to exclude investments in any company which derives more than 5% of its revenues from fossil fuels. It has also increased its green energy use, with renewables, biogas and carbon offsetting.

The group hopes to engage even more schools and parishes with CAFOD's LiveSimply award programme, asking all schools to sign up by the end of 2021.

What is the LiveSimply award?

It is awarded to communities who can show how they have been living:

- simply
- in solidarity with people in poverty
- sustainably with creation.

Some LiveSimply award communities have encouraged people to walk or cycle to church or school, install solar panels, start recycling schemes, join a climate change campaign, support Fairtrade stalls or donate to a local food bank. The award celebrates what you have already done and inspires you to do more. It helps your community to live, not just more simply, but also more fully.

Can I help?

You may already be doing amazing work through CAFOD, the Columbans or local environmental groups. You may already be a member of a parish environment group or you may just be looking for a way to increase your impact in the fight against climate change, or to embed the principles of Laudato Si' in your community.

If so, you could be one of a new network of climate champions, with whom the Archdiocese can consult, support and celebrate on our journey to 2030. To sign up visit the Archdiocese's environment page:

www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/environment

A LiveSimply School

Students and staff at St Thomas More Catholic School in Willenhall were presented with the CAFOD LiveSimply award in October.

Canon Gerry Murray, Chaplain of the Climate Action Group and Chair of the Justice and Peace Commission, said: "It's wonderful to see a school achieving the LiveSimply Award through their dedication and hard work. I hope this will provide an inspiration to other schools to follow in their footsteps."

Students across all year groups have been involved in the planning and delivery of many of the events and initiatives which contributed to achieving the award.

Even during lockdown activities continued. Assemblies were delivered virtually focusing on CAFOD's campaigns. Students were able to participate in the 'Walk for Water' campaign during Lent and, once back in school, many classes contributed to the 'Eyes of the World' campaign in the lead-up to the COP26 conference recently held in Glasgow.

During Advent 2020 when visitors were not able to come into school, students met in their bubbles and reached out to local care homes and charities by donating food, clothing, gifts and Christmas cards. Year 11 student Laurna said: "When we care for the world we come closer to God as His stewards."



"It's wonderful to see a school achieving the LiveSimply Award... I hope this will provide an inspiration to others to follow in their footsteps."

Canon Gerry Murray



The LiveSimply award that was presented to students and staff at St Thomas More Catholic School in Willenhall.



Top, students from St Wilfred's Catholic School with artwork they produced. Above, a pupil presents her project to Bishop David Evans and, right, two students from St Peter's make a presentation on the project.



Celebratory Mass for pupils

OUR Lady and All Saints Multi-Academy Company (MAC) joined a special Care for Creation Mass at St Chad's Cathedral – the culmination of a two-week school challenge to look after the Earth.

All 13 schools within the MAC took part in the activity programme in which they were engaged to look at action that could bring about positive environmental change.

The event was designed to engage students to prepare for the COP26 United Nations environmental summit, which took place in Glasgow in November.

It also took into account the Season of Creation – an annual occasion when the global Christian family unites to pray and take action for our common home – and 'Great Big Green Week', an opportunity for communities to hold events that raise awareness of climate change and the need to protect the planet.

The MAC was supported in the activity programme by the Columban Missionaries who share their experience of cross-cultural mission

with students and educators across the country.

Students were also encouraged to put their faith into action in a creative way – by producing artwork and banners from recycled materials as well as composing prayers, music and choreographing dance routines that could raise awareness about climate change.

Many of the pieces of artwork that were produced were brought to St Chad's Cathedral for the Mass, which took place on 4 October 2021, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment.

Pupils were also invited to write letters to their local MPs challenging them to put pressure on the UK government to do more, and also had the chance to meet with political leaders outside the cathedral following the Mass.

The Columbans Justice and Peace Education Worker, James Trewby, said: "It is fantastic for the Columbans to be a part of this programme and to be able to help educators and young people explore the relationship between faith and action on social justice issues."

'Go Green' challenge spurs on schools

PRIMARY school pupils from Birmingham turned presenters for the day to host a national harvest assembly encouraging schools to explore how they can help to protect the Amazon rainforest and support communities who live there.

St Chad's Catholic Primary School recently presented the LIVE Go Green assembly, in collaboration with overseas development charity CAFOD.

The harvest assembly encourages pupils to get involved in the Go Green challenge by taking part in green-themed fundraising activities, which includes dressing green for the day, baking green cakes or making a pea green soup for lunch.

St Chad's Headteacher, Martina Parker, said: "It was a real privilege to be part of CAFOD's national assembly and to have been part of the team driving very important messages about taking care of our world and supporting others in the run up to COP26."

The assembly also featured Luana, a 14-year-old girl from the Brazilian Amazon who sent a powerful message of how the climate crisis is affecting people all around the world, and what she and her community are doing to protect the rainforest.

Archbishop Bernard also joined the assembly to thank children and young people in Birmingham and Catholic schools across England and Wales for taking action with CAFOD and raising their voices on the important issue of the climate crisis.

"Congratulations to the children of St Chad's who've joined with children all over the world to present this very powerful assembly to encourage others to pray, raise money and speak out for a better world," he said.

"The schools within the Birmingham Archdiocese are a wonderful support to CAFOD and we very much appreciate everything they do for us."



A Parable for our time

Continuing the series where *The Sower* highlights how the parables of Jesus are strongly relevant in modern-day life, **Professor Judith Champ**, who has recently retired from teaching Church History at St Mary's College, Oscott, and is chair of the new Archdiocese of Birmingham History and Archives Commission, explains how the Parable of the Great Banquet has a powerful message for this year's Advent celebrations.

We're welcome guests at the Lord's own supper – so why not accept the invitation?



ADVENT is the season of hope, and of new beginnings, and none more so than this year. We begin the reading of St Luke's Gospel for the coming year in Advent, during which we all hope to be moving outwards, less constrained by the dangers of Covid-19, and hopeful of a fresh start.

In a very particular way, the Parable of the Great Banquet, as set out in Luke 14:15-24, invites us all to a fresh start by accepting the invitation to a banquet laid on the altar.

The parable tells how a man was preparing a great feast and invited many guests. He sent his servant to inform them that all is ready but, one by one, they make excuses. One of the invitees says he has bought a field and has to go and see it, another says he is on the way to try out five yoke of oxen which he has bought and the third says he cannot attend because he has just got married.

When the servant returns to report the outcome to the owner he angrily orders him to go out into the streets and alleys of the town to bring in the poor, the crippled and the lame.

There are still places available when this has been done so the master urges that people must be

brought in from the roads and country lanes to fill up the guest list.

The house owner is determined that not one of those who has been invited will enjoy his banquet.

The invited guests made such feeble excuses for declining the invitation to the banquet; nothing surprising there.

Haven't we all made excuses to miss an event that we thought might be tedious, or unwelcoming, or just because we were too tired to be bothered?

The puzzle is, why did the invited guests not want to attend? The host was not expecting anything of them, except to share his table; the welcome was unconditional, the food and drink was lavish, and free.

St Luke's Gospel is directed, not to the traditional Jewish communities in which Christianity had taken root, but to the Gentiles; this Gospel is addressed to the whole world.

Who are we in this story? Might we be the ones who, in overcrowded lives, are too preoccupied, distracted, tired, or just plain bored to respond to the words of welcome?

Obligation does not always sit comfortably in our everyday lives; it sounds too much like

“ Who are we in this story? Might we be the ones who, in overcrowded lives, are too preoccupied, distracted, tired or just plain bored to respond to words of welcome? **”**

Professor Judith Champ

regulation. We are being asked to renew our sense of obligation to accept the Lord's invitation to share his banquet at Sunday Mass. Like the invited guests in the parable, why would we not want to join the feast?

The host expects nothing of us, except to share his table; the welcome is unconditional, the food and drink is lavish, and free. It is the Lord's own supper. We know we are welcome guests, because the Lord insisted that only those who rejected him would be left outside; there is room inside for all of us.

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town,” he said, “and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame... Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and press people to come in, to make sure my house is full”. Why would we not accept such an invitation?

● The History and Archives Commission was founded earlier this year to enhance appreciation and understanding of the history of the Archdiocese in its parishes and communities, to support the Archdiocesan Archivist in building awareness of the archives in the life of the Archdiocese, and to offer resources and guidance to those seeking to deepen their understanding of the history of the Archdiocese.

It also aims to produce online and printed information, including guides to resources, maintain a parish archive, arrange events in parishes and schools; develop workshops for researchers and parish history groups and arrange formation events for clergy on the history of the Archdiocese.

● To find out more email: hac@rcaob.org.uk



THE faithful are invited to return to church – because there can be no replacement for attending Holy Mass in person and receiving the great Gift of the Eucharist.

During the pandemic, many people welcomed the opportunity to participate in Holy Mass live streamed from their parish – but now, the Catholic community is being encouraged to resume physical church attendance if they have not already done so.

Continuing procedures including the cleaning of churches, wearing face masks and social physical distancing ensure churches remain among the safest of public spaces.

The call for the return to a familiar routine comes from Father Tom Millar, Spiritual Director of St Mary's College, Oscott.

Remote worship during the Covid crisis has been helpful but has been no replacement for actually receiving Holy Communion, he reflects.

Coming back to church restores a sense of belonging in a "family of faith."

He asks the Catholic community to remember how, in the Scriptures, God often

Encouragement to return to Church for Mass on Sundays

called his people to assemble, to gather, to congregate – and he would speak to them, giving the words of life.

Fr Tom reminds the faithful of the importance of receiving Our Blessed Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and, through that Sacrament, being truly in "communion with the Lord" and "with one another."

Faith and love is nourished by hearing the Word of God, reflecting on the Word and, through the homily, applying the Word to our daily lives.

"In church we can have that real sense of gathering as a community, a family of faith, and experiencing what that means at first

hand," said Fr Tom.

"God gave us the Church so that we would have not only the sense but also the experience of journeying together, of being a people, supporting and encouraging one another and also of receiving graces, support and encouragement from the Lord himself.

"When we celebrate the Sacraments of the Church, Christ is present. Always. And we surely want to be present to Him!"

"The clergy have greatly missed seeing their parishioners over the past months and they are ready to welcome the opportunity to re-engage them in pondering the wonderful gift of Christ in the Eucharist."

Faith weekend staged for culture celebrations

THE Catholic community in Coventry took part in a Faith event which was mounted as part of the UK City of Culture celebrations.

Faith centres and spaces across the city opened their doors on Saturday 11 September for an Open House to share more about their beliefs, practices and work within the community.

Catholic Churches which invited people to learn more about their activities included Christ the King, St Osburg's, Ss Mary and

Benedict and St Stanislaus Kostka.

As part of the 24-hour celebrations a play entitled *Bless Me, Father* by Alexandra Marie Johnson was staged at Christ the King.

The Faith weekend was co-produced by Coventry City of Culture Trust and the Royal Shakespeare Company in association with City Voices writing programme and Coventry faith communities.

To emphasise the connection between different faith groups, churches were tied

together using 12 miles of ribbon in the 'Coventry blue' colour.

Canon Tom Farrell, Dean of Coventry Deanery and parish priest of Christ the King Church, said: "We were pleased that the City of Culture organisers acknowledged the important link between faith and culture.

"It was an opportunity to celebrate the many ways in which faith communities contribute to the life of the city. It was a wonderful way of rejoicing in our diversity."



Altar Servers Sebastian Sutton, 13, Mike Watt, 74, and Anne Adebiyi, 12, at Our Lady of Lourdes in Yardley Wood, Birmingham.

Inspiring role brings altar servers closer to Jesus

THE altar servers at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Birmingham span the generations. Septuagenarian Mike Watt has been serving in the parish for around 65 years – and his grandson Sebastian Sutton, 13, regularly serves alongside him.

Younger still is Anne Adebiyi, 12, who is proud to represent the many young families who actively participate in the life of the Yardley Wood parish in various ministries. Mike was born just a quarter of a mile from the Church and both of his grandparents were founder members of the parish.

His parents were asked in the mid-1950s by the parish priest at the time, Fr Denis Murphy, if he would like to become an altar boy.

He was Baptised, received First Holy Communion and was married at Our Lady of Lourdes – and he regards it as a “blessing” that over the years nine of his

grandchildren have been altar servers.

“For myself it has been a great honour and privilege to be an altar server for most of my life at Our Lady of Lourdes,” said Mike.

“The greatest fulfilment is serving at funerals of friends and family I have known in the parish over the last 75 years. And it is also a way of serving the parish community the best way you can.”

At the other end of the age spectrum is Anne Adebiyi, who was first taken to a service at Our Lady of Lourdes Church by her mum Busola when she was aged one, going on to become a Mini Vinnie at the age of six (part of the St Vincent de Paul Society).

She became an altar server at the age of eight and has recently been enrolled into the Guild of St Stephen for Altar Servers.

“I like being an altar server because it brings me closer to

Jesus and inspires me,” said the 12-year-old. Having young people as altar servers is a good idea because it helps them to learn more about the Catholic faith.”

● The inspirational witness of young people was highlighted at the recent Proximity event at St Mary's College, Oscott, for altar servers of all ages. The day, attended by 90 people, was based around the life of recently-beatified teenager Blessed Carlo Acutis and included workshops.

“For myself it has been a great honour and privilege to be an altar server for most of my life. **”**

Mike Watt, aged 74

Honour to host National Mass

THE Archdiocese recently hosted the National Mass for the Guild of Saint Stephen, on behalf of the Archconfraternity in Westminster.

Archbishop Bernard Longley was the principal celebrant and homilist at the Mass, held

at the parish of Ss Mary & John, in Wolverhampton. This Mass, to which altar servers from across the country are invited, was in addition to the annual Diocesan Mass, which takes place each spring at St Chad's.

Campaign aims to raise profile of key services in the run-up to Christmas time



Care Assistant Moira Shakeshaft with St Joseph's Care Home resident Bernadette Lissemore.

THE importance of home has been chosen as an Advent theme by Father Hudson's Care, the principal Social Care Agency of the Archdiocese.

The charity provides services for people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or experiencing need – with a special emphasis on offering care and support.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic its priority has been to continue to provide a place of homely safety, comfort and independence to those whom it aims to support.

In the run-up to Christmas, Father Hudson's is mounting an awareness-raising campaign to highlight two of its services that especially demonstrate the importance of having a homely environment – St Joseph's Care Home and the Family Support Service.

ST JOSEPH'S CARE HOME, situated in attractive surroundings at Coleshill in rural Warwickshire, offers a full range of personalised care services.

These include residential care for older people, specialised dementia care and short-term respite in a friendly, welcoming environment.

High-quality care is provided by a

dedicated team who are on-hand 24 hours a day to ensure residents are safe and comfortable. The purpose-built facility is fully accessible and designed to impart a sense of "just how home feels."

Staff take time to familiarise themselves with the needs and personal preferences of residents so that they can tailor their services accordingly.

The four small wings of the Home have their own lounges, kitchens and dining rooms while the 14 rooms on each wing all have accessible ensuite facilities.

The ground floor wings open directly on to the gardens and the first-floor wings have sun terraces looking out on to the countryside. WiFi available throughout enables residents to keep in touch with loved ones and also allows Mass to be live streamed into each wing, as well as entertainments and other events.

The **FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE** helps children and families to overcome the adversity and disadvantage they face.

Working with schools, health and social care agencies and the voluntary sector, the Family Support Service provides help in situations where a child's emotional

wellbeing, mental health and educational achievement are being affected.

The five-strong team offers support to children and young people who are experiencing difficulties in school or at home. Working with the family, school and other agencies Family Support workers identify underlying causes and support families to address them.

Areas of concern addressed by the dedicated team include isolation, parental separation, neglect, low self-esteem and mental health problems.

Safeguarding support and group sessions are held to address family problems such as domestic abuse, financial hardship, housing and parenting skills. Support work, whether one-to-one or in groups, is child centred and led by the needs of the individual family.

The work by the highly-professional team results in better school attendance, higher pupil attainment and improved relationships between families and schools.

If you would like to know more about these services and the wide variety of other areas that Father Hudson's Care supports please visit the website at:

www.fatherhudsons.org.uk

Planning underway for 2022 return to Lourdes

EARLY stages of planning for the in-person 2022 Lourdes pilgrimage are underway. The Pilgrimage will take place from Saturday 28 May to Friday 3 June with the safety of those attending being paramount.

The last two annual pilgrimages were held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic and the Lourdes leadership team are continuing to monitor the ongoing situation. Guidance on travel,

socialising, vaccinations, and increased health related risks, are constantly being reviewed.

The British Lourdes Medical Association conference and the Pilgrimage Directors conference took place in mid-November to continue to discuss the options of safely taking pilgrimages to Lourdes in 2022. Further updates will be announced on the Archdiocese website.

Meanwhile, Father Jeremy



Howard, pictured above, has been appointed to the role of Lourdes Pilgrimage Director.

The role, by appointment of Archbishop Bernard Longley, has been vacant since the death of Canon Gerry Breen in

December 2019. Fr Jeremy is currently parish priest at Our Lady of Lourdes in Hednesford, Staffordshire, which is home to the Diocesan shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.

His new role will have a focus on programme development.

He will work alongside all parties involved in the Diocesan Pilgrimage, at UK-level and with the Lourdes Sanctuary team.

Anyone interested in travelling to Lourdes should contact Kath White via email: admin.lourdes@rcaob.org.uk or by phone: 0121 230 6288.



My favourite SAINT

In a regular feature, *The Sower* asks people to name their favourite Saint and explain why the Saint is important to them. Here, **Charlotte Carver and Anne Harris** – both parishioners of St Wulstan's Church in Little Malvern – choose Blessed Carlo Acutis, dubbed as a "Patron Saint of the internet".

OUR choice is a remarkable young computer genius who took it upon himself to catalogue Eucharistic miracles that have taken place around the world.

Blessed Carlo Acutis had a tragically short life – he died quite suddenly and unexpectedly of leukaemia in 2006 aged only 15 – but his impact is ever-growing and he was beatified in Assisi last year. Although he isn't a yet a Saint we both feel it won't be long before he is canonised.

In conversations between us at church, we shared our enthusiasm for the Vatican International Exhibition, "The Eucharistic Miracles of the World," based on Blessed Carlo's work. We agreed it would be a great idea to bring the Exhibition to our area.

The Exhibition was mounted, jointly with St Wulstan's, in June this year, at St Joseph's in Malvern which had more space to accommodate it.

Blessed Carlo was born and baptised in London to a wealthy Italian family who, shortly after his birth, moved to settle in Milan. He was a remarkably mature, gifted and intelligent child, who first learnt to pray with his Polish nanny, and with the nuns at nursery school.

He was so fascinated by Jesus, that he constantly asked questions about his faith, to the amazement of his parents whom he was instrumental in bringing back to a more regular religious practice.

At the age of seven he eagerly requested to receive his First Holy Communion, and from then on decided to go to daily Mass, including during the holidays. He was Confirmed at the age of 11, after which he immediately joined the team of catechists in his parish!

He was a very cheerful and generous child who intentionally made friends with the homeless and the destitute. He used to save his pocket money to buy food or sleeping bags for them.

He had an unusual passion for computers for which he proved to be outstandingly gifted, and he taught himself to code as an amateur programmer while he was at primary school. When the internet was still in its infancy he discovered the Eucharistic miracle of Lanciano and he began from the age of 11 compiling miracles on a website he had constructed, www.miracolieucaistici.org.

This young schoolboy researched and documented no fewer than 120, and completed his task only a short time before



Anne Harris, left, and Charlotte Carver with posters from the Carlo Acutis exhibition that was held at St Joseph's Church, Malvern, in June.

he became ill and died. Since his death he has become known as much for his deep spirituality as for his aptitude in using computers to express his Catholic faith.

A seven-year-old Brazilian boy was healed from a rare pancreatic disorder after coming into contact with a piece of one of Blessed Carlo's t-shirts, leading to his beatification.

"I'm bowled over by Blessed Carlo's accomplishments... and full of admiration for the way he decided to live his life."

Charlotte Carver

Anne said: "I 'met' Blessed Carlo about six years ago when I was researching a talk I gave on Eucharistic miracles, and was both startled and fascinated by his biography. After becoming aware of the catalogue of his Exhibition it gave me great hope for the future to discover a young person of his depth of faith and cheerfulness as the first fruits of his generation.

"He championed the traditional basis for Catholic devotion, the Eucharist and the Rosary, while having a love of new technology. This foundation of the living tradition, the complete involvement in the present and the preparation for the future somehow merged

in this young life and are an example to us all. The combination of his enormous sense of fun mixed with personal discipline and profound holiness recall for us the attraction of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, but at a much younger age." **Charlotte** added: "I am bowled over by Blessed Carlo's accomplishments during his short life and I am full of admiration for the way he decided to live his life.

"Normally, it's the parents who lead their children to the faith, but this boy encouraged his parents to lead a different sort of life from the one they were living.

"He was surely sent to be an example and friend to us all, and in particular to the young.

"With four grandchildren (now aged seven to 11 years) I'd like to introduce them, by degrees, to the example he has set us, all of us, and encourage them to regard him as their 'friend in Heaven.' This applies especially in matters of technology, and when in difficulty, or having success, with their online communication skills. I do consult with him often these days!

"By his example of praying the Rosary daily and attending Mass, and weekly Confession, Blessed Carlo has made me more thoughtful and hopefully more prayerful."

● The new parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis, incorporating the churches of St Peter & Paul, St Michael and St Bernadette in Wolverhampton celebrated the feast day of their new patron in October.

Archbishop Bernard Longley celebrated Mass with a proclamation of the new parish and blessing of an image of Blessed Carlo.



'Inspirational' podcast

A new podcast has been launched which celebrates the lives and influence of women in scripture – some of the greatest women of all time.

Natalie Orefice, Diocesan Advisor for Parish Evangelisation, presents a monthly podcast with dynamic women from across the Diocese, each focusing on a different woman in the Bible who has inspired their lives.

It aims to ask and answer who they are and what they can

teach us today. Each podcast is accompanied by extra reading and resources for those who hunger for more.

The podcast is part of the God Who Speaks initiative, helping to deepen faith and love of the scriptures.

People can subscribe to the podcast through Spotify, iTunes or SoundCloud. The podcasts are also available on the Diocesan website: www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/women-in-scripture

MAC supports 'school family'

A NEW multi-academy company (MAC) has been formed consisting of 12 Catholic schools and 4,000 pupils.

Our Lady of the Magnificat Multi-Academy Company was established at the start of September bringing together Our Lady of Lourdes and Holy Family Multi-Academies.

It consists of three secondary schools, one middle school, five primary schools and three first schools across south Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

The emphasis is on supporting "the whole school family" in the wake of the coronavirus and helping students understand the world around them.

One way in which students are gaining an insight into global issues is through the MAC's involvement in the Afghan Refugee Students scheme.

Warwickshire County Council approached the MAC to see if it wanted to be involved and Trinity Catholic Secondary School in Leamington was selected to take part.

Thomas Leverage, Catholic Senior Executive Leader (CSEL), said: "We have already supported refugee students from Syria and Iraq and we are happy to provide for Afghanistan refugee children as well."

"We can provide them with academic studies in maths and English and in other areas such as helping them with things like application forms for jobs and provide support for mental health and wellbeing issues."

The MAC already has responsibility for 4,000 pupils and 678 members of staff, but there are already plans in place to double its size to 24 schools by next year.

Thomas added: "We welcome pupils who are from the Catholic faith, people with different faiths or have no religion at all."

"We want to give everyone a good education and great opportunities for career progression or life at university."

Third anniversary reader survey

TO mark the third anniversary of *The Sower* in its current form, readers are being asked to take part in a short survey to help shape the publication's future.

Please take the time to answer the questions below, then cut out the form and send it to:

**Communications Office,
Archdiocese of Birmingham,
Cathedral House, St Chad's
Queensway, Birmingham B4
6EX or email your answers to:
communications@rcaob.org.uk**

Thanks in advance for your support and feedback.

Your Name and Parish:

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.....

How often do you think *The Sower* should be published?

1. Annually
2. Bi-annually
3. Quarterly
4. Three times a year
5. More frequently

How would you rate *The Sower* as your diocesan magazine?

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Good
4. Average
5. Below average

How do you prefer to read *The Sower*?

1. As a printed publication
2. Online

What kind of stories do you like to read about in *The Sower*?

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What other type of articles would you like to see published in the magazine?

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Any other comments?

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Our minds are focused on what really matters

THE COVID-19 pandemic has focused our minds on what really matters and has also brought out the best in people. We have had the opportunity to get back to the basics of our faith and become acutely aware of the part we all need to play in the service of others, especially the vulnerable and those in particular need.

One example being the work done by Tabor House to provide shelter for the homeless in central Birmingham.

Despite the restrictions faced in 2020, our Archdiocese was blessed with the ordination of four new priests and three new permanent deacons. We were

By **ARCHBISHOP**
BERNARD LONGLEY

also delighted to have celebrated the episcopal ordinations of Bishops David Evans and Stephen Wright and the appointment of Vicar General Canon Richard Walker.

With churches partially reopening later in 2020, numbers attending Mass increased and a priority for 2021 was to provide a safe environment, so that all our parishioners could return to Sunday worship at the earliest opportunity. By embracing technology and live streaming of Mass in particular, many parishes

were able to maintain contact with existing parishioners as well as attracting new people.

Similarly, schools were able to continue to provide lessons for pupils and opportunities to celebrate Mass together.

We are excited by the continued progress of our *Diocesan Vision*, and to be sharing this with our parishioners as we begin to implement the changes necessary to achieve our vision of developing and supporting vibrant and joyful communities full of missionary disciples.

Whilst the 2020 Report and Accounts state our financial results, they also are an



opportunity to reflect on all the work that so many do to further our Mission. I am grateful to the many people who have given themselves in service to all aspects of our work as we proclaim the good news to those whose lives we touch.

The objectives of the Archdiocese may be summarised as follows:

We provide:



Maintenance and support of clergy during their active service and in retirement.



Relief of the poor and those in need.



Generally, for any such charitable purpose or purposes as in the opinion of the Archbishop may be conducive to the advancement or maintenance of the Roman Catholic Religion in the Archdiocese.

We support:



The provision of religious services.



Maintenance and upkeep of churches, schools, presbyteries and parish buildings.



Education and youth services for children attending Diocesan schools, and young members of the Church.



Education and training for clergy and those wishing to be ordained.

THERE are many people across the Archdiocese who undertake work to benefit the public at large and the communities served by the parishes.

These include:

- Evangelisation and Catechesis.
- Outreach work with disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society.
- Provision of support to the elderly, particularly at parish level by providing essential community gathering places, organised activities, support and advice.
- Assisting with mental health and other health issues through our hospital and prison chaplains.

- Working with those struggling financially to supply basic needs for their families such as clothing and food, by providing support through the activities of organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul and food and clothing banks.

- Family and Marriage guidance, and
- Family support.

These objectives are achieved primarily through the parishes and schools working together with the many Catholic societies and organisations based in the Archdiocese.



It has been estimated that volunteers contributed £7.3m worth of time to the Archdiocese in 2020.

Impact from pandemic felt in all areas of crucial work

THE work of the Diocese has undoubtedly been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government restrictions imposed in March 2020.

Subsequently all churches were closed for some months as were both central and parish offices.

Financially there have been three main impacts: on income received, on costs and on investment values.

For the period when public Masses were not possible the normal Sunday collections could not be taken. Measures were put in place to encourage giving by other means e.g. standing orders, and the Diocesan website was configured to enable it to accept online donations for any of the parishes within the Diocese.

Income from hall hire and other sundry sales has ceased, or been greatly reduced, but this has been mitigated by the fact that costs have reduced commensurately.

General costs have been reduced in many cases since offices were temporarily unusable and salary costs were mitigated by the Government Furlough scheme. However, costs have increased through the need for additional personal protection - most especially at parishes.

Finally, the value of Diocesan Investments fell sharply in the early part of 2020 as the full impact of the virus became better known. However, since then, the portfolio has recovered much of its value, although it remains below the level at the start of the year. Income from investments is expected to reduce.

(See income and expenditure charts on p28 and 29 for more details).



Fatima House Deputy Co-ordinator and Columban Missionary Nathalie Marytsch, right, with resident Shamim in the kitchen area of the facility which supports up to nine women at one time.

Legacies provide the lifeblood for many essential services

LEGACIES and donations to the Archdiocese amounted to £11.29 million in 2020 – around 58 per cent of total income.

Although this figure was down by several millions compared to the previous year (2019), it remains the lifeblood for many good causes and charitable projects that benefit the parishes and the network of Catholic schools. These include the Clergy Training Fund, the Diocesan Education Service, the Poor Mission Fund and support for causes such as Fatima House (see below and pages 26 and 27).

Leaving a legacy to a parish is a way for Catholics to acknowledge the faith and sense of community that has sustained them through their lives. It is also an affordable way to give.

In addition, all gifts in wills are tax efficient, as no inheritance tax is paid on a gift to the Church.

Many vital projects benefit from charitable donations and gifts in wills from parishioners.

The **Clergy Training Fund** finances the costs of formation of seminarians preparing for the priesthood and those men in formation for the permanent diaconate in the Archdiocese.

The fund also finances the cost of clergy who are doing further studies and events organised for the ongoing formation of clergy.

In 2020 there were four ordinations to the priesthood, and three permanent deacons were appointed. The Vocations Office primary purpose is to promote vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life.

Located close to the centre of Birmingham, **Fatima House** is a partnership project that offers safe shelter to female asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute and homeless.

Up to nine women can be housed at Fatima House. Women are referred to the project by specialist agencies including Brushstrokes, St Chad's Sanctuary, Restore Refugee Action and the British Red Cross among others.

These agencies support the women with their asylum claim and with moving their lives forward. Fatima House offers a warm welcome to the women who stay there.

A team of Columban Missionaries led by Mauricio Silva and Nathalie Marytsch manage the project on a day-to-day basis.

Father Hudson's Care supports

the governance, building and financial management of the project.

The Saint Vincent De Paul Society (SVP) also contributes to provide Fatima House guests with access to a small weekly allowance. Many other groups, organisations and individuals support the project by providing essential donations of food, clothes, toiletries and household items.

The project came about in 2015, when the Archdiocese was considering how it could respond to the continuing refugee crisis.

During this time it became apparent that a need existed to support destitute asylum seekers already living in the Diocese.

Fatima House welcomed its first two women in July 2016. Over the past five years the project has been able to accommodate 45 women, offering almost 15,000 of shelter bed-nights and supported them with more than £40 from the Fatima House Destitution Fund.

Fatima House residents are extremely grateful to all those who make it possible for the project to deliver such amazing outcomes.

240

maintained Catholic schools in the Archdiocese

Diocesan Education Service 2020

£8.3 million allocated for capital works in our schools from the grant assisted capital programme.

- **96** different projects.
- **31** projects cost over **£100,000**.
- **4** were over **£200,000**

237 schools operating under the charity's trust deed

OF WHICH:

203 schools for children aged four-11.

34 schools for those aged 11-16/19, operate under the charity's trust.

3 operate under separate trust deeds.

7 maintained schools converted to Academy Status.

121 Academy schools operate under 18 Multi-Academy Companies (MACs).

● 2020 also saw the introduction of Catholic Senior Education Leaders (CSELs), a hugely positive step in the executive leadership of Multi-Academy Companies.

Mission to secure, protect and improve education

THE Mission of the Diocesan Education Service (DES) is to announce the joy of the Gospel by securing, protecting and improving the provision of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese.

Based in Coleshill, it maintains high-quality Religious Education and Catholic Life in schools through an advisory and support service.

The work of the DES includes training for school staff and formation of educational leaders as well as monitoring teaching standards.

A strategic aim is to protect the sustainability

of school buildings through planning and capital programmes.

The remit includes obtaining grant finance and supporting schools in funding bids to Government, local authorities and other organisations. It also includes management of building projects and the administration of School Building Fund accounts.

The DES works with the Catholic Education Service, Department for Education, local authorities and other national agencies.

£4m investment leads to more secondary school places on offer



Cardinal Newman Deputy Head Boy Madhav Ketheeswararajah and Head Girl Kirtthi Sri Baskaran, both 17, outside the new dining area – part of the programme funded by the Government's School Rebuilding Programme.

THE DES team had design input into an ongoing expansion project at Cardinal Newman Catholic School in Coventry, which has already increased the number of secondary school places it offers.

An initial £4 million funding boost provided by the local authority has provided new kitchen and dining facilities, together with a refurbishment of existing teaching spaces.

The DES worked with architects and the school on plans to ensure maximum benefit to students.

Cardinal Newman is one of the first 50 schools to benefit from new state-of-the-art facilities

under the Government's new School Rebuilding Programme.

A total of £20 million will be spent on creating an enhanced education environment at the school, which is one of seven that form Holy Cross Catholic Multi-Academy Company (MAC).

The new dining hall with seating for 400 students features a fully-fitted catering kitchen and toilet facilities. Interior design elements include high-finish concrete columns and the domed roof lighting allows natural light into the building.

A mezzanine upper floor, for use by sixth form students, is accessed by an internal floating

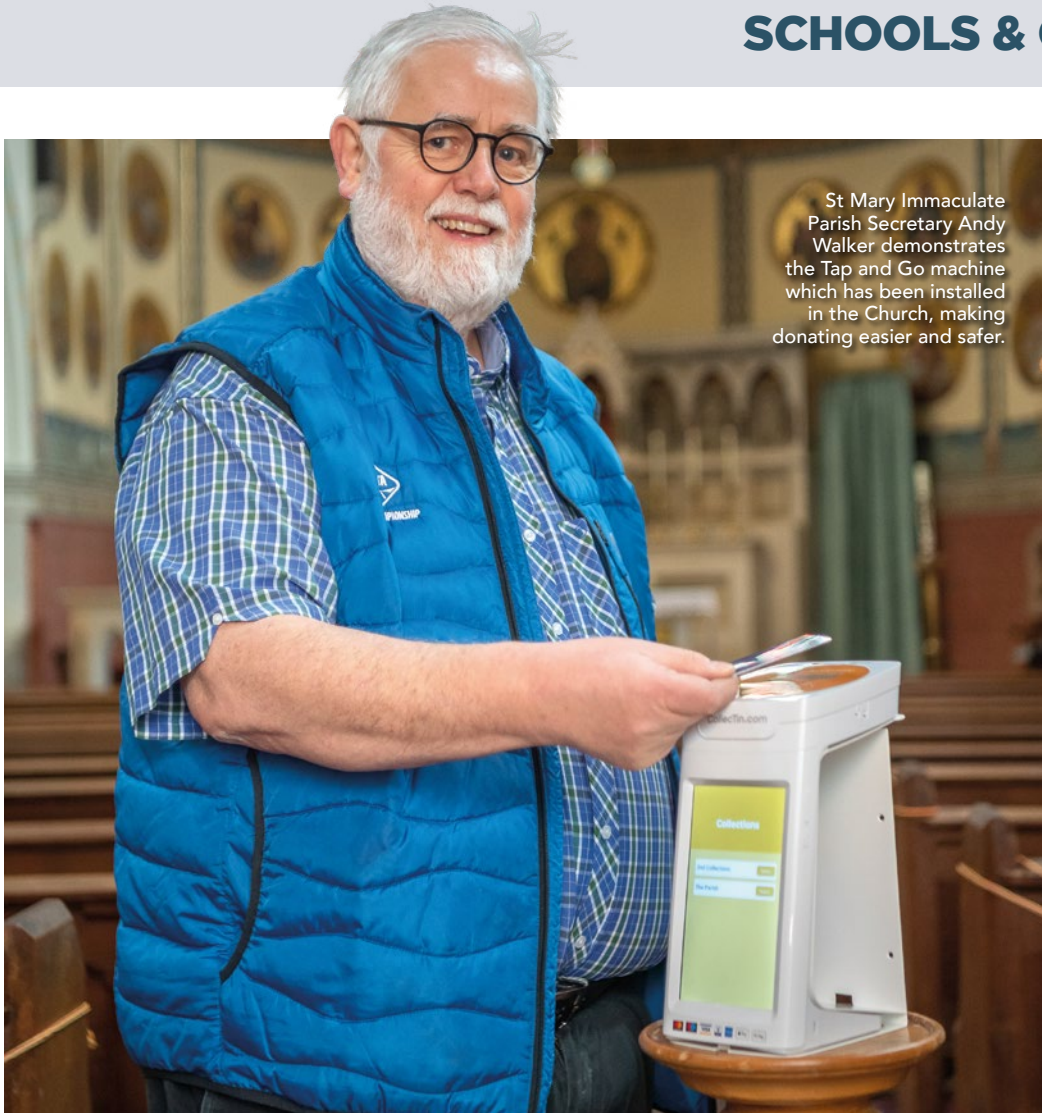
staircase or accessible lift.

Refurbishment of existing teaching spaces has increased the capacity of school by 30 to 250.

Head Teacher, Emma O'Connor, said: "The school is extremely pleased to be receiving this investment.

"The dining hall has been beautifully designed and it puts the student at the heart of the dining experience.

"The additional refurbishment of the laboratories and the much-needed additional classrooms will ensure that the students are able to enjoy learning in an environment they deserve. It really is an exciting time."



St Mary Immaculate Parish Secretary Andy Walker demonstrates the Tap and Go machine which has been installed in the Church, making donating easier and safer.

Maryvale focus shifts to online teaching and exams to offset pandemic

WITH the appointment of the new Dean, Dr Birute Briliute in January 2020 the Institute was able to focus on the teaching programme offered.

In response to the global pandemic all teaching and exams were moved online from March 2020 for both academic years.

The Institute also began rationalising courses offered and focusing on student recruitment.

We were also delighted that Bishop David Evans, newly appointed auxiliary bishop, was appointed to the Maryvale Institute Council.

The financial impact on the Institute of Covid-19 has been significant and required the Institute to reorganize and reduce costs, with an ongoing review of operations continuing through 2021.

Contactless donations embraced by more and more parishes

REGULAR offertory donations form the financial bedrock of the good work carried out in Archdiocese.

Throughout the pandemic, people have continued to donate to their parish or made regular, or one-off contributions to a specific diocesan fund.

An online giving facility introduced at Easter 2020 has ensured a steady stream of income while physical collections during Mass remain suspended. This system also minimises risk and costs the parish less to manage, so money goes further. Anyone who has online banking can set this up online.

Donations can be made to specific parishes, the diocese centrally or other areas such as the Clergy Training Fund. These single donations contribute to the financial health of the parish alongside the stability of regular donations. Further details can be found on the Archdiocese website at: www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/support-our-work.

During 2020, contactless payment devices were trialled and installed in a number of

churches to help offset the impact of the removal of the traditional collection after churches reopened.

The closure of churches had a significant impact on donations, which fell by more than 20 per cent. After the partial re-opening of churches, it was not possible to recommence the usual 'plate' collections, impacting both parish income and donations to other causes.

The income shortfall was offset to some degree by an increase in planned giving and the increased use of contactless devices.

One parish – St Mary Immaculate in Warwick – has now fully embraced the scheme as the way forward and many others are installing the 'Tap and Go' machines, which allow people to choose from one of a number of pre-set amounts and then just tap their card.

Steve Baylis, Head of the Archdiocese Development Team, said: "Although Tap and Go does not replace cash donations it gives parishioners more options when it comes to giving – and the donations go directly into the parish bank account."

The Diocesan annual pilgrimage to Lourdes was held as a virtual event in 2020 and proved to be a great success:

- 6** day event.
- 773** hours of online content.
- 21** videos and live-streams.
- 3,500** social media engagements (likes, comments, shares).
- 9,000** visits to the pilgrimage web page.

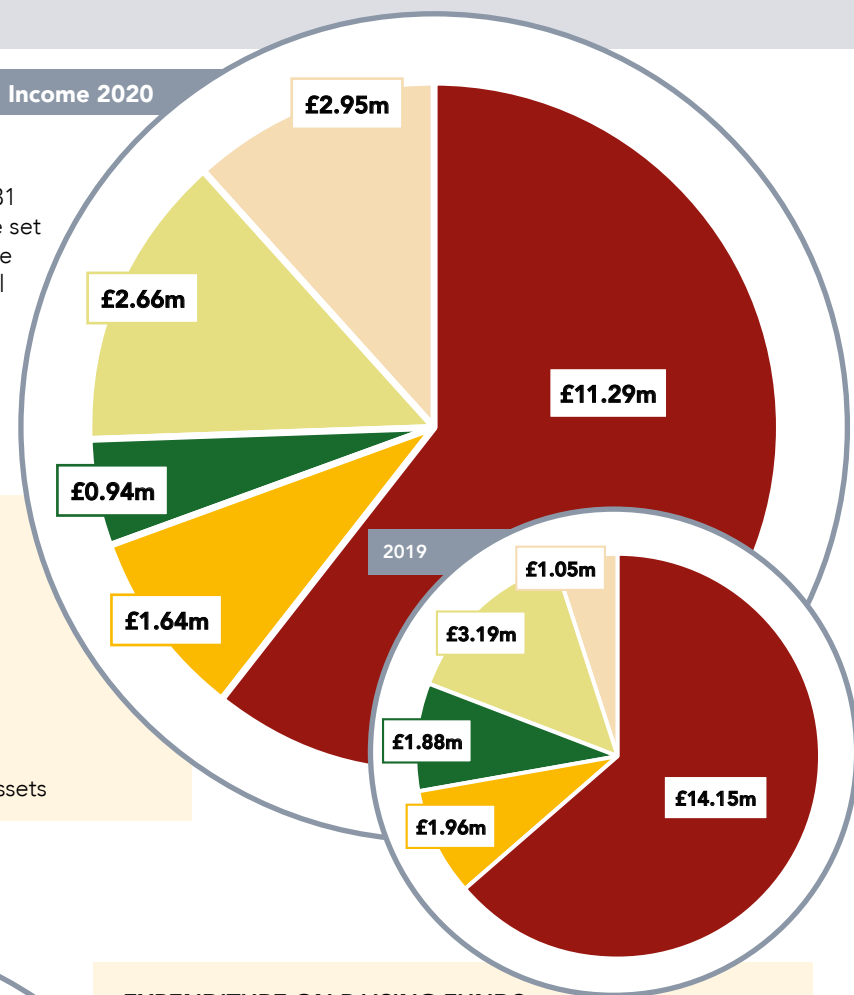
Total Income and Expenditure

(including restricted funds)

THESE summarised financial results for the year ended 31 December 2020 have been extracted from the complete set of annual financial statements on which the auditors have expressed an unqualified audit opinion. The full financial statements are available on the Diocesan website and on the Charity Commission website under our charity reference number 234216.

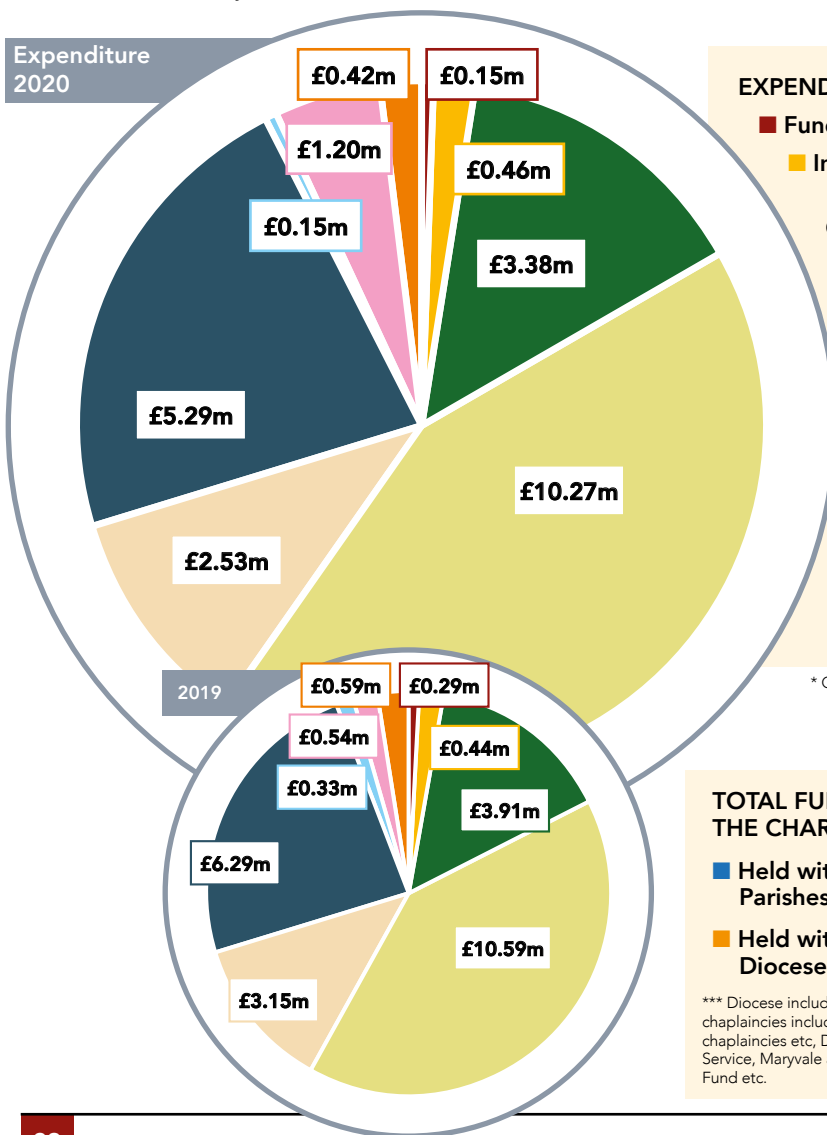
The Statement of Financial Activities of the Archdiocese for the year ended 31 December 2020 shows income of £19.48m (2019: £22.23m) analysed as follows:

- **Donations and legacies – £11.29m**
offertories, donations, legacies, Gift Aid, etc.
- **Income from charitable activities – £1.64m**
votive candles, repository and fees, etc.
- **Income from other activities – £0.94m**
bazaars, raffles, etc.
- **Investment income, including interest – £2.66m**
- **Other income – £2.95m**
including net gains on disposals of tangible fixed assets



Expenditure amounted to £23.85m (2019: £26.13m) analysed as follows:

Expenditure 2020



EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS:

- **Fundraising operations – £0.15m**
- **Investment management costs – £0.46m**

CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES:

- **Liturgical, Chaplaincies, grants made etc. – £3.38m**
- **Curial, Parish and Chaplaincies* etc. general and administrative costs – £10.27m**
- **Clergy costs – £2.53m**
- **Property – £5.29m**
including depreciation and impairment
- **Votive candles, newspapers and repositories costs – £0.15m**
- **Schools costs – £1.20m**
- **Legal and professional fees – £0.42m**
including auditor's remuneration**

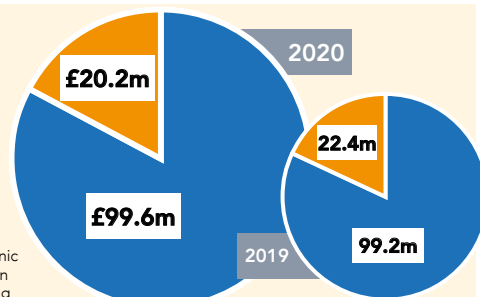
* Chaplaincy etc. general costs include Diocesan activities relating to university and other chaplaincies catering for specific communities and groups within the Archdiocese.

** Legal and professional fees include costs relating to IICSA of £0.19m (2019: £0.28m).

TOTAL FUNDS OF THE CHARITY

- **Held within Parishes**
- **Held within the Diocese*****

*** Diocese includes central Curia, chaplaincies including hospitals/ethnic chaplaincies etc, Diocesan Education Service, Maryvale and Clergy Training Fund etc.



UNRESTRICTED FUNDS – INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

INCOMING RESOURCES	2020			2019		
	Parishes	Diocese	Total unrestricted funds	Parishes	Diocese	Total unrestricted funds
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Donations and legacies	9.21	0.49	9.7	11.45	0.41	11.86
Income from charitable activities	0.49	1.15	1.64	0.96	1	1.96
Income from other activities	0.82	0	0.82	1.78	0.02	1.8
Investment income, including interest, dividends and rent	2.15	0.42	2.57	2.49	0.57	3.06
Other income (including net gains on disposals of tangible fixed assets)	0.72	1.43	2.15	0.88	0.18	1.06
TOTAL INCOME	13.39	3.49	16.88	17.56	2.18	19.74
RESOURCES EXPENDED	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Cost of raising funds						
Fund raising operations	0.11	-	0.11	0.23	-	0.24
Investment management costs	0.43	0.03	0.46	0.43	0.01	0.44
Liturgical, and pastoral costs.	0.76	0.43	1.19	1.59	0.42	2.01
Curial, Parish & Chaplaincy etc. general support costs	6.61	3.47	10.08	6.89	3.47	10.36
Clergy Costs	1.11	1.08	2.19	1.41	1.37	2.78
Property refurbishment, maintenance and repairs	3.14	0.44	3.58	3.17	0.45	3.62
Depreciation	1.03	0.24	1.27	1.01	0.25	1.26
Bank charges	0.05	0.06	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.16
Votive candles, newspapers and repositories	0.15	-	0.15	0.33	-	0.33
Chaplaincy expenditure	-	1.06	1.06	-	0.88	0.88
Schools costs (including impairment losses)	0.01	0.23	0.24	0.01	0.39	0.40
Grant funding	0.24	0.65	0.89	0.12	0.65	0.77
External audit fees	-	0.06	0.06	-	0.06	0.06
IICSA costs	-	0.19	0.19	-	0.28	0.28
Other professional fees	-	0.16	0.16	-	0.26	0.26
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	13.64	8.10	21.74	15.29	8.56	23.85
INCOME & EXPENDITURE SURPLUS/(LOSS) before gains and transfers	(0.25)	(4.61)	(4.86)	2.27	(6.38)	(4.11)
Gains on stock market holdings and investment properties	2.01	0.40	2.41	5.43	2.28	7.71
Internal transfers (including levies)	(2.11)	1.87	(0.24)	(2.30)	2.49	0.19
NET SURPLUS/(LOSS) AFTER GAINS/LOSSES/TRANSFERS	(0.35)	(2.34)	(2.69)	5.40	(1.61)	3.79

Levies from parishes for 2020 amounted to £2.39m, of which £1.59m was paid to the Diocesan Education Service to fund services to schools.

RESTRICTED FUNDS – comprise the following unexpended balances of donations etc. given for specific purposes:

Restricted funds	Balance as 1st Jan 2020 £000	Income* £000	Expenditure £000	Transfers £000	(Losses)/Gains on investments (stock market and property) £000	Balance at 31st Dec 2020 £000
Poor Mission Fund	403	107	(88)	32	(1)	453
Memorial Mass Fund	436	8	(16)	-	8	436
Religious Workers Accommodation Fund	67	-	(4)	-	-	63
Specific bequests						
- University Chaplaincy	705	15	(8)	(8)	21	725
Other funds	400	15	(25)	(32)	6	364
Canons Chapter Fund	315	6	(13)	-	8	316
Clergy Training Fund	2	144	(400)	519	-	265
Maryvale	254	11	(33)	-	-	232
Diocesan Education Service – schools projects	4,215	799	(971)	-	-	4,043
Other Chaplaincies	7	-	-	-	-	7
Parish building and other projects	2,313	1,441	(505)	(269)	31	3,011
	9,117	2,546	(2,063)	242	73	9,915



Weekly average Mass attendance was approximately

22,200*
(2019: 53,300)

During the year there were:



2,068
baptisms and
receptions
(2019: 4,442)

203
marriages
(2019: 504)



3,695
funerals
(2019: 3,233)

Parish offertories and other collections (excluding tax reclaims) decreased to

£5.4m
(2019: £7.7m)

The average offertory giving amount per head (including children) increased by

£2.11 to £4.66*
per week
(2019: £2.55)

* Figures affected by the Covid-19 pandemic – see story on page 25.

What can you do?

AS we take to heart Archbishop Bernard's call for many more lay people to work co-responsibly, it is perhaps the words of Pope Leo XIII that could be the focus of our prayer – "What about you? What are you going to do?" How are you being called to play your part in Christ's Mission? Could you become a school governor? A MAC director? Or could you set up a standing order, or review your giving?



During 2020 the Development team helped to secure a £48,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant to help support the development of Harvington Hall.

Wide-ranging projects bear fruit

THROUGHOUT 2020 the Archdiocese performed well in many areas, adapting to the difficulties of the global pandemic to come up with innovative work-arounds or solutions. These achievements are across a wide number of projects and teams. They include:

Diocesan Curia

The Diocesan Curia continues to support clergy in the parishes as well as providing financial support for pastoral care and youth formation activities, religious education, area catechists, marriage guidance and poor parishes.

Financial support was also given to Catholic national organisations together with chaplaincies and commissions within the Archdiocese e.g. prisons, hospitals, universities, ethnic and disabled groups, ecumenism, interfaith, justice and peace, and overseas development.

The Archdiocese continued to support its associated charities, Father Hudson's Society, St Mary's College, Oscott, The Kenelm Youth Trust Ltd and Barberi Newman Academy Trust.

Evangelisation

Evangelisation staff were furloughed for part of the year, and when they returned to work responded to the challenge of the pandemic by developing online sessions, YouTube videos and podcasts to remain connected to

parish communities. The national God Who Speaks campaign was actively promoted throughout the year, with Alpha and Sycamore projects also run online via Zoom.

Monthly Zoom meetings were established to share ideas on New Evangelisation, and support was provided for a Diocesan-wide weekly Lent retreat. A Covid-19 impact survey was also undertaken.

Marriage and Family Life

The highlight of the year was the Thanksgiving Mass for Marriage, celebrated at St Chad's and live streamed. Over 100 couples with significant anniversaries were represented.

Earlier in the year, the co-ordinator attended the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life in Rome, an international conference on the pastoral care of the elderly.

As part of the Year of the Word, resources were provided to parishes to encourage families to explore scripture in the home, with weekly reflection on the Sunday Gospel being circulated, as well as Lenten resources.

Communications

In 2020 the work of the communications team increased as many more resources and videos were added online to support Catholics during the pandemic, as well as updates on church closures, vaccinations and other Covid-19 related

issues. The number of visitors to the website increased to 186,277 from 130,009 in 2019 and 18,292 of these were new visitors.

There were two editions of the official Diocesan publication, *The Sower*, in 2020. The Advent issue focused on the good work of families, parishes, schools and communities during the pandemic.

Development

Despite a major shift within the funding landscape the development team successfully secured funding valued at just over £1 million via 49 successful grant applications in 2020.

The team also helped secure a grant of just over £2.9 million from the Bishops' Conference to fund capital works to Catholic churches around the country.

Finances accrued by the team have helped support 35 valuable projects including the Archives Project at the Venerable English College in Rome (awarded by Porticus Foundation) and a successful £186,000 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund used for essential repairs to St Mary & St Egwin Church in Evesham.

Other significant projects for which grants were obtained included £92,000 from Historic England to update St Chad's Cathedral's fire alarm system and £48,000 awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to continue our support and development of Harvington Hall, Worcestershire.

It is clear that 2020 was a very challenging year for all of us, and we are very grateful to clergy and staff and the many volunteers who stepped forward in so many ways to devote their time and energy in support of our mission.

To reopen churches we witnessed many new volunteers coming forward to prepare risk assessments, steward, clean and keep parishioners as safe as possible.

In total, it was estimated that volunteers contributed over £7million of hours during 2020, a quite remarkable figure given the length of lockdown.

The impact of the pandemic is very clear from the numbers in our Financial Report; Mass attendance fell by almost 60%, donations and legacies by 20.4% and overall income by £2.74m or 12%. Marriages and baptisms were also down by more than half, with parish social activity almost completely halted.

Planned Giving continued during lockdown to help mitigate the impact of church closures and we offer our sincere thanks to the many who continued to give or increase giving during the year.

The growth of online and contactless payment devices also helped to offset the overall financial impact. The increase in giving per person per week from £2.11 per week to £4.66 can be explained by the total amount received in the weekly collection being divided by the much lower attendance. Not surprisingly, parish communities primarily dependent on cash donations



Parishioners, such as Pat Francis and Patricia Howe, pictured above, volunteered their time to carry out cleaning in churches to help manage Covid-19 and keep venues safe.

By **CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**

ERIC KIRWAN

fared worse and these tend to be in the more disadvantaged areas of our towns and cities, making their financial situation even more challenging.

Like many organisations we used the furlough scheme to help us protect jobs and support the charity through a difficult period. In addition cost-cutting measures helped to reduce our expenditure by £2.28m.

As a result, the accounts for 2020 show an overall loss of £1.82m with total funds falling from £121.6m to £119.8m.

During 2020 the Archdiocese successfully completed the recruitment of a strengthened permanent professional curia safeguarding team and continued to improve safeguarding arrangements and compliance.

In addition to safeguarding, the curia also includes finance, property, planning, IT, health and safety and development (fundraising) teams to support the mission and parishes of the Archdiocese.

Income to the curia from the parishes is used to support the above, and in addition the Diocesan Education Service, youth services, sick and retired clergy, vocations, evangelisation, hospital, university and prison chaplaincies, national levies.

In an increasingly regulatory environment, the challenge of ensuring compliance has become more complex and placed pressures on both the curia and parishes.

We recognise that we are all still on a journey of recovery and that Covid has not yet 'gone away' and returning to pre-Covid numbers will be difficult for many if not all parishes in 2022.

At the same time there are signs of renewal; churches are open. Mass attendance is increasing as are weddings and baptisms.

We pray that with no further lockdowns and increased vaccination we will see this trend continue in 2022.

We ARE the Church – how we can all help

THERE is already so much valuable work done by so many people within our Church, a huge amount of selfless giving of time and resources from our people right throughout the Archdiocese. Do please consider how you might be able to serve the Lord by helping in your parish.

Offertory giving is vital, as much of our work can only be done with the financial resources to support it. For many, the pandemic has affected their family finances, and we appreciate that many already give all that they are able.

If however you find that you are in a position to do so, perhaps you might be able to increase your regular giving – even 50p per week would make a significant difference, and if you are not

already doing so, please consider making your offerings via bank standing order.

This is easier to administer in parishes, removes the security risks of cash, reduces bank charges, and allows your priest to be more certain as to the income that can be expected.

Your parish will be able to provide you with bank details for you to set this up. If you are eligible to, please also Gift Aid your donations. This increases the value of your offertory by 25% with no extra cost to you.

You can find out more about standing orders, Gift Aid and online giving at:

www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/support-our-work

Thank you!

How useful did you find this report?

If you have any comment or feedback in regards to the financial report, please do contact Sue Simkiss at the Treasurer's Department.

please email her at:
sue.simkiss@rcaob.org.uk
or tel. 0121 230 6283

● For the full financial report, please visit **www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/annual-report**



Pictured with Archbishop Bernard are, left to right, Deacons Peter Crosby, Mark Paine, Jim Brannan, Krzysztof Wasilewski and Gary O'Brien.

New Deacons called by Christ to play a part in God's Unfolding Plan

THEY come from widely different backgrounds ranging from black belt karate to railway engineering – but they share the same spiritual vocation.

The five men appointed to the Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese during 2021 have surprisingly contrasting CVs but they all have been called by Christ to play a part in the Unfolding of God's Plan as missionary disciples.

Birmingham-born **DEACON GARY O'BRIEN**, who serves at St Nicholas Church, Boldmere, practised as a solicitor in London and Leeds before changing course to teach at a Catholic high school.

In parallel with his role as a deacon he is studying for a Licence in Canon Law while also working part-time with the Metropolitan (Marriage) Tribunal taking depositions and witness evidence and acting as Advocate.

"I had a clear experience of being called to the Diaconate during a Life in the Spirit event at St Mary's College, Oscott," said the father-of-two.

"As a parish minister, my task is to assist my parish priest to build up the community by my liturgical ministry and my pastoral work amongst the people."

DEACON PETER CROSBY, of St Mary of the Angels, Aldridge, was introduced to the Catholic Faith by his wife Anne at university.

For most of the past 30 years he has been designing and modifying electrical systems for passenger trains, and nowadays he combines four days a week of engineering with one day as a hospital chaplain.

"God had been dropping hints for more than a year that I should join the Diaconate," said Deacon Peter, who believes that listening is the most important element of his pastoral role.

"The more crazy I thought the idea was, the more ridiculous the hints got - including bumping into a bishop I'd never met before

"God had been dropping hints for more than a year that I should join the Diaconate... including bumping into a bishop I'd never met before and being told I should be a deacon!"

Deacon Peter Crosby

and being told I should be a deacon!"

Polish-born **DEACON KRZYSZTOF WASILEWSKI**, a lifelong Catholic who came over to Britain in 2004, has a PhD in Medical Science and works in a pharmacy in Cheltenham.

As a 4th degree black belt in Kyokushin Karate he has represented the UK internationally at European and World tournaments.

Serving as a permanent deacon at St

George's and Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Worcester, he entered the Diaconate with a sense of calling by God to serve others.

"I feel the most important element of my role is serving others with sacraments, bringing them to Christ and supporting them in any possible way," he said.

DEACON JIM BRANNAN, a former coffee factory worker for 33 years, never lost touch with his Catholic roots.

He had a "couple of powerful moments" which brought him fully back into God's plan.

"In early 2015 I felt I was being asked to become a deacon and I ignored it and ignored it," said Deacon Jim, who is serving in the Banbury parishes of St John the Evangelist and St Joseph the Worker.

"However I then got to a point where I couldn't move in my faith or in prayer.

So I decided to open the door Christ was asking me to go through."

He added: "I believe I am being called to work with prisoners who are the forgotten people on the fringes of our society."

DEACON MARK PAINE is a primary school deputy head teacher with more than 25 years' teaching experience, mainly within Catholic schools. The father-of-two is based at Our Lady and St Rose of Lima/St Peter's Church in south Birmingham and he is a part-time chaplain at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

"Chaplaincy, social action and education are my main interests and strengths and I would love to do some work for the Archdiocese in these areas in the future," he said.