

the

SOWER

News from



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM



Pupils cultivate success in bid to

live simply

» SEE FOCUS ON CLIMATE ACTION PAGES 3 & 4

Great joy as pilgrims enjoy return to Lourdes



» SEE CENTRE PAGES



By ARCHBISHOP

BERNARD LONGLEY

To our Diocesan family,

WELCOME to the summer edition of *The Sower* magazine. I hope you and your families are well and looking forward to a break over the coming months.

It is a joy to hear that more and more of you have been returning to parish life after the difficulties of the last two years, and the encouragement to fulfil the Sunday Obligation from Pentecost Sunday has further paved the way for this.

The first weekend of June not only commemorated the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady and the Apostles as we marked Pentecost, but also celebrated Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Many parish communities across the Archdiocese embraced the opportunity to gather together in great numbers and celebrate after two years of restrictions and uncertainty.

That community spirit is sure to continue over the summer months as we welcome the Commonwealth Games to the Archdiocese.

An ecumenical *'Service of Praise: The churches of Birmingham welcome the Commonwealth Games'* will be held at our Diocesan Mother Church, St Chad's Cathedral, on Sunday 24 July.

With guest speakers and a varied musical programme this looks set to be a wonderful celebration just days ahead of the Games.

Should you wish to attend please see **page 5** for details of how to book a free ticket.

We are also preparing to welcome the relics of St Bernadette to the Archdiocese in October, as part of a national tour.

You will be able to visit and venerate the relics whilst they are in situ at St Chad's Cathedral, Our Lady of Lourdes in Hednesford and the Immaculate Conception in Bicester.



Great community spirit set to continue through summer

A number of events are planned at these three venues, please see **page 9** for more information.

This month I will be celebrating the Ordination of Martin Casey and Andrew Lansberry to the Permanent Diaconate and the Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacons Toby Duckworth and Steven Fleming (see **page 13**).

Please do pray for all those discerning their vocation at this time. We need more individuals to step forward and answer God's call to serve in the priesthood, permanent diaconate or religious life.

Our Faith community was very much celebrated during the recent Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, returning in-person after a two-year absence because of the pandemic.

Hundreds of pilgrims from across the Archdiocese immersed themselves in five days of liturgical celebrations to mark the 80th Diocesan pilgrimage.

I wish to thank all those involved in the organisation of this trip, which is featured on the **centre pages**.

As our lives continue to return to normal I cannot express

enough the joy of once again being able to celebrate Mass, meet people, visit our parishes and schools and host meetings and events in-person.

The importance and necessity of human contact has been bought into sharp focus in recent years and shows just how much we need one another.

Our love and support for others has been evident in recent months as we respond to the war in Ukraine.

Many parish communities across the Archdiocese have been most generous in their support – financial and through prayer – for those who are suffering.

There have also been many offers of accommodation to welcome those who are fleeing the war and are settling, temporarily or even possibly long-term, in Britain.

Our work to support those displaced from Ukraine will continue for as long as necessary. Read more on **page 7**.

Just as we help those in need we are also continuing to help our environment.

It is truly heartening to see how parishes, schools and communities have embraced the

environmental challenge that faces us all.

The commitment to protect and improve our common home is evident in the various initiatives taking place throughout the Archdiocese.

Let us hope the projects featured on **pages 3 and 4** inspire even more people to get involved and act as we continue to respond to the climate emergency through caring for creation.

Finally, I wish to thank all who contributed to our 'Walking Together' journey – the Diocesan response to the Synod.

It was most encouraging to see so many of you taking such an active role and I look forward to that enthusiasm continuing as we implement our own Diocesan Vision. See **pages 6 and 9**.

Thank you for your continued support as we navigate our way through 2022. Please keep me in your prayers as I keep you in mine.

With every blessing.

+ Bernard

Parishioners throughout the Archdiocese are being encouraged to champion climate justice in any way they can and answer Pope Francis's direct call to take on the stewardship of creation

Determined action aims to make our home a home for Him

THE Climate Action Group, consisting mostly of lay people of all ages, was formed by Archbishop Bernard and the Trustees after passionate activists in the Archdiocese proposed a meeting.

The Climate Group is carrying out the intention to reduce our impact on the environment, to mitigate against climate change and to champion climate justice, following the principles of *Laudato Si'* – Pope Francis's direct call to us all as Christians to take on the stewardship of creation.

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs".

St Francis of Assisi

The Action Group is working to: Reduce Our Carbon Footprint

We are reviewing the use of fossil fuels in Diocesan buildings to see where we can reduce use.

The majority of parishes already have green energy contracts and the Archdiocese's investments support just causes and do not fund fossil fuels* or unethical practices. The Diocesan Education Service (DES) secured funding worth £987,000 to enlist the help of external specialists to create strategic heat decarbonisation plans for schools, which show how they can use energy more efficiently, save money and reduce harmful carbon emissions. Thus far 42 schools will receive plans and we hope to apply some of this learning to our parishes and other buildings.

Live More Simply

The LiveSimply award is an opportunity for Catholic communities – parishes, schools, religious orders and chaplaincies – to respond to *Laudato Si'*.

That's what Living Simply is mainly about; introducing behaviour and attitude changes and challenging the consumerism that harms nature.

The award is earned by communities and schools who can show how they have been living:

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

Nearly every one of our 237 Diocesan schools has now registered for the Award,

demonstrating that the desire to respond to the climate crisis is real and determined.

We are now encouraging our parishes to register for and achieve the LiveSimply Award.

This needs someone in the parish to take the lead on forming a group, registering, completing an action plan and making sure that the parish progresses in its journey.

If you are passionate in matters of climate justice, we invite you to be a Climate Champion and to agree to assist your parish in this work. Contact:

climateaction@rcaob.org.uk to register your interest or visit caford.org.uk/Campaign/LiveSimply-award to find out more.

*The Archdiocese's investment policy excludes investments in any company which derives more than 5% of its revenues from fossil fuels.

Cerys receives community support for litter pick drive

YOUNG environmentalist Cerys Hard has inspired her local community to care for our common home.

As well as being an eco-warrior at St Anthony's Catholic Primary Academy in Fordhouses, Wolverhampton, the 11-year-old has set up an increasingly popular community litter picking scheme in her village.

Volunteers meet at St Anthony of Padua Catholic Church after Mass on the last Sunday of every month and have collected dozens of bags of rubbish from the local area.

Cerys said: "It is important to look after where we live rather than treating it like a bin. I want to teach people that we are destroying the Earth with pollution and our actions. We do the litter picks after Mass to make it easier for people to attend. They are amazing."

The scheme has also received backing from the local council, which provides waste bags, litter pickers and takes away the rubbish.

Cerys would like to set up a community library as her next project.



Setting a great example... Cerys Hard picks litter near her home.



Small steps to save the planet are rewarded

A school which teaches its pupils to help save the planet in small, manageable steps has been rewarded for its green efforts.

Outdoor learning is a major part of the curriculum at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, in Yardley Wood, Birmingham, and that, along with a number of other initiatives, has led to it being presented with a LiveSimply Award from CAFOD.

The awards are given to Catholic communities who can show how they have been living: **simply; in solidarity with people in poverty; sustainably with creation.** Children at Our Lady of Lourdes have their own eco-classroom, are encouraged to recycle everything they can and have recently enjoyed taking part in a plant and share scheme which has seen families enjoying

“Our children are the activists of the future and we want to teach them to care for God’s creation.”

Pauline David

growing their own produce such as tomatoes at home.

Headteacher Pauline David said: “We have always had a passion for recycling, helping the planet and all the themes of Catholic social teaching associated with it.

“St David always spoke about doing the little things well to have the greatest impact. Our



children are the activists of the future and we want to teach them to care for God’s creation. Our message is that doing something little and local now can become big and global eventually.”

Above, pupils Nathan, 10 and Ariella, 9, in front of the school’s eco board which contains information on LiveSimply. FRONT COVER: pupils Olek and Oonagh, both 6, with the wheelbarrow they have decorated as part of the school’s plant and share scheme.

Electric scheme sparks interest

CLERGY and staff who are motorists are being offered the chance to “go electric” under the Interdiocesan Car Scheme.

Newgate Motoring Solutions has 25 years’ experience in supplying car finance to priests and religious orders as well as curial, parish and school staff and their families. The company is now offering great-value deals on Electric Vehicles (EVs) through its “Project Eve.”

Monsignor Mark Crisp, priest in the Parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis in Wolverhampton, and one of the first to join the scheme, said: “I was nervous about switching to an electric car but from the moment it arrived I have had no regrets. It is perfect for my needs in the parish where I make many frequent short trips around the city.”

■ For further information visit www.newgatefinance.com or phone 08000-324900

Sustainable living is paying off

THREE years of hard work encouraging parishioners to **live simply, sustainably with creation and in solidarity with those in poverty**, has been recognised with a LiveSimply Award.

The parishes of St Wulstan’s, Wolstanton and St John’s, Chesterton, both in Staffordshire, have always tried to promote sustainable living, but their efforts have increased in recent years with various awareness campaigns on issues such as recycling, energy saving measures and walking instead of taking the car.

The churches also put together their own recipe booklet to encourage people to consider having meat-free days.

John Chadburn, treasurer of the parish’s CAFOD group, said: “We have got a world which we believe was created by God and we need to look



Pictured at St Wulstan’s are, left to right, St John’s parishioner Kathy Winter, CAFOD group member Carmel Dennison and CAFOD group treasurer John Chadburn.

after it. We had interactive boards at the back of our churches to communicate ideas how people can make a difference by making simple switches or changing their buying habits.

“They were very well received. It’s been a team effort and whilst we are thrilled to receive an award for our work, we see it as an ongoing process and hope people will continue with their lifestyle changes.”



Rekindled community spirit is aim of 'friendly' campaign

CHURCHES, schools and businesses have all joined a campaign to promote a renewed sense of community spirit to link in with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The message to 'fill your street with friendliness' is the idea of the As One group and encourages people to get together in their own communities to reconnect, make new friends and offer support.

Hundreds of banners have gone up across the region encouraging people to set up their own street association and hold events such as tea parties and picnics. St Margaret Mary's Church, in Perry Common, Birmingham, hosted its event to tie in with



Father Simon Ellis displays one of the 'Friendliness' banners at St Margaret Mary's Church.

the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Pentecost Sunday, but Parish Priest Father Simon Ellis believes the arrival of the Commonwealth Games in the city and surrounding areas is also something to celebrate.

He said: "Birmingham is aspiring to be an ever more friendly city and this campaign is about the radiation of friendship through shared experiences. Hosting the Commonwealth Games is something we should not only give thanks for, but build

on as well. There are 72 principalities taking part and it is massively important to embrace them and recognise diversity. Our church community has 17 different nationalities that we know of and we will be celebrating their history and culture."

Events at the church included a jubilee tea party, where members buried a time capsule and planted an olive tree.

■ **To join, or find out more about the campaign, email birmingham@as-one.uk**

Pupils on their marks to embrace own version of showcase event

SCHOOLCHILDREN are preparing to compete in their own version of the Commonwealth Games before the main event arrives.

Eight primary schools, all part of the Caritas Christi in Urbe group in central Birmingham, are taking part in the friendly competition, which will feature traditional games such as the sack race, running and jumping.

A baton relay will take place beforehand, with the baton being walked between the various schools. Messages from each of the schools taking part have been placed inside and they will be read out at the opening

ceremony. Martina Parker, headteacher at St Chad's Catholic Primary School, which is hosting the event, said: "The Games are putting the city on the frontline and are being held not far away from us so we feel it is important for us and the children to embrace that. "The baton for our schools' games represents the drawing together of our eight school communities. We are linked together – as are many Catholic schools – by the Jesuit Virtues." Each school is hosting its own sports day, with the winners from those events being invited to the school competition on July 12.



St Chad's Catholic Primary School pupils Jaxon, 5, Chloe, 7 and Caelan, 8, with Commonwealth Games flags and a baton.

St Chad's to host Service of Praise to welcome Commonwealth visitors

AN ecumenical service to welcome the Games to the city is being held at St Chad's Cathedral at 3pm on Sunday 24 July.

Those due to attend include the Lord

Lieutenant of the West Midlands, the Lord Mayor of Birmingham and the High Sheriff of the West Midlands. Archbishop Bernard Longley will introduce the service and the speaker will be Bishop Mike

Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England. To book a free ticket, and for more information, visit www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/birmingham-2022-commonwealth-games



Short films project is cutting the mustard

A new educational resource has been launched using videos to help deliver a Catholic education.

The Mustard Seeds project offers a series of short films available for use by schools and parishes, produced by professional cameraman Chris Noonan, pictured above.

The first instalment – about the Sacrament of Confirmation – can be bought to download as part of sacramental preparation programmes, with other free and paid downloads due to be released later in the year.

Chris, a parishioner at All Souls Church, Coventry, said: "I've spent 20 years travelling the world filming sports events but, as a regular churchgoer, I always wanted to use my skills to support the faith.

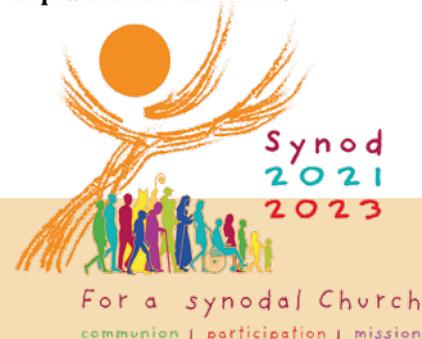
"Children today are so engaged with technology so I wanted to use a contemporary approach to provide them with an alternative way of learning without lessening the message. Nice imagery and graphics provide a positive way of taking information in, and in this instance, remember what the important aspects of confirmation are"

Chris launched the project after creating a number of short Gospel reflections during Lent and Advent during the Covid-19 pandemic. He interviewed Archbishop Bernard Longley and Auxiliary Bishops David Evans and Stephen Wright for the latest videos and filming took place in a number of schools and churches in Birmingham, Coventry and Staffordshire.

He added: "The feedback I've had is fantastic, with schools saying it communicates everything they want children to learn in a timeless and contemporary way. The aim is to build up a library on various topics which can be used again and again.

"I'm very optimistic it will fill a gap for schools in an area which hasn't had a lot of video support in recent times."

■ For more information, visit: <https://mustard-seeds.co.uk/>



Remarkable input helps shape Diocesan response to Synod

THE Archdiocese's "Walking Together" journey is continuing following the completion of the Diocesan Response to the Synod.

The process of listening and discernment that is at the heart of Pope Francis' Synod 2021-2023 is now inspiring the proceedings of ongoing Diocesan Deanery consultations.

Priests are coming together to discuss the way forward towards more co-responsibility in the parishes.

With Pastoral Areas in Oxfordshire and the Midlands the first to meet, Deaneries are seeking feedback on how parishes can support each other across the boundaries and how more people can be actively involved in parish life.

The process of talking together, already

rooted in the *Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan*, has been given a boost by the Synodal Pathway process and also by people's keenness to meet up again following the pandemic.

Parishes, schools, agencies and individuals provided remarkable input when asked to contribute to the Diocesan response to the Synod, with 90 per cent sending in submissions compared with rates across the country of between 50 and 80 per cent.

The Diocesan Synthesis, incorporating the feedback, is now with the Catholic Bishops' Conference and it will in turn inform the national response and discernment.

The synthesis, which highlighted priorities such as evangelisation,

formation and social outreach, will also feed directly into the *Diocesan Vision*.

Canon Paul Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Diocesan Synodal Committee, said: "By walking together, we have become a truly Synodal Church.

"We are actively learning to listen to each other, to listen to the Holy Spirit and to discern together as an Archdiocese and as individuals.

"Working co-responsibly we all seek to be empowered to be Christ in the world and bring the love of God to others.

"We have heard Pope Francis' invitation and have responded with enthusiasm. We are at the beginning of an exciting journey, filled with hope and trusting in the will of God." See page nine for update on the *Diocesan Vision*.

In 1902, Father George Vincent Hudson set up a rescue centre to help and protect vulnerable young people. This year the organisation he established celebrates a landmark anniversary with more plans to expand its service and help those most in need...



Liubov Polyayeva and her son Daniel, who are originally from Russia, play chess with Brushstrokes Community Development Worker Bryan Kirkup during a games evening to encourage asylum seekers to socialise.

Caring role continues to expand as agency marks 120 years of community support

THE principal social care agency of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, Father Hudson's Care, is marking its 120th anniversary by re-doubling its efforts to help those in need.

The Birmingham Diocesan Rescue Society was set up by Fr George Vincent Hudson in 1902, with the original aim of protecting homeless and friendless Catholic children.

Over the years the focus has widened – and the name has changed – to include care for older and disabled people and a wide range of community projects, all of which are powerful expressions of the Gospel

command to love one's neighbour as oneself.

"Father Hudson said that 'the only antidote to routine is freedom', and our ethos demands that we never become enchained by routine or close ourselves off to only doing what we've always done," said Chief Executive Officer Andy Quinn. "As new needs arise, we seek to rise up to meet them."

Last year, still living with the impact of the pandemic, Father Hudson's Care was offering 17 different services to support those in need.

Notwithstanding the fact that everyone was working flat out,

the charity agreed to liaise with Fr Michael White from Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham and the Tabor House management committee to double the homelessness service that they provide together. This will come to fruition in a newly refurbished parish base by the end of 2022 at a substantial cost. A decision was also taken to support three new Community Sponsorship schemes for Syrian refugee families in parishes around, and connected to, the Archdiocese.

Brushstrokes, supporting destitute asylum seekers and refugees fleeing war and famine, has doubled its staff and services

in the last three years.

New Routes, supporting children and young people who need a safe home to live in, has recently approved two more foster carer households.

New schools have joined the Family Support Service and the fourth wing at St Joseph's Care Home has been reopened now that the pandemic has receded.

Andy added: "We're not aiming to have 120 different projects to match our anniversary number, but with the help of people in the Archdiocese we will open new services and sustain our existing ones as long as the need is there."

Generous response to those fleeing Ukraine



PARISH communities across the Archdiocese are generously supporting people seeking safety from the war in Ukraine.

More than 70 parishioners, religious and priests have offered accommodation to welcome refugees into their own homes as guests.

Fundraising through parish collections is being co-ordinated by Father Hudson's Care and the response has been magnanimous.

Thanks to money raised, the social care organisation is recruiting a Ukrainian refugee support worker who will liaise with the arrivals and their hosts over the coming months.

"Witnessing the generosity of individuals

and families from all around the Archdiocese offering to welcome Ukrainian refugees into their own home has been a joy," said Andy Quinn, Father Hudson's Care Chief Executive Officer.

The charity was asked by Archbishop Bernard to oversee, support, match and co-ordinate the offers of accommodation working with referral agencies, local councils and Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham.

A weekly meeting was established between representatives from Father Hudson's, the Archdiocese and the Ukrainian Catholic community in Coventry.

The Father Hudson's team also liaised

with the Catholic communities in Wolverhampton and Stoke-on-Trent.

A small team at Father Hudson's is working with Citizens UK to match the offers of accommodation to the needs of those who wish to come to the UK.

They arrange virtual matching meetings and also hold video conference calls to help hosts prepare for the arrival of their guests.

"It is hard to capture the warm humanity of the matching meetings," said Andy.

"When one mother shared that her 15-year-old Ukrainian son was passionate about cooking the host informed her that her own son wanted to be a chef and she really looked forward to cooking with him."



Joyous return to Lourdes

brings great sense of optimism for family of pilgrims

THIS year Diocesan pilgrims returned to Lourdes for the 80th Annual Pilgrimage after two years' absence.

Although numbers were lower this year there was a great sense of joy and optimism as people came together again as a Diocesan family for a very special trip.

Located in the French Pyrenees, Lourdes is home to an important sacred site – the Grotto of Massabielle, where St Bernadette was visited by the Virgin Mary. Lourdes is a place where each individual matters. It is a place of both sacred significance and great beauty.

Pilgrims were accompanied by Archbishop Bernard Longley as well as Bishops David McGough, David Evans and Stephen Wright. Students from Blessed George Napier School, Banbury; St Francis of Assisi College, Aldridge; Painsley Catholic College and St Joseph's College, Stoke-on-Trent, gave up their time to support the assisted pilgrims and to make lasting friendships.

Colette Harris, Assistant Principal at Painsley Catholic College, has been bringing Year 10 students to Lourdes for 10 years. She said that visiting Lourdes is a hugely valuable experience for their students:

"We have so many students



The Diocesan family of pilgrims pose for a photo in front of the Rosary Basilica of Lourdes.

that find it life-changing, from finding peace to a reason why we belong in community. We're in the north of the Archdiocese so coming with the Diocese gives the idea of community, that we are an international church, we are not on our own, and that we all have a part to play, which is hugely important."

Hannah, attending the pilgrimage as a Handmaid, agrees: "It's definitely a life-changing space not only for adults but also young people when they come. They

have some great encounters and it's a place where people can come back time and time again and have similar connections every single time.

"When I was on my volunteering year at the Kenelm Youth Trust, I worked in the baths here and it really was a life-changing moment for me, my "Lourdes Moment", as people call it. It was phenomenal being able to assist with sick people and being able to encounter a really special moment with them and with God. It blew my mind and that's why I come back time and time again."

Lucas, attending the pilgrimage as a Brancardier, talked about a

more recent "Lourdes Moment": "I got asked to assist a pilgrim with lighting some candles. This pilgrim had recently lost a couple of loved ones, so we had a beautiful moment of about 15 minutes of quiet prayer with the candles and it was incredible. It was a truly special encounter."

As Birmingham brings so many pilgrims to Lourdes, we are often honoured with leading the processions and the International Mass. This year, Monday night's Marian Procession was led by Archbishop Bernard Longley, and Wednesday's International Mass was celebrated by Bishop David Evans.



Blessed George Napier School students strike up a tune during a visit to Lac de Lourdes. Bishop David Evans celebrates International Mass At St Pie X, Lourdes.



Above, viewing the High Stations of the Cross. Top left, Archbishop Bernard with the nursing team from Keele University, both qualified and student nurses. Left, Archdiocese pilgrims leading the Marian Procession.

Who comes to Lourdes?

Anyone can come to Lourdes. This year the pilgrimage was attended by people who have been coming every year for over 20 years, as well as people coming for the first time, in parish groups, with friends and family or as individuals ready to make new lifelong friends.

Accueil (Assisted) Pilgrims

Accueil means 'place of welcome' in French and refers to the place where our assisted pilgrims stay. These pilgrims are the VIPs of the pilgrimage and are supported by our own volunteer hospitalité team – our nurses, doctors, carers, brancardiers and handmaids.

Nurses and doctors

Every year the Diocese brings sick pilgrims to Lourdes, a pilgrimage that they cannot

make without the support from the wonderful doctors and nurses who come with us. Without your expertise we cannot give as many pilgrims the wonderful experience of Lourdes.

Handmaids and Brancardiers work with all the other Hospitalité members (nurses, doctors, carers) to ensure the smooth running of the pilgrimage. They help to care for assisted pilgrims, whose spiritual needs are the main focus of the pilgrimage.

To find out more about this year's pilgrimage – via videos, photos and liturgy, or to register your interest for next year, you can find all things Lourdes on our subsite www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/lourdes or subscribe to our Lourdes newsletter via QR code:



St Bernadette relics to tour UK

A pilgrimage of the relics of Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous, is coming to the Archdiocese of Birmingham this October.

The relics will be visiting St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham, Our Lady of Lourdes in Hednesford and the Immaculate Conception in Bicester over the weekend of 7-10 October.

It forms part of a national tour of the relics. A section of bone from Saint Bernadette's thigh will be taken to major cathedrals and churches of the dioceses of England, Scotland and Wales as part of the UK-wide pilgrimage.

The Shrine of Lourdes approached the English and Welsh bishops in 2021 with the offer of the pilgrimage of the relics and the bishops accepted.

The remains of Saint Bernadette are preserved in a shrine in the town of Nevers, 700 kilometres north of Lourdes.

Venues to visit in the Archdiocese:

- St Chad's Cathedral, Friday 7 October and Saturday 8 October
- Our Lady of Lourdes, Hednesford (home of the Diocesan Shrine) Saturday 8 October, in Church and Sunday 9 October, in the Grotto
- Immaculate Conception, Bicester Sunday 9 October and Monday 10 October.

For further information about the venues and a history of the relics please visit: <https://bitly.com.np/Pz>

A website dedicated to the national tour has also been launched. It contains details of the Tour, St Bernadette, What Are Relics?, Continuing the Journey and much more. Visit: stbernadette.org.uk/

Eric Kirwan, Chief Operating Officer, provides an update on our Diocesan Vision



Feedback will be embedded within Vision

WITH our response to the Synod being the main priority in recent months (see page 6) you might be wondering what has been happening with the Diocesan Vision.

We paused our work on the Vision to focus attention on the Synod and the process was two-fold: It resulted in the Diocesan Synthesis (response to the Synod), and the feedback from the Synod process is now directly helping to shape the next phase of our Diocesan Vision, Unfolding God's Plan.

Feedback gathered from our parishes, schools, groups and individuals will be embedded within the Vision and our priority areas of Evangelisation, Formation, Liturgy and Worship, and Social Outreach (with co-responsibility, young people and families a focus in every area).

Our 'Walking Together' Synod journey created and raised expectations; it generated real

enthusiasm and momentum amongst people; it increased participation and engagement at parish level and it provided direct feedback to inform the Diocesan Vision.

It proved to be an invaluable listening device. Amongst the hundreds of responses received several key themes emerged including: the importance of schools, families and young people; formation throughout one's lifetime, and the need for greater co-responsibility and an involved laity.

These themes will now help to finalise and drive the work of the Vision's four priority areas moving forward.

We have learned a lot from the Synod, not least how to engage better with our parish communities and what our people are seeking.

It is vital the feedback received is acted upon as we continue this journey together and embed the Vision in all that we do.

OUR VISION STATEMENT

We are called to be a Catholic diocese which is:

- Faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ
- Full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith,
- Joyful in their service of God and neighbour.



Planning for all risks is really bearing fruit

THE importance of a robust health and safety culture is being highlighted through a sustained focus on best practice across the Archdiocese.

Strategic planning backed by the Trustees is bearing fruit as parishes respond to the call to place safety centre-stage as they go about God's work.

Parish priests are being encouraged to appoint health and safety co-ordinators from within their congregations to handle the administrative side of complying with legal safety requirements.

At the same time, the Archdiocese is working with insurers PIB Risk Management to bring about positive change

(see page 12 for more details).

"The ideal is for a pro-active parish priest to be surrounded by good and active helpers who understand that health and safety is part and parcel of what the parish has to undertake," said Deacon Paul O'Connor, the Archdiocese's health and safety co-ordinator. "By acting co-responsibly our members are keeping safe all those who come to church, ensuring best use of the buildings and understanding instinctively that health and safety is essential parish work.

"We are called to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves so it is

only right that we make our buildings safe for visitors."

Parishes have been given access to an online risk management system called xCenta which gives them the information necessary to meet compliance standards.

The latest in a sequence of parish performance reviews is now underway to check on the status of risk management processes such as checks for fire, gas and electrical safety; slips, trips and falls assessment; asbestos risk; safeguarding, security and kitchen hygiene. Health and safety co-ordinators are required to administer safety checks in church buildings and grounds.



Community spirit helps lift Jubilee celebrations

COMMUNITIES around the Archdiocese were out in force over the four-day Bank Holiday weekend to celebrate Her Majesty's 70-year reign.

At all Sunday Masses over 4 and 5 June, each parish was asked to pray for Queen Elizabeth II to mark her Platinum Jubilee by including an intention in the Prayer of the Faithful and by reciting at the end of Mass the Prayer for the Queen.

Parishes could also sing the chant *Domine, salvum fac and/or the National Anthem.*

Parties, activities, outdoor games and of course celebratory buffets were the order of the day as people gathered together in great numbers to mark the historic occasion.

At Christ the King Church, Coventry, for example, a number of activities were staged over the long weekend.

There was a Family Fun Day and a Jubilee-framed photographs show plus a Flower Festival in the church on Saturday and tea, coffee and cakes baked by parishioners provided to visitors.

Canon Tom Farrell said: "I am grateful to all of those who have helped mark the occasion and ensure it was a memorable Platinum Jubilee celebration for all ages."



Colin O'Carroll, left, Lisa Fahy and Michael Hession checking the gravestones and monuments in the graveyard to ensure they are safe and secure.

Pro-active approach on a day-to-day basis

IN the parish of St Michael and St James, Haunton, Health and Safety Co-ordinator Lisa Fahy was appointed last year under the Diocesan initiative.

Lisa is part of a pro-active team which is being praised for the way it looks after the safety of the historic south-east Staffordshire church along with its presbytery, church hall and graveyard.

"The biggest challenge in putting in procedures and documentation is to keep the process dynamic so that everyone realises that health and safety is a day-to-day requirement," said Lisa.

"The ongoing focus by the Diocese will help everyone to stay safe in the long-term and also assist in the recording of safety information

across the parishes." St Michael and St James volunteers, including parishioners Michael Hession (who lives on site), and Colin O'Carroll, have over the last two years been diligent and precise in meeting Covid-19 safety requirements and supported the safety drive in the areas of legionella and asbestos management, fire safety management, and gravestones and monuments management.

Safety checks of the buildings are carried out on a regular basis.

Parish priest, Fr Eamonn Corduff, said: "People like to feel safe when they come to Holy Mass and they are reassured to know that the parish is confident in its compliance with the regulations."



My favourite SAINT

In a regular feature, *The Sower* asks people to choose their favourite saint and explain why. Here **Sarah Hickman**, the Chief Handmaid for the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, chooses St Bernadette.

SAINTE Bernadette is the miller's daughter who experienced remarkable visions of the Blessed Virgin at a grotto near her home in the department of Hautes-Pyrenees in south-west France.

She was born in 1844 and baptised Marie Bernarde Soubirous, but was known as Bernadette. She is known as St Bernadette of Lourdes in acknowledgement of her birthplace and she was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1925.

As a 14-year-old, St Bernadette experienced 18 apparitions of Our Lady and these led to the foundation of the Marian shrine – the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes – which is one of the world's major sites of pilgrimage.

Around five million pilgrims from all over the world visit annually to pray, wash and drink from the miraculous spring at the Grotto in response to Our Lady's instruction to the young Bernadette. I was first introduced to St Bernadette and the story of Lourdes in the early years of primary school.

My grandmother travelled as a sick pilgrim with the Archdiocese and I can remember taking her to Birmingham New Street station to join the train.

I still have the statue of St Bernadette she brought home for me along with my first set of Rosary beads.

I chose St Bernadette as my Confirmation name, and in my preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation I enjoyed learning more about her simple life, humility and faith.

Since then her teachings and sayings have become an important part of my own faith journey.

When you delve into St Bernadette's life, you learn that during the first apparition, although she did not know who this 'Lady' was, she responded to her in wonder and reverence.

She began to pray the Rosary, which shows her child-like faith and obedience. Her reaction to Our Lady from the first apparition was one of total trust; she trusted her completely even though it was not until the 17th apparition that Our Lady revealed herself as the *'Immaculate Conception'*.

The young Bernadette had great perseverance. People thought she was foolish and crazy, that the meetings and commands of Our Lady were totally made-up fantasies, but she did not give up.

She fought the local authorities until they conceded and allowed a church to be built on the site where the apparitions had taken place.

When you read many of St Bernadette's sayings, you learn how although now a Saint she was not a pious person in the sense that she never missed her prayers.

She admits that at many times she found it hard to pray – and I myself, like many modern-day Catholics, have struggled.

However, St Bernadette has taught me to speak to God and Our Lady as if I am having a face-to-face conversation with any other person.

We do not have to be kneeling down in church in front of the Blessed Sacrament for our prayers to be effective.

St Bernadette shows the way to health and to healing in many different ways, not just through illness. I have travelled with the Archdiocese to Lourdes for over 30 years. Though many people understandably focus their attention on visiting the Grotto, because of my love of St Bernadette I always try to visit –

Sarah Hickman pictured in front of an image of St Bernadette during this year's 80th annual Archdiocese Pilgrimage to Lourdes.



volunteer hours allowing – one of the focal points of her life.

These include the parish church where she was baptised, the Boly Mill – where St Bernadette was born and lived with her parents for the first 10 years of life – and the Cachot, the one-room former prison where the poverty-stricken Soubirous family lived at the time of the apparitions.

In every one of these places, I feel close to St Bernadette.

Since my second pilgrimage with the Archdiocese, I have volunteered as a handmaid (female non-medical volunteer) helping to make the sick pilgrims get the most out of their

pilgrimage experience.

As volunteers we serve their meals, clean and attend to their rooms, transport them by wheelchair to the various focal points of Lourdes and to the various Masses and liturgies that form part of the week's spiritual programme.

I was approached in 2013 to step into the role of Chief Handmaid, in which alongside the Chief Brancardier I lead and organise a vast group of non-medical volunteers.

It's a lot of organising and it is challenging, but there's a great sense of pride when at the end of a pilgrimage you look at what you have achieved.



Mitigating risks to parish buildings by covering all the 'what if?' scenarios



WHETHER it is protecting your congregation, your staff and volunteers, or assets, it is vital to ensure you have a robust risk management system in place.

Risks can include anything from premises risks such as asbestos and fire safety, or the risks to people through slips or trips when visiting your premises.

Seeking guidance from an experienced risk manager to help you navigate your way through the legal, financial and moral benefits of a strong, proactive risk management approach will assist you to:

- Identify hazards and assess risks;

- Establish best practice to reduce the likelihood of an accident and potential for a claim in the future (or enforcement action);
- Implement a review system to continually improve.

It is important that every 'what if?' scenario is covered and working in partnership with colleagues at PIB Risk Management allows the Archdiocese to ensure the correct covers are in place, as well as adequate insurance in the event of a claim.

PIB Risk Management has worked with the Archdiocese of Birmingham for over six years on a risk management basis, and for longer on an insurance

basis, which has led to a workable and sensible plan being put into place.

PIB Risk Management is supported by Trustees and continues to build upon relationships as it moves forwards in supporting and protecting the organisation.

With ongoing support via a developing online risk management portal, regular reviews and long-standing relationships with parishes, PIB can help you have peace of

mind that you remain compliant with health and safety regulations and are protecting your greatest assets.

■ Please contact Gavin Leatherbarrow CMIOSH MIIRSM, PIB Risk Management's Head of Education, Charities and Care if you would like to discuss your requirements on 01777 861861 or email gavin.leatherbarrow@pibrm.com

Trio of united churches share spiritual unity and focus

A young computer genius dubbed the "patron saint of the internet" has proved to be a key figure in helping unite three churches.

The Parish of Blessed Carlo Acutis – set up in December 2020 – faced a challenging task from the start when it needed to bring together three different communities during a time when people had to stay away from each other because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

But its success has largely been put down to the patron they adopted.

Blessed Carlo died from leukaemia when he was 15 but was well known for building a website documenting Eucharistic miracles.

In October 2020, he was the first millennial to be beatified by the Catholic Church.

Parish priest Monsignor Mark Crisp discovered Blessed Carlo's story when he travelled to Assisi, the patron's resting place, just before the first lockdown.

He said: "When lockdown hit, we didn't have live streaming in our church.

"It was a hard task to get a system going, but I found it quickly united people.

"We'd been thinking about a patron saint but were struggling to find one that didn't give a preference to one of our three churches. That's when I realised Blessed Carlo was the perfect fit.

"Even though he died in 2006, he was really passionate about using the internet for the means of our mission and that was the situation we'd found ourselves in during the pandemic and setting up the parish."

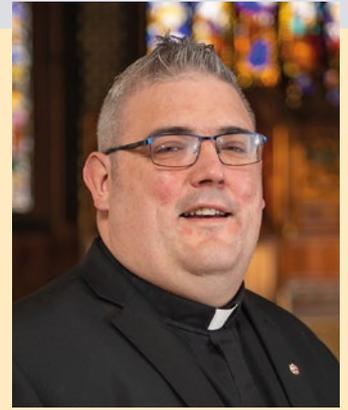
The new parish incorporates St Bernadette's in Wombourne, St Michael's in Penn and Saints Peter and Paul in Wolverhampton city centre.

Each of the churches now display the same image of Blessed Carlo and they share a relic of his hair. Monsignor Crisp added: "It was important to link each of our church communities from the start to ensure they all felt involved. They are each quite diverse in who they serve but Blessed Carlo has given us a shared focus and spiritual unity."



Monsignor Mark Crisp in the recently restored Lady Chapel at St Michael's Church in Penn, which contains the portrait of Blessed Carlo Acutis.

Priests and Permanent Deacons take up roles with 'joyful hearts'



THE Archdiocese is set to welcome two new priests when Deacon **Toby Duckworth** and Deacon **Steven Fleming** are ordained later this month.

As they come to the end of their time in seminary they have both found their years of formation immensely fulfilling.

Toby, 27, born in Sutton Coldfield, was a full-time youth minister at the Soli House at Alton Castle before going on to take a BA (Hons) in Theology at Newman University, Birmingham.

Now approaching the end of his formation at the Venerable English College in Rome he feels "very blessed" to be studying at heart of the Universal Church.

Toby looks back on the year just before he applied to join the priesthood, when he helped with parish work in inner-city Wolverhampton, as a formative time when he felt "incredibly happy and so fulfilled."

"For me to become a priest was the idea of many other people before it was mine," he said. "It's a leap of faith but it is about putting yourself forward."

If it's God's plan for you it will happen and it's something you choose in response to the

Lord's call with a joyful heart." Steven, 37, also born in Sutton Coldfield, worked as a full-time youth leader at Alton Castle and as a missionary in eastern Europe before going on to help the poor and needy in the Bronx and Harlem. He subsequently undertook his Pontifical degree in Ireland.

He feels privileged to be in his sixth year at Oscott College. "It has been an amazing experience," he said.

"It's wonderful to be among like-minded seminarians, learning from each other and sharing the journey to find out how and where God is calling us."

Meanwhile, **Andrew Lansberry** and **Martin Casey** are set to be ordained as Permanent Deacons later this month.

Andrew, by profession a funeral director in Coventry, first realised that he might have a vocation while serving in the parish of St John Vianney as a young man.

His priestly formation has principally taken place at St Mary's College, Oscott and in his own parish.

"One of the most important aspects of formation is the support network that is put in place as you begin your studies,"



IMMENSELY FULFILLED BY NEW ROLES – clockwise from top left, Toby Duckworth, Steven Fleming, Andrew Lansberry and Martin Casey.

said Andrew, 42, who was born in Marston Green.

"The seminary staff along with my formation tutor and the priests of my parish have continually encouraged and supported me for the duration of my formation."

Martin, 36, who was born and raised in Nottingham, has been a full-time teacher at Archbishop Isley Catholic School in Birmingham for the past 11 years.

His two passions within the Church are liturgy and catechesis

and a highlight of his formation at St Mary's College, Oscott was his admission to candidacy when he heard the words spoken by the Bishop: "May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment."

Martin, who says he is "humbly excited" at the prospect of his ordination, said: "At Mass and during Adoration we should feel, and encourage others to feel, a sense of numinous beauty – of awe and wonder in the Presence of God."

Building relationship with Christ through engagement

THE Diocesan Vocations Office exists to build up a culture of vocation across the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

Through the Clergy Training Fund, it supports seminarians and men in formation to be Permanent Deacons, as well as providing for the ongoing formation of clergy.

Through vocation promotion work, the Office engages with schools, university chaplaincies and parishes and produces a range of prayer materials to help build relationships with Christ. It also administers the Diocesan Guild of St Stephen, supporting altar servers in their commitment to God and his people (see page 15).

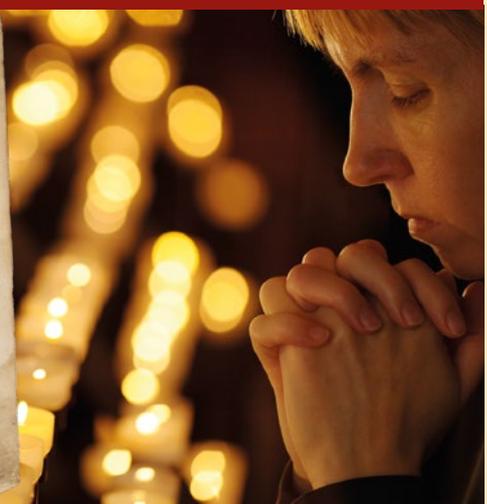
The Diocesan Prayer for Vocations

Heavenly Father, we ask you to send labourers into your harvest.

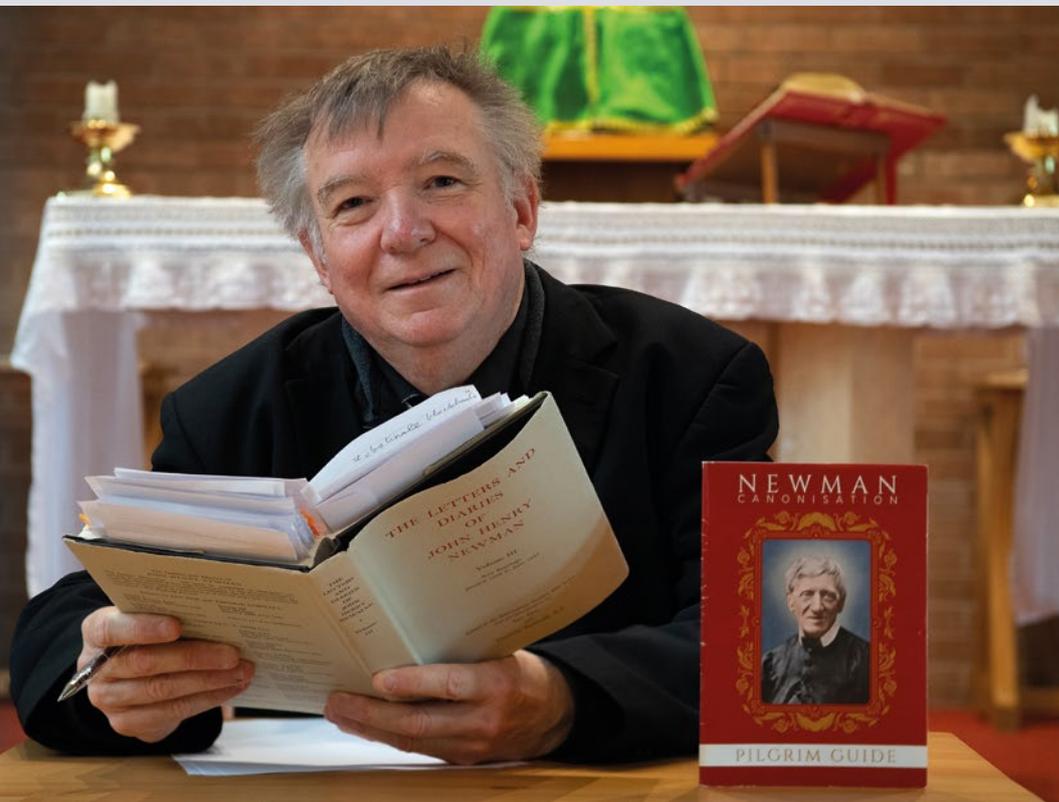
Inspire, in the hearts of your people, vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life.

Bless our families with a spirit of generosity, so that those whom you call have the courage to give themselves to your Church in faith.

*Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*



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 love of nature and its connections with virtue in people.



All things great and small on Earth speak in praise of God

HAD St John Henry Newman been alive in the late 70's, we might have shared a take-away curry (he liked spicy food), glued to the hit TV series *All Creatures Great and Small*.

This dramatised the books by a Yorkshire Dales vet, whose pen name was James Herriott, born 26 years after Newman died in 1890. Both men celebrated the fact that **"All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all"**

Newman's childhood memories, in his letters and diaries, included hearing grass being cut, the first cuckoo in Spring and seeing the donkeys at the seaside. He owned a pony called Charlie and a lively Irish horse Klepper who threw him off, breaking his glasses!

John Henry loved his daily, solitary, walking or being joined by others to chat, think through problems and, while riding, compose homilies and addresses. He described the holiness of nature as a "Temple" or "vast Cathedral":

Does not the whole world speak in praise of God? Does not every star in the sky, every tree and every flower upon the earth, all that grows all that endures, the leafy woods, the everlasting mountains, speak of God... (**Parochial and Plain Sermons, VI: 21**).

Newman was full of excitement when visiting the Victorian Zoological Gardens in London with close friends Rogers and Wood and in Birmingham and Dublin,

accompanied by his Oratorian confrere, Ambrose. Remembering this particular trip, John Hungerford Pollen, who designed the University Church at St Stephen's Green for Newman, comments upon his *"wonder at and speculations on the design of beasts; their ferocity; their odd ways; birds especially."* (**LDXVII, p.230**).

Newman, a keen gardener, laments to Mrs Maxwell-Scott that, in the grounds of the Oratory house in Rednal:

The chestnut and lime leaves are just a quarter out – and the Sycamore shows just a few beautiful pink buds where there should be a burst of full rejoicing verdure... We excel in rhododendrons, camellias and arbutus – but our soil is not the best. (**LD XXVIII, p.62**)

Whereas he celebrates the glory of creation, in its fulsome late summer bloom, when commenting to W.J. Copeland, from the same setting:

The green is of a thousand hues, as the corn begins to turn – the heather is purple and the mountain berries are in profusion. (**LD XX, p.262**)

Newman also found, in nature, a fruitful source of analogy to describe the development of virtue in different people:

The soul which is quickened with the spirit of love has faith and hope...one and all exist in love, though distinct from it; as stalk, leaves and flowers are as distinct and entire in one plant as in another, yet vary in the quality, according to the plant's nature. (**Parochial**

and Plain Sermons IV, 21)

In his advancing years, Newman, with poignancy, humanity and wit, compares himself to a variety of wildlife!

Writing to Mrs T.W. Allies he says:

You asked me what bones I am cracking? The bones of old jackals and hyenas, or foxes, rats and mice, in some ancient palaeontological cave. (**LD XXI, p.22**)

Then, after Richard Stanton enquires, Newman replies:

You kindly ask after my health. I have nothing the matter with me, but I am feeble...I have had several falls – I walk, read, write, speak at a snail's pace, and my mind gets confused, especially my memory.

Thus I may call myself emphatically in God's hands, unable to move day by day except He wills it. (**LD XXXI, p.100**)

Newman viewed his frailties as an invitation to engage with the Cross.

He recognised hints of the paschal mystery in the cycles of birth, death and rebirth in creation and concludes:

As on a misty day, the gloom gradually melts and the sun brightens, so have the glories of the spiritual world lit up this world below.

The dull and cold earth is penetrated by the rays.

All around we see glimpses of reflections of those heavenly things, which the elect of God shall one day see face-to-face. (**The Heart of Newman, Erich Przywara, p.307**).

Church hall renovation is boost for community



Volunteer Norma Butterworth, left, and Café Co-ordinator Carol Hayes prepare food for the Over-50's club which meets up at the community centre.

A renovated church hall is bringing a community back together again after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The church centre at St Gerard's Church, in Castle Vale, Birmingham, had stood empty for over three years before being transformed thanks to grants worth over £42,000.

Volunteer and Parish Administrator Sue Perkins said: "This project was in the pipeline before the pandemic, driven by the parish's desire to support our community.

"Whilst the restrictions of the pandemic delayed the project it gave us time to get our house in order in terms of repairs and fundraising.

"Unfortunately, it also meant there was a greater need for something like this by the time we were able to open."

Its new community room provides a café in the mornings and a meeting space in the afternoons.

There is also a low-cost second-hand furniture shop and all the facilities are run by the church's link partner Upcycle Birmingham, part of Spitfire Advice & Support Services Ltd. Sue added: "A lot of people

"We've turned a disused space into something really nice, which also provides an income for the church, securing its valuable presence here."

Judy Tullet

suffered loneliness during the various lockdowns but we're so pleased now to be able to offer a place to come and meet people again and have a cup of tea made for them.

"People have really begun to value it already and said what a difference it makes to their lives"

Over 40 volunteers now work across the facilities giving them

purpose and opportunities to develop their skills.

The meeting space is being used by around 12 organisations offering support with issues such as finance, housing benefit and employment.

There are also various clubs – including knitting and history – and plans for a foodbank-type scheme.

Judy Tullett, Spitfire's Community Services Coordinator, said: "We were keen to have a base in the heart of the Castle Vale community and our work with St Gerard's has become a really happy marriage.

"We've turned a disused space into something really nice, which also provides an income for the church securing its valuable presence here on Castle Vale.

"The café and the showroom really complement each other and it has been lovely to see people coming together there – the atmosphere is fantastic."

Sainthood welcomed by Society

MEMBERS of the Society of Divine Vocations (SDV) based in the Archdiocese have welcomed the canonisation of the founder of their organisation. Blessed Justin Russolillo was canonised a new saint by Pope Francis on May 11. His miracle for beatification took place in 1998 and second miracle for his canonisation in 2016.

Born in 1891 and brought up in a suburb of Naples, Italy, blessed Justin went on to found the SDV in the 1920s. It now exists in 16 countries, including the UK.

There are seven Fathers of the SDV in the Archdiocese of Birmingham – three vocationist priests in the Stechford community and four in the Walsall community.

Fr Rionelle Hinampas, one of those seven, said: "The news means a lot for the SDV Fathers in the Archdiocese as it reinforces and gives more meaning on our specific mission and charism in the Church."

Thanks for feedback

THANKS to everyone who took the time to respond to the Third Anniversary Reader Survey published in the Advent 2021 issue of *The Sower*. Answers received, both in the post and online, are helping to shape the publication's future.

Everything from the type of features and stories that appear to whether people prefer to receive a printed or digital version of the magazine were looked at.

The *Sower* editorial team would also like to take this opportunity to remind people that they can send in feedback or story suggestions at any time – and we very much welcome your thoughts.

Please email the Archdiocesan Communications Team at communications@rcaob.org.uk

Thanksgiving Mass to return in-person

THE annual Mass of Thanksgiving to rejoice in the contribution of altar servers in the Archdiocese is to be celebrated in-person for the first time since the beginning of the Covid pandemic.

In 2021, the Holy Mass organised by the Diocesan Guild of St Stephen was live streamed.

However, on Saturday 1 October altar servers will have the opportunity to renew their promises in St Chad's Cathedral at which

the principal celebrant and homilist will be Bishop David Evans. Most parishes in the Archdiocese of Birmingham are affiliated to the Guild of St Stephen.

The Guild is an international organisation of altar servers, founded in England in 1904 by Fr Hamilton McDonald. Altar servers have Saint Stephen – one of the first seven deacons chosen to assist the apostles in service (Acts 6) and the first martyr of the Church – as their patron.



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

Members of the new St Vincent de Paul Conference set up at St Chad's Cathedral, left to right, Secretary Mary Walshe, Treasurer Cedric Conboy and President Alicia O'Brien.



Reigniting call for volunteers to help poor and needy

THE Christian voluntary network known as the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) is redoubling its efforts to provide practical assistance to those in need.

The local branch of the Catholic lay organisation, which has been helping the poor, the sick and the lonely for almost 200 years, has launched a "Reigniting the Flame" initiative.

The aim is to raise awareness of its role in helping those in need and to encourage the setting-up of more Conferences (small groups) of men and women of goodwill who want to help people who are disadvantaged.

Two Membership Support Officers, Maria Lynch and Olivia Lavelle, have been appointed to lead the way in recruiting new members.

Already new Conferences are up and running at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham; Our Lady of the Wayside in Shirley; St Michael's, Moor Street; Birmingham Oratory, Edgbaston; and St Peter's with Our Lady & St Rose of Lima, Weoley Castle. Seven operate in Oxfordshire and three more are being set up at St John Fisher, Coventry; St Ambrose Barlow, Hall Green; and St Mary and St Thomas More, Cannock.

Within the Archdiocese there are currently 77 local groups (Conferences), 105 'Mini-Vinnie' groups in primary schools and 15 Youth SVP groups in secondary schools.

Across England and Wales as a whole membership numbers are more than 10,000 while, internationally, around 800,000 people in 153 countries follow the SVP way of personal service of the poor.

The volunteers, motivated by faith which

need not necessarily be Catholic, visit vulnerable or isolated people and offer them friendship and practical support.

The desire to help alleviate poverty in all its forms is consistent with the original aim of the St Vincent de Paul Society when it was set up as a Conference of Charity by a group of Catholic students in Paris in 1833.

For more information on becoming a member of the SVP, or to make a donation, please contact:

Maria Lynch (West Midlands conurbation & Staffordshire) – MariaL@svp.org.uk

Olivia Lavelle (Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire) – OliviaL@svp.org.uk

Andy Gudge (Central Council President) – PresidentF02@svp.org.uk

The group's Founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, said: "No work of charity should be alien to the Society."

He and his companions, inspired by the compassion for the poor shown by seventeenth century French priest St Vincent de Paul, went out onto the streets to help the starving and downtrodden as part of their spiritual formation.

After news of their good works spread across the Channel a group of Catholics

met in London in 1844 to establish the first Conference in England.

Modern-day Conference members continue to be inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul who championed charitable person-to-person help for the poor.

Recent examples of such help given in the Archdiocese of Birmingham include support with re-laying a floor for a mother of five who had been in a refuge after suffering domestic abuse, provision of a table and chairs to a mother on benefits and phone calls, FaceTime calls and visits to a care home resident who felt isolated during Covid.

With economic circumstances becoming increasingly challenging for the poor and the lonely, the Society of St Vincent de Paul is determined to raise its profile.

"Our work is very much 'under the radar' and was even more so during the pandemic and the periods of lockdown," said Andy Gudge, Birmingham Central Council President.

"But now we want to raise awareness. The need for the support offered by the SVP has become more acute – we are getting increased referrals and requests relating to people requiring help with food, clothing and fuel payments.

"This winter looks to be a particular trial for people on low incomes and we expect many of them to come to us for help.

"Our aim is to provide practical help in a Christ-centred way. We welcome Christians from all walks of life and our current members include ex-engineers, teachers, a driving instructor, students and an oncologist."