



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM

DIOCESAN VOCATIONS OFFICE

Ask · Invite · Pray



# VOCATIONS NEWS

**WELCOME to our Vocations Sunday newsletter from the Diocesan Vocations Office!**

Each year, Vocations Sunday invites us to reflect again on the call that God places in the hearts of His people. Here in the Vocations Office, our mission is to nurture a culture of vocation across the Archdiocese of Birmingham. We do this by working closely with parishes, schools and chaplaincies to help young people listen for and respond to God's call in their lives.

In my role as Diocesan Director of Vocation, I have the privilege of accompanying men who are discerning a call to the priesthood. It is a quiet but powerful reminder that God never ceases to call. In recent months, we have continued to welcome men at different stages of discernment - through our Discernment Weekends, ongoing accompaniment, and opportunities for younger men to begin asking the question: "What is God asking of me?"

Vocations Sunday is also an important moment to reflect on the practical support needed to form the future priests of our Archdiocese. The Clergy Training Fund exists to make this possible. To form a priest is a long and significant journey – typically around seven years – and it currently costs in the region of £200,000!

This is a considerable investment, and it is only possible because of your generosity. Every prayer offered, and every contribution made – whether large or small – is deeply valued.

On this Fourth Sunday of Easter, our annual Clergy Training Fund collection will once again take place in every parish. I am deeply grateful for your continued support. Above all, I ask for your prayers: for those currently discerning, for those in formation, and for many more to hear and answer the Lord's call with courage and trust.

With my prayers as we celebrate the Season of Easter.

God bless,

Rev. Fr. Craig Szmidt  
Diocesan Director of Vocation

**PLEASE PRAY FOR VOCATIONS**



**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.**

# 2026



## AN INVITATION FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

Dear friends,

This weekend we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, when the Church prays especially for vocations to the priesthood. I want to ask you to join me in praying today that all those whom Our Lord is calling will respond with courage and generosity to his invitation to serve their brothers and sisters as priests in our Archdiocese.

If you feel that the Good Shepherd might indeed be calling you - and if you are 18 or over - I would ask you to write to me directly at: [archbishop@rcaob.org.uk](mailto:archbishop@rcaob.org.uk).

I shall be happy to meet you, with our Vocation Director, Fr. Craig Szmidt, and to hear your story as you try to discern what the Lord is asking of you today and in the years ahead. Please pray for me and for all our priests.

With my prayers and kindest wishes.

**+Bernard Longley**  
Archbishop of Birmingham



## ORDINATIONS IN 2025

On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July, Archbishop Bernard ordained Paul Milton to the permanent diaconate in St. Chad's Cathedral. Deacon Paul (*left*) who was joined for the ordination Mass by family, friends and clergy, is serving the parishes of St. Peter, Leamington Spa and Our Lady's, Lillington.



The following Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, we celebrated the ordination to the sacred priesthood of Fr. Gerard Bowen (*right*).

In his homily, Archbishop Bernard reflected that the joyful occasion of an ordination, "evokes our gratitude to God for his providence and it strengthens our hope for the future of the Church's mission."



In December, in an historic first, ordinations to the diaconate were celebrated in three different Catholic rites at St. Mary's College, Oscott. Tenny Antony was ordained in the Syro-Malabar Rite, Jiithin Titto in the Syro-Malankara Rite, and finally Jonathan Henry (alongside four seminarians from other dioceses) in the Latin Rite.



Each of the ordination liturgies was a joyful occasion, where the men committed themselves to celibacy and to service in the Church. All three new deacons are now ministering as deacons in parishes in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. Please continue to pray for them as they prepare for their ordinations to the priesthood.

*Pictured, from left to right: Dcn. Jiithin, Dcn. Jonathan, Archbishop Bernard and Dcn. Tenny.*



## HOW WE PROMOTE VOCATIONS

Throughout the year, we engage in a wide variety of vocation promotion work, often alongside others in the Archdiocese and beyond. In the last year, we again supported the Office for Mission with the **Annual Thanksgiving Mass for Marriage**. We have spoken with different groups across the diocese, such as University Chaplains, the Union of Catholic Mothers and as part of the *Something Greater* programme in the Banbury & Warwick Deanery. In November, we also hosted the national **Conference of Diocesan Directors of Vocation** - of which Fr. Craig is currently the Chairman - meeting at St. Chad's Cathedral.

As well as our discernment weekends for men (*see overleaf*), we held the first meeting of our **Young Discerners Group**. This is a chance for those under 18 to visit Oscott, meet seminarians and to explore their sense of calling to the priesthood through discussion and prayer together.

We continue to **promote vocations with our diocesan schools**. An example of this is collaborating with St. Mary's College, Oscott, who offer *Laudato Si'* days for schools, based in the seminary grounds. The Vocations Office has contributed to a video shown at the start of each of these days, which explains the purpose and history of the seminary, introduces the term *Laudato Si'* and invites the children to consider their own vocation through prayer. Other engagement with schools has included attending the DES Conference (*right*) and supporting Masses organised by both the Dudley & Wolverhampton and North Staffordshire Vocation Promotion Groups.



Every first Saturday in October, the Vocations Office organises the celebration of the **Annual Guild of St. Stephen Mass of Thanksgiving**. Last year, as the altar servers processed in, it became evident that extra seating would need to be hastily put out, due to the record numbers attending - a wonderful problem to have! In total, 324 altar servers of all ages, plus their families and clergy, filled St. Chad's Cathedral for our Mass celebrated by Bishop David Evans.

In spring this year, working in collaboration with the Kenelm Youth Trust, we held our biennial **Called to Serve** weekend retreat for altar servers at Alton Castle. Over 60 young people, plus adult leaders from their parishes, came to reflect on service to God not only in the liturgy, but through their lives. There were lots of moments of fun, and times of great faith, such as a candlelit Blessed Sacrament Procession and Bishop Timothy Menezes joined us to celebrate Sunday Mass.

**Look out for our first newsletter for altar servers this summer.**

## THE VOCATIONS OFFICE TEAM



**FR. CRAIG SZMIDT**

**Diocesan Director of Vocation**



**DCN. OWEN GRESTY**

**Diocesan Promoter  
for Vocations**



**KATHRYN BAYLISS**

**Personal Assistant to the  
Diocesan Director of Vocation**



We accompany men along the entire journey of discerning priesthood: from initial enquiry, formal discernment and application, through to seminary formation and ministry as a deacon in a parish prior to priestly ordination. Here are some stories of men whose discernment your prayers and donations have helped to support.

### TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

"I had my first inkling of a calling to the priesthood about a year ago. For a month, I kept this 'secret' in prayer, a private dialogue between me and God. Eventually, opening up to close friends, my spiritual director, and Fr. Craig, the Vocation Director, turned that interior thought into a lived conversation.

However, the process truly gained momentum when I attended my first discernment weekend at St. Mary's Oscott (pictured right). While the initial discussions were vital, visiting the place where priests are formed was a major milestone.

Seeing the reality of seminary life first-hand helped ground my expectations, but the most edifying part was the community of fellow discerners. Meeting other men in the exact same position - navigating the same questions and praying with the same intentions - was reassuring and invigorating. Realising I wasn't discerning in isolation has been a profound encouragement, and I eagerly look forward to the next weekend."

**Richard**  
**A Discerner**



### BECAUSE OF YOU, AND FOR YOU

"I remember at the beginning of my propaedeutic year in Valladolid in September 2024 – after the novelty of moving to Spain had begun to settle in – having an overwhelming sense of being out of my depth! Up until that point in my life, my pride had always been satisfied with a sense that I had earned my place in life. But being in seminary, I quickly discovered just how dependent I am upon the generosity of others.

As my journey has continued into Oscott, I have only become ever more aware of this. Alone, I couldn't fund my way through seminary or pay for my train ticket back home, any more than I could push myself on when the going gets tough. The reason the cost of my formation is met is because of the generosity of the people of our Archdiocese. The reason I have the strength to persist even when I am struggling is because I have an Archdiocese behind me, praying for me, supporting me, willing me on.

While on parish placement in Coventry this year, I had a wonderful encounter when speaking with a parishioner: as our conversation drew to a close, I asked them to pray for me. I received a smile and this reply: 'I may have only just learned your name, but I have prayed for vocations – and therefore for you – since before you were born.'

It is because of you, the Church, that I am able to be in seminary. And it is for you, the Church, that I am in seminary. God's grace and your support have brought me to where I am, and it is these same assistances that shall allow me to continue. I offer you my heartfelt gratitude and the assurance of my unwavering prayers."

**Douglas Grantham**  
**Seminarian, Oscott**



## THE FIRST MONTHS IN A PARISH

"I've been very fortunate to be assigned as assistant priest in the parishes of Holy Trinity and Sacred Heart, Sutton Coldfield, with Fr. Van Nguyen (the parish priest). From my experiences of the first eight months of my time here, they are a very active community. It's certainly been a learning curve, with everything that's required of a priest behind the scenes. It demands a lot of time, but it's been made a lot easier by the good people of both these parishes. It's a very moving and humbling experience and I'm very, very happy indeed to have been placed here; I feel very blessed.

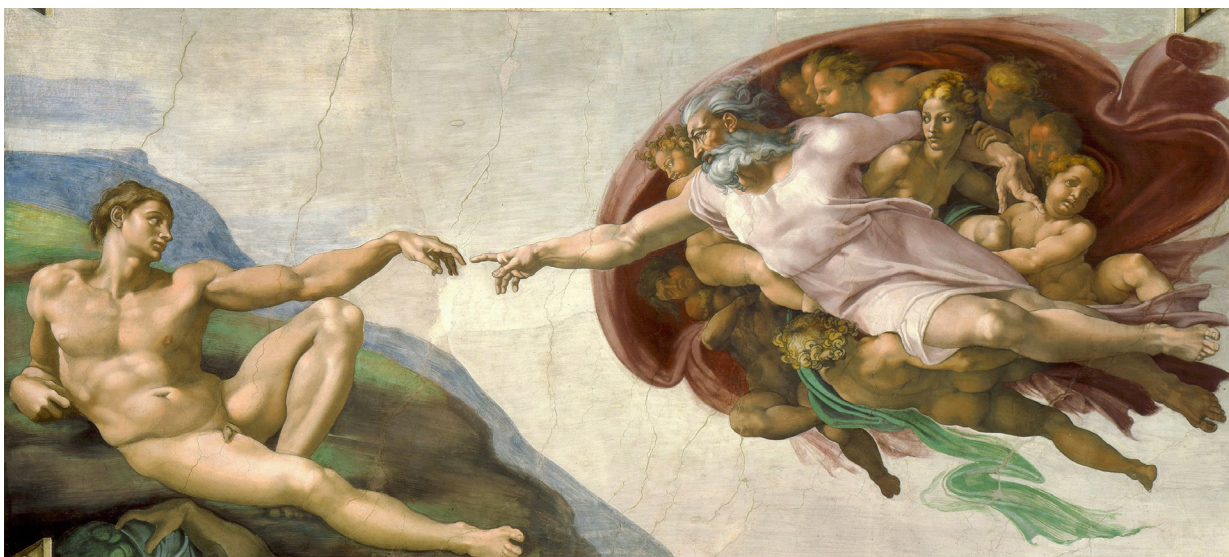
I was a seminarian at the Venerable English College in Rome. It is well known that there's a big academic element to seminary, but I got a lot out of the human development. Human formation is important because there are so many lessons to be learnt as a person preparing to step into what is obviously a very public role. When ministering to other people, for instance, it is important that my 'baggage' isn't somehow placed on their shoulders in an unconscious way. It is not until you are actually living as a priest that you find yourself having to weigh up what's the best way of approaching a situation. I do feel there was a good grounding in this awareness of oneself and how to approach other people pastorally.

I returned to Rome, living as a priest, following my ordination in 2024. It may seem strange to spend your first year as priest finishing off your studies, but I was studying dogmatics and fundamental theology I was at the Angelicum and it was by far the hardest year of the entire dimension process in seminary. There was pressure, with the *Lexio Coram* (final exam) approaching and the dissertation that I had to write along the way, but it was only by the time I arrived on the licence programme that I actually felt like I had a handle on theology. It was a privilege that the Archbishop wanted me to continue this study, because it rounded off what I felt were really just foundations. I specialised in Creation Theology (which is *not* creationist thought!) One of my biggest realisations was that you have to get the theology of creation right, because it undergirds so much else in theological study. And it is already becoming really useful in a parish for things such as RCIA – answering the many questions of those coming to know Jesus better and to join the Church.

Throughout my formation, the support of the Clergy Training Fund was indispensable, as I didn't have other streams of financial support, really. So everything that I've described, the many blessings that I experienced being formed, is all because of the Clergy Training Fund and the generosity of the people in parishes of the Archdiocese."

**Fr. Dave Bench**

**Assistant Priest, Holy Trinity & Sacred Heart, Sutton Coldfield**





## CLERGY TRAINING FUND ACCOUNTS

INCOME	2025	2024	2023
<b>Income from Donations</b>			
CTF Donations (non-Gift Aid)	£14,160	£8,263	£7,501
CTF Donations (Gift Aid)	£3,885	£4,592	£2,944
CTF Standing Orders (non-Gift Aid)	£8,876	£10,003	£10,784
CTF Standing Orders (Gift Aid)	£36,847	£37,251	£35,835
Vocations Sunday Collection	£62,964	£46,245	£48,080
General Donations	£5,538	£18,069	£15,038
Binations (Priests)	£4,269	£2,525	£2,681
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>£136,539</b>	<b>£126,948</b>	<b>£122,862</b>
<b>Income from Other Sources</b>			
Bank Interest	£293	£1,067	£1,328
Gift Aid Reclaimed	£11,789	£10,468	£20,005*
Rental Income (inc. Sale of Property)	£0	£108,139	£1,729
Vocations Promotion (e.g. Donations from Schools)	£0	£0	£395
Legacies	£21,602	£34,204	£41,800
Diocesan Grant	£49,997	£200,000	£280,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>£83,681</b>	<b>£353,877</b>	<b>£345,257</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£220,220</b>	<b>£480,825</b>	<b>£468,119</b>

\*2022's Gift Aid Reclaim was paid into the CTF in 2023

EXPENDITURE	2025	2024	2023
<b>Formation</b>			
Seminarians (incl. Grants & Seminary Fees)	£246,828	£248,229	£189,060
Permanent Diaconate Fees (Seminary Fees)	£90,375	£39,825	£105,733
Clergy Undertaking Further Studies	£6,864	£6,640	£14,922
Priestly Discernment Costs (incl. Application Costs)	£5,838	£7,302	£900
Propaedeutic Year for Diaconate Costs (Incl. Application Costs)	£23,344	£32,725	£5,040
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>£373,250</b>	<b>£334,720</b>	<b>£315,654</b>
<b>Diocesan Vocations Office</b>			
Vocations Promotion Costs (incl. Printing & Postage)	£3,494	£4,112	£10,083
Personnel Costs (incl. Salaries, Mileage, Training etc.)	£72,313	£70,781	£68,021
Office Expenses	£5,458	£10,252	£10,679
Rent for Vocations Office	£7,653	£15,178	£13,146
Vocation Director Accommodation Costs (rent, utilities etc)	£13,980	£16,081	£19,648
Bank Charges	£646	£962	£573
Exceptional Expenses	£0	£0	£2,648
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>£103,544</b>	<b>£117,367</b>	<b>£124,835</b>
	£476,794	£452,087	£440,489

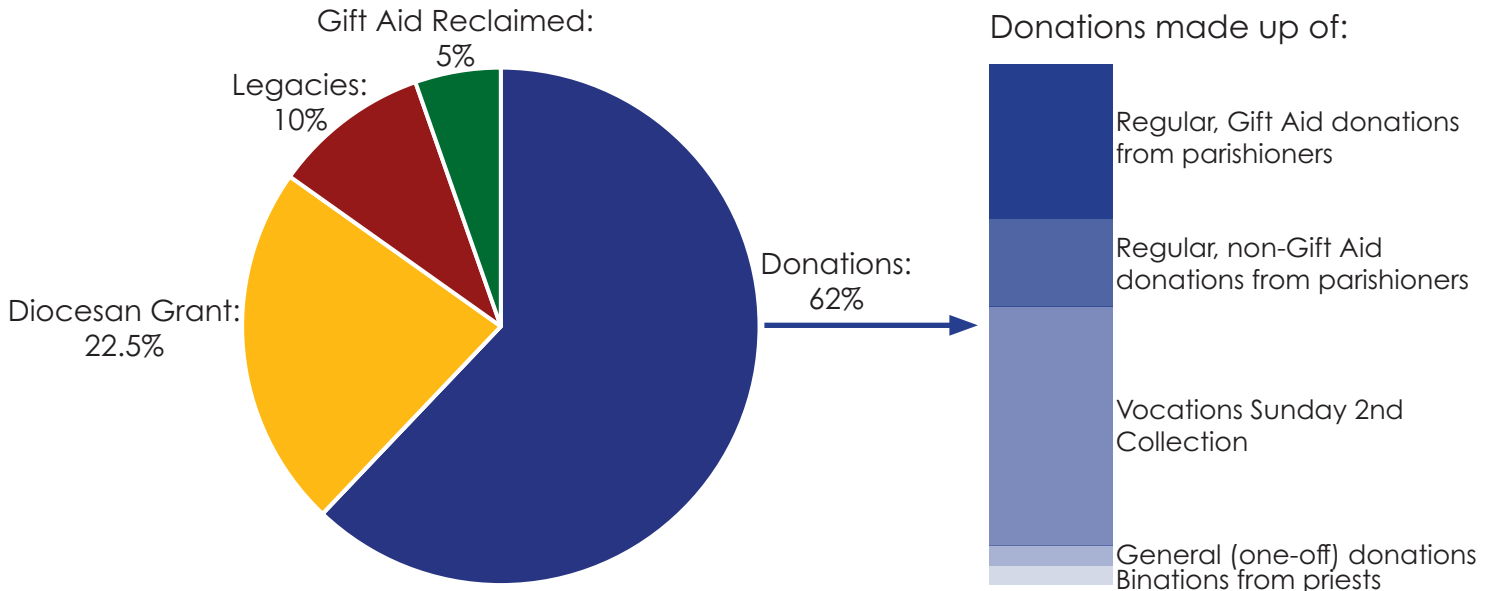
<b>TOTAL SURPLUS/DEFICIT PER YEAR</b>	<b>-£256,574</b>	<b>£28,738</b>	<b>£27,630</b>
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To support us: [www.vocations.org.uk/ctf](http://www.vocations.org.uk/ctf)

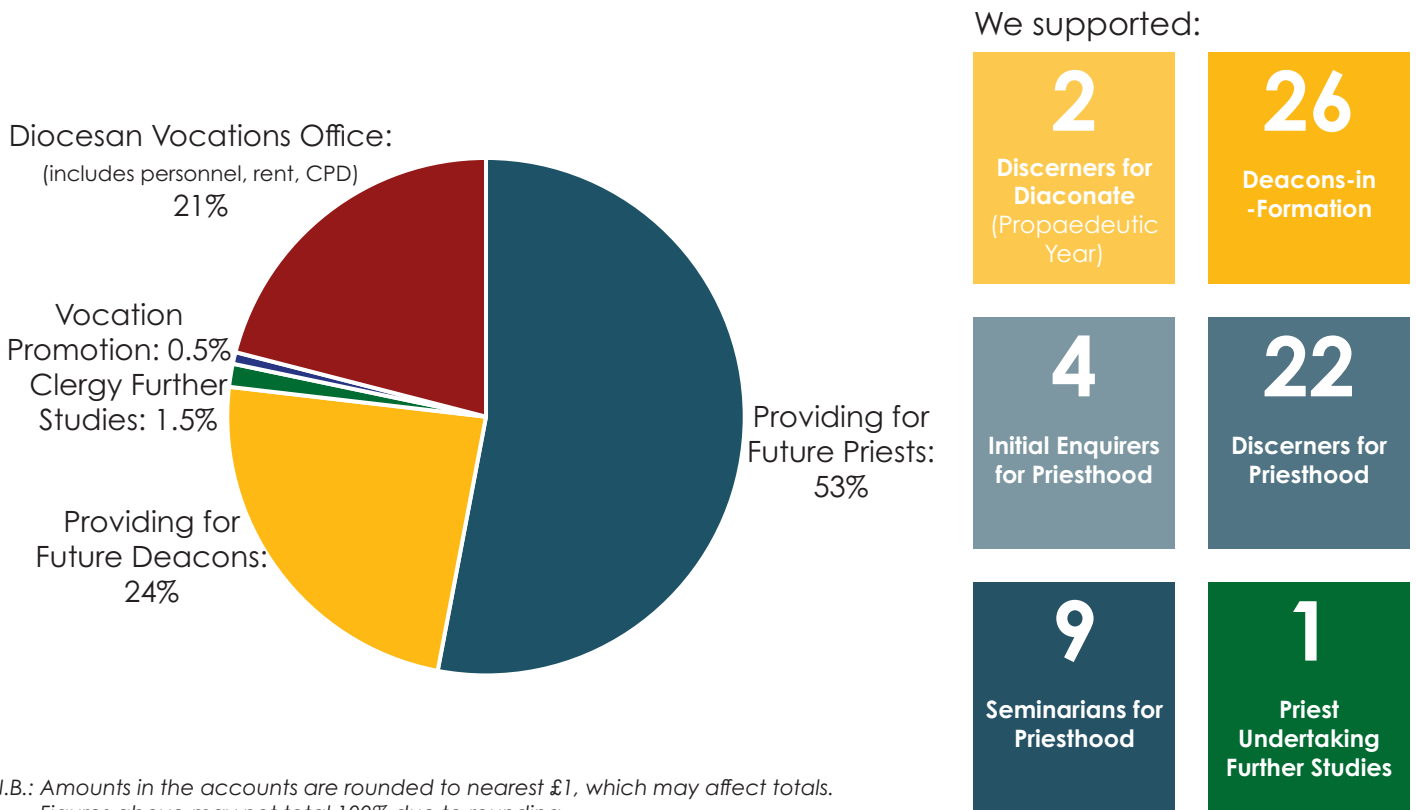




### INCOME: Where Our Money Came From in 2025



### EXPENDITURE: How We Spent This Money in 2025



*N.B.: Amounts in the accounts are rounded to nearest £1, which may affect totals. Figures above may not total 100% due to rounding.*

The **Clergy Training Fund** exists to pay for the formation of the future priests and permanent deacons for the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

It costs approximately **£200,000 over seven years** of formation for one new priest (£25,000 - £30,000 per seminarian each year). This is a substantial amount of money, but it is essential because it covers seminary fees, living costs, travel and study materials.

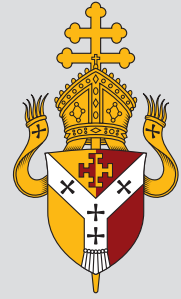
We rely solely on your generosity. Anything you can give - whether big or small - will help to provide future priests and deacons for our parishes.

**How you can give:**

- Standing Order
- Regular giving or one-off donations
- Online by credit or debit card
- Legacies



# DEANERY VOCATIONS MONTHS 2026



THE ARCHDIOCESE  
*of* BIRMINGHAM

**JANUARY:** MONTH OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

Pray for the courage to serve the Lord in whatever ways He calls you during the coming year.

**FEBRUARY:** MONTH OF THE HOLY FAMILY

**DUDLEY & WOLVERHAMPTON**

**OXFORD (SOUTH)**

**MARCH:** MONTH OF SAINT JOSEPH

**BANBURY & WARWICK**

**APRIL:** MONTH OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

This Easterfide, pray that the Lord sends more labourers into His harvest.

**MAY:** MONTH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**BIRMINGHAM CATHEDRAL & SOUTH**

**JUNE:** MONTH OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

**COVENTRY & NUNEATON**

**JULY:** MONTH OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

**LICHFIELD & WALSALL**

**OXFORD (NORTH)**

**AUGUST:** MONTH OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Through the intercession of Our Lady, pray for the priests of our Archdiocese.

**SEPTEMBER:** MONTH OF THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY

**BIRMINGHAM EAST & NORTH**

**OCTOBER:** MONTH OF THE HOLY ROSARY

**NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE**

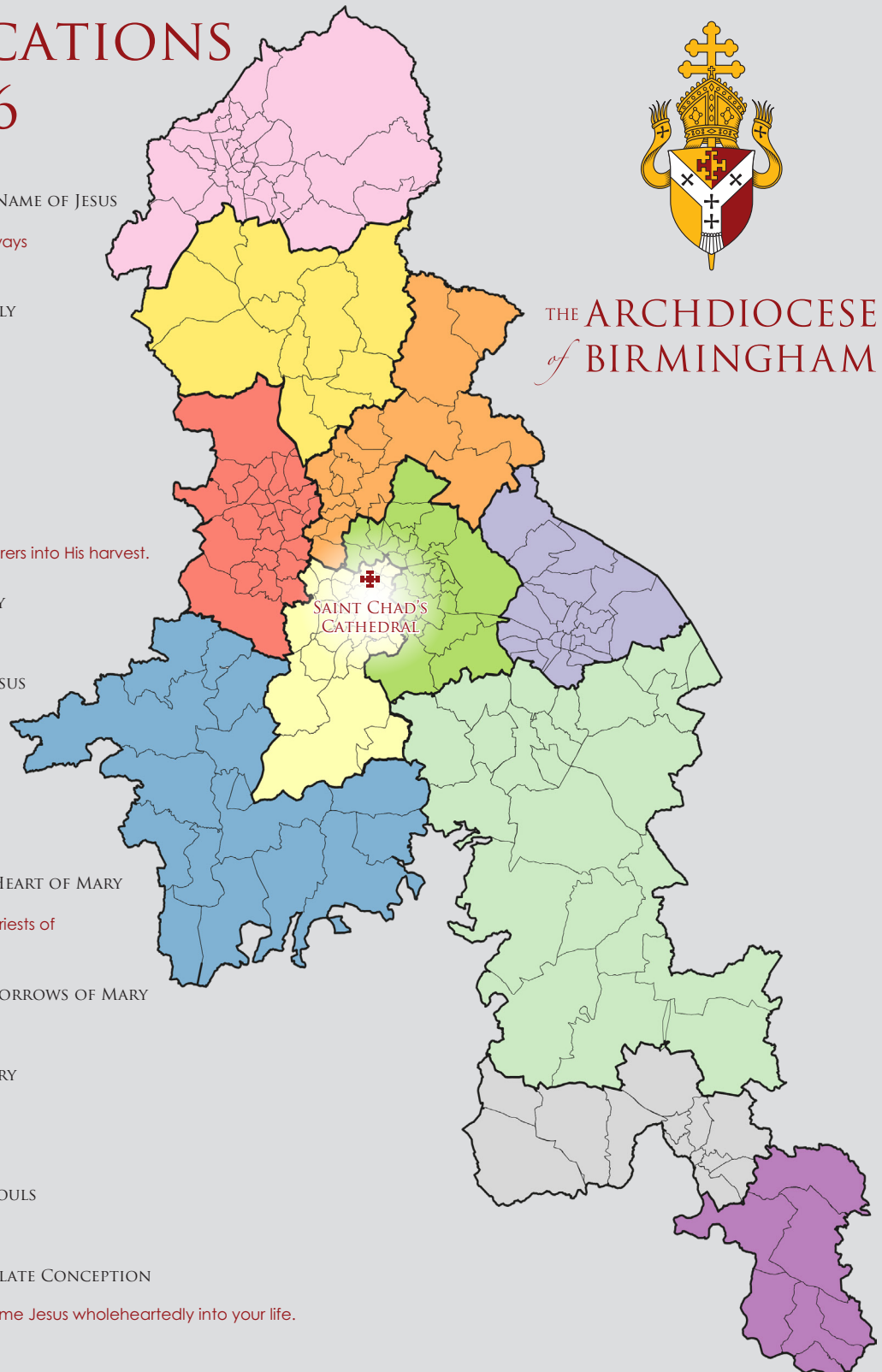
**STAFFORD**

**NOVEMBER:** MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS

**KIDDERMINSTER & WORCESTER**

**DECEMBER:** MONTH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

This Advent and Christmas, pray that you will welcome Jesus wholeheartedly into your life.



**DIOCESAN VOCATIONS OFFICE**  
 St. Mary's College, Oscott  
 Chester Road  
 Sutton Coldfield  
 B73 5AA

To discuss a vocation to the priesthood:  
**Fr. Craig: 0121 321 5142**  
 For general enquiries, the Clergy Training Fund  
 and the Guild of Saint Stephen:  
**Kathryn: 0121 321 5144**  
 For vocation promotion:  
**Dcn. Owen: 0121 321 5135**