THE CLIFTON EVANGELIST

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION AND EVANGELISATION - NEWSLETTER

Volume Seventeen - 2026

A FUTURE FULL OF HOPE
CLIFTON DIOCESE

In this issue:

- Diocesan Prayer Offerings
- Lent - a Journey
- From Lent to Easter
- Celebrating St Francis
- Walk for Peace with St Francis
- Laudato Si' and Animating
- The Joy of being a Catechist
- Called & Sent
- The Evangelical Catholic
- Step Up - Step Forward
- Becoming a Deacon
- What we've been up to
- Dates for the Diary

Called to be a People of Hope

The Department for Adult Education and Evangelisation seeks to serve our diocesan community at all levels in living out this invitation, serving the Church's mission to evangelise and to proclaim the Gospel. We are committed to encouraging parishes in all they do to welcome others into the life of their community as well as nurturing the faith and prayer of those who seek to understand their faith in a deeper, richer way.

The Team

Department for Adult Education and Evangelisation

Sarah Adams
Director of Adult Education and Evangelisation

Rich Williams
Adult Education and Evangelisation Administrator

Welcome to **'The Clifton Evangelist'** our 17th departmental newsletter. For this venture we would like it to serve the **Diocese of Clifton** community as effectively as possible. Our aim is that it is both a source of information and formation, engaging you, the people of our diocese, in sharing and growing in our capacity to be faith-filled people, serving the wider community and proclaiming the Gospel.
If you're reading a hard copy and would like to read online to make use of the hyperlinks, scan the QR code below.

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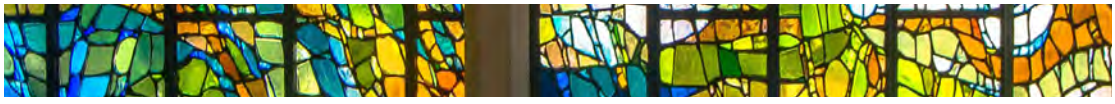
"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day".
Evangelii Gaudium 3

CLIFTON DIOCESE



Diocesan Prayer Offerings

Prayer for Lent

Merciful and Compassionate God
As we journey through Lent,
you speak to our hearts
calling us to return again and again.

May our prayer,
fasting and generous giving
bring us closer to your Son,
our Lord, Jesus.
Through him, may we come to know
more fully the abundance of love
which you freely offer us.

Bless our desire to accompany Jesus
on his road to calvary,
walking with him in his suffering
and in the suffering people of our world.

May your grace enable us
to live Lent fully,
so that with transformed hearts
we may joyfully celebrate
the abundance of life
offered to us at Easter.

Amen

Lent - A Journey of Encounter, Healing and Transformation

Lent is one of those seasons that we either dread because of its apparent emphasis on self-denial and self-imposed hardship or one that we embrace with enthusiasm because it is a real opportunity to re-assess our lives and take steps to deepen our relationship with God. To the un-initiated, especially those with no particular religious affiliation, Lent is seen as an austere time when 'giving' up chocolate or alcohol or some other sensuous pleasure appears to be the norm. The emphasis on 'giving things up' not only misses the point of Lent but can cause people to shy away from what can be a deeply enriching aesthetic practice. In addition, it can result in people forgetting the other dimensions of Lenten practice such as prayer and almsgiving.

So what is Lent about?

If we think of a wedding or an imminent birth, we will know that many months of preparation go into being ready for these significant occasions. In many ways Lent is not so different. It is a time, lasting 40 days when we prepare to celebrate Easter, the Resurrection of the Lord. As is traditional in the Catholic Church, the beginning of Lent is marked by the ritual marking of ashes on our foreheads, reminding us of our earthly vulnerability. On Ash Wednesday we are reminded through the readings of our need to reacquaint ourselves with the One who loved us into being and continues to love us.

Lent, it seems, is an opportunity, a period of time to reflect, to re-align ourselves spiritually so that when Easter comes we can celebrate with fresh vigour the joy of the resurrection. We can give thanks to God for the gift that Jesus is to the world, his life, death and ultimate rising to new life, in which one day we will share. By participating in the 40 days of Lent we follow Jesus into the desert, a place of wilderness and testing. Whilst Jesus may have gone physically into the desert ours is an inner journey, where through prayer we spend time with God determining where our life is going, considering what God might be asking of us and how far we may have wandered from this path. Ultimately it is a deepening of our daily journey with God. The liturgy of Lent provides us with rich opportunities to engage deeply. The themes of 'encounter, healing and transformation' are pertinent. On his own journey to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a woman at a well, a blind man in need of healing and a dead man who has been lying in a tomb for four days. Each encounter transforms people. An ostracised woman shares her story and the people of Samaria come to believe. A blind man receives his sight and those around him are astounded. Mary and Martha see their brother brought back to life and many around come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. In each Gospel an encounter leads to some form of healing and then to transformation.

This is what Lent is about.

From Lent to Easter: a parishioner shares her thoughts on the Journey

It is with mixed feelings that I approach the seasons of Lent and Easter. My first thoughts are of extra meetings and services at the church, the need to find some sort of penance and a general sense of not exactly gloom, but certainly not one of light-heartedness. The thought of Holy Week makes me quail: Masses or services four days running, late nights, and a feeling of guilt when I don't quite manage all that might be expected. And yet, year after year (and I am now 83) I find it a refreshing and consoling time, leading to an Easter of joy and hope.

So how do I approach it really? Firstly, I put the whole situation into the hands of God. He knows my weaknesses and he knows what I need. I ask Mary to help me recognise His guidance. I start off gently, perhaps making just a little more effort to bring bedtime forward a little so I have time to pray just that little bit longer. I make an effort to read a small portion of Scripture and decide which book of the Bible I will read gently and prayerfully, a few verses at a time, through the six weeks ahead. I may also choose a 'religious' book to read at other times.

It is also traditional to perform some sort of extra penance during Lent, be it fasting, or extra prayer or an additional 'good deed'. This helps us remember that we are human and need to train and discipline our desires. It also draws us closer to the Lord in His passion and death. There are many ways of using this special time.

Then life carries on around these 'extra's'. The shopping and the cleaning still need to be done; other duties and appointments do not stop just because it is Lent.

I go to a strength and balance class weekly, which is where I meet different people from those I know from the church. We have coffee etc after the class, which is where we chat and get to know each other. If someone goes to a church of another denomination, we may ask each other what we are doing for Lent. Non-churchgoers join in the conversation. We may even discuss what we do and why.

The same thing happens when I go to a community choir at the local city farm. Again, the members are outside my usual group of friends, but it is good to hear of their lifestyles - and just sometimes, there is a chance to gently insert a Christian concept into the general conversation - or, of course learn of a different point of view, which widens my thinking.

I still meet friends for coffee and take Holy Communion to a lady in the nursing home round the corner. I think: I can't do anymore! I am worn

From Lent to Easter

out already! In addition to all this, I am a member of the music team at the church, which means helping to plan all the Holy Week services.

What more can I do?

The answer is simple. I can learn to rely more and more on God. The Lenten message and liturgies are comforting. He does not want me to DO more. He just wants me to trust Him and get to know Him a little more in the silence of my heart. He wants me to realise where I am wasting energy and, even more, where I am going wrong. He is loving and comforting and wants to heal and repair me.

Lent is the time when we draw very near to Jesus and find rest for our souls. In tears, we find ourselves comforted. When we feel totally inadequate, He reassures us. When we worry about the state of the world, or our city or our church or our family, He gently tells us that He is in charge. He tells us that suffering is part of the package. There is no growth without pain of some sort. Throughout the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible we learn that our development and ultimate transformation take us through dark valleys before leading us into the light.

The sacrament of reconciliation is wisely encouraged during this time. It can reaffirm the truths that we have allowed ourselves to forget in our busy lives.

Holy Week can be exceptionally demanding. I think we do need to use good sense and do what we can do in the light of other commitments and our own health, and trust in God's mercy for the bits we cannot manage.

And then comes the glorious joy of Easter! Life looks possible once more! We can rest and look forward in hope - and enjoy our families and Easter eggs and plan holidays and thank God for the great blessings we enjoy.

So, has our experience in Lent born fruit? Hopefully it has cleansed us and sharpened our mind and allowed us to focus on what is important. Most of all, it has enabled us to love more: to love other people with understanding and mercy and be more willing to listen to them.

A major mission for all of us, but particularly for older people, is that of attending to people and listening to them, young and old and in between. Older people usually have more time to listen and certainly more experience to draw from. I would like to think it is Wisdom! If we are not too busy, we can notice when someone is unhappy or alone and at the very least smile at them or say something which could lead to a conversation.

If our Lent has helped us to be more compassionate and Easter has helped us to bring hope and joy to the world and our neighbours and our families, then it has not been in vain.

Marion

Celebrating St Francis

Celebrating 800 Years of St Francis: Living His Values at St Francis' Primary School

"Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." – St Francis of Assisi

Eight hundred years after his death, the life and witness of St Francis of Assisi continue to speak powerfully into the world we inhabit today. In 2026, as the Church marks the Year of St Francis, his example reminds us that faith is most convincingly expressed not through explanation alone, but through the way it is lived.

At St Francis' Primary School in Nailsea, this anniversary is not simply a moment of commemoration, but an opportunity to reflect on how Francis' values of peace, care for creation and love for the poor are embodied each day in the life of the school. Through relationships, learning and service, these values are made visible in the actions and voices of the children and the wider school community.

St Francis believed that everything God created was special. He loved nature, cared deeply for others and lived simply. In school life today, these beliefs are shaped into daily behaviours – how children are encouraged to speak kindly, listen carefully, include others and act with compassion.

He is especially remembered as a peacemaker, greeting people with the words, "Peace be with you," and striving to bring kindness wherever he went. He listened carefully, forgave easily and treated everyone with respect. Inspired by these qualities, the school encourages all members of its community to follow Francis' example by creating a safe and welcoming environment. Children are guided to use kind words, include others and solve problems calmly; helping to build a caring school community.

Members of the school Chaplaincy team shared their thoughts on what being peaceful means to them. Hattie, aged 8, said, "Being a peacemaker means stopping arguments by being gentle and listening." Ivy, aged 9, added, "Being peaceful means using a calm voice and kind words even when we feel upset." These reflections show that children are learning to practise patience, understanding, and care every day.

Staff also play an important role in showing Franciscan values. Through patience, encouragement and care, staff model kindness, respect and generosity. They support pupils not only in learning but also in personal growth. Staff do this intentionally, recognising their role in forming a Franciscan culture where faith is lived through daily actions, not simply spoken about. By listening carefully, celebrating effort and guiding children to make good choices, staff bring the spirit of St Francis into classrooms, playgrounds and daily school life.

Celebrating St Francis

St Francis is the patron saint of animals, ecology and the environment because of his love for the natural world. He saw God's beauty in the sun, moon, animals, plants and people, and believed it was important to care for creation. The school encourages pupils to look after the environment through recycling projects, litter picking, sustainable transport initiatives, stewardship and outdoor learning. These activities help children understand their responsibility to care for the world.

Children shared their thoughts on helping the environment. Lily, aged 9, remarked, "We helped by litter picking in the community. We did this because 'stewardship' is one of the Catholic Social Teaching principles and we are being stewards of creation." Poppy, aged 10 explained, "We cleaned up the school garden and planted bulbs to make it look welcoming and to attract bees and butterflies". Aaron, aged 8, added, "We are learning about climate change and we want to make our world better. To stop global warming, we must turn off lights and walk or cycle to school." Through these simple actions, pupils learn that caring for creation is one way of giving thanks to God.

Generosity and helping others were also central to St Francis' life. He gave up his wealth to help people who were poor, sick or lonely. At St Francis' School, this spirit is reflected in fundraising days, charity events and service projects that help people locally and globally. Children learn that even small actions can make a big difference.

Kiana, aged 8, shared, "We like helping the poor and vulnerable because our good turns make sad people smile." Katherine, aged 9, reflected, "When we raise money for charity, we're doing what St Francis did—helping people. It's also a way of showing we are grateful for the things that we've got." Orla, aged 10, commented, "Raising money is fun – it's also important for the common good and helps to make the world fairer." These experiences help children develop caring hearts and an understanding of the importance of kindness and fairness.

The life of St Francis serves as a reminder that faith is meant to be lived, not just spoken about. By embracing Franciscan values in every aspect of school life—from classroom learning and playground interactions to environmental projects and community service—pupils are encouraged to act with peace, generosity and respect every day. St Francis' example inspires gratitude, care for others and respect for the world. During this special anniversary year, the school community is focused on following their patron's example, helping children grow into thoughtful, compassionate young people ready to make a positive difference in the world.

A Prayer Inspired by St Francis

Loving God, We thank you for the gift of St Francis, whose life of peace, simplicity, and love for all creation inspires us still. Bless our Diocese and all who live and work within it. May we follow Francis' example by caring for one another, welcoming the stranger and cherishing the world you have made. Teach us to be peacemakers in our homes, parishes and communities; to act with generosity, patience and humility; and to walk in love each day. May the light of your Spirit shine through our words and actions, bringing hope, joy and care to all we meet.

Amen.

Walk for Peace

Walk for peace with St Francis of Assisi in this special year!

2026 is 800 years since the death of St Francis of Assisi and Pope Leo XIV has declared a special Year to mark the occasion. St Francis was a pilgrim who undertook significant journeys to Rome and Santiago de Compostela and attempted to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He embodied the pilgrim spirit of humility, peace building and seeking God. Pope Leo has spoken movingly about his holistic approach to peace:

"The Franciscan vision of peace is not limited to the relations between human beings, but also embraces the whole of creation. Francis, who calls the sun "brother" and the moon "sister", who recognizes in every creature a reflection of divine beauty, reminds us that peace must be extended to the entire family of Creation. This insight resonates with particular urgency in our time, when our common home is threatened and cries out under exploitation." [1]

We live in troubled times. The 2025 Institute for Economics & Peace report [2] record that global peace is at its lowest point since World War II, with 59 active state-based conflicts. Many fear that we are sliding towards global war. It would be easy to despair, but as Christians we are called to be pilgrims of hope, so in this special Year perhaps you could promote peace by undertaking a pilgrimage with St Francis of Assisi.

You could walk the Way of St Francis in Italy from La Verna to Assisi and Rome. You could walk to any church dedicated to St Francis of Assisi in England or Wales, either alone or in a group. The Holy See has announced an Indulgence for such pilgrimages [3]. You will find details of 48 Catholic churches dedicated to St Francis of Assisi and Franciscan communities in England and Wales on the Hearts in Search of God website (https://www.pilgrimways.org.uk/churches-of-st-francis-of-assisi). You could simply pray the words inspired by St Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

I hope that it may be possible to hold a group walking pilgrimage on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on Sunday 4th October 2026 in the Diocese of Clifton. If you would be interested in taking part, please sign up for updates here: https://www.pilgrimways.org.uk/register-for-updates

I hope that this Year of St Francis of Assisi will be an inspiration for many, and a contribution to building the peace our world so desperately needs. Buen Camino!

Phil

Phil McCarthy is a parishioner at Clifton Cathedral and leads the 'Hearts in Search of God' project which promotes and develops walking pilgrimage in the Dioceses of England & Wales. For more information visit www.pilgrimways.org.uk

1 - Pope Leo XIV on the opening of the Eighth Centenary Year of the death of St Francis of Assisi
2 - https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf
3 - https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2026/01/16/260116c.html

Laudato Si' and 'Animating'

Last May was the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis's encyclical 'Laudato Si'/Praise be to You', the first-ever devoted to the crisis of our planetary home. Inspired by his namesake, St Francis of Assisi and his deep communion with all Creation (best captured in the Canticle of the Creatures that inspired the encyclical's title), the Pope issued a powerful appeal to the Church and 'all people of good will' to come together urgently and respond to 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor'.

Laudato Si' – with its subtitle, 'On Care for Our Common Home' – is now perhaps more widely known than any other encyclical, and seen as one of the cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching. Credit for this is in large part due to the worldwide Laudato Si' Movement, its mission being to inspire and mobilise the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice, in collaboration with all people of goodwill.

The Movement comprises over 500 Member Organizations, 700 Circles, and 80 Chapters in 145 countries, taking action together: its Animators' training programme is designed to 'breathe life' into Pope Francis's teaching. Having myself enrolled in the free online course during Covid, I am one of now more than 19,000 certified Laudato Si' Animators, and convener of the Cheltenham Laudato Si' Circle. The Movement strives for further impact, as Laudato Si' is still little known in many places. Accordingly, last year I took part in a pilot 'in-person' (as opposed to online) project, and facilitated a course to lead to more awareness of the encyclical.

With the permission of my Parish Priest, I led four meetings during Advent in the hall adjoining my home Parish Church of St Gregory the Great in Cheltenham. On the first evening we considered: What is happening to our common home? With our present economic world order, we are changing the world as we know it. It's no longer enough to be passive witnesses: we need an integrated approach, to combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded and protect nature. We in the Church can be a force for creating change, we are a people of hope.

In week two we looked at Catholic Social Teaching and in particular how as part of our faith we are called to be missionary disciples, not only in our Parish, but within our families and communities. The third session considered Pope Francis's call for 'ecological conversion' – that it should be for each of us a personal conversion, a communal conversion and an ongoing conversion. Finally, we considered: How do we put our faith into action? So much can be done, both in terms of our personal lifestyles and in working for political change in the broadest sense.

Feedback received from the new would-be 'Animators' on our pilot course was positive. I am encouraged to report back an appetite for further in-person sessions within a Parish context. If you wish to know more, please contact me.

Martin Davis

cheltlaudatosicircle@gmail.com

The Joy of Being a Catechist

Have you ever been a witness in a situation in life? A few years ago, I was involved in a car crash. I was very fortunate when a total stranger came forward to act as an independent witness to the accident. I was so relieved, thankful and humbled that someone would do this for me.

As a catechist, I have the great gift of being a witness for our Lord Jesus Christ and to be able to share the Good News of the Gospel. Accompanying people of all ages who are at different stages of their faith journey is a great honour and privilege. Helping everyone develop in their own personal relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ, is a great blessing. What a joy it is to share God's Divine Love with another person. We pray, share Scripture, go to Holy Mass and walk the path of life supporting each other.

Working with a team of catechists provides mutual support, constant learning and builds up the community. As changes take place in the parish, the catechists provide continuity for parishioners in many ways. Lifelong friendships form and our own faith journey is well supported to strengthen our mission to serve our Lord.

Working alongside families brings a deep joy to the life of a catechist. One of the first Holy Communion children's parent agrees.

From a parent's perspective, this journey is especially precious. Our son is currently preparing for his First Holy Communion, and this preparation is not just for him; it is for all of us as a family. Faith is not something learned in isolation; it grows in the home, in conversation, in prayer, and in the small moments we share together.

Watching our son engage with the preparation has been a joy in itself. He is genuinely enjoying the process - asking thoughtful questions, showing curiosity, and beginning to understand the love Jesus has for him. His excitement reminds us that faith is not meant to be heavy or complicated, but something joyful, living, and full of hope.

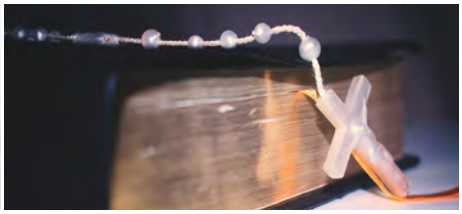
As parents, this has invited us to reflect on our own relationship with Jesus. Through helping our son prepare, we are reminded of the beauty of the sacraments and the importance of making space for God in our family life. His journey encourages us to slow down, to listen, and to rediscover the joy of faith through a child's eyes. Thank you for the beautiful and faithful work you do in helping our children grow closer to Jesus.

Helping everyone flourish in their faith life is precious. When a project is completed and our journey together ends, there are many opportunities to meet again along the way. Memories and experiences are shared. Several children have grown up and have become adult catechists. Children go onto serve Our Lord at Holy Mass as altar servers, readers or in the choir.

There is great comfort in knowing that the Holy Spirit is always working ahead, getting ready for the next part of our journey to begin.

Volunteers are always welcome. Everyone shares in the same mission given at Baptism. Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the

The Joy of being a Catechist



Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. God is calling all of us to share the Good News. Everyone is an evangelist of their faith by word and example. Come forward and be Jesus' witness in your parish. Being a catechist is not about being 'worthy' so do not rule yourself out.

A parishioner recently commented;

'Catechists touch the lives of individuals, drawing us out of our shells and letting us know that we are never alone, as conduits of God's love. With a smile and a kind word, or just their loving presence they are a reminder of the true joy of faith, the love that God shows us, and calls us to show others'.

Challenges come along the way. Time is limited. Every moment given to the church is sacred. Time spent together in catechesis lives on in the people you accompany. I recall the people who have helped my faith to grow; family, teachers and more recently, the leaders on the pastoral ministry course. I remember fondly all the priests who have served me in my life. This golden time serving our Lord, is time preserved for ever.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is quickly infiltrating many areas of our lives. How can we discern if what we see and if what we hear is real or fake? Catechists speak with the real authentic Catholic voice and can testify to a genuine relationship with Jesus and to the true Catholic church traditions. This trust is precious as new technology continues to radically evolve.

There are many 'mountain top moments.' With the help of God, prayer and perseverance, people's lives are transformed and saved by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

I join St Paul when I say;

'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice'.

Nothing that the world can give you can compare to the love and joy of accompanying other people in faith. Praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God. Amen.

Becky

CLIFTON DIOCESE

Called and Sent – Jesus-centred lay ministry in Catholic Christian life

An invitation to participate in a piece of research with one of our Diocesan parishioners!

Are you involved in lay ministry of any kind in your parish, pastoral area or in a Catholic organisation? If so, then this project could be for you! David Blake, a parishioner in Salisbury, is bringing together two groups of lay people, one in Bristol and one in Trowbridge, to discuss the highs and lows of lay ministry.

The meetings will take place on two Saturdays in April and May. In particular, the groups will discern how people involved in Catholic lay ministry maintain Jesus Christ as the focal point for their ministry and avoid becoming absorbed by the mission itself. Can the doing of something end up becoming an end in itself, rather than a means to an end and does this ever apply to lay ministry? Ever felt that your Church life has taken over your spiritual life? Or maybe you have found that your route to an encounter with Christ is through lay ministry?

1. What is the purpose of this project?

The overall aim of 'Called and Sent' is to discover how people involved in Catholic lay ministry maintain Jesus Christ as the focal point for their ministry and avoid becoming absorbed by the mission itself. Can the doing of something end up becoming an end in itself, rather than a means to an end and does this ever apply to lay ministry? If you have an opinion on that, then this is for you!

2. Who is organising and funding the project?

'Called and Sent' is organised and delivered by me, David Blake, as the means to the end of my MA in Catholic Theology. I am supervised by Dr Clare Watkins of Durham University. The project is carried out under the auspices and procedures prescribed by Durham University. All funding comes from myself – there are no funders influencing the outcomes or their presentation.

3. What will I have to do if I take part?

I am inviting those who are involved in lay ministry within the Diocese of Clifton to fill in a questionnaire that will be sent to them and then to take part in up to two sessions which will be carried out in either Bristol and Trowbridge – whichever is nearest to you. Dates and times are below. The sessions will include small group work where participants will discuss their ministry in terms of its theology and practical application. People will talk about what inspires them and how they respond to Jesus Christ in the performance of their ministry.

4. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There is a time commitment in filling out the questionnaire (30 mins) and attending the sessions. A certain amount of travel by car will be required although every effort will be made to hold the sessions at convenient locations and to arrange lift sharing. Some people may find it is challenging to write about and share personal experiences and to talk about their faith in public. All contributions will be kept anonymous and there will be general agreement amongst all participants as to the confidential nature of the discussions.

Called and Sent

5. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have an opportunity to talk about your own faith and how your ministry is a response to that faith and your lay vocation. You will also be able to hear other people speak about how they have responded to being called and sent by God. There will be opportunities to receive gifts of learning, wisdom and inspiration of the Spirit as well as giving those gifts to others. It is in this mutual sharing of gifts that you may find the greatest benefits of taking part.

The project uses a technique called "Theological Action Research" or TAR. It has been said of TAR that it is built on the conviction that the Holy Spirit is moving Christ's people to an ever deeper understanding of faith, in faith; and that this 'theology' is before us, waiting to be 'seen' or recognised.

6. Will what we say be kept confidential?

All participants will sign a confidentiality agreement which will safeguard themselves and others as well as giving consent for data to be used anonymously. The conversations during the sessions will be recorded, but the transcript will not identify individuals. Any material taken from questionnaires or conversation transcription will be anonymised – names, dates, place names and other identifying references will be removed.

7. What will happen to the results of the research?

It is hoped that the results of the research will contribute to lay ministry within the parishes of Clifton Diocese and in the formation of catechists and all those in lay ministry. This study will form the research part of an MA dissertation in Catholic theology. Copies will be available to all participants.

8. It's all voluntary!

Participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time and withdraw your permission to use what you have said. I cannot offer to recompense financial expenses, such as travel costs, but light refreshments (tea/coffee/biscuits) will be provided at the meetings.

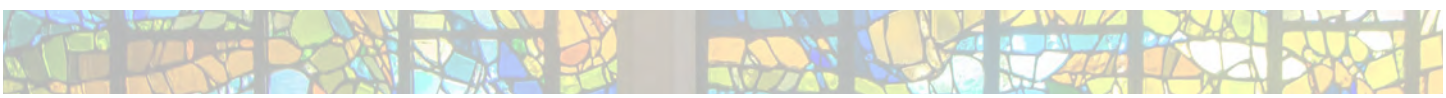
9. What happens afterwards?

This is entirely up to the group. If we have found the experiences helpful, or feel that there are more gifts to be received and exchanged, and wish to carry on meeting then we can decide to do so within the TAR process or not.

Trowbridge meetings – St John's Catholic Church Parish Centre, 2 Wingfield Road, Trowbridge.
Session 1 - Saturday 18 April (9am to 1pm).
Session 2 - Saturday 23 May (9am to 1pm).

Bristol meetings – Clifton Cathedral, The Apostle Room, Clifton Cathedral House, Clifton Park, Bristol.
Session 1 - Saturday 25 April (Gathering at 10am after Mass, finish at 1pm).
Session 2 - Saturday 16 May (Gathering at 10am after Mass, finish at 1pm).

If you would like to paticipate, David would love to hear from you and can be contacted at david.blake@durham.ac.uk.



The Evangelical Catholic

In 2024, I was invited by my parish priest to take part in Evangelical Catholic.

Developed in the US, the Evangelical Catholic program has been running since 1998 to bring Catholic parishes a gentle approach to evangelising as part of everyday life. Without being pushy or 'preachy', participants learn over twelve weeks the skills to enrich how we bring the Word of God to those in our own lives and help to encourage others' faith in our parish. It's also an opportunity for deepening faith and strengthening or creating bonds with others within the group.

I was part of the sixth group to go through EC in the parish of Taunton Vale, with six others who were mostly only by-sight acquaintances or unknown to me. Among our number were two parishioners who had been actively involved in their previous parishes throughout their lives, two 'lapsed' Catholics who had returned to faith; one whose attendance at Mass was inconsistent but was looking to reconnect and myself and another convert to Catholicism whom I knew from the RCIA course. We were quite a mix of ages and cultural backgrounds!

Led by two laypersons, we met for two hours per week on a Wednesday evening. The leaders were there to guide and support us as they had both been through the EC program themselves as participants, which was really helpful as they were able to understand areas we may find more difficult and things which could be improved upon from previous groups. The sessions are structured, incorporating some reflective reading or Lectio Divina, some learning through media and some group discussions. Prayer is also a big part of the makeup of the program, which was new for me as I hadn't experienced group prayer previously. Initially, the sessions begin with self-reflection about our own faith story, to help us with sharing these as a means of supporting others to do the same. All of the materials provided are aimed at learning how to 'meet people where they are' in faith and exploring the ways in which we can be true disciples of Jesus by spreading the Good News.

As well as the group sessions, the prayer companion guidebook contains some daily readings and questions for the week in between. These weren't burdensome for me and I managed to fit this around a very busy life! Each day is a different Gospel reading, a quote from a Saint or Holy leader or a passage from non-religious text which has some contemplative value, to use as part of prayerful reflection. We were each also assigned a 'point person' to be our individual contact through the program. These

The Evangelical Catholic

were all parishioners who had been through EC before and there was an aim of meeting informally every few weeks to discuss how we were doing and any areas we might be struggling with.

As the session progress there is more focus on the tools to bring evangelisation into our everyday lives and how we may do this through starting our own prayer group, bible study or local community gathering (although only if that's something you feel called towards!). By the end of the twelve weeks, the aim ultimately is to feel more confident in talking openly about faith.

For me, I found the Evangelical Catholic program to be a great way to learn a little more about people I'd seen at mass but never had the opportunity to socialise with, and it encouraged me to do the same with others whom I knew on a similar level. It was also very helpful as part of my own faith journey to spend some time reflecting on how I'd reached that point and where I was heading next, as well as contextualising my personal story in direct comparison with the others around me. The opportunity for group prayer was something I'd never had before and I found this to be a very powerful experience.

Following on from the program, I was able to use some of what I'd learned within a group I was already running in the parish, as did several others, and one of our number was inspired to set up a group to go through Exodus 90 together, which was very successful. Outside of the parish, I have a lot of contact with non-Catholics and non-Christians, so the gentle approach to evangelisation as part of daily life has caused me to exercise particular discernment in how I engage in conversations with people which may aid their path to God or subtly challenge preconceptions they may hold about the church.

I would recommend the Evangelical Catholic program to anyone; there's no requirement to be a certain age or level of involvement in the church. Whether you have a particular goal in mind, like being able to bring God's Word to those closest to you or whether you simply feel called towards the program for your own spiritual growth (or for no discernible reason at all!) I am sure that you will be directed on the path God wishes for you.

Robyn

Step Up - Step Forward

The Diocesan Certificate in Pastoral Ministry Course is an opportunity for parishioners to develop their own faith in a context of service for ministry within a Parish or other settings. Overtime the course has evolved in content and application, with a particular emphasis on accompaniment, listening and discerning. Participants on the course come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They are encouraged to be open to the Holy Spirit working in their life and to see where God is calling them next. In this article we hear from one past student, who shares her reflections on what happened to her when, coming to the end of the course, there was an expectation that participants would seek to engage in a pastoral project of their choosing.

"We need well-formed lay people, animated by a sincere and clear faith, whose life has been touched by the personal and merciful love of Christ Jesus. We need lay people who take risks, who get their hands dirty, who are not afraid of making mistakes, who go forward. We need lay people with a vision of the future, not confined to the little things of life. The Church needs lay people who "dare to dream." Pope Francis

The Pastoral Ministry Project is the expression of a vocation to step up and step forward wherever and whenever there is a need. It is not always easy to offer help, but people touched by the personal and merciful love of Christ Jesus may just need that little sign of welcome, to see an example of others stepping up and stepping forward, so they too can see they too might be able to offer pastoral ministry. It is to be able to reach out a hand of friendship so to engage someone who is animated by a sincere and clear faith and blessed by the love of Christ Jesus.

After many years of being too shy to volunteer for anything, I have taken a big breath and stepped forward and said 'Yes – I am here Lord – what can I do?' I am now involved with: First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparation, I am on the Meet and Greet and Coffee rotas and our Parish Jubilee Group which is organising our 150-year Jubilee celebrations. I have the privilege of recently having been appointed to the Dunstan Catholic Education Trust with a special interest in the special education need provision in the thirteen schools within the Trust.

I am, in my very small way, setting out to walk with other people and by my actions express my faith and try to be a spiritual guide. These acts may be nothing to shout about in a Catholic family and community but in a secular family and community they are most unusual and the source of many a raised eyebrow and a grim – "You don't really believe all that nonsense, do you?'

By my actions I am replying 'Yes I do' – I am telling those I love and live with that not only do I go to church each Sunday I believe what I hear in church. By my actions I am trying to reach out as a pastoral minister to those who have no sense of there being a God and no

Step Up - Step Forward

understanding of the love of Jesus Christ. I am not leading a group of committed believers I am trying to witness meaningfully to a group of committed non-believers.

Have I been successful? If I am honest, I have not yet changed anyone's mind, and I have not yet managed to reach out a hand to engage anyone else in the life of our church. It feels to me as if it is early days, but I am taking my first cautious steps and when it is hard to find the words - 'actions,' as they say, can speak louder than words.

I am trying to show those around me that we have a living church not a doctrine driven, book-based, archaic organisation. To show by my actions that we have a loving church that has message of hope for us all – the message that we are loved, forgiven and blessed.

My pastoral ministry is taking place outside of the church, as much as it is joining in the activities in the community of my parish. Every little challenge to those around me is ministering in some way – my frequent 'Oh gosh 'not 'Oh God' is a joke among my little ones – but it sinks in eventually and we have conversations – seeds are being sown.

I hope that as I settle into my various roles within the Parish, I will become more confident and feel able to 'step out' as well as 'step up'. On the home front I do not anticipate a sudden change of mindset but hope that the tiniest of splits in the certainty of not believing might let the Holy Spirit seep in and allow the small seeds of doubt to grow. In the Parish I would hope that I will be able to show that stepping up is not only trying to minister to others but is ministering to oneself - day by day witnessing, bringing the knowledge that the Love of God is central to one's life.

As I sat in church and spoke to God I could hear the selfishness of my prayers. I prayed for my family that they may come to know and love the Lord, but what was I doing to make that happen? On Sunday mornings I go to church, I pray, come home, and life goes on as usual. How to change that… if only I could learn some skills to put into words what I knew was true, how much better prepared I would be when challenged.

If I could learn how to be true to what I believe would I be able to spread the Word? The Pastoral Ministry Skill Course has been my way in, and there is no denying that it has been a rocky path at times, but face to face meetings with such wonderful group of fellow travellers has been a God given blessing.

I have learnt over the last two years that my faith is such a delicate flower that the slightest breeze can bruise it and it takes time to recover. I learnt that analysing and speaking of things with those who are certain leaves me so uncertain. I believe that the Holy spirit led me to understand that 'doing' not 'thinking' or 'saying' things was my way to mend the shaky faith that underpins me.

This project reflects that need to 'do' and has enabled me to be busy 'living' my faith while I work out how that put it all into words and how to effectively give spiritual guidance to those who do not know that they are loved by God. Explaining that, in some small way to my wonderful, eclectic, loving family is my project in progress, and I know that God is working in them all and I just need to try to be the spark that lights their fire.

Annie

Becoming a Deacon

Becoming a Deacon - Called to Serve

A long-delayed conversation at the church gate affirmed a sense of vocation which was stirring in a French engineer living in Malmesbury, and began the road to ordination as a Permanent Deacon in September last year. This is Rémi Thivet's vocation journey.

Rémi was born in France. He grew up in a small village in the Vosges, a county in the North-East of France and studied at University of Nancy-Brabois and Belfort as an Electrical and Electronics Engineer. Rémi started his first job in Besançon where wonderfully he met his English wife, and they moved to the UK when their first child arrived, so they could be closer to family. They settled in Malmesbury and found St Adlhelm's parish, a welcoming faith community, and life continued as it normally does, but Rémi found himself thinking back to the catechists that had helped form his early years in France. He began to read a quarterly review from a French religious congregation, thinking it was a good way to support their cause, but he found it deepened his interest in spirituality and theology amongst other subjects, and it reminded him ever more of the formation programmes of his youth with the Brothers of St John. He began to read other religious books our of curiosity and explored the lives of the saints like St Therese of Lisieux. The effect was striking. The more he read, the more he had the feeling that there were wonderful things to discover about the Saints and the treasures of the Church in general, and his faith started to expand and grow. He started to wonder what more he could do better in his Christian life, but without finding any immediate or obvious answer.

No two experiences of vocation are the same, nor is there one road to ordination, the Lord calls us in different ways to use our different skills. For Rémi when he was growing up in France, he used to go to Mass on Sundays and on Wednesday afternoons with his grandmother as there was no school on Wednesdays in France

at that time. Like many of us he served as an altar boy with his brother and 3 other friends, and Mass was often followed by sessions on the Catechism delivered by a local lady in the parish. Encouraged and supported by the parish, the group of altar boys at Mass increased to become 12 friends altogether, from which Rémi developed his passion for serving at the altar and for the beauty of the liturgy in general.

In 2019, long after Rémi had moved to England, he heard his catechist had died after a long illness and it was an opportunity for him to reflect on the gift of knowledge she had passed on. She was a 'fisher of people', quietly fostering their faith. Without her, perhaps he would not have been as active in his faith as he was. A few days after this sad event, Rémi meditated on the parable of the Sower [Mt 13:3-9] which was the reading of the day. He notes that we tend to focus on what happens to the seeds in the parable of course, but Rémi also thought about the

Becoming a Deacon

'Sower', without whom there would not be any seed to produce any crop. We need this initial movement to get started, which comes from someone. Someone who is called to do it.

At about the same time, someone close to Remi asked him whether he had thought about becoming a Deacon. He was not really convinced by the idea. 'No, not me' he remembers feeling and he put the idea to one side, that was until his parish Deacon walked up to him the following Sunday and asked precisely the same question. When the Lord speaks … It was quite loud! Rémi felt great a peace afterwards. Like a relief when a possible solution is found after a long search for it and the process of exploration, discernment and journeying gently in faith began.

When Rémi started his diaconate formation he says he was fully aware of his weaknesses and gaps, but the opportunity to learn from theologians and biblical scholars during the formation was invaluable in shaping his understanding of the Church's mission and teaching. The formation also shaped his view of the ministries of a Deacon, but also the spiritual life of a Deacon as a man of prayer. For instance, Rémi was introduced to the Ignatian contemplative prayers and Liturgy of the Hours, and learned about the threefold diaconal ministry of word, altar and charity, serving the parish and helping people explore the Gospels, learnt about prayer and the wonders of our liturgy, and serving the poorest in our communities.

When Jesus taught us about bearing fruit [Jn 15:16], there was a clear dynamism intended for the lives of all Christians, but it also defines very well the mission entrusted to Deacons in their ministries like the service of the Word, by proclaiming the Scriptures, bringing to everyone the gift of faith, sown in human souls and touching hearts. Inevitably the role of the Deacon is varied, and differs from parish to parish as the need leads us. Bearing fruit in raising minds and hearts to God and praising Him, wishing to develop our spiritual lives and ensuring our part in pastoral care as servants of the worshipping community is universal for those called to ordination. Equally, bearing fruit in assisting in the celebration of the divine mysteries, fostering a liturgical role, enhancing the solemnity of the celebrations, serving at the table of the Lord and entering in communion with Him and the faithful, and leading prayer and devotion is a wonderful privilege. The question to invite in your mind is – is this for you?

For this busy family man who still finds time for his hobbies of DIY, reading and gardening, Rémi reflects on his path to the diaconate which he says required dedication, perseverance, and sacrifice. Time spent away from family for weekend sessions during his training was not without challenges, but he is excited to learn what the Lord has in store for him next. He is deeply grateful for the support the Parish clergy and the parishioners whose prayers and encouragement sustain him on this journey of faith and service.

Rémi was ordained on the 20 September 2025 in Clifton Cathedral. A happy day for him, his family and the parish of St Aldhelm's in Malmesbury where he now serves as a gifted preacher and wonderful guide of liturgy and prayer. He would be the first to say his initial reaction was 'Not me, Lord', but his willingness to step forward to follow the Lord allowed his yes to emerge.

How about you, is the Lord calling your name to be formed and ordained a Deacon – why not speak to your Parish Priest, your local deacon or explore the diocesan website:

cliftondiocese.com/vocations/

THE JOY OF LOVE

SATURDAY 4 JULY

DOWNSIDE SCHOOL & ABBEY

DIOCESAN DAY 2026

A FUTURE *full of*

HOPE

We would like to invite you to our big Diocesan celebration on ***Saturday 4 July,*** *where we will be gathering with Bishop Bosco for our Diocesan Day 'The Joy of Love'.*

Our venue will be ***Downside School & Abbey****. We will have* ***Patti Boulaye OBE*** *as our keynote speaker for the adult programme as well as a children's & young people's programme throughout the day.*

We start at 10am with refreshments and conclude at 4.30pm after Mass in the Abbey with the bishop. A lunch will be provided.

If you would like to join us for the day, booking through Eventbrite is essential. Please follow the link: joyoflove.eventbrite.co.uk on the diocesan website. All are most welcome!

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A FUTURE *full of*

HOPE

LIGHT *of Truth*

SHOWING REVERENCE TO GOD

*Clifton Diocese in partnership with '**Light of Truth**' are offering 'Showing reverence to God'.*

Light of Truth
Catholic Faith Formation for Everyone

Join us on:

13 March 2026

7pm to 8pm - an online session to explore the virtue of religion and how to practice it in the liturgy of the Church and in our daily life.

To register, please click on the Zoom link found on the Light of Truth website: www.lightoftruth.uk/join

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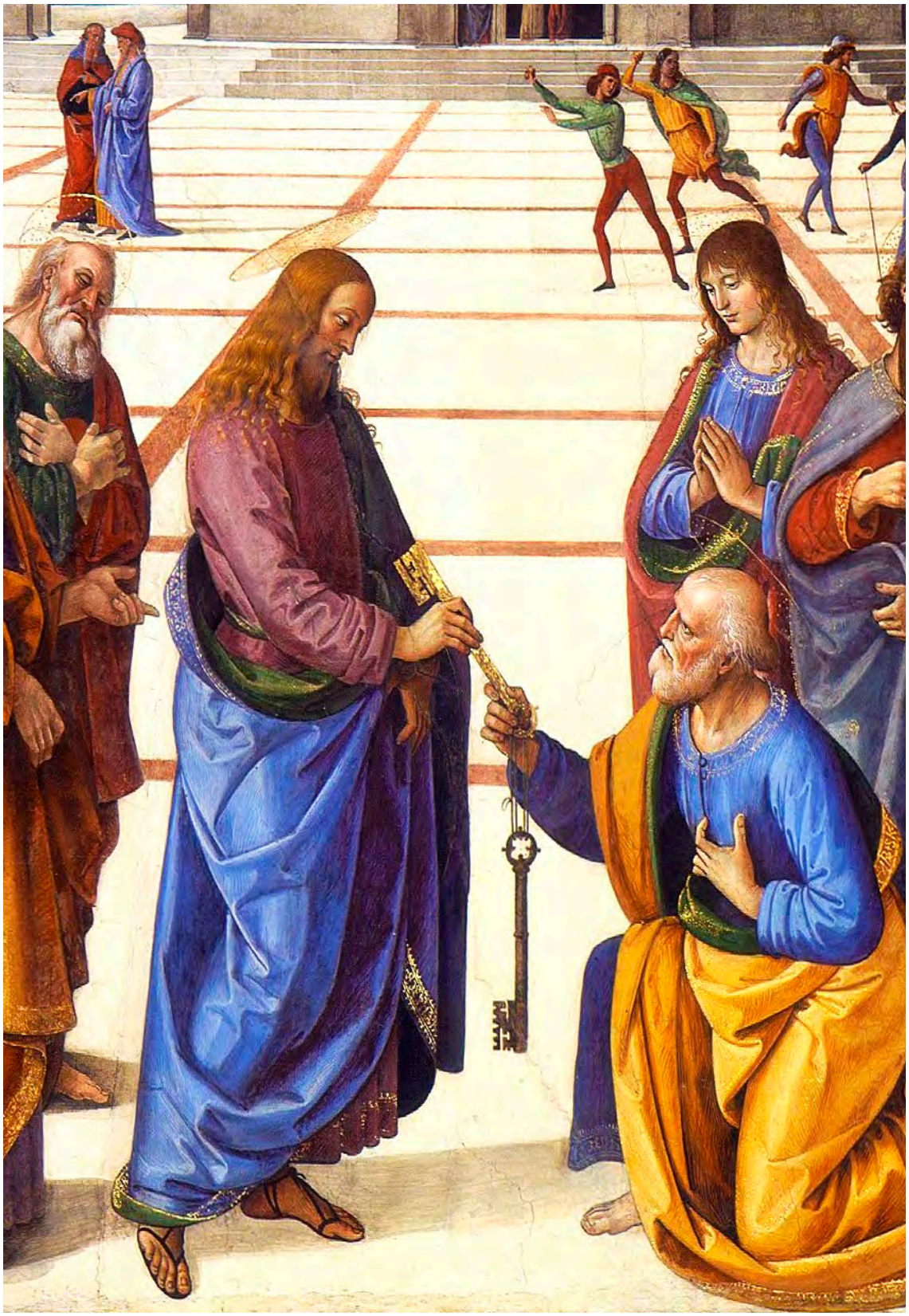
A FUTURE *full of*
HOPE
LIGHT *of Truth*



WHAT IS CHURCH?

Clifton Diocese in partnership with ***'Light of Truth'*** *are offering 'What is Church?'*

Light of Truth
Catholic Faith Formation for Everyone

Join us on:

17 April 2026

7pm to 8pm for an online session where we will discover essential aspects of the nature of the Catholic Church.

To register, please click on the Zoom link found on the Light of Truth website: www.lightoftruth.uk/join

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What We've Been Up To

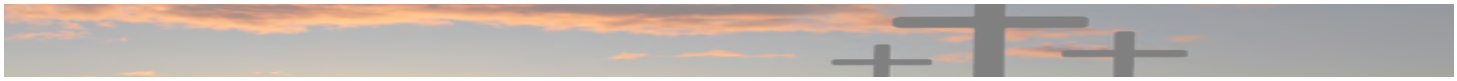
What we've been up to...

Pastoral Ministry Formation – the Pastoral Ministry Formation Course began in 2021 with twelve people. Each year, since then, the formation course has continued with a further 48 people taking part. The primary focus of the course is deepening prayer, active listening, accompaniment and engaging in Parish Ministry rooted in an understanding of the Scriptures and modelling the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a challenging course which encourages and facilitates a journey of personal growth and faith in the participants. We have now started with our fifth group of people who we be participating in the year long course.

Rite of Election - on the first Saturday of Lent, our diocesan family with Bishop Bosco gathered at the cathedral to celebrate the Rite of Election. This is a very special occasion when those who are journeying towards becoming part of our Catholic community are presented to the bishop. Here family and friends, sponsors and godparents, joined with those preparing for Baptism (catechumens) and those preparing to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church (candidates) as they came to this stage of their journey towards reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. This year, as always, it was good to see that joy on the faces of the 83 catechumens and 100 candidates, as they were each greeted by our bishop. These numbers, of course, do not include those who are continuing their journey towards baptism or full communion at Easter but were unable to be present at the cathedral. We keep these people too in our prayers, along with their sponsors and godparents, as we continue our Lenten journey to Easter.

Celebration of Marriage & Family Life Mass - on a cold but gloriously sunny Valentine's day, 150 couples, family and friends making a congregation of 600+ gathered to celebrate over 5000 years of marriage. Mgr Liam Slattery concelebrated with priests from the Diocese offering a beautiful and uplifting celebration of the Mass for all present. Speaking of the joys and challenges, the love and the commitment, Mgr. Liam gave voice to the witness and vocation to marriage as lived out by the couples present. Having rained so much for weeks, the appearance of the sun added to the occasion, allowing everyone to feel full of gratitude.

We Dare to Ask - we are pleased to offer you the wonderful resource 'We Dare to Ask'. Ideal for small group faith-sharing or for individual meditation, it features five sessions on the theme of our Baptismal Vocation. The 52-page booklet offers the opportunity to go deeper using scripture, prayer, art and focused questions. As we prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter, let us explore the depth of what baptism truly means. If you find they are not available in your parish and you would like a copy, please order directly from us. In order to cover our costs, we are asking for a donation of £1.25 per booklet (plus postage). You can pay via bacs, our details are: *Sort Code: 52-10-03; Acct number: 66827949; Account name: Clifton Diocese; Ref:'WeAsk' plus your initials*. Please consider using 'We Dare To Ask' this Lent, exploring together the theme of our Baptismal Vocation. You might like to invite others to join you for this either in the parish or as a homegroup. Please just email: adult.education@cliftondiocese.com and let us know how many you require and we will send them out to you.



Dates for the Diary

Lent 2026 – Liturgies of Reconciliation
Bishop Bosco invites you to join him during this season of Lent to celebrate the abundant mercy of God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Join him at the remaining venues across our diocese as part of your Lenten Pilgrimage.
Tuesday 10 March – Immaculate Conception, Devizes
Tuesday 17 March – St Joseph, Tewkesbury
Tuesday 24 March – Christ the King, Thornbury
Each Liturgy will start at 7pm.
Building upon the beautiful gatherings during Lent he is inviting our diocesan community to gather with him in celebration of God's merciful love as part of our Lenten journey. There will be priests available at each venue to celebrate sacramental reconciliation. You will be most welcome at any of the venues.

Showing reverence to God
Clifton Diocese in partnership with 'Light of Truth' are offering 'Showing reverence to God'. An online session to explore the virtue of religion and how to practice it in the liturgy of the Church and in our daily life.
Friday 13 March, 7pm-8pm.
To sign up for the session, please click on the Zoom link here.

What is the Church?
An online session to discover essential aspects of the nature of the Catholic Church.
Friday 17 April, 7pm-8pm.
To sign up for the session, please click on the Zoom link here.

Discover the Rosary
An online session to discover the prayer of the Rosary and how to pray it.
Friday 15 May, 7pm-8pm.
To sign up for the session, please click on the Zoom link here.

More information on other courses & sessions run by the Sisters can be found on the following link: https://www.lightoftruth.uk/join

Diocesan Day 2026 - Bishop Bosco warmly invites you to join him on **Saturday 4 July** for our Diocesan Day at Downside School & Abbey to celebrate the 'Joy of Love' with Patti Boulaye OBE. We will have Patti as our keynote speaker for our adult programme throughout the day, as well as a children's & young people's programme. Arrivals and refreshments from 10am. Our programme of prayer and talks will commence at 10.30am. The day will finish around 4.30pm (after 3.30pm Mass). Refreshments – in addition to coffee and tea breaks, a free hot lunch will be provided – this will be by booking only (a lunch box is provided for the children). There will be a max of 400 tickets for this including children. Booking – If you would like to join us for the day, booking through Eventbrite is required. Please register via this link: https://joyoflove.eventbrite.co.uk for your free ticket. All are most welcome; we look forward to seeing you!