The Oswestry Gazette

THE SEE OF OSWESTRY

2024 edition



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Letter from Bishop Paul

Beloved Friends,

I rejoice in this inaugural edition of *The Oswestry Gazette*. Through the pages of this Annual Review I am confident that you will see how it is that the Lord is renewing his Church. Each of the short articles here gives you a flavour of the ways in which our life together in the See is growing, and how our shared priorities are taking shape.



For example, you will read about the fruitful work that has been undertaken over the last year to address **vocations** both to the Distinctive Diaconate and the Sacred Priesthood from among our parishes. You will also see that **catechesis** features prominently, reflecting the strong emphasis I have placed from day one in my ministry on teaching the Catholic Faith with directness and clarity. The fruits of catechesis are evident – when the sons and daughters of the Church are more formed in the Catholic Faith, not only will they know what is true and right-believing (at a time when there is great confusion about the Church's teaching and what she actually believes), but they will also feel ever more confident to become sharers of the truth.

You will also learn about how the life of the See is taking on a more festive character. **Festivals** have cropped up across the See of Oswestry over the last year – one of the most exciting developments. These Festivals (be they the various Walsingham or Chrism Festivals) bring the Faithful together in a greater density of numbers. This density not only intensifies the offering of worship but raises the spirits of the Faithful as they awaken to their participation in a larger Body, a greater Church, a wider Family. These things embolden and strengthen discipleship and leaven with joy our common life in Christ. And if that was not rich enough fair, you will read here reference to our plans to develop a strategy for working with **Young People**, as well

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as the better organisation of the See into five **Pastoral Regions**, and the immensely encouraging statistics on **Confirmation**.

In all of these many things, there is essentially one thing being pursued, a programme and agenda of **Total Evangelization**. It is our overarching purpose, in each and everything we do, to super-charge with powerful magnetism our living-out of the Catholic Faith in the Church of England so that others are drawn to us and through us to know the truth and light of Jesus Christ in his holy Church. And Total Evangelization means precisely that, the placing of *all* our resources, both spiritual and material, at the disposal of Christ to make his name known.

I pray you are stirred as I am with excitement and renewed encouragement about what you read in the pages that follow. Please, pray for the life of this wonderful See, its people, clergy, and bishop. May the Lord prosper the work of our hands.

Advance Oswestria!

+Paul Oswestriensis

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Alpha, Beer and Creativity:
encouraging green shoots of renewal!

After 14 years' interregnum, **St Anne's Derby** had scarcely 10 people at the *fortnightly* Sunday Mass. Fr Giles Orton writes, "Just four years later there's now around 30 *every* Sunday and we offer other services, concerts, refugee support and social activities."

"The Holy Spirit is indeed moving in this place – first stirring me to take it on in 2020, then the development of clear strategy, investing in music, encouraging others to become involved. *Deo gratias!*"

The following year Fr Thomas Fink-Jensen and family moved to **New & South Hinksey in Oxford,** another church at a very low ebb. "We have seen slow, steady, but sustained growth in regular attendance which has now trebled, we have knocked on doors, hosted Alpha Courses and feasts, seen people come to faith, and taken joy in the growing sense of a *holy* community. No magic bullets, just a clear shared sense of direction and the prayers and hard work of the faithful; such things are mighty works in the hands of Almighty God. For when we are weak, *He* is strong."

> "THE GOSPEL'S CALL FOR EACH OF US TO WORK ON THE LORD'S LAND AND PREPARE THE SOIL FOR GROWTH."

Meanwhile last year Fr James Walton the Curate at **All Saints' Shrewsbury** unexpectedly found himself holding the reins when his incumbent retired early. He writes: "The underpinning themes for growth and recovery in this place have undoubtedly been the people's confidence in, and commitment to, the Gospel's call for each of us to work on the Lord's land and prepare the soil for growth. With this in mind, we have moved together as a parish to new, often untilled land (such as the local allotments and the local pub!); finding creative ways, new people, and new opportunities to remind people of, and be reminded ourselves, of the unchanging love and salvific presence of Christ amongst us. Our aim is to be, once again, at the heart of our community.

Artwork in **St Peter's, Plymouth** depicts the Sisters helping the needy in the 19th Century. This gives a taste of what Anglo-Catholic parishes did, and still can today: showing the loving nature of Christ to all. Since 2019 Ben Otley has worked across Plymouth's Society parishes helping revitalise such social justice ministry. Ben says, "This work with the needy and marginalised has helped people encounter Christ. Many have gone on to attendance at Sunday Mass and on weekdays, as well as joining the Daily Offices. The beautiful loving mercy of Christ, lived out by the church, is most certainly revitalising life in Society Parishes here in Plymouth and the historic pattern of Offices and Mass underpins this."



Chrism Masses become Chrism Festivals for 2024



Oswestry clergy and people have long supported the Passiontide Chrism Masses in good number.

This year these events are being developed further with the addition not just of a (free!) lunch, but also a teaching session led by Bishop Paul and finally a closing service of Benediction. Whilst Lichfield and Exeter are well established as hosts in the north and south of the area, this year Gloucester Cathedral will be hosting those in the middle of the patch, the very first time we have been there. We are deeply indebted to the goodwill of the Diocesan Bishops in the respective dioceses and to the Deans and Chapters, and the wider staff, of the hosting cathedrals.

These are always uplifting occasions, the clergy and people gather with their Bishop in the very midst of the great events of Passiontide and Holy Week. The clergy renew their vows of ordination. The Holy Oils of Baptism, the Sick and of Chrism are blessed and consecrated and immediately taken back to our parishes to be received and pressed into use. Do come and support your clergy, and bring a friend or three, these are always a spiritually enriching day out.

Rowan Williams headlines Glastonbury...



The Glastonbury Pilgrimage reaches its Centenary and Bishop Paul is now Chairman of the Pilgrimage Association.

His appointment, and the recovery from Covid, opens up opportunities to bring new energy to this much-loved event, to be truly a Walsingham for the West.

The Pilgrimage was envisaged as a means of deepening and strengthening Catholic faith and life across the West. Today's pilgrimages indeed draw people in from as far as Cornwall, South and West Wales as well as from the Midlands and beyond, to this ancient site of Christian witness, which conveniently lies at the heart of the area served by the Bishop of Oswestry, and to which there remains a profound spiritual pull.

The theme is "Who are These like Stars Appearing: Our Lady and the Communion of Saints", a reminder that we are called to participate fully in a Church that stretches back beyond time and into the future. The centenary Pilgrimage will be blessed also by the presence of former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams as preacher.



Mass on Saturday 13th July is at Noon in the abbey ruins, and after a picnic lunch there's a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by Adoration and Benediction to conclude the afternoon. Let every Oswestry Parish look to be represented!

Joy in Collegiality



> "THE BEST I HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED, BY A HUGE MARGIN."

Over the three decades since Bishop John Richards was consecrated, we have never had a residential Clergy Conference. Nearly 70 clergy gathered in England's Nazareth in North Norfolk for four days of worship, teaching and fellowship, and in silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We were grateful for financial support from *The Cleaver Fund* and the *Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament* which enabled the very first *Oswestry Clergy Eucharistic Congress* to be offered affordably. Clergy came from far and wide, from the far South West including from Truro, and flying in from Jersey, one even by public transport from the Welsh border! The Archbishop sent an encouraging video message which was greeted with warm applause.

Bishop Paul set the scene with a mighty keynote address, and each day covered one of the themes of the Conference strapline, of "Renewal through *Collegiality, Worship and Service*". In small group work in our new regions, in the Refectory and in Norton's Cafe Bar, new friendships were made and old ones rekindled. All of us enthused by the simple act of being together and being with our new bishop at the start of something new, and palpably exciting. The next Congress is likely to be in November 2025 and every third year thereafter.

Appointments made to lead the new Pastoral Regions



With a large area, one key piece of work has been how best to organise the See. There will be five *Pastoral Regions* each led by a Regional Dean and at least one Assistant Regional Dean: The North Midlands (Fr Giles Orton & Canon John Stather; The West Midlands (Preb Mark McIntyre & Fr Steven Baggs); Birmingham Coventry & Milton Keynes (Fr Mike Bartlett & Fr Simon Oakes); Thames Valley and the West (Fr Toby Boutle & Canon Brendan Clover); The South West (Preb Nick Debney, Fr Peter March & Fr David Way). The regions will organise festivals, events and activities as well as providing pastoral support. Deans will sit on the Bishop's Council too. Meanwhile Fr Gary Ecclestone continues to support the Bishop as *Healthy Churches Mentor*, Deacon Sarah Gillard-Falkner is assisting with liturgical matters and Louisa Thomas is undertaking part time administrative duties.



2023 was retirement year with Frs Kevin Palmer (Longton), Mark Liddell (Ocker Hill), Simon Sayer (Shrewsbury), Martin Ennis (Tividale), Iain Templeton (Walsall) and James Cope (Castle Vale) stepping down. We offer heartfelt thanks to all for their service to parishes of the See over many years. Currently 17 benefices (26 churches) in Oswestry are vacant. We hope, however, to appoint to fifteen posts this year. Some appointments have been made and Bishop Paul has been pleased to welcome Fr Thomas Singh (Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath), Canon Paul Greenwell (Hoar Cross), Fr David Lawrence-March (Pittville, Cheltenham) and Fr Matthew Cashmore (Milber & Bovey Tracey). Two priests have taken on additional parishes: Preb Julian Laurence (Good Shepherd, Chard) and Canon Brendan Clover (All Saints' Weston-super-Mare). Fr Andrew Montgomerie (Iver Heath) and Fr Paul Jones (Babbacombe) retire this year, we thank them and wish them well.

Confirmation and Ordination: Sacramental Grace Abounds

Encouraging numbers are emerging for the sacraments. 200 people have received the reinvigorating grace of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation at Bishop Paul's hands this last year, candidates from more than half of the Bishop's churches, from 11 of the 12 dioceses, and strikingly, two thirds are adults, with a good mix of men and women, many younger adults too.



Further encouragement saw three priests and two deacons **ordained** across the See of Oswestry, and God willing there will be three Deacons and two priests ordained this year. One, **Alex Honey** writes:

"Training is a minefield, ever more 'modes' and 'models' of training than ever, usually non-residential and part-time, but thankfully residential training still exists. Taking on the Oxford degree and St Stephen's House's pattern of prayer is not a road often taken, in the words of Robert Frost, 'I took the road less travelled by, and that made all the difference'. It is this 'expensive' and 'long' form of training which causes me to feel ready to move to Ordination in June; I could not recommend it more. If you feel God is calling you, please do ask people you trust about exploring vocation; the Church and the world need faithful priests. Do keep me in your prayers."

Labourers for the Vineyard



Amidst encouraging news on numbers of vocations enquirers in the See of Oswestry, Fr Andrew Swift writes: "The re-vitalisation of the See of Oswestry prompted remarkable change; Ebbsfleet as we knew it is over, and with it many assumptions of what the See is about, not least around vocations. The presumption had been that the settlements of the last decades were temporary, as we have seen, this has not been the case; catholic Anglicanism has continued to flourish, grow, and be a blessing to the Church. Whilst many anticipated, and some hoped, that we would die out, God continues to have other plans: raising up both new and young vocations, as well as advisors to the bishops of the Church of England at every level. Across Oswestry we hope to encourage and facilitate vocations to the ordained, religious, and lay life according to the will of God. Bishop Paul calls us to 'total evangelization,' in that we hear the echo of Jesus' prayer in Matthew's Gospel that we ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest (Mt 9.37-38). Ultimately, you have been called, every one of you reading this. The question is – to what? Let us help you to discern that. Today."

Fr Andrew is part of the new Oswestry Vocations Strategy Group

Flourishing in Rural Devon

St Petroc's in Hollacombe, near Holsworthy (population just 39) has an enthusiastic congregation with a heart for mission and growth. St Petroc travelled widely as a missionary founding Hollacombe and others. The Norman church is surrounded by farmland set upon a hillside in northwest Devon with amazing views to Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor.

Fr Michael Berrett SSC writes: "The Eucharist and traditional priestly ministry are central to parish life, drawing people in. The Parish has recently renewed its Petition for extended sacramental and pastoral care while still working with others locally. A November visit by Bishop Paul led to exciting plans for a Patronal Festival on Saturday 1st June led by him: outdoor Mass, devotions to S Petroc, picnic lunch and procession following part of the 'Petrock Way' nearby, concluding with Evensong and Benediction. Activities for youngsters are planned. All are welcome to share this pilgrimage day in lovely Devon!".



Family Fest South West: Family, Fun and Faith

"How do we minister to young families?", and "how are we building a group to take to the Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage?". With few children in many parishes, we decided to share a weekend of camping and fun for families at *The River Dart Country Park*. The Walsingham Children's Pilgrimage was too far away, so we brought Walsingham to Devon!" says Fr Nick Debney.

There's the worship Marquee; great food, company and music - subsidised by the Catholic Societies. Parishes get involved acting as Godparents, paying for children's places. Since 2016 we have grown from 35 to 200, and now can take groups to the Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage too. Pray for our families, and all who make it possible!

Across the Se(a)e: The new kid on the Oswestry block

St Luke's Jersey Parish Priest, Fr Nick Barry SSC writes, "In 2014, The *Bishops' Declaration* and the Guiding Principles appeared, but it cut no ice in Jersey.

It's a little-known mystery of the Church of England that Canon Law is different here, so we carried on as the last Resolution A and B parish in the world! Only in late 2022, when we were attached to Salisbury Diocese (long story) and our Canons changed, did passing a Resolution become a possibility. That possibility became reality on Advent 2 last year, when a congregational meeting (not the PCC in these parts) voted overwhelmingly to seek Bishop Paul's oversight. So here we are: the only traditionalist parish in the Channel Islands, rejoicing to be united with our sisters and brothers across the Se(a)e! Come and join us if you're visiting on holiday."

Cornish Revitalisation Project takes shape...

Our two Cornish parishes in Truro and Penwerris, Falmouth are about 20 minutes apart, both having been in interregnum for far too long, nine years at Penwerris and six at St George's. The faithfulness of retired clergy and determination of key lay people keeps the life of these churches going. Bishop Paul and the Diocese of Truro are now working together in a new and creative partnership, alongside Anglo-Catholic grant awarding bodies, to create a new full-time post to lead these two parishes. The priorities will be the revitalisation of Penwerris and the ongoing development of the life of St George's. Keep the parishes in your prayers, such a wonderful place to live and work!



Out and about with the Bishop

Thursday 21st March
Chrism Festival:
Gloucester Cathedral 11.00am

Monday 25th March
Chrism Festival:
Lichfield Cathedral 11.00am

Tuesday 26th March
Chrism Festival:
Exeter Cathedral 11.00am

Saturday 4th May
Society of Mary May Devotion:
St Silas Kentish Town, Bishop Paul preaches at Vespers
societyofmary.weebly.com

Saturday 11th May
Forward in Faith National Festival
forwardinfaith.com

Saturday 18th May
Walsingham Festival:
St John's, Bathwick, Bath

Monday 27th May
Walsingham National Pilgrimage
walsinghamanglican.org.uk

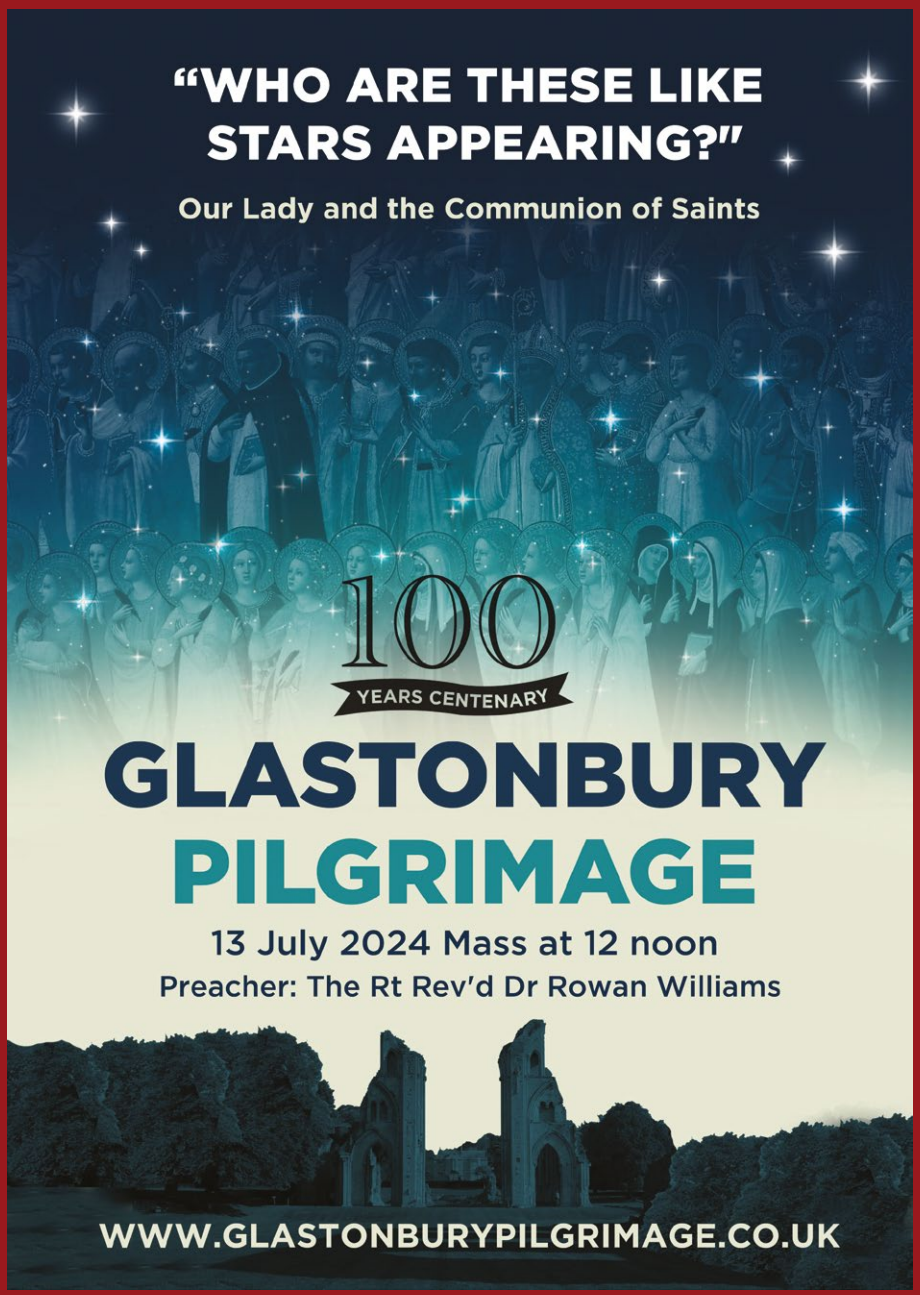
Saturday 1st June
St Petroc's Festival: St Petroc's, Hollacombe, nr Holsworthy, Devon

Sunday 2nd June
Corpus Christi Celebration:
St Peter's, Plymouth
plymouthstpeter.co.uk

14-16th June
Family Fest South West
at River Dart Country Park
familyfestsouthwest.com

Saturday 13th July
Glastonbury Pilgrimage:
Glastonbury Abbey 12 noon
glastonburypilgrimage.co.uk

Saturday 20th July
St Peter's, Calow, Festival Weekend: Calow, Chesterfield, Derbyshire



5-9th August
Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage
walsinghamanglican.org.uk/youngpilgrims

Saturday 21st September
Walsingham Festival: St John the Evangelist, Clevedon, N. Somerset
www.stjohns-clevedon.org.uk

26-28th September
Eucharistic Festival: Swindon
swindonnewtown.co.uk

"WHEREVER THE BISHOP APPEARS, THERE LET THE PEOPLE BE."

St Ignatius of Antioch 37-107AD