

# ST BARNABAS SOCIETY NEWS SUMMER 2014

*In co-operation with the Catholic bishops, to provide support and assistance to those former clergy and religious of other denominations and their dependants who have come into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church, until such time as they have been integrated into the Catholic community and have re-established themselves.*

## **The view from Wolvercote**

*As always, I start with most grateful thanks for the generosity of those who support the Society. Thanks to you, having looked into the circumstances of those asking for help, the Society is able to give them the help they need. While those who come to the Society for help differ widely, there are some who have families, little income and nowhere to live. These people need substantial financial help. Others may need very much less, but they too are always most grateful; both for the financial help and for the knowledge that there are so many of you who care about them.*

I am also personally grateful for the friendship, support and prayer of so many people.

The main news for this Newsletter is that Fr Richard Biggerstaff takes over as Director of the Society on 16th September. He has written about himself for the back page and there is a photo. Please pray for Fr Richard as he takes the reins of the Society. By a happy coincidence, I took part, as a priest, in his ordination at Pentecost 1996.

People ask me about numbers: how many clerics are received into the Church? How many does the Society help? How many are ordained? I have been Secretary/Director since November 2000. When I took over, there were some fifty current beneficiaries. Excluding the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, about 125 new people have approached the Society for help during my time. Some forty are now receiving help and eleven helped during my time have died. Many of these have families, so the total number of people helped is much greater. Again excluding the Ordinariate, 54 have been ordained priest in that time, eight are actively preparing for ordination and three have joined religious orders.

It is worth noting that considerably more than one in ten of the active Catholic priests in England and Wales is a convert cleric, though not by any means all of these needed help from the Society.

The most interesting development in my time has been the establishment of the Ordinariate



and I have been privileged to be involved. As with all who come into the full communion of the Church, the desire for visible unity with the See of Peter and the sacrifices made to achieve this are very moving.

It is good that those in other Churches are now often very positive towards those who leave them to become Catholics and it is much less likely that old friendships will be broken; though this does happen. I would like to take this opportunity to record the kindness and generosity with which the authorities in these Churches often treat

those who are leaving to become Catholics. Both materially and personally it makes what is always a difficult time very much easier and we are most grateful.

I wish Fr Richard well, and will continue to support the Society and its work as best I can.

**Fr Robin Sanders.**

The photo is of the recent Corpus Christi procession at St John the Baptist Church, Westerham in Kent – home to the Sevenoaks Ordinariate Group.



Icon from original  
by Sr Petra Clare, St Cecilia's Abbey,  
Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 1LH

## **THE ST BARNABAS SOCIETY PRAYER**

*Father in heaven, we thank you for the life and work of your servant  
St Barnabas.*

*Through his intercession may all who work for the St Barnabas  
Society be strengthened to follow his example of joyful encouragement.*

*Help them to extend a warm and generous welcome to those who  
have left home and livelihood to be united with Christ's One, Holy,  
Catholic and Apostolic Church.*

*This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**AMEN**

## **THE ST BARNABAS SOCIETY**

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Archbishop of Westminster

**Director:** Rev Richard Biggerstaff  
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## Cyprian Blamires

A memorable compliment I have heard from time to time from a parishioner after one of my appeals on behalf of the Society: "I don't hear very well, I was sitting at the back, but I could hear every word!" Why is it that persons hard of hearing tend to gravitate to the back of church? Or is it my imagination? A rather more satisfying compliment came from a parish priest after I had completed my talks at the masses in his church. 'Just before you came, I was planning to make your appeal the last ever one in our parish, because the standard of the speakers has been so bad! But you have renewed my faith in appeals!' After nearly twenty years on the stump, speaking for the Society around the parishes, I still get a huge kick out of this ministry. That is because I see each talk as an opportunity to inspire and galvanise Catholics in our parishes. After all, we who represent the Society have great stories about conversion, and this always has the potential to inspire.

Moreover, we are privileged to have good news to tell. Many of our parishes are greying, and that is in part because of a widespread inability to pass the faith on to our offspring and their generation. I am sure there is a lot of sadness – and perhaps even a degree of despair – about this out in the congregations – and it ought indeed to be a subject for intense prayer. But we can balance this with good news about the many people who are coming into the Church. At the same time there is also disappointment out there about the lack of young priestly vocations (although in fact numbers have begun to increase in recent years), and we can also balance this by reporting on the large number of clerics who are coming into the Church and then going through to the Catholic priesthood.

Some of the stories we have to tell are particularly inspiring for the Catholic people – the eleven Wantage Sisters received last year

being a very special example. To think that the eleven Sisters took absolutely nothing with them when they left their community, and that the elderly and infirm among them were relying on the younger ones for support, while the younger ones took responsibility for the infirm among them as well as for themselves! One parishioner told me that on hearing their story she was in tears.

So we who represent the Society out in the parishes have a gift to bring. The challenge is to succeed in conveying the richness of our work in the seven or eight minutes allotted to us for our talks. But one of the greatest joys I have in the work is to see the faces of parishioners absorbed and taken up in what I have to say, and to hear the words of gratitude and affirmation they often address to me as they leave.

## From United Reformed to Roman Catholic

My journey to the Catholic Church, as a previous minister of another denomination, is perhaps an unusual one in that I was formerly a full-time minister of Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church (URC). When I tell people this they usually exclaim: "that's a big jump!" Indeed, when I announced to my former congregation in Chester that I was leaving in order to join another Church, one lady said afterwards: "I thought you were going to say that you're becoming an Anglican..." Such, it seems, is the perceived gulf between the Catholic and Reformed traditions.

For me however, the change couldn't have felt more natural and obvious, since at each stage of discernment and then during instruction with a Catholic priest, I felt like I was moving towards the 'fullness' of what my Christian faith had always been pointing me towards. Now, five years after my reception in the Catholic Church, I still find myself thanking God that I am a Catholic. When people ask me why I became a Catholic, and why I gave up a ministry in the URC, I answer that it's because when I first experienced the Catholic Mass, I knew that I was in the presence of God in a way that made sense of everything and which was drawing me in.

Having been received into the Catholic Church, as I'm sure many who have left previous ministries would testify, life wasn't necessarily plain sailing. Being single, I didn't have the added responsibilities of a spouse and children, but the challenge of finding new employment was nonetheless very real. Fortunately, the transition was made smoother by the singular support and encouragement of the St. Barnabas Society and also by a providential conversation between an education officer in the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the head teacher of a Catholic Sixth Form College in Manchester. That

head teacher was looking for a full-time lay chaplain for her school, and I was looking for such a job having speculatively sent my CV to various Diocesan education departments. It happened that a Senior Tutor of the College 'phoned me the next day and within a week I had been offered a new job as a full-time college chaplain.

The College proved to be the best environment for me to 'learn' how to be a Catholic; appreciating the culture of Catholicism in northern England and in particular the place of schools in the Church's mission. Throughout that period I was nevertheless discerning a call to ordained ministry in the Church. The question of Priesthood had been very much part of my journey to the Catholic Faith and this continued to grow. And so it was that in 2011 I applied for seminary formation, initially in the Shrewsbury Diocese, and was sent for a propaedeutic year at the International Seminary of St. Jean-Marie Vianney in France.

Thereafter, having transferred my application to the Salford Diocese, my bishop sent me to the Venerable English College in Rome, where I have now been for two years, pursuing a course of formation which should lead, God-willing, to my diaconal ordination next summer.

**Richard Howard**  
Diocese of Salford



**THE SOCIETY INVITES YOU TO A  
MASS AND RECEPTION**  
**On Wednesday 5th November 2014 at 5pm**  
**At St Patrick's Church, Soho Square, London W1D 2NR**  
**ARCHBISHOP ANTONIO MENNINI, THE PAPAL NUNCIO,  
WILL PRESIDE**  
**FR ALEXANDER SHERBROOKE WILL PREACH.**  
**All are most welcome.**  
*To help with catering, if you wish to come to the Reception,  
please let us know.*

## The District Organisers

Dr Cyprian Blamires is Organiser for the dioceses of Birmingham, Cardiff, Brentwood, Clifton, East Anglia, Menevia, Northampton and Nottingham.  
The Mount, 130 Burmill Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7JG  
01858 468224 cpblamires@aol.com  
William Johnstone is Organiser for the dioceses of Westminster, Southwark, Arundel & Brighton, Plymouth and Portsmouth.  
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For other dioceses, please contact the Director at Wolvercote.

## John David Owens

In matters of dogmatic authority the choice is not between the bible alone and the magisterium of the Catholic Church but rather between the magisterium of the Catholic Church and the magisterium of my personally chosen interpretation of the bible. That conclusion, by the grace of God, led a convinced bible Protestant into the arms of Holy Mother Church.

I was brought up in a secular fashion even though there was some God talk in our home. My Dad was very anti-Catholic describing the Catholic Church as the 'woman that rides the beast' and yet I was sent to a Catholic (in name only) secondary school in Carlisle. In sixth form I became a huge fan of Bob Dylan. I read that Dylan said that the meaning of life was contained in the bible so I took it upon myself to read it. The bible convinced me of my sins and showed me Jesus Christ as the only remedy for sin.

I joined a Baptist community and the pastor instructed me in the Calvinist doctrine of grace. I quickly saw however the problems of congregationalism when a coup to remove a

good pastor was successful. So I began a search for something more robust, something which I thought I had found in the Book of Common Prayer and 39 Articles of the Church of England.

For me at that time, the Pope was the anti-Christ and therefore the Church of England was a pure Reformed Church which in keeping the episcopacy was used by God to deliver England from popery and superstition. Works righteousness, purgatory, the sacrifice of masses, were all abolished by the legislative power of the King in the providence of God.

Whilst gaining a first class degree in theology at Spurgeon's College I was accepted for ministry in the Church of England and began training in 2010 at Mirfield. I, as a convinced Protestant, was probably seen as a novelty at Mirfield, especially when I proclaimed, when it was my turn to preach, that the mass and Marian devotion were idolatrous!

I was ordained in good conscience on 30 June 2013 in Leicester cathedral but not long after

the trouble began. With what authority could I say my sermons were faithful to the word of God? My own interpretation based on personally chosen exegetical methods. Who was there to tell me I was wrong? No one as their authority was suspect too. Why did I trust the particular commentators, of my own tradition, to truly present the meaning of the text? Because they agree with my preconceived interpretations. Does the bible even teach that we should get all our doctrines from the bible? Not at all, oral tradition is presumed, there is no biblical expectation of a biblical Christian, a notion impossible before the printing press and widespread literacy.

Through an awful lot of study on all the doctrines of the Church, which I can't go into here, I knew I had to resign my ministry and become a Catholic or I could not be saved. I knew the Roman Church was the one true Church of Jesus Christ and not entering it would have been mortally sinful.

I made this journey with my beautiful wife Megan who for different reasons but at the same time also joined the one flock of the Redeemer with our two sons, George and Henry. With great rejoicing we entered the Church on December 13 2013 and soon after received The Lord for the first time at Holy Mass. We truly partook in the sacrifice of the New Covenant, Calvary was made present, not just to our minds, but there in front of us on the holy altar.

We cannot express the thankfulness we have to and for The St. Barnabas Society for the help and support they have and are giving us. Truly, through their work, we know we are loved more than the sparrows. Please support The St. Barnabas Society.



Jarrett House, The Society's Headquarters in Wolvercote. This provides both living and office accommodation.

## William Johnstone

Among the various people that come into contact with the St Barnabas Society are those who seem to be in a kind of limbo when it comes to conversion. By this I mean that they want to be in communion with the Catholic Church – or at least they say they want it – but they can't quite bring themselves to do anything about it. The practical consequences of such a step seem too great.

It is an agonising situation to be in, not least for the person trying to help. We know from experience the deep peace that results from being part of the Catholic Church. And yet unless someone comes to this conclusion themselves and seeks to be received there is not much we can actually do. There are however, a few points for reflection which might help people to move forward.

The first thing to emphasise is that conversion is a spiritual matter. This might seem obvious but it is striking how many potential clergy converts

get stuck in a more pragmatic mode of thinking. We inhabit a world of consumerism and the choices about the way we live are endless. This mentality can drift into the spiritual realm and we can end up shopping around for the right religious fit. And yet the Catholic Church does not see itself as simply one option among many. It makes some pretty bold truth claims; it even states that the person who believes that the Catholic Church is who she claims to be, and yet refuses to embrace her, is risking their salvation. There is a spiritual urgency about discovering and submitting to the truth which goes beyond any immediate practical concerns.

The second point is that conversion will always involve the cross. Those of us who were nurtured in the Anglo-Catholic movement will recall the joy and exuberance of that type of religion. But a weakness of this tradition was that it sometimes underplayed the role of redemptive suffering in the Christian life. This is not to suggest that we

seek out misery for its own sake. But it does mean that when faced with the inevitability of the cross in our lives we will see it not as a tragedy but as an opportunity to be more firmly configured to Christ.

Finally, we need to dwell on the real joy of communion with the Universal Church. This is something to emphasise strongly whenever the arrows of doubt undermine a person's peace of mind. The pain of conversion is quickly forgotten when we join that vast global family unlimited by time and space. The communion that we experience is with every Catholic in the world, with the Pope in Rome and with all the saints in heaven; above all it is communion with the crucified and risen Lord. It gives us a deep joy which, while not taking away the sacrifice of our particular situation as convert clergy, transforms that sacrifice into something of eternal value.

## THE NEW DIRECTOR, Fr Richard Biggerstaff – TELLS US SOMETHING OF HIS STORY

I feel deeply honoured to have been asked to be the new Director of The St Barnabas Society in succession to Fr Robin Sanders. I have had a long association with the Society since I first met Tony Bickersteth, who, as a District Organiser, came along to my reception into the Church in St Edward's, Keymer, East Sussex in August 1993. More recently I have been a member of the Board and its Deputy Chairman.

My story is typical of these last twenty years in the history of our Society and the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

I was born and brought up in Orpington, Kent. My grandparents had moved there in 1936 and shortly after the birth of my mother, my grandmother died. When my parents married they moved into the family house, a house my mother had never left. My mother died in 2009 and my father still lives there.

My brother and I went to our mother's infants' school, we enjoyed the rigour of Miss Reins, our mother's childhood teacher, we had regular visits from our splendid vicar, Mr Sherriff, and we sang -badly- in the church choir.

We were both baptised in the same font as our mother in the church of St Paulinus, now sadly redundant. My father was unbaptised and neither of my parents attended church services although we all rallied round for the vicarage fete!

At about the age of 13 I started to get interested in the Catholic faith. Catholic neighbours had given me a book called 'Life in Christ'. Black and white, it certainly wasn't bland; it had me captivated and, in a strange way, I wanted to believe every word. The text was broken up by questions in what I later discovered was the classic catechetical style; pictures, religious old masters, poorly reproduced but quite beautiful were its aesthetic feature. This was the beginning of a sense of religious doctrine and religious art.

We had little of either in St Paulinus, but we did have two windows of Peter and Paul. I can remember them now. I was keen to see other churches and so I got on my bike and explored. Every church I found was open and every experience different.

The first Catholic priest I got to know was Fr Philip Matthias. As parish priest of St Joseph's, St Mary Cray, Fr Matthias was an inspiration. He was both kind and gracious and loved church music. He

lives in retirement in Vauxhall and I last saw him in April at a performance of the Matthew Passion in Westminster. We talked again about how, all these years on, we are now brother priests.

My travels also took me to other Anglican churches of different traditions and I eventually settled at St Francis, Petts Wood. I started serving, visiting Walsingham, I made great friends and found a spiritual home.

I think my parents were mystified, but I suspect we were all a little relieved that I hadn't thought it necessary to become a Catholic. From that time I took a sense of a call to ordination seriously. I wanted to be ordained, I saw my life going in that direction, there was really nothing else I would do. My non-churchy friends were very accepting!

After A levels I secured a place at King's College London to read theology. I was fortunate enough to be appointed pastoral assistant to the Anglican chaplaincy in Nice and I managed to get through the rigours of Anglican selection for ministry. My good friend Ruth told me Mirfield was the only theological college I should consider and in due course I began there in September 1988.

I loved Mirfield – the college, the community, the liturgy and the life. Fr Denys Lloyd was principal and after he had taken a sabbatical at Quarr Abbey we realised he would not come back. Word went around, 'Denys has popped', and we were shaken and challenged by the news.

My appointment, after ordination, was to Brighton where I learnt such a great deal from Canon Brandie, my training incumbent. I have fond memories of that parish. A growing sense of a call to the Catholic Church, however, was sharpened by the events of modern Anglican life. It is strange to think how liberating development for some can be a negation of tradition for others. I became a Catholic three years after my Anglican ordination as deacon because I felt called to be a Catholic, 'called home', to use a familiar phrase and to describe a familiar experience.

I will have the opportunity to reflect with you on this call in the years ahead. Suffice it to say, this call to the full communion of the Catholic Church is what we are about. The Society exists to support those who hear this call and have to cope with its consequences.

I am writing this having just taken Holy Communion to Betty. Each morning she watches EWTN and



delights in the stories of converts to the Catholic faith. As I write this I think of those stories which have touched my own.

I thank God for the gift of faith and the grace of ordination as a Catholic priest, I thank Him for the parishes in which I have served, not least Horsham which I have left after only three years to take up this appointment. I thank God for the many extraordinary people who have supported me, forgiven my frailties and treasured the sacraments and the communion of the Church.

But I thank Almighty God most of all for my parents. Bill was baptised a Catholic in 1994 and Jan was received at the same Easter Vigil. My brother, who had married a Catholic called Loretta with whom he has a wonderful family of four boys, became a Catholic this last year. My aunt, Anne is a Catholic too, received into the Church in Great Missenden in 1995.

We are indeed fortunate as a family to have found this gift of faith and shared it a little.

I look forward to the challenges ahead and meeting and being in touch with you, the readers of this newsletter and the supporters and members of the Society.

In the press release announcing my appointment I wrote these words:

'I am greatly looking forward to the challenges of this exciting post and the development of the Society for the service of the Church in England & Wales and beyond. The Society has a rich history and the personal histories of so many who seek the full communion of the Catholic Church is so enriching to the life of the Church. I am grateful for the confidence of the trustees and I entrust myself and the Society to the intercession of Barnabas, that son of encouragement so committed to the Lord, for the important work ahead.'

Please pray for me

Fr Richard Biggerstaff

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

### If you are a priest...

Contact our local District Organiser or the Director to arrange an appeal in the parish or to talk about the Society's work.

Let the Director know of any convert clergy who have been received into the Church.

### Whoever you are...

Pass this Newsletter on to others.

Pray for the Society and its work, those whom it helps and those thinking of coming into the Church.

Send the Society a donation at the address on page one or remember it in your will.