



# ALLEN HALL SEMINARY NEWS

EASTER EDITION 2024







## RECTOR'S EASTER MESSAGE

Canon John O'Leary

Welcome to our Allen Hall Newsletter. There is much to interest you in it – not least the profiles of so many new seminarians!

Your prayers and financial support helped eight priests and eight deacons to be ordained last year. This year three priests and four deacons have already been ordained. In the summer, God willing, we will have four new deacons and seven ordained to the priesthood. For this, we thank God – the giver of every priestly vocation. By his grace, we hope we have formed faith-filled missionary servants of the Gospel, conformed to the self-sacrificing love of the Good Shepherd, Christ our High Priest.

This last point calls me to mind what the emeritus archbishop of Seattle, Pater Sartain, wrote in his inspiring book, *Strengthen Your Brothers*. I'm so grateful he gave me a copy when he visited Allen Hall. The archbishop describes how his parents' faithful love enabled them to make decision for the 'we' and not for the 'me'. This, he explained, "Had its origin in God's faithfulness". He adds:

"Isn't that the way for every vocation? Once accepted, a vocation impels us to live for the sake of – and in communion with – others, for the glory of God. It is no longer about 'me' but 'we' or better, 'You'".

Rightly observing that those who make themselves the centre of the universe are not really happy, and that if ministry is about 'me' it is not ministry, Archbishop Peter reminds us:

"The Lord's way draws us out of ourselves and teaches us the way to surrender to the other...For every Christian, the old 'I' of self-seeking is conquered by the self-giving of Jesus".

Your lived example of this truth is the most precious way that you contribute to Allen Hall's mission to form priests who, as Archbishop Peter emphasises, are called not only to free themselves of self-absorption in a psychological sense, but even to surrender their 'I' to God, to be used completely and irrevocably by his Son. Thank you.

Please continue to pray for us all at Allen Hall, as we do for you. May the Good Shepherd risen from the dead lead you into everlasting joy.

## HOUSE RETREAT 2023

Dan Lally  
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham

This year, the house retreat for those who were not on ordination retreats was held at the Friars, Aylesford. This priory is the home of the Carmelite Friars, who first settled in Aylesford in 1242. We were blessed by the beautiful setting, being surrounded by medieval buildings and quiet walks. The hospitality was excellent. Our meals were taken in silence, in the thirteenth-century pilgrim hall. This gave us the opportunity to eat in common but to have silent time for meditation and prayer.

The retreat was led by Monsignor John Armitage, a priest of the Brentwood Diocese, who delivered the spiritual conferences. In our first conference, he asked us to be open to God and to place ourselves in His presence both in head and heart, reflecting upon the Rule of St. Benedict. This helped us to reflect and guided us through the retreat in an open, honest and silent state of being, in the presence of Our Lord who made us in His image and likeness.

The pattern of the retreat involved starting each day with Morning Prayer and Mass. We were all encouraged to undertake a period of meditation beforehand. Whilst the retreat was of a structured nature and with disciplines, we had time for reading and for walking in the beautiful grounds. We were incredibly blessed with the weather: the sun shone and the weather was very warm. Thanks be to God!

On the Feast of St. Anthony of Padua (13 June), we reflected on the state of our lives and our own knowledge of ourselves. This is important, to enable us to show others Christ. "So, we need the light of God's grace to show us the real state of our soul and induce us to clean up our hearts!" (St. Anthony of Padua). By making this a priority we can help ourselves and other people to know and seek the love of Christ, because God takes us beyond ourselves, for he is already in us, he made us, and he loves us. "For the Son of God became man, so man can be God" (St. Athanasius).



## HELENA DUCKETT RIP

1967 – 2023  
Rector's PA and Domestic Bursar

Allen Hall mourns the loss of Helena Duckett, a faithful servant of the college and a great friend to those who have worked and studied here. We will miss her great goodness and love, her generosity of spirit, her good humour, her practical wisdom and discernment.

Please pray for the repose of Helena's soul and for the consolation of her family, friends, and all who mourn her loss.



Helena Duckett RIP

## FIRST YEAR OF CONFIGURATION: BECOMING CONFORMED TO CHRIST

This academic year 2023-24 at Allen Hall we have introduced a new "Year of Pastoral Theology" course for seminarians who have completed their philosophical studies. In the light of the adage that "theology should be done on one's knees" the aim of the course is to lead theology seminarians to begin to fall deeper in love with Jesus.

### Introduction of the New *Ratio*

The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* is subtitled "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation". This points to the responsibility that the Church has to propose a "serious journey of formation" to those who are granted this gift if they are to be "missionary disciples who are 'in love' with the Master, shepherds 'with the smell of the sheep', who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them." The *Ratio* assures us that it is the Most Holy Trinity who is the principal agent of a priest's formation, "who shapes every seminarian according to the plan of the Father, both through the presence of Christ in His word, in the sacraments and in the brothers and sisters of the community, and through the many actions of the Holy Spirit".

### Stages in Priestly Formation

The *Ratio* treats priestly formation as part of a lifelong journey. Time in the seminary is "initial formation", which avoids the impression that arriving at priesthood is an automatic process. Nor should formation, the *Ratio* tells us, be linked to "time spent in the seminary" or "studies completed", but rather to "the actual progress that has been achieved in overall integral maturity".

To underline this point, the *Ratio* introduces the idea of "stages" in formation, emphasising a "genuinely completed spiritual journey". Seminarians are to undergo an initial "propaedeutic" stage before studying philosophy; the second



is a "discipleship"; the third is a "configuration" stage; and the fourth is a stage of "vocational synthesis" when seminarians leave the seminary to be introduced to full-time parish ministry. Focusing on the stages of formation, rather than the results achieved, helps seminarians to engage fully with the process of transformation.

### The Stage of Configuration to Christ

At Allen Hall, this stage begins with a year of orientation called the Year of Pastoral Theology (YPT). The *Ratio* emphasises that once the seminarian has entered the lifelong demands of discipleship, the next stage, of configuration, is primarily aimed at "the spiritual formation proper to the priest". The focus shifts away from theology as a solely academic pursuit.



The Catechism tells us that the end of doctrine is “the love that never ends” and that “at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus.”

The *Ratio* tells us that gradually entering a deeper relationship with Christ “becomes an experience which causes the sentiments and attitudes of the Son of God to arise in the life of the disciple”. To contemplate Jesus, who is both Son and Shepherd, means that the seminarian begins to see himself as a beloved son who is anointed and sent on mission by the Father. He starts to assume a priestly identity; it is a gradual process.

#### YPT

The YPT is divided into two phases, the first being a preparation-for-mission course that runs from the start of the academic year. During this course, the seminarians reside at Allen Hall from Monday to Thursday, and at weekends they go to the respective parishes to which they have been assigned. The course serves as both an introduction to various aspects of parish life and a chance to reflect on the personal transformation ahead of them. It presents reflections on mission and evangelisation through the lens of Scripture and Church teaching and introduces seminarians to listening and pastoral discernment, journaling, and self-reflection. The students are ‘sent out’ then with a missionary spirit to reside full-time in the parishes where they will carry out their *practicum*. The *practicum* commences on the first Sunday of Advent.

#### **Practicum: The Role of the Parish Placements**

The seminarians enter the parish with the humble, prayerful approach of theologians “on their knees”, as it were. They are inquisitive observers, asking for clarification before jumping to conclusions. They respect the existing structures and condition of the parish, take initiatives where necessary, and are ready to ask “Is there anything I can do?” Seminarians have the privilege

of deeply engaging with parishioners. They visit the sick and bereaved, take part in the sacramental preparation team, work with schools, and participate in parish liturgies, leading prayers and more. They will begin to discern God’s voice in everyday events and encounters, reflecting upon their experiences through keeping a journal.

#### **Continuation of the Formation Process**

Once the YPT has been completed, seminarians will usually return to Allen Hall to complete the remainder of the Stage of Configuration, taking with them the theological insights and questions they have gleaned in the parish. The *Ratio* points out that the journey towards priesthood is not a matter of completing a course. A real discernment process must take place: before the majestic and loving heart of the Father, each one of us must ask Him, “What is your will for my life?” In every case, the answer is always to follow him as a disciple, but we must acknowledge that not every disciple is called to be a priest.

#### **In Conclusion**

The new *Ratio* provides a way forward in the important task of training priests for this task. It reminds us that the vocation to the priesthood is a “gift”, a gift to the whole Church. The priest is configured to Christ, who is Himself a gift of the Father to humanity, “for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”.

The Stage of Configuration, the *Ratio* tells us, aims to form disciple priests who are “in love” with the Master, meaning that seminarians approach their theology books as a person in love would read love letters. They yearn to know everything about the beloved and love to hear and speak about Him.

May Our Lady, Mother of Priests, consecrate this new Year of Pastoral Theology to her Immaculate Heart.

## EXTENDED PASTORAL PLACEMENT: GUILDFORD 2022–23

#### **Scott Coleman** Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

Spending an extended pastoral placement in the Catholic Parish of Guildford (CPG) has been greatly beneficial, highly enjoyable, occasionally challenging, and, above all, a crucial step in my discernment of and preparation for priesthood. It is a big, busy parish, comprising four churches, served by three priests, with seven Sunday Masses, attended by about 1,500 people.

CPG was formed from the merger of four separate parishes, and consequently has a complex network of communities, individuals, and structures. It is consequently very difficult to get to know even the “key people”, let alone to know the names of all the people – and how is one to be familiar with the “smell of the sheep” if one does not even know their names? On the other hand, a large parish benefits from ‘economies of

scale’. For example, CPG’s First Holy Communion programme has 150 children, which means that it is worth investing serious time and energy in preparing and delivering an impressive and professional programme. The challenges faced by the Church (fewer priests, parishes merging) can indeed be an opportunity for growth, rationalisation, and spreading an enthusiastic outlook.

In the variable and changing context of pastoral ministry, prayer is a rock. Leaving behind the seminary’s daily *horarium* can feel like a liberation, but one quickly realises the necessity of a well-disciplined commitment to prayer. On those occasions where I neglected my times of silent prayer, I swiftly realised that I was anchorless. Intercessory prayer seems to me a vital way of holding together our spiritual lives and pastoral zeal.

Praying for someone is not merely “the least I can do”; it is in fact “the most I can do”.

I have greatly enjoyed the opportunities to undertake a teaching ministry. Prayerful preparation is essential to place God at the centre; we make use of our theological and intellectual training; we serve a pastoral need by discerning what people need to hear; we are called to present our arguments in a humanly attractive manner. We try to nurture the faith and lives of real people. RCIA has shown me the need to identify the questions that people are in fact asking. In schools and children’s liturgies, the human element is particularly important: children, lacking the cynicism and scepticism of adults, are delightfully open to the possibilities of faith; we can engage them with joy and without affectation.

It is increasingly clear that mission and evangelisation are central parts of pastoral ministry. Evangelisation takes us outside our comfort zone. In Advent we held a “Night of Light” in church, with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, music, prayer and candles. I was part of a street evangelisation team who distributed information and invited people in. Reactions were mixed, of course, but largely friendly. I certainly felt



uncomfortable, but I soon realised that that didn’t matter, and all I had to do was smile and be friendly – and leave the rest to God.

## NEW FACES

#### **FR DAVID BARRETT** Director of Human Formation



I am a priest of the Diocese of Northampton and am currently dividing my time between being the parish priest of Olney in Buckinghamshire and being the Director of Human Formation at Allen Hall – as well as teaching a course on the early Church Fathers.

I was born to an Irish family in Luton and went to school there. I was ordained a priest in 1993 for my Diocese after formation in Rome. Much of my life as a priest has been in parish ministry in places such as Kettering, High Wycombe, Bedford, Burnham and now Olney, although for about 6 years I was Bishop’s Chaplain and also Vocations Director for a time. I have trained in the field of counselling and psychotherapy which has led me to do human formation work in a number of places, including St John’s Seminary, Womersley.

Working in London is a new experience for me. To be working at Allen Hall, with its physical link to St Thomas More and its spiritual link to the Douai Martyrs, is a profound gift since the Seminary is continuing the centuries-old work of the formation of priests to engage in real missionary work in our country.

#### **PAUL SHIELD** Diocese of Westminster



Originally from Liverpool, I have lived most of my adult life in London, working as a Civil Servant and more recently as a Psychiatric Nurse. In 2000 I moved to Dublin, Ireland and worked as a Psychotherapist and University Lecturer. In 2020 I returned to the Diocese, and am now based in the Parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Dominic, Homerton.

#### **ASHLEY WELLS** Diocese of Westminster



Originally from Yorkshire, I moved to London at 12 years old and, at 17, I embarked on a career in the music industry, working with Mark Owen (Take That), Olly Murs, James Blunt, Boyzone, and many more. In 2019, I was baptised into the Catholic Church. After two years, I started to discern a vocation to the priesthood, being accepted for the Diocese of Westminster as a seminarian

in 2022 and beginning my propaedeutic year in Valladolid, Spain. In September 2023, I returned to Westminster Diocese for formation, joining Allen Hall.



### BRENDEN ALVARES

Diocese of Westminster



I'm currently in my first year at Allen Hall, following the year in Valladolid, Spain. I grew up in London attending primary school at St Margaret Clitherow's in Wembley and secondary at St Gregory's in Kenton. I've been discerning with Westminster Diocese since my youth and took my first steps in discernment when the time was right. Along the journey, I've had the privilege of being taught some of life's most important lessons from the people I've encountered and the moments I owe to following Christ. This is especially true of my time at Cardiff University where I cherished my time with the Chaplaincy and now look back on as the place where I took serious strides forward. My family has been invaluable and it's here in the Catholic Church where I'll continue to discern, grow and walk.

### JOSUÉ GARCIA RAMO

Diocese of Westminster  
(Redemptoris Mater House of Formation)



I was born in Zaragoza, Spain in the year 2000. I am the eldest of nine siblings within a Catholic family that has been part of the Neocatechumenal Way for fifty years. Upon the completion of my training in Spain as an engineer specialized in Industrial Technologies, I felt God's call, inviting me to follow Jesus Christ beyond the future plans I had crafted for myself. The Lord illuminated

for me the realization that the pursuit of wealth, success, and prestige, which I might have sought in a prosperous professional career and in forming a family according to my own designs, were ultimately devoid of substance without a complete surrender to the will of the Father. Presently, I find myself at Allen Hall, engaged in the discernment of my vocation to the priesthood, an endeavour I regard as both a gift and a grace bestowed by God.

### TOMMASO GATTARI

Diocese of Westminster  
(Redemptoris Mater House of Formation)



I am 29 years old and was born in Rome, the third of four children, and have been a computer engineer. I have always been certain of God's existence, but since childhood, experiencing suffering, I struggled to understand His love for us. Unable to find answers to my questions, at the age of 16, I opened my heart to the Lord, who showed me the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over death.

Out of gratitude, and feeling a lack of belonging in anything I did, I discerned a desire and willingness to enter the seminary. Being part of the Neocatechumenal Way, which is missionary in

nature, I was sent, among many possibilities around the world, to London to begin my training for the priesthood, unveiling the journey He had prepared for me.

### MAKIR AHMED

Archdiocese of Southwark



I grew up on the Isle of Wight. Before seminary I worked as an actor. As my career was progressing, I noticed there was a longing in my life that wasn't being fulfilled. I began taking my faith more seriously but was still distracted by the world and its pleasures. It wasn't until the Covid lockdowns that I was able really to take time and reflect. In that reflection I felt the Lord was calling me to the Priesthood. I am still in my early days of discernment at Seminary, but I am enjoying it and feel blessed to have this opportunity.

### FARVIN GONSALVES

Diocese of Portsmouth



I'm from the Diocese of Portsmouth and currently in the second year of Discipleship at Allen Hall. I was born in Goa, India and brought up in a Catholic family. In 2015 I moved to the UK after finishing my master's degree in Computer Applications and started working in IT. I've always been passionate about catechesis, so I started helping with the Confirmation group in

my parish. In 2018, I first felt called to the priesthood while I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Ever since I've been on a journey of discerning my vocation to the priesthood.

### EMMET O'LEARY

Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle



I grew up in a Catholic family in the North East of England. From an early age I had a sense that God might be calling me to serve his people as a priest. As I came to the end of my A-Levels, this became too pressing to ignore, and I began three years of formal discernment with my diocese. Whilst discerning I read History at St John's College, Oxford, and then undertook a year of formation

in the propaedeutic stage in Valladolid before beginning at Allen Hall. I am so grateful to the people of Westminster for their welcome, and I pray that God will help me to use the gift of my formation to repay the love and prayerful encouragement the people of God both here and at home have lavished upon me.

### HUGO LOMAX

Diocese of Plymouth



I began discerning priesthood when I was still an Anglican. I had a profound sense that God was asking me to leave the comforts of home and follow him in some radical way, but I came increasingly to realise that the kind of life I felt called to wasn't to be had in the Church of England. Something prompted me to attend a Mass one day and everything moved quickly from there; I was received into the Church in 2020. Before coming to Allen Hall, I spent a Propaedeutic year in Valladolid. Born and raised in Cornwall, I have a degree in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Studies, and have had various jobs, mostly to do with Higher Education Fundraising.

### RENE DE LOS REYES

Diocese of Aberdeen



Born in Manila, Philippines, I am the fourth of the seven in the family. Raised in a God-fearing Catholic family, faith has been the core of my life. At the age of eight, the call to the Priesthood was planted in my heart but in my teenage years, after the death of my father, I needed to focus my attention into helping my family. After my siblings had finished their studies, found jobs, and

started their own families, I finally gave up everything to pursue God's call which had been the yearning of my heart since I was a boy. I joined a religious order, grew deeper in faith through prayer and discernment, finding God in everything, even in the most miserable condition of life with the marginalised of the society. After a thorough discernment process, I left the religious life to continue my training to the diocesan priesthood. Prior to my formation to the priesthood, I worked as a specialist nurse in Pain Management and as an ITU nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

### RHYS JONES

Archdiocese of Liverpool



I am 23 years old, and I joined Allen Hall Seminary in 2023 for the Archdiocese of Liverpool. Before Seminary, I was a tailor in Liverpool. I have been discerning whether God is calling me to the Sacred Priesthood for some years now. Last year, I completed my propaedeutic year in Liverpool where I was able to live in a community of other discerners which gave me the opportunity to experience

parish life. This was a great blessing for me, as it gave me the opportunity to spend my first year as a seminarian with the people of God in a community setting. I hope that in these coming years I can spend this time discerning my vocation.

### PAUL PIMBLETT

Archdiocese of Liverpool



I am a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Liverpool. I was raised in a practising Catholic family and from the age of around 13 I have always had some interest in a vocation to the priesthood. At times this was stronger than others but, after graduating with a degree in History and working in a Secondary School for a year, I decided to formally begin discerning with the diocese. I was sent to the Royal English College, Valladolid, in Spain in 2022 for a propaedeutic year before continuing my formation at Allen Hall.

### ERIC LOBSINGER

Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham



I am in formation for the priesthood for the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. I was received into the Catholic Church in 2022. Prior to that, I served in Anglican holy orders for twelve years – nine years in the Church of England and three years in the Episcopal Church in the United States. Before entering Anglican ministry, I worked as a lawyer in Washington, DC,

first as a practitioner and subsequently as an academic. I grew up in a suburb of St. Louis and I also spent a considerable amount of my childhood and young adulthood living in Fukuoka, Japan, as my mother is Japanese. I am married to Alice; we have twin toddlers, Miriam and Benedict, with another child on the way in May 2024.

### BR SIXTUS UZOMA CHUKWUBIKEM SDB

Salesians of Don Bosco



Born in 1993, into a Christian family where I got my faith in Catholicism. I am a Nigerian and of Igbo decent. Like every other child in my locality, I went through the primary system of education in Nigeria. It was after my primary education that I expressed to my parents my intention of joining a minor seminary for my secondary education. On expressing this desire, I

was enrolled in a Spiritan congregation Juniorate where I got my first school certificate. Providentially, after my studies at the juniorate, I met with the Salesians of Don Bosco, and was enthralled by their splendid work for the youth. I joined the Salesians in 2012 and ever since, I have been undergoing intensive intellectual and human formation as part and prerequisite necessity to administer my mission as a Salesian in the future. Presently, I am studying theology at Allen Hall as part of the requirement of my religious formation. It has generally been a glorious experience.



**BR RAPHAEL BHEMBE SDB****Salesians of Don Bosco**

I am a Swazi national and the only son in a household abundantly blessed with five sisters. My Catholic grandmother named me Raphael, mainly as an English name for birth registration. Ironically, my great-grandmother, who practiced traditional Swazi religion, named me 'Thembinkosi', meaning 'the one who Trusts in the Lord'. I first met the Salesians as a young satellite installation technician seriously discerning 'what to do with my life'. It was with the Salesians where I felt my call to serve young people. In 2014 I answered my second call to be a missionary to Taiwan. I studied theology for two years in Taiwan (in Chinese) and, following re-organisation of our personnel, I was transferred to Allen Hall Seminary.

**BR REUBEN BAKABA DOEYOU SDB****Salesians of Don Bosco**

I am Reuben Bakaba Doeyou, a Salesian of Don Bosco from Monrovia, Liberia now living in Battersea. I joined the Salesians in 2012 as a "Come and See" having felt deeply in love with the charism of Don Bosco our founder. Today, I am so very happy with the path of life I have chosen and now in the theologate.

**BR CHIN K' SDB****Salesians of Don Bosco**

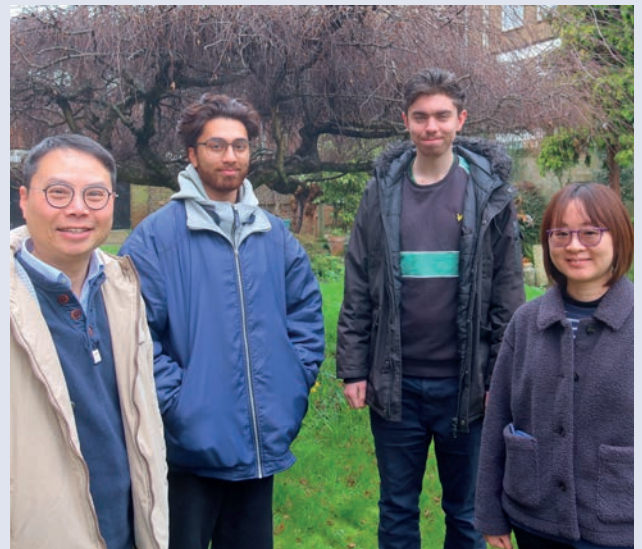
I am Chin K' from Vietnam. I am a Salesian brother studying theology at Allen Hall. Inspired by the kindness and the life of Salesians in my home parish, I have discovered my vocation which is to follow Jesus in the footsteps of saint John Bosco, to dedicate my life to the poor young people. I made my first profession in 2015 and 3 years later, after finishing my philosophical study, I made myself available to the superior of the Salesian congregation, to become a missionary 'ad gentes, ad vitam' (to the other nations, for a whole life). I was sent to Ukraine to live my Salesian life and mission in that beautiful country. As a person who loves adventure, the biggest adventure in my life is to say "yes" to God's call and let Him lead me to anywhere he wants.

# ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT ALLEN HALL

In September 2019, Mater Ecclesiae College (MEC), the pontifical institute established by the bishops of England and Wales to grant Church recognised degrees, opened its doors. MEC was established in collaboration with Allen Hall Seminary and St Mary's University, Twickenham. Thus, in the past five years seminarians studying at Allen Hall have been awarded two degrees, one from St Mary's University and another by Mater Ecclesiae.

Following a long tradition of lay students at the Seminary, five from St Mary's University began their courses at Allen Hall. Most of them are enrolled in an intensive course of philosophy, giving them enough credits to access the Theological courses. Their presence at the Seminary Monday to Thursday is appreciated by all and their contribution to Allen Hall's intellectual life is welcome.

We hope this will be a feature in time to come and that others may deepen their knowledge and appreciation of the rich theological tradition of the Church.



Lay Students at Allen Hall, 2023-24



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