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Benedict XVI
Centre for Religion,
Ethics and Society



Convert Clergy in the Catholic Church in Britain

The role of the St Barnabas Society

Stephen Bullivant, Fernanda Mee, and Janet Mellor
with a foreword by Cardinal Nichols

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Report headlines

- c. 700 former clergy and religious of the Church of England, Church in Wales, or Scottish Episcopal Church have been received into the Catholic Church since 1992.
- The number includes 16 former Anglican bishops and two Continuing Anglican bishops (as of December 2024).
- There were an estimated 491 ordinations of former Anglican clergy in the Catholic Church during the years 1992 to 2024 (5 Permanent Deacons, 486 priests).
- c. 29% of *diocesan* priestly ordinations from 1992 to 2024 in England and Wales were former Anglican clergy.
- c. 35% of *combined diocesan and Ordinariate* priestly ordinations from 1992 to 2024 in England and Wales were former Anglican clergy.
- 9% of *diocesan* priestly ordinations from 2015 to 2024 in England and Wales were former Anglican clergy.
- 19% of *combined diocesan and Ordinariate* priestly ordinations from 2015 to 2024 in England and Wales were former Anglican clergy.

Acknowledgements

The project “Led by Faith and Conscience”: The experiences of clergy from other denominations (and religions) within the Catholic Church in the British Isles’ project was commissioned by the St Barnabas Society. This public report summarises some of the project’s main findings. We wish to thank the Director and Trustees for trusting us with this important topic, and for their patience over various unforeseen delays. Mgr John Broadhurst’s dataset was essential to the statistical elements of the research, and we are grateful to him for sharing it. We are indebted to all interviewees who were willing to share their own experiences with us. Thank you to all.

About the Centre

The Benedict XVI Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society is an international hub for research and engagement activities in the area of religion and the social sciences. It is a joint initiative between St Mary’s University and the University of Notre Dame Australia, with bases in London and Sydney.

It is founded upon the conviction that interdisciplinary research, in which the sciences are brought into direct engagement with theology and ethics, is central to the life of a Catholic university (cf. Pope St John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 46).

Accordingly, the Centre draws together existing strands of research on campus, while fostering new projects in collaboration with external partners, both individual and institutional.

About the authors

Stephen Bullivant is Professor of Theology and the Sociology of Religion at St Mary’s University, and Professorial Research Fellow in Theology and Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. His recent books include: *Catholics in Contemporary Britain: Faith, Society, Politics* (OUP, 2022; with B. Clements), *After Secularisation: The Present and Future of British Catholicism* (CTS Press, 2025; with H. Vaughan-Spruce and B. Durcan), and – forthcoming – *Trads: Latin Mass Catholics in the USA* (OUP, 2026; with S. Cranney).

Fernanda Mee is a Roman Catholic researcher who has recently been awarded a doctorate in Pastoral Theology from St Mary’s University, Twickenham. Her thesis looked at the role of families in the intergenerational transmission of the Catholic faith. She is married to an ordained minister in the Church of England.

Janet Mellor is a retired secondary school teacher of Modern Foreign Languages, whose career has also included teacher training and school inspection. Her experience as a convert to the Catholic Church, together with her husband, who went on to ordination, has enabled her to serve the Church in many diverse ways. She is a trustee of the St Barnabas Society, and of St Mary’s College Oscott. Her interest in religious art has led to work with a leading biblical scholar and a publication, following several in the field of education.

Foreword

In the famous soliloquy in ‘As You Like It’, a melancholy Jaques proclaims that ‘All the world’s a stage... and one man in his time plays many parts’ (Act II, Scene VII). The movement of clergy from the Church of England into full communion with the Catholic Church in recent times is also a story of many parts. Until now, those parts have not been drawn together. To do so was never going to be an easy task.

I am therefore very grateful to the St Barnabas Society for producing this Report entitled ‘Convert Clergy in the Catholic Church in Britain: The Role of the St Barnabas Society’. It draws together so many disparate stories and facts, from across this period from 1992 until 2024, of those who have made this journey. It is fascinating reading, not only in its collating of facts and figures, but also in so many personal testimonies and insights.

In reading this Report, one question has kept returning to my mind. It circulates around the word ‘convert’.

I remember being impressed by the argumentation of Scripture scholars, such as Tom Wright, who made the case against the use of the phrase ‘the conversion of St Paul’. The argument is that Paul’s experience was not so much that of turning away from his Jewish roots and faith as seeing them fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Christ. It can be said that he did not so much renounce his Jewish upbringing and practice as go beyond it, into something he understood to be its completion. Certainly, he was clear in stating its incompleteness, yet he maintained its promise, a promise now being fulfilled and powerfully experienced on, for example, the road to Damascus.

In my limited experience there are echoes of this in the story of many of those who have come into the full communion of the Catholic Church – not so much a turning away or rejection of their rich and precious Anglican heritage but an experience of an imperative to move into the full visible communion of the Catholic Church, in union with the See of Peter.

Yet historic titles and long traditions in the use of the phrase ‘convert clergy’ give it a resonance which endures.

I thank the authors of this Report, Stephen Bullivant, Fernanda Mee and Janet Mellor. I trust that their meticulous work will help us all to understand in more detail what has happened among us in these decades, to thank God for the gifts of his grace and courage, and to learn, with humility, from these remarkable times.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

Welcome

In 1913, Robert Hugh Benson, son of The Most Reverend Edward White Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury, published a book entitled *Confessions of a Convert*. In a very candid way, it told the story of his conversion to Catholicism and his eventual ordination as a Catholic priest. The book begins with these words:

When one stands at last upon the high ground, it is extraordinarily difficult to trace the road behind by which one has approached: it winds, rises, falls, broadens and narrows, until the mind is bewildered. Nor indeed do the comments of friends and critics shouted from below tend to clear the situation.

I was reminded of Benson's words when I first read the conversion stories contained within this report. He became a Catholic in 1903 and was ordained a Catholic priest the following year. But 120 years later, those who choose to leave their former ministries and embrace the Catholic Faith experience many of the same thoughts and emotions as he did. I count myself among that number.

This report was commissioned by the Trustees of the St Barnabas Society in 2019. It was meant to be published in 2021 to help mark the 125th anniversary of the Converts Aid Society. The Coronavirus pandemic prevented this from happening, but the unfortunate delay meant that further research could be conducted. This final version worthily commemorates the Clergy and Religious who have consciously chosen to embrace the Catholic Faith, especially between the years 1992 and 2024. Their stories deserve to be told.

Some of you will also be aware that in 2023 the St Barnabas Society purchased Aston Hall, in Staffordshire, the former home of Blessed Dominic Barberi, who received St John Henry Newman into the Catholic Church in 1845. As well as saving Aston Hall for the Church and re-establishing it as a place of pilgrimage, we have also been able to provide a home there for the Ordinariate Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, all of whom are converts.

The Society is deeply grateful to our President, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, not only for writing the Foreword to this report, but also for his guidance and encouragement in its production. We echo his thanks to Professor Stephen Bullivant, Dr Fernanda Mee and Janet Mellor for the painstaking research they have conducted and for their dedication and professionalism in putting the material together.

The statistics contained here are more than just sets of numbers. They represent a unique collection of life stories and conversion experiences. The St Barnabas Society has worked very closely with many of the individuals concerned, providing them with the pastoral and financial support they have required. For a good many, their conversion journey has eventually led them to ordination as Catholic priests, but it is questionable whether this could have happened without the Society's help. The fact that it did happen is largely due to the kindness and generosity of the Society's many friends and supporters. In the end, they are the people who enable our work to continue, and it is important for us to publicly acknowledge the debt of gratitude that we owe to them.

If you wish to financially support the unique and invaluable work of the St Barnabas Society, the information which will enable you to do so can be found at the very end of the report.

Father Paul Martin
Director, St Barnabas Society

Introduction

In May 2019, the Trustees of the St Barnabas Society approved funding for a research project, based at the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion, Ethics and Society at St Mary's University, to explore the experiences of former clergy and religious of ecclesial communities, not in full communion with the Catholic Church, who have now entered into full communion with the Catholic Church in Britain (referred to hereafter as 'convert clergy/religious'¹). To do this, it was necessary to assemble testimonies from a wide range of convert clergy/religious and, where relevant, their spouses, from over the past thirty years. We also needed to collate and analyse existing data, where available, concerning numbers and key characteristics.

Over the course of the next several years – pandemic permitting – we recorded interviews with 36 convert clergy/religious (male and female), including three former bishops, and/or clergy spouses. There was correspondence with one person, who did not wish to be interviewed live, and we transcribed four episodes of EWTN's *The Journey Home*, which featured the conversion stories of former Church of England clergy. We also held numerous interviews and conversations which, although not recorded or quoted directly, have also been taken into account in our thinking and analysis. These were conducted with around twelve convert clergy/religious and/or spouses, as well as with four current Anglican clergy, who have leanings towards the Catholic Church but have no immediate plans to convert.

¹ In the view of some interviewees, the term 'convert' here is theologically problematic. They would argue, on the basis of such conciliar texts as *Lumen Gentium* 15 and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, that the process of moving from one of the 'separated Churches and ecclesial communities' into full communion with the Catholic Church is neither properly nor best understood as a process of conversion (see also Sullins 2016: 96-7). This may well be so. For the purposes of this (mostly) non-theological report, however, we note a) that 'convert clergy/religious' is a readily understood shorthand for specifying the constituency intended here; b) the more precise (and/or neutral) phraseology, given above, is cumbersome; c) language of 'convert' and 'conversion' was readily and naturally used by many of our project participants to describe their and/or their spouses' ecclesial journeys; and d) 'convert clergy' is a term readily used on the St Barnabas Society's own public materials (e.g., 'It began its work on 1st June 1992 and within a few months there occurred the largest increase ever in the numbers of convert clergy received into the Church...' in the 'History' section of the Society's website). The Society was, moreover, originally founded as the Converts Aid Society in 1896.



Alongside this body of original data, we read a significant number of existing conversion narratives, collected from various books, for example Longenecker and Blamires (2010) and Cavanaugh (2011), and those published in the media. Together with this qualitative data, our work was able to draw together facts and figures from a number of sources. The most important of these are the extensive records kept by Mgr John Broadhurst, to whom we are immensely indebted. Further details are given in Chapter 1, where we are able to present the fullest statistical picture of the convert clergy/religious phenomenon yet published.

This short report presents a synthesis of some of the main findings of the project. It offers key information about a significant period in the history of the Catholic Church in Britain, as well as recording the role of the St Barnabas Society during this time. It also highlights the substantial ongoing contribution to Catholic life made by convert clergy/religious in this country.

Chapter 1: Numbers of converts, patterns and destinations 1992-2024

a. Compiling the data

Precise figures for the numbers of convert clergy/religious, especially during the critical post-1992 period, are hard to come by. There are several reasons for this:

1. Religious bodies are often not meticulous at keeping or publicising accurate statistics, even on matters of great pastoral importance. The Catholic Church in England and Wales, and Scotland, by no means bucks this general trend.
2. There is no single, centralised process for leaving the Church of England, Church in Wales, or Scottish Episcopal Church.² Neither is there one for joining the Catholic Church. It is therefore the case that no single Church body has all the relevant information. To leave was, in large measure, an individual matter between the clergy and their bishops. To join was typically, in the first instance, a low-key affair at local parish level. Potential pathways to ordination differed in very great measure. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.
3. Especially in pre-internet times, converts found it difficult to keep track of each other. One might, for example, know that several old friends from the same diocese or theological college had resigned their orders in order to be received into the Catholic Church, but if, when, and where they had subsequently been ordained as Catholic priests might only be discovered many years later.

² We will mostly just be referring to 'the Church of England' in this publication, which is by far the largest contributor. However, a good deal of fluidity between these three Anglican churches – and indeed with other parts of the Anglican Communion – means that it is in practice hard to draw sharp distinctions between them. Clergy ordained in one often ended up ministering in another prior to converting. Similarly, clergy ordained in, for example, the Church of England ended up as priests in the Catholic Church in Scotland. The remit of the St Barnabas Society is, in any case, UK-wide. Without denying cultural and or ecclesiastical differences between the nations, attempting to treat each one separately would needlessly complicate matters.

4. Understandably, Anglican dioceses have little reason to publicise the numbers of those leaving, or give a platform to their reasons for doing so. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church has officially been very careful, then and since, to avoid all appearances of what could be referred to as 'triumphalism'. The Church is constantly mindful of ecumenical sensitivities.

These and other reasons all contribute to a widespread impression that Anglican-to-Catholic clergy conversions have been, despite hopes or fears to the contrary, few in number: e.g., 'small groups splintering off' (Valentine 2013: 221); 'the ordinariates have stubbornly refused to grow' (Pepinster 2017: 117). They have also been regarded as having little ultimate significance (Brown and Woodhead 2017: 87): 'it now seems a project left on the shore of the Benedictine pontificate' (Pepinster 2017: 118). Most remarkably, a recent 300-plus page history of the Church of England, written by – in the author's own words – 'an Anglican priest, and a somewhat renegade Anglo-Catholic at that' (Morris 2022: xiii), fails to make any mention of either the post-1992 exodus or the Ordinariate.

While several estimates of both the overall numbers who left their ecclesial community to join the Catholic Church, and the proportion who have since been ordained, have previously been floated in various publications (Church Times 2005; Geldard 2011; Gledhill 2014; Hattersley 2017: chap. 32), the underlying methodologies for the calculations are unclear. Furthermore, none offers much beyond total numbers, with no indication of trends over time, or details of the dioceses or religious congregations in which ordinations of converts to the Catholic priesthood took place.

More detailed data sources do exist, however. By far the most important is a running database of 'convert clergy', beginning in the early 1990s and maintained initially by 'Forward in Faith',³ then latterly curated by Mgr John Broadhurst. This includes space for (*inter alia*) name, date of reception into the Church, married or not, Ordinariate or not, ordination to the priesthood of the Catholic Church with date and diocese, and for some, if they returned to the Church of England. While relatively few entries provide a complete set of information (dates, especially, are frequently absent), it is a source of invaluable information. As part of the project, we were able to add much missing information into the dataset, though – as will be clear from several of our graphs – it remains

³ 'Forward in Faith' was founded in November 1992 to support parishes which could not accept the decision of the General Synod for the Church of England to ordain women to the priesthood.

incomplete. Most of the following figures and charts in this chapter are taken from the updated version of the ‘Broadhurst List’.

b. Overall numbers

The dataset has records of 805 named individuals who, having been clergy within the Anglican Churches of England, Wales, or Scotland, were subsequently received into the Catholic Church. Of those, 91 were received in the years from 1969 (the earliest record) to 1991. This is unlikely to be the complete number, since the Broadhurst List was not begun until the early 1990s, and these represent a retrospective counting up of all those who can be identified.

The main focus of this section is, however, on those received from 1992 onwards, and for whom Forward in Faith kept a running count, as and when word was received. This leaves 714 with either a 1992-or-later year date given for reception, or else, no year specified. While a small number of this latter group may have been received prior to 1992, it is safe to assume that the majority were after that year. (And indeed, when we have been able to fix a date for some of these “unknowns”, they have indeed all been post-1992.) Nevertheless, it seems safe to state that a total of approximately 700 Anglican clergy and religious have been received into the Catholic Church since 1992. As of December 2024, this includes 16 former Anglican bishops and two former Continuing Anglican bishops.⁴

According to our data, 522 former Anglican clergy have proceeded to ordination in the Catholic Church. Since 31 of those ordinations were prior to 1992, this leaves 491 in our key 1992-2024 period. Of these, 5 are permanent deacons.

⁴ For the record, these are: Graham Leonard (London, received 1994), Conrad Meyer (Dorchester, 1994), Richard Rutt (Dorchester, 1994), Charles Klyberg (Fulham, 1996), Paul Richardson (Aipo Rato, Papua New Guinea and Wangaratta, Australia, 2009), Edwin Barnes (Richborough, 2011), John Broadhurst (Fulham, 2011), Andrew Burnham (Ebbsfleet, 2011), Keith Newton (Richborough, 2011), David Silk (Ballarat, Australia, 2011), Robert Mercer (Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 2012), Michael Nazir-Ali (Rochester, 2021), Peter Forster (Chester, 2021), John Goddard (Burnley, 2021), Jonathan Goodall (Ebbsfleet, 2021), Richard Pain (Monmouth, 2023).

In addition, Harry Entwistle (2012) was ordained in the Church of England but later served as a bishop in the Anglican Catholic Church in Australia, and Gavin Ashenden (2019) spent a brief period as a missionary bishop in the Christian Episcopal Church. Both of these are Continuing Anglican denominations.

The data also show that of the c. 700 received since 1992, 35 are recorded as having returned to Anglicanism. A large majority of these, roughly seven-eighths, were among those received into the Catholic Church in the 1990s. Of the 190 received from 2010 onwards, 3 are recorded as returning to the Church of England, with a fourth having joined the (Continuing) Anglican Catholic Church. Meanwhile, of the 491 ordained as Catholic clergy since 1992, only 5 are recorded as having returned. A further one has moved on to become a Russian Orthodox priest.

c. Patterns over time

The graphs below focus on the period from 1992 onwards. They show the years, where known, in which Anglican clergy were received into the Catholic Church (fig. 1.1), and where applicable, were ordained as priests or (more rarely) as permanent deacons (fig. 1.2). The numbers of those for whom specific years are not recorded are given in the far right-hand columns. It is safe to assume that the vast majority of these will have been received and/or ordained in the years immediately following 1992.⁵ Note also that, due to the lowkey nature of these conversions – there is no central process and, except in the case of an Anglican bishop or otherwise prominent individual, they are rarely publicly announced – these figures undoubtedly represent an undercount.

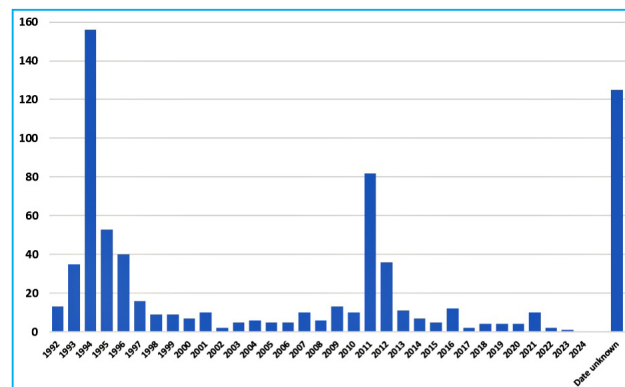


Fig. 1.1 Numbers of former Anglican clergy received into the Catholic Church, by year (where known), 1992-2024

⁵ For various reasons, dates are much easier to ascertain from the mid-2000s, as digital traces are much more likely to exist (e.g., from diocesan websites or archived parish newsletters). In many cases, it has been possible to infer hitherto-unrecorded dates of ordination in the 1990s from online mention of priests’ Silver Jubilees in the past few years.

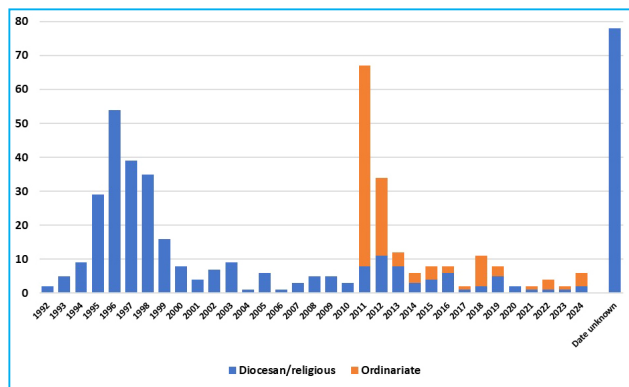


Fig.1.2 Numbers of former Anglican clergy ordained (as priests, where applicable) in the Catholic Church, by year (where known), 1992-2024

Both graphs show a high degree of unevenness. That is to say, the numbers of both receptions and ordinations over the years are centred around two critical moments. Firstly, the Church of England's decision in 1992 to ordain women to the priesthood, which was enacted in 1994: the largest single year of receptions by far. Secondly, Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 apostolic constitution, *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, mandating the creation of 'Personal Ordinariates for those Anglican faithful who desire to enter into the full communion of the Catholic Church in a corporate manner', together with the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. This also saw a rise in the number of converts, with the first ordinations to the Ordinatee occurring in 2011. Both 'moments' triggered significant waves joining the Catholic Church over a discrete period, approximately 1993-7 and 2011-12 (fig. 1.1). Following the first of these, there was then a lag of a couple of years before an extended period of increased numbers of ordinations between roughly 1995 and 2000 (fig. 1.2). A similar crop of ordinations accompanied the second period, albeit without so great a lag, due to the very different arrangements made for the Ordinatee ordinations (see Chapter 2). It should be noted, as is clear from the graph, that by no means all of the receptions and ordinations triggered by *Anglicanorum Coetibus* and the Papal Visit were for the Ordinatee.

These two periods, however, are not the only points of interest. In fact, from the perspective of the St Barnabas Society, as it looks to the future, the most significant trend is arguably what one might call the number of receptions and ordinations in 'normal' years. In any given 'normal' year, it seems there are anywhere up to 11 Anglican clergy being received into the Catholic Church, and the same number being ordained. Both of these numbers fluctuate from year to year, with a loose correlation between the numbers received in one year, and the numbers being ordained a few years later.

d. Destinations

There is also data for the dioceses and religious congregations into which convert clergy have been ordained, as well as for the Ordinariate. This aspect of the dataset is pleasingly near-complete, with only three unrecorded destinations for the 491 men ordained between 1992 and 2024.

Of the 491, 339 – 69% – have been ordained for dioceses in England and Wales, plus a further 5 for Scottish dioceses. 10 were ordained for foreign dioceses: France (2), Italy (1), Cyprus (1), the USA (4), Australia (1), and Japan (1). 115 have been ordained for the UK Ordinariate, as well as 2 for the North American, and 1 for the Australian. 3 have been ordained for Eastern Catholic Churches (2 Melkites and a Ukrainian). 13 have been ordained within religious congregations, with the Benedictines being particularly popular.⁶

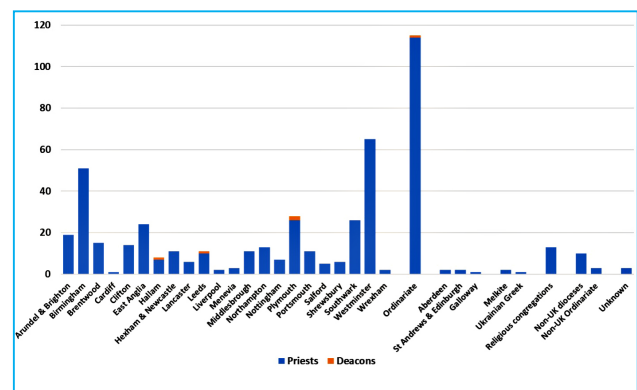


Fig. 1.3 Catholic dioceses/congregations/Ordinariates into which former Anglican clergy have been ordained, either as priests or (permanent) deacons, 1992-2024

Fig. 1.3 shows both this breakdown as a whole, and more specifically, the 'receiving dioceses' in England and Wales, and Scotland. Clearly, former Anglican priests and deacons are not distributed evenly among them. The destination of individuals depends on a complex number of factors. The overall size of the diocese is clearly a determinant, as are the levels of 'catholicity' within the corresponding Anglican diocese. The relative readiness of the various Catholic dioceses to welcome convert clergy, above all during the immediate post-1992 years, is also critical.

6 For reference these are: Society of Jesus (1), Order of Friars Minor (1), Communities of Jerusalem (1), Community of the Blessed Sacrament (1), and the Order of St Benedict (9).

Focusing on the more recent past, table 1.1 (by year) shows the locations of convert clergy's ordinations in the ten-year period 2015-24, inclusive. Instructively, this period falls after the Ordinariate/Papal Visit wave of ordinations, noted above, and so provides a 'normal decade'. This data shows that while a large slice, basically half of the former Anglican ordinations, is taken by the Ordinariate, the direct diocesan option remains an important route (see Chapter 2). During the past ten years 13 British dioceses have ordained former Anglican clergy. There is more detailed analysis of this data in Chapter 2.

During this ten-year period, the records show that 52 former Anglican clergy have been ordained as priests within the Catholic Church, and a further 1 as a permanent deacon. All have been ordained for ministry in Britain. Even in this relatively short period, however, there is variability from year to year, in terms of both overall numbers and destinations.

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | Total |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Arundel & Brighton | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | | | 2 |
| Birmingham | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| East Anglia | | | | | 2 | | | | | | 2 |
| Hexham & Newcastle | | 3 | 1 | | | | | | 1 | | 5 |
| Leeds | | 1 | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Liverpool | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Middlesbrough | | | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| Nottingham | | | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| Plymouth | | 1* | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Portsmouth | | 1 | | | | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| Southwark | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Westminster | 2 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | | | 4 |
| UK Ordinariate | 4 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 3 | | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 28 |
| St Andrews & Edinburgh | | | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| Religious | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| Total | 8 | 8 | 2 | 11 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 53 |

* Permanent Deacon. All others are priestly ordinations.

Table 1.1 Destinations of former Anglican clergy ordained as Catholic priests or permanent deacons, 2015-24

e. Former Anglican clergy as a proportion of all priestly ordinations in England and Wales

The former Anglican contingent constitutes a significant proportion of the total number of British Catholic priests, especially of those in England and Wales. Based on various sources of data, over the period between 1992 and 2024⁷ inclusive, Catholic dioceses in England and Wales ordained a total of 1179 men to the priesthood. The data suggest that some 338 of these were former Anglican clergy. This equates to **29% of all diocesan priestly ordinations** across the whole 33-year period.⁸

Though not ordained to a diocese, a large proportion of Ordinariate clergy are working within diocesan ministry, for example as parish Priests-in-Charge, or in chaplaincies. Therefore, Ordinariate ordinations are included here alongside those for dioceses (as is the practice of the National Office for Vocation itself, which divides its own data between 'religious' and 'diocesan/Ordinariate'). Once one combines the diocesan and Ordinariate figures, then **former Anglican clergy account for 35% of priestly ordinations between 1992 and 2024 in England and Wales**. The same proportion holds true for the fifteen-year period from 2010 to 2024 also.⁹

⁷ Ordination figures quoted here are based on a combination of those published in the relevant editions of the *Catholic Directory* up to 2011 (helpfully collated in Latin Mass Society 2013), and from 2012 to 2023 from the annual statistical summaries released by the National Office for Vocation. At the time of writing, 2024 data has not been officially released, so the provisional figures here are based on publicly available information, plus a good deal of crowdsourced fact-checking (including from some of the bishops whose diocese are mentioned).

⁸ It is worth noting here that ex-Anglican and 'homegrown' candidates for the priesthood are not necessarily a like for like comparison. Though we do not have sufficient data to prove it, it seems reasonable to suppose that convert clergy tend, on average, to be older than other ordinands. The vast majority would count as 'late vocations', for example. (That said, over the past five years, the average age of entry to diocesan seminary for all English and Welsh seminarians has been between 35 and 40.) However, this should be balanced by the recognition that convert clergy typically have a great deal of prior pastoral experience upon ordination.

⁹ There were 470 diocesan or Ordinariate priestly ordinations within this shorter period, including 165 former Anglican clergy (51 diocesan, 114 Ordinariate).

Restricting ourselves to the more 'normal' decade from 2015 to 2024 – i.e., after the 2011-13 wave had subsided – English and Welsh dioceses ordained a total of 231 men to the priesthood. Of these, some 21 were former Anglican clergy, making a total proportion of 9%. Adding Ordinariate priestly ordinations for the same ten-year period, the combined figure rises to 19%.



Chapter 2: The path from reception to ordination

a. The decision of the individual

G. K. Chesterton once famously remarked that ‘the difficulty of explaining “Why I am a Catholic” is that there are ten thousand reasons, all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true’ (1926: 19). As often noted by his biographers, however, it took Chesterton himself several years from realising this fact to being received into the Catholic Church.

It is abundantly clear from all the interviews conducted, and all the memoirs and testimonies read as part of this project, that something very similar applies here too. There are all manner of paths to the Catholic Church taken by our interviewees. Some are very circuitous. There was one by way of Islam, atheism, and evangelicalism, and another including sojourns as a Hare Krishna and a Baptist missionary in Tajikistan. Only very few involve converting immediately, even impulsively, upon becoming convinced that what the Catholic Church teaches is true and that unity with the See of Rome is essential. *Some do*,¹⁰ but many more recount a ‘history of that long-drawn-out process whereby he passed from one to the other’ (Benson [1913] 2011: 16), which frequently involves a period of years, or decades, in the state of what one might call ‘ecclesial unease’. This can take many forms, including a feeling that perhaps they ought to be a Catholic, or that they might become one eventually, or that they definitely will become one, *after* retirement or some other particular milestone. Alternatively, it could be thinking such as they will convert if the Church of England does X, or once the children are off at university, or when a resolutely anti-Catholic mother or father has died.

¹⁰ Among our interviewees, for example, is a late-thirties diocesan priest, who began his theological studies as a hard-core, strict Calvinist at a succession of Pentecostal/Baptist bible colleges. He then joined the evangelical wing of the Church of England thanks partly due to its historical role as a bulwark against ‘popery’ and ‘the Pope... the man of sin and the son of perdition’. (‘I would have used that language. You know, I find it quite quaint now, but I would have used that language’, he adds.) Sent to Mirfield for training – ‘obviously they wanted to broaden me’ – he refused to participate in anything there not strictly mandated by the Book of Common Prayer. Just a month after his diaconal ordination, in a sleep-deprived haze of ‘too many chocolate digestives’, reading, and watching episodes of EWTN’s *The Journey Home*, he decided ‘I’m gonna have to become Catholic’.

Not surprisingly, financial considerations often loom large, especially for those with young families. It is not simply a matter of leaving one’s job. It is severing one’s ability to gain other employment in the only profession for which one is trained. As one interviewee stated, ‘it’s very hard to get a job if all you’ve got is a Theology degree’. Resigning from ministry in one denomination and then being received into the Catholic Church normally requires leaving one’s home, often at very short notice indeed if it is church accommodation. There may also be a question of the children’s schools.

It is almost inevitable that, even for those able to rely on a spouse’s income, a period of extreme uncertainty and precarity, perhaps lasting several years, may be ahead. For some security could be gained through other gainful employment, for example as a teacher, lay chaplain, funeral director, and perhaps – eventually – as a Catholic priest. As one former Anglican priest, now a retired layman, observed:

I think there are a number of reasons that people didn't go. I think the attraction is the cheque, the stipend cheque was strong, for some... Fear of the unknown – that's understandable, isn't it? [In the high-level meetings between Catholic and Anglican bishops prior to the erection of the Ordinariate] what wasn't discussed was often the logistics of going. Nobody ever mentioned the stipend, nobody ever mentioned money. 'What am I going to do for money?' [This was a particular issue for] some who had children.

Material considerations aside, there is no shortage of other reasons for caution about thinking too much, or too seriously, about converting. Some interviewees recount family alienation, broken friendships, or marital strife. Spousal reticence, in particular, is often cited as a reason for not converting sooner. For some Anglican clergy, currently interested in converting to the Catholic Church, lack of support from their spouse is a reason for not making the move, at least not yet. Other interviewees have a sense both that they are called to convert, and also that God wants them to be doing ‘some definite service’ (Newman [1848] 1903: 301) in their current situation, at least for now. On this theme, several interviewees commented on how, looking back over their Anglican ministry, they see God playing a kind of ‘long game’, having them take the scenic route to be in a better, more rounded, more fruitful place when they finally did arrive. This is especially common among those who had considered leaving the Anglican Church in the 1990s, but who only actually did so with the formation of the Ordinariate.

What this comes to reveal is that, at any one time, there is a certain pool of Anglican clergy who might well, when the time is right for them, decide to ask to be received into the Catholic Church. Many of these are well aware of the possibility of just such a situation arising, even if others, including close family or friends, may not be. They either can imagine it happening, possibly, or else definitely expect or hope that it will. Certain sectors of the Church of England are, obviously, more likely to hold clergy likely to become converts than others (though we note that our interviewees came from the full spectrum of churchmanship). They may be influenced and encouraged by others, for example, in the well-known Anglo-Catholic societies where their membership will have brought them into close contact with converts.

Research shows that in any one ‘normal’ year, a certain very small proportion of these are received into the Catholic Church. The precise reason, or combination of reasons, is different in each case, and impossible to predict in advance. It is these that make up the apparently random numbers in any given year: e.g., 4 in 2020, 10 in 2021, 2 in 2022. Every so often, a big event comes along and forces the issue – the 1992 Synod vote, and the Ordinariate/Papal Visit being the big two in recent decades, of course – causing a relative landslide for a few years.

There is strength, and moreover courage and resolve, in numbers. Interviews with those who became Catholics in those periods reveal that discernment often occurred within and among groups, whether formally, or in informal networks of clergy friends. Even then, given the sensitive nature of the subject, not least with regard to their current Anglican diocesan bishop and their parish congregation, such discernment was often kept secret until it could be made official, even from closest relatives. Two separate interviewees, a father and son, recounted how they surprised each other with their respective resolutions to join the Ordinariate.

b. The path to ordination in the Catholic Church for convert clergy

It has been seen how the ultimate decision to become a Catholic is, therefore, a step into the unknown. This is true of any convert, but it is all the more so for someone, perhaps with a dependent family, leaving both ministry and livelihood in the process. Eventual ordination to the Catholic priesthood is by no means the hope of all. Many convert clergy have gone on to live out the ‘lay apostolate’ (*Lumen Gentium* 33) in secular professions, or indeed in retirement. There should also be noted here the particular

sacrifice of those ineligible for Catholic ordination, most obviously women Anglican clergy and those whom the Catholic Church sees as being in various types of canonically irregular marital situations. However, for a man without impediments and with an abiding feeling of a vocation to Holy Orders, together with years of ministerial training and experience, it is a natural hope that ordination to the Catholic priesthood¹¹ will be possible and that he will ultimately be able to support himself and any dependents. At a time when Catholic dioceses as well as religious congregations are low on new vocations, it might reasonably be expected that such hopefuls find a very willing home. Indeed, there were issues and sensitivities for many of our interviewees, but they have now successfully come through the process and work positively and joyfully as priests in the Catholic Church.

There was, however, much variation in the amount, nature, and appropriateness of formation expected of former Anglicans. Many clearly felt that their years of theological study and pastoral experience were not adequately taken into account when, for example, placed in seminary classes with students in their early 20s, or when enrolled on courses which they had already covered with much greater depth and sophistication. Such complaints were not, it must be stressed, uniform. Others greatly enjoyed such experiences. The salient point here is not that some convert clergy had somewhat unsatisfactory experiences in their journeys to ordination, because of course many non-convert clergy do too. Besides, all interviewees were philosophical about their various hardships as things to be expected and endured. Rather, the key issue is the sheer uncertainty of the whole process. There is no standardized, predictable route or timeline from being an Anglican cleric to becoming a Catholic priest. Each of Britain’s 29 dioceses has its own way of operating, and even this is always subject to change when bishops move around, which often involves months or even years of interregnum.¹² Since only very few dioceses have a consistent flow of incoming ex-Anglicans, there is rarely any set path – rather, arrangements are made anew each time.

¹¹ For example, ‘I took it for granted. I’d been planning for the Anglican ministry, so I took for granted that I was going into the priesthood. I never doubted for a moment. It never entered my head.’

¹² For example, within the past quarter-decade alone East Anglia has been ‘between bishops’ twice, for 16 months (October 2001 to February 2003) and 23 months (July 2011 to June 2013). Meanwhile, Menevia was vacant for 33 months between +Burns’ retirement in July 2019 and +O’Toole’s appointment to both there and Cardiff in April 2022. The two dioceses were formally merged in 2024, to create the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia.

This is, as we shall see below, in many ways a genuine strength of the system: it allows flexibility and bespoke solutions to specific cases. However, it also increases the sense of risk and uncertainty for those considering whether or not to take the step of conversion.

And I think it does have an effect on others looking at us. You know, how we're looked after? Because that's the sort of thing going through my head when, when I was struggling, could I go to the diocese? Would they support us? Would they? Would we, you know, not just lose our home? Do I have to start in a different career, get back to computing or something? The decisions about money are a peculiar thing in the Catholic Church.

Hanging over the whole process, moreover, is the anxious wait for word from Rome. Married converts aspiring to the Catholic priesthood were all too aware that their cases had first to be assessed by a Commission of the Bishops' Conference,¹³ then ultimately approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This adds two further aspects of uncertainty to the whole process. The biggest is the real possibility of a negative response.

It should be noted just how very far along the road it is possible to progress, how long after having left one's livelihood as an Anglican priest, before a definitive answer is received from Rome. The stress of this period of waiting was a very common experience, expressed by one interviewee as 'the file went away and it was all quiet and nothing seemed to be happening'.¹⁴ Another priest interviewed spent a year receiving unemployment benefit, having left a senior clergy role in the Church of England, and waiting to start seminary: 'I did phone up [the bishop] at one point, and I said, "Look, if you've got to say no, say no quickly." I'm now 51. And I've got to get another career, get a job... And then my papers came back.' Another priest recalls how he had finished seminary but, with no word back yet from Rome, was given a job in his diocese's bookshop to support his wife and young family, with help from the St Barnabas Society. Only after that year, did he finally receive the green light.

¹³ An overview of the work of this Commission, for which we are grateful to Bishop John Arnold, is included as an Appendix to this Report.

¹⁴ Very similar experiences are noted in Sullins' (2016) study of ex-Episcopalian convert clergy in the USA.

Given the above sections, it would be fair to characterise the path to ordination as often being markedly high-risk for all involved, not least for convert clergy and their families. Even when things progress more or less to plan, it is a period of stress for all concerned, but progress towards ordination in the Catholic Church may become complex. From the diocesan side, convert clergy did not fit neatly into the usual seminary formation track. Especially if wives or children were involved, there were far more logistical issues to take into consideration. Convert clergy might expect, at a bare minimum, a long, uncertain, and difficult time. Both the dioceses and the convert clergy, moreover, were at the mercy of long delays from Rome, with no guarantee of a 'yes' at the end of them.

c. The Ordinariate

The establishment of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham in 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI created a new way for former Anglicans to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church whilst retaining much of their heritage and traditions. For those wishing to pursue this, there was a perception that it came to offer an attractive route, mitigating some of the uncertainties which our interviewees perceived as characterising the initial routes to ordination in the Catholic Church of former Anglican clergy.

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, it exists as a permanent option for Anglican clergy considering becoming Catholics, whether or not they wish to explore ordination in the Catholic Church after their reception, whilst being clear that they bring with them and retain aspects of the heritage and traditions of the Church of England.

Secondly, the Ordinariate offers a relatively standardized, and hence more predictable, path over that offered by dioceses, which is appreciated by converts. The experience from 1992 to 2011 of former Anglicans in the many dioceses has been drawn upon to create this standardization.

Thirdly, formation typically occurred more swiftly on the Ordinariate pathway than in dioceses. This was most obviously true for the very first cohorts of priests ordained for the Ordinariate. As one of them recalled: 'We journeyed as a group, through Lent 2011 and then we were received at Easter. I was ordained deacon that May, and then a priest in June, so it was all was very rapid.' Such speed was in order to allow the Ordinariate to be up and running over a short time, and was therefore exceptional. A good deal of seminary formation occurred after ordination. Ordination to the priesthood within two or three years of being received into the Catholic Church is now fairly standard within the Ordinariate.

Fourthly, the creation of the Ordinariates¹⁵ appears to have resulted in a more streamlined process for considering applications on the part of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as well as an improvement in ongoing working relationships needed to advance responses.

That there are clear practical differences between the Ordinate and ordination in a diocese was widely commented upon in the research interviews. This was particularly pronounced among some diocesan priests, as well as their wives, ordained around the same time as the first cohort of Ordinate priests. The duration of their formation had in most cases been longer than that of their Ordinate counterparts. In at least one case, an interviewee who was already far along the diocesan route when *Anglicanorum Coetibus* was promulgated, was willingly allowed by his bishop to move to the Ordinate, on the understanding that he would be loaned back again once ordained: '[He said], "if you went through the Ordinate, you'd probably be through and done six months. But if you go through the diocese, it'll be a couple of years again... They're fast-tracking the Ordinate. If your paperwork is with them, it might make sense... They're going to be processing those ones first and they want to get them all done in six months. So why don't you go there?"'

Of course, practicalities aside, the Ordinate carries attractions of its own (see Bullivant 2016, 2018). Its Anglican spiritual, liturgical, and cultural 'patrimony' (see Nichols 2013; Tomlinson 2016; Rowland 2021) is genuinely valued by its members. Many also cherish its being a corporate reunion between Anglicans and Catholics as an authentic fulfilment of the ecumenical hopes kindled during the twentieth century (Oddie 1997; Walsh 2019). Regarding its more prosaic aspects, some content diocesan priests admit that had it existed when they became Catholics, it would have been a tempting option. One interviewee commented 'one of the frustrations of the [diocesan] process I was going through was how dragged out it was. The advantage of the Ordinate was that you left your Church of England parish, and 3 months later you are a Catholic priest... which would have been very attractive, very attractive. But I'm glad I didn't do that... It didn't exist at that time, [but if it had] I would have *hoped* I'd have said no.'

Speaking to more recent converts, it is clear that a prudent weighing-up of alternatives – diocesan or Ordinate? – is now a natural part of the discernment process. In this regard, the following testimony is worth quoting at some length, since it gives a valuable insight into the thought-processes of one who was in formation when interviewed. He thus had to make this decision within the past few years, with the Ordinate now an established part of the ecclesiastical scene. Following an initial conversation with the St Barnabas Society about the prospect of converting, and then a discussion with 'another former Anglican, who I knew when he was an Anglican – he went over with the Ordinate' (again, note the role of informal networks in the discernment process):

[The Ordinate route] made sense in as much as it was very straightforward. I was keen that I should be understood. I expected that anyone involved with the Ordinate would, of course, understand where I was coming from. So, instinctively, it made sense to me. So I went to see Monsignor Newton... He was very lovely. Very good, very matter-of-fact. We didn't really [need to] discuss at any great length my 'journey' or anything like that. Because I guess instinctively he knew it. He knew what's going on. And so, after I went to see him, I was reasonably settled – to be honest with you, I think, not entirely without reservation – but reasonably settled that that seemed to be the best for me. I'd heard that it could be tricky going the diocesan route. Depending on where you are and who you approach, it can be not always straightforward. With a diocese, it depends on the bishop and his team, really. So I thought, 'Well, you know, if it [i.e., the Ordinate path] is the easiest way to do it...'

Meanwhile, however, a mutual friend of both him and a diocesan bishop suggested the two might usefully have a conversation:

¹⁵ There are three such Ordinariates: the Personal Ordinate of Our Lady of Walsingham (England and Wales, Scotland), the Personal Ordinate of the Chair of Saint Peter (USA, Canada), and the Personal Ordinate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross (Australia, Japan).



So, I went to talk to [the bishop]. And we spent quite a lot of time together over two meetings. He was very, very generous, very welcoming. It was all very, very good. And really, it wasn't that what was being 'offered' was better – although it was, in lots of ways. You know if I've got to wait two years to get back to ministry, on the diocesan route I'd spend that time at seminary [full time]. Whereas with the Ordinariate, presumably because of finances, [it would just be] a couple of nights a week at Allen Hall, while working as a pastoral assistant in an Ordinariate parish.

Accordingly, he opted for the diocesan route.

Several things are notable here. The first is that there are pros and cons with both diocesan and Ordinariate routes, which different people will weigh differently. It is perhaps worth noting that the above interviewee is unmarried. Someone with a family might well find part-time seminary studies, while working the rest of the week, much more attractive. The second is that this was explicitly framed as a choice between two attractive options, one of which was more attractive than the other. The impression is also gained that at least some dioceses have recognized a need to streamline their processes in order to accommodate the vocations of former Anglican clergyman, who may not wish to pursue the particular emphasis of the Ordinariate in retaining much of Anglican heritage and traditions.

In the ten-year period from 2001 to 2010, Catholic dioceses and congregations in Britain ordained a total of 45 former Anglican clergy. Then followed the exceptional years of 2011 and 2012, in which 100 were ordained (19 diocesan, 81 Ordinariate). However, in the following ten-year period from 2013 to 2022, 62 former Anglicans were ordained, divided almost equally between dioceses or religious congregations (32) and the Ordinariate (30).¹⁶ One reasonable interpretation of this data is that the Ordinariate is not only ordaining men who would otherwise, had it not existed, have joined dioceses. Rather, it would seem that the overall numbers being attracted over has increased, and that both dioceses and the Ordinariate have things on offer to attract them.

¹⁶ There was also one ordination for the North American Ordinariate, not included in these figures.

Conclusion: The ongoing role of the St Barnabas Society

It would seem that since 2011 any Anglican priest who is exploring the passage to the Catholic Church now has, on average, a better sense of the probable scenarios if he were to be received and had hopes of eventual ordination. It is also likely to be a faster and more efficient process than in the fairly recent past.

Quotations from more recent converts testify to the critical nature of the Society's valued support of their own and their families' journeys. The research interviews contained such comments as 'Without the St Barnabas Society, it would have been simply impossible to make such a move'; 'the St Barnabas Society bore so much of the financial load for us'; and 'We wouldn't have done it without them'. To frame this in perhaps more seemly theological terms, it could be said that alongside St Barnabas, St John Henry Newman and the Society's other intercessors, St John the Baptist would be a fitting patron for the Society. The path from Canterbury to Rome, or indeed from the Thames to the Tiber, often involves a long, draining spell in the financial, professional, and spiritual wilderness. The Society's assistance genuinely does 'make the path', if not straight, then at least straighter and more obstacle-free.

Its other role, just as valued especially in the long run, is the ongoing pastoral, social, spiritual support and encouragement that it gives to convert clergy and their families. It is clear from our interviewees that former beneficiaries do not merely see the Society as a grant-giving charity, but rather as a focus for developing and maintaining a personal relationship through the conversion experience and in the years that immediately follow. This is especially true of the support given by the Director and his colleagues.¹⁷

The personal aspect of the Society's work can hardly be underestimated, especially given the necessarily informal, trust-based nature of its role prior to a clergy conversion. Several interviewees mention how their first contact with the Society came fairly early in the process. There was maybe a chance conversation with the Director or an 'ambassador', introduced by friends.

¹⁷ Stephen Bullivant wishes to add here that his first knowledge of the Society came through a friend – an ex-Church of Scotland minister and Catholic layman – who, years after his conversion, would meet up with the former Director of the St Barnabas Society who supported him several times a year.

This could have been a good while before a decision was close, or even before the realization that there was a decision to make.

The Society is not able to offer or promise anything 'up front'. One interviewee stated that he had been told: 'We are not allowed to offer you anything until you've resigned because otherwise we'd be accused of poaching you'. Its careful and effective role is based almost exclusively on trust and reputation, especially with regard to the reports of those whom the Society has supported in the past. Needless to say, one has to have a lot of trust in God, and his work through the Society, to abandon one's livelihood, housing, and family security. It is to the credit of the Society's Directors, past and present, that so many have evidently been willing to take the step of 'crossing the Tiber', trusting in the Society that awaits to catch and care for them on the other shore.

On this theme, and by way of a conclusion to this short report, it seems fitting to allow some of our interviewees to have the last word:

1.

I was put in touch with the St Barnabas Society beforehand, and before the pandemic I had someone come to visit me and we talked about it. They were very supportive, very encouraging. And after the pandemic [during which time the final decision to leave Anglican ministry and enter the Catholic Church had been made], because I needed to move out, find a place to live [I got in touch again]. Again, they said, 'Yes, we will help you with that'. [...]

I think I would say, simply, that without the St Barnabas Society it was just going to be impossible. As simple as that. It was just not going to be possible. I didn't have the kind of money to rent a home, and I have a child with special needs who goes to a special school. My wife doesn't work, she has just finished her degree. [...]

'Without the St Barnabas Society, it would have been simply impossible to make such a move. Because it is an expensive move when you think about it. Suddenly you haven't got a stipend. You haven't got a place to live, and you'll be given a date in a month's time 'when we need the house back'. Suddenly, you're just basically on your own now. And the St Barnabas Society were very helpful to step in, and make it possible for us to have a house where we can live, and also give us some money for our weekly needs.

Current beneficiary, in formation with the Ordinariate

2.

We [i.e., then a transitional deacon and fulltime curate, and his wife] were received, and I then contacted the St Barnabas Society, and they were able to find a bungalow for us to live in. What had happened was that I had a nice letter from the [CofE] bishop, and then an email telling me 'You're leaving [the church-owned house] in ten days'. And we have one child who is nine months, and one on the way, and yet we're being told to leave in ten days. So we had to find somewhere – quick. The St Barnabas Society were very good. I found somewhere and they just said, 'Right, we'll sort it out'. And they did. [...] They were fantastic. They helped us until I was ordained priest in the Catholic Church. For six years they helped us. We wouldn't have done it without them.

Former beneficiary, currently a diocesan priest

3.

We are very grateful for [the St Barnabas Society's] help, because we bought a house – we had to move out of the vicarage [with two children]. We needed some practical support and, financially, a bit of cushioning. The first two years were quite hard, and I found those first two years very difficult... but I would never say to anybody [in a similar situation] don't do it. Because God really has looked after us.

Wife of former beneficiary, currently an Ordinariate priest

4.

Husband: The St Barnabas Society did exactly what they said they'd do. They found us a house... I got a job, we weren't expecting the St Barnabas Society to pay for everything.

Wife: I wasn't fretting and panicking. I was a lot more sanguine about things [because] the St Barnabas Society bore so much of the financial load for us.

Husband (former beneficiary, currently a diocesan priest) and wife

5.

St Barnabas is paying. It's great I've had that support... That's been a great relief. And actually, they've been very generous. They're paying, St Barnabas is paying, essentially for me to be here. And not just to be here, but making sure that I've got, – don't me wrong, I'm not getting lots of money – but I'm getting enough to make sure that whatever things, like whatever existing kind of commitments I had, car insurance and mobile phones ... all of that's covered with a little bit, you know, a little bit on top.

Current beneficiary, in diocesan formation

6.

The moment I resigned, the St Barnabas Society offered me support, which is fantastic.

Former beneficiary, currently a diocesan priest

7.

I always look back now you know... I was baptized at St Barnabas Church, supported by the St Barnabas Society, and I was ordained in St Barnabas Cathedral in Nottingham. So, I have an icon of St Barnabas as well, because – you know? – I think he's been watching over me.

Former beneficiary, currently a diocesan priest

Appendix

The following text, prepared by Marie Sartini, was provided to us by Bishop John Arnold (personal communication to Janet Mellor, June 2025). We are grateful to them both.

A short overview of the work of the Commission of the Bishops' Conference in undertaking preliminary oversight of the applications of married convert clergy, a faculty having been established by the Holy See

The Commission of the Bishops' Conference was established using the statutes approved on 2nd June 1995 by St Pope John Paul II to oversee the process for married former Anglican Clergymen to apply to the Holy See for a Dispensation from Celibacy and Ordination to the Catholic Priesthood. Its purpose is to give a uniform approach to the process so that all applications are treated in the same way.

The Diocesan Ordinary will send three copies of the paperwork to the Chair of the Commission who forwards a copy to each of the other two members of the panel, asking for their opinion on the suitability of the candidate. The file is thorough and asks a number of questions to establish whether the candidate understands the duty that he will be taking on – it also seeks the support of a candidate's wife, if he is married, in the new role that he will be given. This is important as the outcome will, of course, have an impact on the whole family. Having reflected on all of the information, the members of the Commission will return the file to the Chair with their opinion. A dossier will then be prepared for submission to the Holy See.

One of the main points to be considered is the ongoing study and formation that is to be put in place for the candidate. It is vital that they are supported both before and after Ordination and the Commission – together with the Holy See – will seek an assurance that sufficient support is there. A letter will be received from the Holy See to confirm that permission for Dispensation from Celibacy and Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood has been granted. It is a pleasure to share this news with the Diocesan Ordinary and to request that he prepare for the ordinations to take place. The ordination dates will then be sent to the Holy See for their records in an annual report.

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St Mary's
University
Twickenham
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Benedict XVI
Centre for Religion,
Ethics and Society

St Mary's University
Waldegrave Road
Twickenham
London TW1 4SX

T +44 (0) 20 8240 4000
www.stmarys.ac.uk