

**ORDINATION OF PRIESTS
ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL
23 JULY 2022**

By Archbishop Bernard Longley

No one takes this honour on himself, but each one is called by God.

The Ordination of a Priest for the service of the local Church is a very special day in the life of every Diocese. It is a sign of the abiding love of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, for the People of God as he continues to gather and lead us on our pilgrimage through life. As we journey together along the Synodal Pathway we shall have two new pastors to accompany and guide us and to listen to the insights and concerns of all God's children.

The Ordination of two Priests to pick up the baton of service in this Archdiocese is a moment for thanksgiving and joy – it evokes our gratitude to God for providing us with this help and it strengthens our hope for the future of the Church's mission. Today the Cathedral is the crossroads where the individual journeys of two deacon-seminarians are transformed into a shared pilgrimage which will now unite them irrevocably with each another and with all the fraternity of priests.

Dear Toby and Steven, I am emphasising the ecclesial nature of the sacrament that we celebrate today - but not to diminish the personal journeys of faith that have brought each one of you to this moment. The change that comes about in your lives through the laying-on of hands, the prayer of ordination and the anointing of your own hands will forever unite you with the universal priesthood of our Lord.

The direction of your lives will now be determined by Christ at work within his Church and you must dispose yourselves to that new reality. Your years of formation in Rome and at Oscott have prepared you for this and you will now begin a new partnership of service whose fruitfulness will depend on your availability and readiness to put the service of others before your own desires or comforts.

The personal gifts that you have brought, the life experiences that you have had, the support and example of your families and the network of your friendships - these have all helped to shape your response to the formation that the Church has offered you over the last seven years. I offer my thanks to your parents for their trust in God and for recognising the choice that he has made: *No one takes this honour on himself, but each one is called by God.*

You can both reflect prayerfully on the pathway that led you to the priesthood. It will have its individual characteristics, which you recognise and respect in each other – but it also has the nature of a shared journey. You have been members of the same parish community at St Anne's in Streetly, supported by the prayers of your fellow parishioners and guided by the example of your Parish Priest, Fr Gwyl Lloyd who is here beside you today.

Nor can I forget the witness and influence of the staff at St Francis of Assisi College in Aldridge where your sense of vocation was valued and nurtured. Your shared journey will now continue within the diocesan presbyterate. I invite you to consider together what this will mean during the coming year when Toby will return to the Venerable English College and Steve will take up his new responsibilities as an Assistant Priest.

While you recognise the strengths that God has given you for the life ahead, you are also conscious of the fragility that we all bring to the priesthood. This can be a source of grace for you if you remember St Paul's maxim that *when I am weak then I am strong*. Yours strength will come from our Lord who has already prayed for you: *Holy Father...I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one...consecrate them in the truth.*

The priesthood is not a theological concept or a metaphor for the life of ministry to which you have been called. It is a sacrament and it becomes a living reality in the human lives which it transforms. This is a profound moment of personal encounter between you and our Lord, but it also belongs to his Body the Church. For the Church's sake Christ draws from your life another unique image of himself as the High Priest who redeems and serves his people.

You have been called to evangelize and teach. As newly-ordained priests I shall look to you to help me in implementing our diocesan vision to be a *Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.*

You will be uniquely placed to bring the lay faithful together in our common mission around the five themes that we have identified as our priorities for the future. I would ask you today to consider how you understand your new ministry in relation to evangelization, formation, parish renewal, young people and families and charity – and to listen to the insights and concerns that have emerged along the Synodal Pathway.

In a few moments I will ask you to declare your willingness to submit your lives freely and unreservedly to the ministry of service to which our Lord has called you. This act of commitment is lifelong and the gift you receive – a share in our Lord's priesthood – is eternal. He will give you the strength to walk the whole journey beside him and you will in turn be encouraged by the members of his flock.

Toby and Steve: your hands are anointed so that you can feed and tend the flock – as you celebrate Mass you will call the people together through the Word of God and share the Eucharist as nourishment for their journey.

When you are clothed in the priest's stole and chasuble these are not a personal adornment for you, but they signify the presence of the Lord whom you represent and they help us focus on him alone. Always try to see with his eyes and look for those who are lost to lead them back to Christ through the Sacrament of Reconciliation – be patient with them and be a lens for them when they find it hard to see very clearly or very far ahead.

Through your prayer, your love of the Scriptures and your priestly witness shape your life of service day by day to fulfil the prayer of Christ: *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.*

WELCOME

Dear friends: together with Mgr Timothy Menezes, the Cathedral Dean, I welcome you to St Chad's Cathedral on this joyful day when Toby Duckworth and Steven Fleming will be ordained priests and will join the presbyterate of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

I am grateful to Bishop David, Bishop Stephen and our Vicar General Canon Richard Walker for assisting at today's Ordination.

I offer a very warm welcome to Toby and Steve's parents and the members of their families who have joined us today, together with their many friends. Thank you for the love and support that you have always given them over the years and for the gift of two new priests to serve the Church.

I thank all our priests for their presence and support today – and in particular Fr Gwyl Lloyd and all those who have supported Toby and Steve in their parish pastoral placements.

My particular thanks to Fr Stephen Wang, to his predecessor Mgr Philip Whitmore and to all the Staff at the Venerable English College in Rome – together with Fr Michael Dolman and the Staff of St Mary's College Oscott - for the programme of priestly formation from which Toby and Steve have benefitted these last seven years.

Finally, I welcome all those who have been unable to travel to Birmingham today but who are joining us in prayer from their homes through the live-streaming of today's Ordination.

With these many intentions in our hearts we turn to God our loving Father at the outset of this Ordination Mass and ask for his gift of peace.