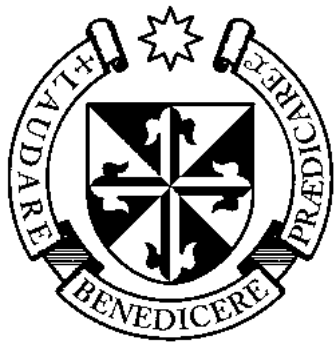




THE DOMINICANS

Summer 2026

The Magazine of the Dominican Friars of the English Province



- **VOCATION** Reflections from friars old and new
- **MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS** Food for thought from Pope Leo
- **YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY** Forming tomorrow's leaders
- and more...

Life in Abundance

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

With these words Jesus succinctly points both to the motivation and goal of his Incarnation – that humanity might be renewed, freed from the slavery of sin, and so elevated by the grace of the Saviour to share in the life of the Trinity. Hence in a well-known Christmas sermon, Pope Leo the Great declared: ‘Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition.’

In his first encyclical, Pope Leo XIV thus fittingly recalls the magnificent dignity of Mankind, called to communion with God and so with his fellow men and women. He says: ‘By becoming man, the Son of God enters our history and takes on human flesh, bringing with him the love that unites him to the Father and the Holy Spirit. In him, “the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear” because his humanity is completely free, open to others, capable of building healthy and beautiful relationships and committed to the total gift of self.’ (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 49) Hence all technologies and human activities are to be ordered towards the flourishing of our natural life, and moreover should lead us deeper into union with God through charity so that we can receive the abundance of life, i.e., eternal life in heaven, that Christ desires to give us. The manifold activities that take place in our parishes, chaplaincies



and various ministries all serve these ends, and we share with you a brief overview of the full Catholic life that is shared with students in St Albert’s, Edinburgh.

Pope Leo XIV recalled that ‘human persons are called to communion with God and “can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving.” Indeed their deepest vocation is to enter into the Trinitarian dynamic of love received and shared.’ (MH, 48) Hence we highlight two vocation stories, as examples of how friars have responded to the vocation to receive and share love: Br Jerome Johnson is our most newly-ordained friar, admitted to the diaconate in July; and on the other hand we invited one of our revered Jubilarians, Fr Robert Ombres, who featured in our recent Formation video, to tell his story. The life of a friar is a beautiful way to live out our fundamental Christian vocation, receiving life in abundance from Christ whom we follow,

and we have been creating online digital content to tell the vocation stories of our Dominican brothers. Fr John Church reflects on his role using social media and online content to preach the gospel, and more importantly to bring people together in person through talks, study days and monthly gatherings of the Dominican Young Adults group which he oversees. For as Pope Leo XIV says, ‘What saves humanity is not enhanced self-sufficiency, but a relationship that liberates, a communion that transforms.’ (MH, 128)

My hope is that the new café in Oxford, currently being built, will become a place that nourishes both intellect and body, building communion among persons in a manner that serves the ends called for by the Holy Father. As an example of the kind of intellectual hospitality that Oxford in general and more especially Blackfriars fosters, I am especially grateful to Richard Finn for his thoughtful piece on the ‘Just War Theory’ responding to Pope Leo’s call for our thinking on this crucial issue to be ‘updated’, so that human dignity and life in abundance is safeguarded in these times which are filled with ‘res novae’ and new challenges. With your prayers and support, we aspire to continue to form Dominicans to respond to the signs of our times with humility, clarity, and Christian insight.

Fraternally,

– Fr Lawrence Lew OP, Editor

You can send any comments or feedback to me via magazine@english.op.org

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Requiescant in Pace

We remember with affection and gratitude all the recently departed, including the following who made gifts to the Friars in their Wills.

- Catherine Brookes (Dominican Young Adults ministry)
- Patricia McGoldrick (Blackfriars Hall, Oxford)

May they and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Since 1221, gifts made in Wills have always played a vital part in sustaining the mission of the friars.

If you are considering leaving such a gift, please see the back page of this magazine or visit www.english.op.org/legacies





'My Beloved is mine and I am his'

Br Jerome Johnson OP, ordained deacon in July 2026, explains how God called him to the religious life.

When I found him whom my soul loves, I held him, and would not let him go... (Songs 3:4)

Growing up, if you had told me that I had a vocation to the consecrated religious life, I probably would have laughed in your face. Throughout my late-teenage years and even in my early 20s, I was utterly convinced that I wanted to get married and to have children of my own. However, in hindsight, I think the call was always there – I simply did not have the language to understand it.

I was raised in a Catholic family in Malaysia, and we attended Mass together every Sunday without fail. As far as I can remember, I had always been troubled by the passage from the Gospel of Matthew concerning the rich young man, to whom Jesus had said, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' [Matthew 19:21]. What troubled me was that whenever this passage was read out at Mass, I could not see anyone around me who lived in this way. Of course, I was aware that not every disciple of Christ is called to embrace poverty in such a radical way, or to follow Him in the manner of the apostles. Scripture is full of such examples – Joseph of Arimathea, Mary and Martha

of Bethany, and Nicodemus all lived out their discipleship without having sold all their possessions in order to follow Jesus. So, I understood why most Christians did not live this way; but what bothered me was that *I* did not live this way – and I wasn't able to see how *I could* live this way.

Coming to the UK for university was an eye-opening experience. Living and studying in Bath provided me with the opportunity to visit the Benedictine monks at Downside Abbey where, for the first time, I saw men living together in religious vows. For the first time, I had the language to understand the call that I had been experiencing since my childhood. I began to suspect that the desire I had to embrace a more radical poverty and to follow in Christ's footsteps was, in fact, a vocation to the religious life.

However, I very quickly realised that I was not being called to be a Benedictine monk. While at university, I began spending about 4-5 hours a week doing Church-related activities, initially with the Catholic Society on campus, and later in helping to run the young adults' group and leading a weekly Bible Study session in one of the local parishes. Whilst I enjoyed my studies, I came to realise that those 4-5 hours each week were the times when I felt the happiest – when I felt most alive. From this experience, I understood that God was calling me to an apostolic way of life, to serve the Church in an

active way. So, although I admired the Benedictine monastic discipline, I knew I was not going to be one of them.

After a period of searching, I encountered the Dominican friars online, while trawling through YouTube. By chance (or was it divine providence?), I stumbled upon the Province of England's vocations video, wherein the friars spoke about the Dominican way of life, which seeks to strike a balance between contemplation and action; a way of life which takes seriously the search for Truth in the intellectual life, and the need to share the light of that Truth with others. Watching that video, I felt my heart ache with a yearning for what the friars were describing. I started considering seriously the possibility that God was calling me to be a Dominican friar.

One thing, however, stood in the way: I still wanted to be married – I desired to be a husband and a father. I doubted that I could be happy remaining celibate and continent for the rest of my life. I remember spending quite a bit of time agonising over this matter before the Blessed Sacrament. One day during Adoration, I was inexplicably drawn to open the Bible and to read the *Song of Songs* for the first time. It would not be an exaggeration to say that my life was for ever changed by that moment. Through what I read, I became deeply convicted of the fathomless depths of God's love for me. It finally dawned on

continued overleaf...

me that the consecrated life was possible because Christ himself has promised to be my comfort [Psalm 119:76].

Therefore, after obtaining some liquid courage one night, I wrote to the Province's director of vocations, in order to explore a possible vocation to the Order of Preachers. This eventually led me to enter the novitiate in 2020; and led to this very moment, as I sit in my cell, writing this reflection on my vocation two weeks before I am to be ordained to the Diaconate.

As a consecrated religious, 'my Beloved is mine and I am his' [Songs 2:16]; everything that I am – my talents and weaknesses, my hopes and dreams, my sexuality, my desire for marriage and fatherhood, every aspect of myself – belongs to Christ. Through my religious vows, I have set Him as a seal upon my heart [Songs 8:6]. And as a Dominican friar, and as someone called to the Priesthood, this is the love that I am compelled to preach and to share with others – 'not that we loved God, but that He loved us' [1 John 4:10] – so that they too may be filled with an unquenchable love for God [Songs 8:7]. This is the concrete reality which motivates me each morning, and which I pray will continue to motivate me until my death.

Please pray for Br Jerome and all those who are called to the Dominican vocation



Beyond Just-War Theory

Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, offers an inspiring vision of what it means for us to be Catholics. It demands our social engagement, our commitment to building a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world, by rooting such action in the fundamentals of our Christian faith. The Pope is at pains to show how the Church's Social Doctrine (more often referred to elsewhere as 'Catholic Social Teaching') emerges seamlessly from Church doctrine on our creation and redemption. In Christ, we are drawn into the love shared among the persons of the Trinity and, so, inescapably, called into sharing God's love for each and every person who is made in His image and likeness and so endowed with an inalienable dignity to be revered and respected. *Magnifica Humanitas* then reviews the tradition of papal encyclicals on social justice that has followed the publication of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to identify moral principles of enduring relevance in addressing the many urgent issues raised in the present day by Artificial Intelligence. Pope Leo doesn't offer all the answers – far from it! Instead, he outlines the angle of approach, moral perspectives to be adopted and brought to bear on difficult questions in honest, constructive, dialogue.

One key area with which *Magnifica Humanitas* requires us to wrestle is the untold damage wrought by an all-too ready recourse to war as 'an instrument of international politics' (Paragraph 190);

and the yet greater harms that may occur through the changing nature of modern warfare as its weaponry is revolutionised by AI. Pope Leo starkly warns: 'Today, more than ever, without prejudice to the right to self-defence in the strictest sense, it is important to reaffirm that the "just war" theory, which has all too often been used to justify any kind of war, is now outdated' (Paragraph 192). That judgment may come as a shock to doughty champions of an ethical tradition that counts two Doctors of the Church, St Augustine of Hippo and St Thomas Aquinas, amongst its chief proponents. So, what sense can we make of Pope Leo's verdict?

It helps first to remember the different elements that comprise so-called 'Just War Theory'. There are the conditions that must be met if there is to be just cause for fighting at all, and conditions which limit how warfare may be conducted. Only the credible threat or infliction of grave injustices may justify recourse to arms to prevent or redress those injustices, and such recourse must be the last resort after other avenues for resolving the matter have been exhausted. There must be good grounds for holding that a war fought with due observance of ethical imperatives will succeed in securing the good it aims at without incurring even greater evils. Those who then prosecute the war must have due authority so to act.

Within war, 'Just War Theory' holds that it is never right to target non-combatants, those not involved (directly or indirectly)



in waging war, nor to destroy the vital infrastructure that maintains civilian life. The force used must be proportionate to the size and strength of the legitimate targets identified, so that collateral damage, and in particular civilian casualties, are minimised.

There is no reason to think Pope Leo rejects these conditions that are, theoretically, meant to limit the grave harms done by war. Indeed, he laments the erosion of such ethical principles. The problem, rather, lies in the difficulty of applying the conditions successfully. That is to say, the difficulty lies in making good (rational) use of them, either in the run-up to a likely war or in its prosecution once underway. The ‘theory’ doesn’t, in practice, deliver the protections it is meant to ensure or, if not ensure, at least promote.

The problems are multiple. In part, the difficulty lies with the principal ‘actors’, those with the command and who claim authority to launch or direct a war. Some are simply not guided by the ethical principles or goals envisaged by Just War Theory, and their control over the armed forces brooks no dissent from their orders. Be they Heads of State or leaders of armed movements, ‘Just War Theory’ has little or no purchase on their decisions. Where Heads of State are constitutionally required to gain authorisation for war from those who do respect the conditions laid down by ‘Just War Theory’, Pope Leo has drawn attention in particular to how a ‘culture of power’ fuels a ‘false realism

that insists that there is no alternative’ to war (Paragraph 188). The widespread diffusion of misinformation, the distorted and stunted nature of political debate, deprives people of the knowledge needed successfully to apply the criteria of ‘Just War Theory’ and so restrain warmongers. While the theory respects conscientious objection on the part of civilians and the refusal by soldiers to carry out war crimes, the actual training and execution of warfare, including the use of child soldiers by warlords, makes the latter refusal all too rare.

On the world stage, political leaders collaborated in the aftermath of World War Two in order to reduce the threat of renewed destruction through war. They subordinated national sovereignty in some measure to international law which limited the authority of States to act unilaterally in going to war, and which further defined war crimes against humanity, together with a crime of genocide. They established the United Nations and international courts to uphold these laws. Yet, the legislation lacks sufficient teeth, and the ability of the United Nations to restrain some of the most powerful actors is hobbled by the nature and operation of the so-called Security Council. ‘Just War Theory’ needs a tougher international legal apparatus to gain adequate purchase.

A further difficulty in putting ‘Just War Theory’ to good use lies in the blurring of traditional lines that facilitated its application. The line between war and peace

is blurred through the language of ‘military operations’ with consequences for how, or by what body, such fighting is authorised within the State when there is no formal declaration of war. Worse, warfare is no longer confined to a front line or its immediate hinterland, a battlefield distant or at least separate from civilian life, but is conducted at high speed against numerous targets, including command posts, dispersed within towns and cities. In this context, where civilians have no time and little opportunity to flee, civilian casualties multiply, and it becomes harder to determine the proportionality of any single attack. Cyberwarfare further blurs the line between military and civilian targets as it seeks to disrupt systems vital to all sectors of society.

Meanwhile, drone warfare and the use of AI increase the degree to which modern warfare distances protagonists from appreciating the flesh and blood reality of the men and women under attack. Serious consideration is currently being given to the enabling of drones to select and attack targets without reference to, or authority from, a remote human operator who is required to make a moral judgment of whether or not to attack a given individual, group, or installation. Pope Leo is adamant on this point that ‘it is not permissible to entrust lethal or otherwise irreversible decisions to artificial systems’. Those ‘who design, train, authorise and employ’ this technology ‘must be held accountable for their decisions’, and its operation must admit of a ‘moral timeframe’ within which the handler can identify and protect civilians (Paragraphs 198–199).

What, then, happens next? It may not be a matter of replacing ‘Just War Theory’ but of recovering respect for law, including international law, of strengthening the hand and reach of international courts, and of building a culture of peace-building through diplomacy. It means better access to, and interpretation of intelligence. Pope Leo XIV in *Magnifica Humanitas* doesn’t provide a blueprint but sets an agenda for debate.

Fr Richard Finn OP is the former director of the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University



Being Human in a Digital Age

Following my ordination to the priesthood last July, I was entrusted with two main ministries: young adults and social media. As such, Pope Leo's recent encyclical has been both a great encouragement and a timely challenge. *Magnifica Humanitas* speaks to our age of technological transformation, one which has the greatest impact on young people and is accelerated by social media channels. The Holy Father's words have given me plenty of food for thought!

Towards the end of the document, Pope Leo writes: 'It is imperative to cultivate hearts that love the truth' (§237). This rallying cry immediately jumped off the page at me. It serves as a mission statement for what we have been trying to do with Dominican Young Adults, the Province's young adults ministry. Our own (inferior) version is 'Transformed by Truth'.

There is a profound desire among young people for formation. So many are searching for meaning, having found society's offers wanting. It has been encouraging to see the numbers attending our study days. Recent events in London have been over-subscribed, and so too is our upcoming summer study week at Worth Abbey. Pope Leo speaks of a world in which knowledge is too often fragmented, and that there is 'an inability to connect information with deeper knowledge or maintain a sense of purpose' (§146). It is precisely the kind of formation that responds to this intellectual fragmentation which is so vital: one which offers a coherent vision

for life, shaped by our understanding of God, the human person, and salvation in Christ.

In the same section, Pope Leo raises the threat of a different kind of intellectual fragmentation, namely the distraction cultivated by social media. Short-form content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are well-built machines for shredding attention. They foster a culture which risks giving rise to 'fatigue, boredom, and apathy concerning the effort required for seeking the truth' (§139). Learning requires time and effort, and some digital media seem set against this.

Here Pope Leo's observation poses more of a challenge than an encouragement. As a Province, we have recently begun to develop our own digital presence, including posting both short-form and long-form content. AI tools have proven very useful here, including one which cleverly edits longer videos, such as talks and homilies, by clipping them for use as reels on Instagram and TikTok. The risk of simply exacerbating a problem here is genuine. But, as Pope Leo is clear to state, these tools are not wrong in themselves.

In his discussion of digital communication, the Holy Father speaks of social media as part of the 'creation of a culture' (§136). This is where its great potential lies, for good or ill. I find it striking, albeit unsurprising, how many of the young people I meet have made their journey to faith almost entirely online. It isn't friends or family that have played the central role,

nor pubs or discussion groups providing the context, but rather YouTube and the safety of their bedroom.

Social media for us is fundamentally a preaching platform, with the potential to reach vast numbers. Since late March, our Instagram page has had more than 800k views across all the different posts. However, the goal is never simply to maximise views. Pope Leo provides the framework: it is about the 'creation of a culture', and one in which 'inner freedom and critical thought can mature' (§136). The purpose of the short-form content, which need not be superficial, is to encourage interest in something more substantial, with the hope that this leads to genuine encounter.

If so many young people are present in a particular place, the gospel must be preached there too. The risks of social media are very real, but there is vital work to be done. We are just adding a small voice to much of the great work that has long been underway in this space, not least from our Dominican brothers in the USA. The response has been promising so far, helped by willing brethren and a talented videographer (*see facing page*).

As a final point, there is another kind of fragmentation which *Magnifica Humanitas* raises frequently, and it is the most important: social fragmentation. Pope Leo continually returns to an anthropology which defines a human being as made for relationship. The devastating effects of rapid technological

transformation are already visible in the increased loneliness felt by so many. A consequence of conversions taking place at home and on YouTube is that many young people are not embedded in living communities. For the young adult events we organise, cultivating community is the central focus.

When Pope Leo discusses the threat of AI to workers, a similar concern emerges. The threat is not merely economic: 'work is a fundamental dimension of the human experience' (§154). It forms character and builds relationships, and is the 'normal path towards maturity, development, and personal fulfilment' (§149). As a Church, we have a critical role to play in promoting the dignity of the worker and providing the stable communities in which young people can grow and flourish. This is especially true when technology threatens to remove the ordinary means of maturity and development. Good formation can only happen within a community.

It is a wonderful time to be working among young adults, with so many seeking God and opening their hearts in new ways. There is a great deal of work to be done, but it is a time to be hopeful. In his conclusion, Pope Leo speaks of the spirituality of the 'wise architect' who 'enters the construction site of our time' so as to work for the coming of the Kingdom. Among the foundations of this spirituality, the Holy Father offers the following advice: 'Let us remain faithful to the truth!' and 'Let us cultivate relationships!' (§237-9). They are encouragements I take especially to heart.

Fr John Church OP is based at Holy Cross Priory, Leicester. For more information about Dominican Young Adult events, see www.english.op.org/dya

Find the friars on social media at [@DominicanFriarsinBritain](https://www.instagram.com/DominicanFriarsinBritain) (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) or see english.op.org/links for a full listing of ways you can follow us.



Cut Through the Noise

Those attending the diaconal ordination of Br Jerome, or one of our recent Dominican Young Adults events, may have noticed the presence of a videographer. Royston Pais has been working with the friars in recent months, and in particular with Fr John Church (*see left*), to assist us in telling our story in the modern video age.

At a time when everyone's social media timeline is crowded with videos that compete for attention, Roy brings his professional skills to help us 'cut through' the noise. This is very important at a time when we are actively seeking to evangelise the digital space, and to reach the young 'digital native' generation – challenging them to go deeper, even to consider whether they have a vocation.

One recent project was to produce a video in support of fundraising for the Formation Fund (*see back cover*). The resulting film showcases the personalities



and personal journeys of Dominican Friars, both young and old, and indeed the humour that so often accompanies our life together.

Watch the video at www.english.op.org/formation and follow us at [@DominicanFriarsinBritain](https://www.instagram.com/DominicanFriarsinBritain) (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) to bring clips of Dominican inspiration into your social media feed.





The Mosaic of a Vocation

The acceptance of my vocation as a Dominican friar wasn't so much a response to a distinct call from God coming out of the blue, as the convergence of so many influences and experiences that I came to recognise as adding up to a call from God, a vocation, to be a Dominican friar. It was a journey, an accumulation of events and perspectives which came to point in a certain direction, rather than a call to make a radical break.

My background was in various ways a favourable though unknown predisposition for the future. Birth and early years in Naples, and a Catholic family and schools in Italy and then England came first. Firm from within, the Baroque Catholicism of Southern Italy meant one could be nurtured by early and formative habits of faith and piety that would not be overthrown by the massive presence of militant communism in Italy. This predisposition was also a stabilising factor for what was to come in 1960s and 1970s British Catholicism.

The Neapolitan street shrines of the souls in purgatory, inviting the prayers of passers-by, made a lasting impression on my young mind and were in fact to shape my earliest theological studies and publications as a Dominican. Indeed, becoming a Dominican provided the theology for childhood devotional experiences. My maternal grandmother kept her rosary beads under the pillow, my parents had a large rosary hung on a wall of their bedroom. Invitations to pray can be visible and tangible. As it happens, wearing a rosary is part of our Dominican habit,

and praying it every day is required of us. Attending a boarding school run by religious Sisters was another influence in this direction. In time, all this would affect my understanding of preaching and the presentation of the faith. As Dominicans, the pursuit of study and doctrine today can be taken as a constant; perhaps its combination with piety less so.

With that kind of upbringing, the consideration of priesthood as a possibility was not out of context. Priest, maybe, but accompanied by what kind of life? As I started graduate studies in London intending to practise as a barrister and specialise in international law, there was a recurring sense of needing to consider life's ultimate meaning, and if it were to involve the priesthood, then the choice seemed to be between joining a diocese or a monastery.

I did not know any Dominican friars. Then by chance I talked to a Franciscan one evening, and for the first time realised that as well as dioceses and monasteries there existed the life of friars and all that meant in terms of certain apostolates, and a distinct understanding of religious vows and life in common. As never before, the fact that my mother had a strong devotion to St Francis of Assisi impinged on me, as did the awareness of the framed print she had of that saint preaching to the birds – after all, I did become a friar preacher! The picture is now here in my room.

The thirteenth-century origins of the Order, and its unique attachment to Aquinas, also matched my instinct to be drawn to the medieval embodiment of

many of the things that I studied or that appealed to me, from law to art. In the European West, medieval Catholicism was at the root of much thinking and culture and provided internal coherence and a public influence it has since lost. From initial formation to a lifetime of study, turning to the philosophy and theology of St Thomas Aquinas (died 1274) once I entered the Order has been the main intellectual foundation. The combination of a metaphysical exploration of reality with an explicit concern for political and social life, done in the light of reason and revelation, is a hallmark of Dominicans.

But responding to what was now starting to become a pressing intuition of God's will for me was not to lead to the Franciscan way of being a friar. Soon after meeting the Franciscan, by chance (chance?) I read an article on the Dominicans as they renewed themselves after Vatican II. It had an immediate appeal, and fitted in with such knowledge as I had of Aquinas, religious life, and the impact of reading Herbert McCabe OP's *Law, Love and Language* (1968). It was the Dominican ideal that made an impression on me. An apostolate consisting mainly of preaching and teaching, on an international scale if need be, would with relative ease accommodate a legal cast of mind based on sound argument and the need to be convincing. But now this was to be done explicitly for the sake of Christ our Saviour, and it would centre on celebrating the sacraments.

I do recall once sitting down and jotting on a piece of paper two columns



Good News from Blackfriars Hall

Friends of Blackfriars Oxford will be pleased to hear that the project to create our new venue, the 'Good Habit' café, is well under way and scheduled to be complete in mid-August!

Regent of Blackfriars, Fr John O'Connor OP, and the future café proprietor, Mr Rich Sewell, are pictured with the crew from Interiorbuild on 16 June 2026 as they began work on the Blackfriars Annexe

ground floor.

The project is taking an unused retail space and transforming it into a beautiful mixed-use venue: it will operate both as a public café and also offer private weekly dining for Blackfriars students, plus other events for our community.

Fr John O'Connor said:

'We are delighted that this new venue will soon be open to the public and to

our community of students and staff at Blackfriars. We are really looking forward to working with Rich Sewell to create memorable events.

'Alumni, supporters and grant-makers have been a big help in getting this project started, and we look forward to being able to welcome them at the Good Habit once it opens.'

Visit us at www.bfriars.ox.ac.uk

listing, with as much self-knowledge and honesty as I could muster, all that was in favour of accepting that I had a Dominican vocation and all that pointed away from it. Without ever having met a Dominican friar, I eventually wrote to the then Prior Provincial asking for more information about the Order. He wrote back inviting me to meet him in our London priory. Having done so, he said the next step was to go to Blackfriars, Oxford, where the novitiate and the studentate had been transferred.

The rest is the story of my life as a Dominican friar since entering in 1970. Many of the different pieces of my life before then converged and made me fulfilled at every level, and I hope of some use to others. My vocation has been rather like the assembling by divine Providence over years of pieces of a mosaic that eventually came to look like a Dominican friar.

Fr Robert Ombres OP lives and teaches at Blackfriars, Oxford

We are truly delighted that Rev Dr Reginald Lynch OP will join Blackfriars Hall in the new academic year, to occupy the new post in Medieval and Scholastic Theology joint with Oxford University's Faculty of Theology & Religion. Fr Lynch, a member of St Joseph's Province, USA, is an outstanding scholar and will be a valuable addition to the academic community at Blackfriars, as well as greatly increasing our profile within Oxford. Fr Lynch will provide lectures and tutorials across the University, ensuring a new generation of students becomes familiar with medieval theology, including figures like Aquinas.

Fr Lynch has published widely on an impressive variety of theological topics, and is thus exceptionally well equipped to lead Blackfriars' **Aquinas Institute** and

engage the thought of Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition with a broad range of scholars.

Blackfriars owes a big debt of gratitude



to the McDonald Agape Foundation for their very generous support. This development is testimony to how Blackfriars can successfully form partnerships with benefactors and advance theological scholarship within Academia!



The Church Exists to Evangelise!

St Albert's, Edinburgh, is this Province's most active University Chaplaincy.

We have been blessed by the presence of Fr Patrick Akunne OP from the Province of Nigeria, who, along with Fr Andrew Brookes OP, has worked closely with the students and, in particular, with the thriving Catholic Student Union. A highlight for many was the annual retreat. Fr Andrew and Fr Patrick took just under 30 students away for four days to Craig Lodge House of Prayer. But here at St Albert's, from week to week, there have been a variety of student-led prayer events: Taizé prayer evenings, praise and worship with Eucharistic Adoration, Lectio Divina, and a Rosary prayer group. On Sunday evenings, throughout the semester, the Student Sunday Mass enjoyed good attendance and prayerful participation. On alternate Sundays there was a series of talks entitled 'Sunday Seeds' after the Student Mass. These talks, given by various speakers, explored different aspects of the faith. On the other Sundays, there were social events organised by the Catholic Student Union; these are always an important way of fostering a friendly atmosphere that draws new people in and helps them settle and, in turn, contribute. The midweek meal on Wednesdays, cooked by students for students, has run for decades. As in former years, this semester we had a succession of national dishes from our very international range

of students. Friday lunchtime featured baked potatoes with a range of toppings, as well as a 'Catholic Life Hack': a short talk by one of the chaplains on how to grow as a Catholic student amid the challenges of contemporary culture. We supported the students in running a branch of the Thomistic Institute, which fosters intellectual formation in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas in dialogue with various academic disciplines. This attracted students from all faiths and none.

Outreach has become an increasing part of the work of both students and chaplains. Until recently, we instructed converts one to one, but the recent increase in interest in Catholicism, together with our desire to evangelise proactively, has led to the development of further group activities. Fr Andrew ran a basic outreach course, 'Who is Jesus?', using a weekly meal-talk-discussion format, which attracted good numbers. He has also developed a 'What is Catholicism?' course to take people through the specifics of the life and worship of the Catholic Church, and how to be a Catholic. These courses covered the content of OCIA formation but as well as helping enquirers, they also helped existing Catholics grow in their faith and share it with others. This semester, we have seen 12 people receive sacraments for the first time, comprising the newly baptised, those received into full communion, and those confirmed after many years away from practice.

Several more are in ongoing formation, with the hope of receiving sacraments next year. Overall, we received an enquiry from a student wishing to find out more about Jesus or the Catholic faith more or less every week, so meeting this need has become a crucial part of our work. After all, the Church exists to evangelise!

The student body has been keen to contribute to ecumenical relationships and inter-religious dialogue on campus and more widely in the city. They have also engaged in corporal acts of mercy, preparing and distributing food to the homeless alongside the local Knights of Malta. More recently, they have been involved in helping students donate household items and clothing to support former prisoners and homeless people through Fresh Start. Catholic students are largely responsible for the University Life Society. The list of activities could go on, but this broad range of spiritual activities, faith formation, and outreach is held together by a deep sense of unity and mutual respect. Fr Andrew comments:

'I think it is a very good embodiment of the renewal of the Church and its mission called for at Vatican II.'



For more information:
www.scotland.op.org/about-us/edinburgh-catholic-chaplaincy/



Dominican Young Adults



Bringing together young adults in their 20s and 30s, united in their pursuit of Truth and love of Christ.

Led by Dominican friars and sisters, we host study days and weekends, retreats and pilgrimages across the UK, which provide a deeper understanding of the faith and the tools for navigating the complexities of modern life.

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For more information about Dominican Young Adult events, see www.english.op.org/dya

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Version: LIT-5

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Vocations Success Brings Challenges

Dominican vocations are thriving, with four Dominican novices expected to begin their studies at Oxford in the coming term, and more coming to Cambridge to join the noviciate.

The intellectual vocation of the Dominican friars to preach and teach requires a long and costly formation: the noviciate year, five years of study here in Oxford, then the 2-year STL (Catholic licence to teach theology), and often a doctorate. Recently, we estimated that each friar's lifelong formation currently costs £168,000.

Income from our invested funds is proving insufficient to meet these essential costs, so we are fundraising to bridge the funding gap. This year we have had to raise a minimum of £150,000 and next year will require something similar.

If the generosity of our donors goes beyond our fundraising target, however, then this means more can be laid down into our invested funds, increasing our future annual investment income and decreasing the pressure to fundraise. If you are able to make a gift now, it will be most gratefully received. Gifts in your Will are another way that you could help us to resolve this funding problem while also reducing the burden of UK inheritance tax on your estate.

To add your gift, visit www.english.op.org/formation

For information on leaving a gift in your Will, including the Free Will-Writing Service that we offer to our supporters, visit www.english.op.org/legacies

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