

## **ONE STEP ENOUGH**

### **The History and Mission of The St Barnabas Society**

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Throughout Cardinal Newman's pilgrimage of faith he did not ask to see the distant scene but prayed only for sufficient grace to take one step at a time.

Although every step in a pilgrimage is important, the step required for non-Catholic clergy who ask to be received into the Catholic Church is momentous. This "one step" often takes them from family, friends and a recognized position in society to isolation, misunderstanding and rejection. To become a Catholic, any clergyman who is still working, sacrifices home, professional status and a secure livelihood.

The St Barnabas Society continues the work begun by The Converts' Aid Society more than a century ago, to give pastoral and financial help to these courageous men and women and their dependants.

## **ORIGINS**

The immediate background to the foundation of The Converts' Aid Society was that of the Papal Bull "Apostolicae Curae", issued on 15th September 1896, in which Anglican orders were declared to be null and void.

The findings of the Papal Commission which had studied this question had already been anticipated, even before these conclusions had been laid before Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster, believed that as a consequence of what was anticipated, a large number of Anglican clergy would resign from the Church of England and ask to be received into the Catholic Church.

It was with this possibility in mind that on 23rd August 1896, just prior to the publication of the Bull, Pope Leo XIII sent a letter to Cardinal Vaughan expressing his concern at the plight of Anglican clergy who might ask to be received into the Catholic Church.

He wrote "We would wish therefore to come to the aid of those who have taken this step or are ready to take it. For this purpose what we ourselves have thought of, and now propose to you, would be the formation of a considerable fund for the help of converted Anglican clergymen.

We desire you, dearest son, to communicate with your brethren in the Episcopate for the organization of this work, and to invite all who have the means of doing so to join with you for the realisation of a project which affects the salvation of so many chosen souls".

Cardinal Vaughan lost no time in setting up such a fund and The Converts' Aid Society was founded on 16th October 1896, within two months of the receipt of Pope Leo's letter.

The principal objects of the new Society were as follows,

- 1) To welcome with kindness and attention those who have embraced the truth at all costs.
- 2) To find Catholic acquaintances and friends for those who have forfeited former friendships for Christ's sake.
- 3) To assist clergymen, especially married clergymen with families, whose conversion has reduced them to need.

The importance of providing a pastoral role, as well as financial help, has continued to be a priority during the whole history of this charity.

Six years before the Papal Bull of 1896 Cardinal Newman had died. He had become a greatly revered figure among Christians of many denominations. This had given rise to consideration of his life and work, and had already created an atmosphere of expectation that there would be a sizeable increase in the numbers of Anglican clergy asking to be received into the Catholic Church.

It is not clear that a large and immediate increase did take place, though the Papal Bull of 1896 must have had its effect on those in the Church of England to whom reconciliation with the Holy See was a prime consideration. Independently of *Apostolicae Curae* several significant conversions did take place in the next twenty years including Ronald Knox and R.H. Benson, each of whom had a father who was an Anglican bishop.

Whilst it is true that in those days it was not uncommon for Anglican clergy to have private means, the majority relied entirely upon their stipend as clergy. For these, resignation from a secure living and reception into the Catholic Church led inevitably to financial and material sacrifice.

The Society thus had to face the fact that its work would need to be continued on a long term basis and that it might well need to be expanded.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH**

In the period following the Great War of 1914-1918 the Society developed its role in several ways.

Initially, funding had come mainly from a small but generous group of established Catholic families. This however was not sufficient to provide resources on a long term basis. The provision of a full time Secretary in 1922 opened the way to seeking support from the whole Catholic community.

This was achieved centrally by the publicity generated from the Society's secretariat and by the appointment of representatives of the Society, themselves convert clergymen, whose task was to make the work known by visiting parochial clergy and, where invited to do so, to make appeals in parish churches.

The range of eligible beneficiaries was also enlarged. In addition to support for convert Anglican clergy, help was now offered to former Anglican Religious and to convert clergy from churches of any denomination.

The Society was managed by a committee which included some notable converts, such as Mgr Ronald Knox, and it appointed Patrons among who were G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Old minute books give a fascinating insight into the way the Society dealt with applications for help. Many of those who asked for help later became prominent in the Catholic Church, and in due course they were able to repay the kindness which had been shown to them.

## **F.W. CHAMBERS**

It would be impossible to produce even the briefest history of this charity without paying tribute to the late F.W. Chambers who became Secretary in 1922 and held this position for forty five years until his death in 1967.

Freddie Chambers was born in Staffordshire in 1881 and was ordained in the Church of England in 1907. After curacies in Oxford he became Vicar of St Stephen's, New Town Row, Birmingham, a fine Victorian church which, sadly, has now been demolished. He was received into the Catholic Church on 25th November 1919 by Fr John Ratcliffe SJ.

Freddie Chambers' genius was in personal relationships, and during the 45 years he worked as Secretary he was given a great deal of freedom to exercise this particular talent. He made many friends, among who were notable convert Catholics such as Mgr Ronald Knox. It was Freddie Chambers' practice to buy a pipe for Mgr Knox every Christmas and over the years there developed an amusing correspondence, now in the archives of The St Barnabas Society, between these two over the matter of the annual pipe.

Freddie Chambers had the reputation of being able to enthuse others with his own personal commitment to the Society's work and, in addition to his administrative and pastoral role, he travelled widely throughout the United Kingdom and in Ireland and even had pamphlets seeking support for the work translated into French and distributed on the continent.

From 1967 to 1986 the work which Freddie Chambers had done was continued by his widow Mrs Pat Chambers.

### **PAT CHAMBERS**

Pat Chambers had been the wife of an army officer who, unknown to her, died in a rearguard action following the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942. Pat and her small daughter escaped overland and after months of hardship reached Australia. From there she returned to England and awaited news of her husband, who by now was presumed dead. It was many years before she met a soldier who had been present when her husband had died trying to save someone else. Meanwhile Freddie Chambers, himself a widower, had met Pat and after waiting the statutory period of years before which she could be declared a widow, they were married.

From 1967 Mrs Chambers, assisted by a loyal staff and guided by a sympathetic Executive Committee, provided a continuing ministry to many convert clergy. Over the next 19 years she established a reputation for generous hospitality and a skill at remembering the particular personal needs of many of the Society's beneficiaries. The writer of this history is one whose family will always be grateful for kindness shown on more than one occasion, and there must be many more who remember her good deeds with gratitude and affection.

### **SEMINARIANS**

Another development in the Society's work was the provision of grants to help convert clergy who had been accepted for training for the Catholic priesthood at both The Venerabile and the Beda College in Rome.

Seminarian grants continue to be an important part of the Society's work. While a young man from a Catholic family will enjoy additional back up and financial support from his family and local parish church, those who are convert clergy may have no such help and can even find themselves ostracised by their families. The Society acts as a sort of adoptive father and mother and family all rolled into one, and grants not only pay for things which otherwise would have had to be done without, but provide welcome security to convert clergy seminarians who might otherwise experience a sense of loneliness to a greater degree than most other students. Such grants enable those in receipt of them to purchase books, and, in more recent times, to acquire the ever growing electronic wizardry increasingly thought desirable for tasks formerly accomplished with pen and ink!

This contribution to the training of new priests remains very much a part of the Society's work, though its beneficiaries now include Seminarians other than those at Rome. In very recent times some Dioceses have experimented with schemes whereby those training for the priesthood are attached to a parish where they learn pastoral skills and are tutored in small seminars for their academic and theological studies. This has been particularly the case with married convert clergy who, because of their prior commitment to a wife and children cannot always be sent off to the traditional seminary.

## NUMBERS

Everyone wants to know how many clergy from other Christian communities are known to have "come over". The fact is that it is extremely difficult to give a precise figure,

The Society has only ever dealt with those who have applied to it for help. Even at the end of the twentieth century there are some who need no financial help at all. Others, who need help very urgently, frequently struggle alone and have to be encouraged to come forward.

There is also a certain ebb and flow in the numbers applying for help in any given year. Most of those who come into the Church as convert clergy are former Anglicans. The main reason for this is that there are more Anglican clergy than any others in England and by simple arithmetic they are going to be the largest bloc.

Particular events in the unfolding story of Anglicanism sometimes have dramatic effects. In recent years there have been three such occasions when a specific action, or even a proposed action, has had this result,

First was the scheme to unite various churches in India, some Episcopal and some Presbyterian, to create The Church of South India. When this took place in 1947 it caused many Anglican clergy who held strongly to the claims of the Church of England to share in the historic ministry of the Western church, to think hard about the implications of what was being done. Many looked again at the claims of the Catholic Church and this resulted in an appreciable increase in those asking to be received.

Secondly, in the sixties and seventies there were proposals in England to bring about a church formed by a union of Anglicans with Methodists. These schemes were eventually rejected by a small majority of Anglicans. A few years later there came a broader proposal to form a united church with any who would "covenant" to go forward in such a venture.

Both these schemes were unpalatable to those whose position depended on what they saw as the unique catholicity and apostolicity of the Church of England.

Thirdly, the largest exodus took place after November 1992 when the Synod of the Church of England voted to ordain women as priests. Even in this situation where media interest

about numbers was intense it is not easy to be precise. About 400 resigned their livings but not all of these became Catholics, Some who had already retired and who were not part of the 400 asked to be received. Some hung on until retirement before deciding what they would do. A few were received into the Orthodox Church. Some came out with trumpets blazing while others slipped quietly away. In December 1996 The Times reported that 16 clergy who had been received into the Catholic Church had returned to the Church of England.

An estimate based on the minutes and archives of the Society suggests that since 1896 something like 3,200 actual applications for help have been received, the number of applications, however, implies a much larger total of people helped, because many of those who seek the Society's support have families. So if we are looking at the total number involved the true figure is likely to be at least 12,000 to 14,000 and may be as high as 15,500. This estimate, still probably on the conservative side, takes account of the increase in applications for help which took place in the years immediately prior to 1992 and the great surge which took place from then for the next four or five years.

In any case the count never stops. The Catholic Church continues to draw thoughtful men and women who recognize its unique character, and who come without seemingly needing a jump-start of some kind. Perhaps, in the end, only the Recording Angel will be able to give the true score!

So far, all our beneficiaries have been ministers in some other Christian community; but one wonders whether, in a multi-faith society, the time will come when the charity might receive an application for help from a former Rabbi or Mullah or Brahmin!

## **A NEW CONSTITUTION**

The constitution of the Society had remained more or less the same from 1896 to 1991. By then the many changes in charity legislation which had taken place made it necessary to provide a new constitution. At the same time it was important to retain the identity of The Converts' Aid Society as such, but separately, so that legacies which had been left to it could be received. The solution was to keep the older charity in existence in "shell" form, and then to create a new charitable company with identical aims and objects. This would then take up and continue the charitable work and responsibilities of The Converts' Aid Society in the same generous tradition, but also in compliance with what modern charity legislation now required.

## **ST BARNABAS**

Considerable time and ingenuity was expended on what to call the successor charity. Some of the suggestions put forward, though well meant, would have soon become dated. A charity name which reflects a particular period and fashion, especially where this happens to be of short lived duration, soon finds this to be a serious disadvantage.

The proposal to name the charity "The St Barnabas Society" in honour of the apostle Barnabas was made because one of the most far reaching effects of his many good deeds was to welcome the newly converted Paul of Tarsus and stand as surety for him at a time when he had few friends within the Church. Barnabas then went on to encourage Paul to begin a new life the results of which were to be of overwhelming importance to the expanding Church of the first century.

The Society saw itself as having a similar ministry of providing a generous welcome and encouragement for those newly received into the Church and whose lives would have to take a new direction. Thus The St Barnabas Society was formed and began its work on 1st June 1992.

Someone whose own personal gift was also generosity and encouragement was The St Barnabas Society's first Chairman, John Goble. All who worked in the Society before and during these changes will always remember John Goble's wise leadership, apparently tireless energy and, above all, his very special gift of inspiring hope in those around him.

There are two extraordinary footnotes to all this which call to be recorded here.

In 1956 Mgr Ronald Knox preached a sermon at a Mass for The Converts' Aid Society in Pimlico. His sermon ended with the words "God forgive us if we cannot emulate the spirit of St Barnabas, when He raises up among us so often the spirit of St Paul".

In the same year, when addressing the Annual General Meeting of the Society he predicted that in the next few years there would be "a particularly large number of applications to the Society".

Within a few months of The St Barnabas Society coming into being there occurred the largest increase ever in the numbers of convert clergy received into the Catholic Church. Meeting this need was the first task of the reformed and reconstituted charity.

## **A HUNDRED YEARS ON**

The modern charity has set out its principal aims in the following terms:  
"In co-operation with the Catholic bishops, to provide support and assistance to those former Clergy and Religious of other denominations, and their dependants, who have come into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church until such time as they have been integrated into the Catholic community and have re-established themselves".

The Society is a charitable company and is registered with the Charity Commission. There is a Board of Directors who are unpaid and the Society's President is the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

In July 1995 Major David Flood succeeded John Goble as Chairman and Cardinal's representative. The Society greatly values his gifts of warm generosity, leadership and prayers as it approaches the end of one century and the beginning of another,

### **THE SOCIETY'S CURRENT TASKS**

The Society's headquarters are at 4 First Turn, Wolvercote Oxford, OX2 8AH, where there is a full time staff of three. The Society's Secretary is himself a convert clergyman as are the small team of District Organisers. The Secretary and his colleagues administer the day to day work of the Society and the Secretary acts as a link between the Board of Directors, the Society's beneficiaries, both potential and actual, and its District Organisers.

The District Organisers raise funds by making appeals in parish churches in England, Wales, and Scotland. But both they and the Secretary also exercise a unique pastoral role. While it remains a principle that no financial help or promises of such help can be made until after reception, many of those who are setting out upon this journey find it a great help to be able to talk over the spiritual, moral and practical problems with someone who has already been this way before them. Some can come to the Society's headquarters, where they benefit from the quiet atmosphere of what was once a vicarage, and where they can if necessary bring their wives and families for a day or so, Others who cannot do this can be visited at home or anywhere else that they wish by the District Organisers. In some circumstances contact is perforce restricted to letter writing, or to contact by telephone.

### **FORTITUDE IN ADVERSITY**

For some the period after reception can be one of anti-climax sometimes leading to depression. This is particularly likely where an experienced clergyman has worked in a busy parish for many years. He may go through a long period where he has no certainty of what his future is going to be. In addition to what this can do to his own self-confidence, it can bring added strains if he is married and there are dependant children. Although, as a newly received Catholic, he will be surrounded by the welcome which all who become Catholics in this way experience, he may still need pastoral support and the Society's staff make every effort to provide whatever help is needed.

The Society's archives contain numerous accounts of the experiences of many of those who were received in past years. At one time the Society encouraged its beneficiaries to write about what they had gone through and why they had asked to be received into the Catholic Church. Convert clergy were frequently invited to tell their stories at the Society's Annual General Meetings. Some of these written accounts give harrowing details of the hardships through which new converts went.

It is generally true that things are much improved today and in several cases Anglican bishops have co-operated with their Catholic counterparts in helping convert clergy to

move from one community to the other, Nevertheless there are still some very heroic men and women who have had to face opposition and even hostility in order to obey their consciences,

A former Anglican nun who left her community with nothing but the clothes she was wearing was told by her chaplain that she would be damned if she walked out and thus broke her vows as a religious.

A married clergyman who had served in his church for nineteen years before becoming a Catholic found that his decision so upset his family that he was subjected to physical violence which left him with permanent injuries.

Very recently a young Presbyterian minister and his wife asked to be received. The young man's congregation contained members of an Orange Lodge who would certainly have shown displeasure at their minister becoming a Catholic. Such circumstances inevitably cause considerable anxiety for a convert clergyman on behalf of his wife and children. Fortunately this story had a happy ending but at the time this family had to be very circumspect.

In yet another instance, another Anglican nun, 70 years old at the time, and in poor health, had tried for some time to be released from her community so that she could become a Catholic. She found her requests politely side-stepped. In the end she simply fled to a relative two hundred miles away and threw herself penniless upon her mercy. Fortunately this relative was able to introduce her to a generous Catholic priest who provided her with emergency help in the form of accommodation, clothes and money. The Society reimbursed this priest as soon as the circumstances were made known. Later she came to the Society's headquarters and after much correspondence, including writing to her M.P., she was granted an old age pension. She was too old to be acceptable to another Religious community and her health was deteriorating all the time. After several temporary homes in various girls's schools she had to go into hospital for health tests. While there she met the Catholic Warden of a Sheltered Housing Scheme who recommended her for a flat. At no time did she ever complain and at one stage when she was in great need, it was an uphill struggle to get her to accept grants from the Society.

There are many other stories like these and, no doubt, they will occur over and over again.

## **HOW GRANTS ARE MADE**

The Board of Directors, together with the Secretary, holds monthly meetings at Archbishop's House, Westminster. The principal item on each agenda is the consideration of applications for help. Each application is looked at with great care and sensitivity and help is given in the most appropriate way possible.

There are two fundamental requirements for eligibility for help. One is that every applicant must already have been received into the Catholic Church. The Society cannot make

grants or enter into promises of help until the applicant concerned has actually become a Catholic. The reason for this is that the Society has to protect itself from accusations that it may be buying converts.

The other rule is that an applicant, if not a member of a religious community, must previously have been "a stipendiary minister" of some other Christian church. This means that grants are restricted to those whose income or accommodation was provided directly by the denomination which they left to become Catholics.

There is a very wide range of financial assistance, from one-off grants to long term support. Most applicants need help for removal expenses from a previous clergy house to some new home. Some have debts which need to be paid off. Many of those with families need a regular monthly grant to help them with their basic household expenses. Some need particular grants to help with such things as clothes for their children or books for study.

One of the most important roles fulfilled by the Society is the provision of grants for re-training to enable individuals to become financially independent. This may cover schemes for the training of teachers, social workers, nursing or other professions.

Other beneficiaries need help with unexpected costs for dentistry, new spectacles or repairs to domestic equipment which chooses to break down the week after they have been received. The Society also helps with the payment of rent where necessary.

As already mentioned, the Society provides Seminarian Grants for needy convert clergy who are training for the priesthood and may also provide an Ordination Grant at the end of training. These grants, as explained earlier, are based on the principle that most "cradle" Catholic seminarians receive support from their home parish and family, whereas the convert clergyman has no such support.

Other than those currently in need of help as they re-adjust and work towards a new life, the Society supports a number of frail and elderly beneficiaries, mostly the widows of convert clergy from the past.

At Christmas the Society makes grants to all recent beneficiaries who are known to be in need. This is particularly helpful for families who are always hard pressed at this time, and for seminarians abroad who, otherwise, might not be able to afford the cost of a return journey home for a holiday.

## **EVENTS SINCE 1992 AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

The decision in November 1992 by the General Synod of the Church of England to proceed to the ordination of women priests caused many Anglican clergy to ask whether they could accept that such a Synod had the authority to make so radical a change unilaterally. This question in turn raised more serious doubts about the fundamental

nature of Anglicanism, while at the same time drawing attention to the historic claims of the Catholic Church. The result was that there was a considerable increase in the number of those asking to be received.

A factor which had some surprising effects was the subsequent decision by the Church of England to provide financial compensation for most, though not all, of its clergy who take this step. Those seeking these provisions were required to sign a declaration saying that they had resigned over the issue of women priests. Some converts felt that they could not in conscience sign such a declaration, since it was for deeper reasons that they felt called to become Catholics.

Anglican compensation, known officially as "Periodic payments" remains therefore limited to clergy willing to make this declaration, who had served for more than five years prior to November 1992, and who had been holders of parochial appointments. Thus many younger clergy, salaried chaplains and those in religious communities were excluded.

The compensation payments to eligible clergy run for three years following resignation but are scaled down for each succeeding year. The effect of this compensation has been, on the one hand, to cushion the financial demand made upon the Society, but on the other hand it has actually increased claims for help.

The provision of compensation has made it possible for more clergy than ever before to leave the Church of England, but the effect of an annual reduction in the amount paid has left many of these in severe financial hardship in the second or third year of such payments. The number of those excluded from compensation who ask to be received into the Catholic Church also increased since, apart from financial considerations, conscience is an over-riding imperative therefore the questions raised by the Synod's action were just as acutely felt by those without hope of such payments. These have always been a first priority on the Society's resources.

It can now be seen that the greatly increased numbers, laypeople as well as clergy, coming from the Church of England in the period after November 1992 has decreased. This of course does not take account of any new developments in Anglicanism. While many of those who came in the period immediately after 1992 were from the Anglo-catholic party in the Church of England, former clergy from other Anglican traditions have also continued to become Catholics, for reasons which are nothing whatever to do with the decision to ordain women as priests.

The prominence given to these events has had an on-going effect in churches other than the Church of England. Firstly this has meant an increase in convert clergy from sister churches of the Church of England, chiefly The Church in Wales, and The Scottish Episcopal Church. The decision by the Synod of The Church in Wales in September 1996 to follow the example of the Church of England and proceed to the ordination of women to the priesthood has had a similar but more modest effect to what happened in England after 1992.

In addition the Society is now finding that it is helping former clergy from churches quite unconnected with Anglicanism, The Society has been helping convert Free church ministers for many years and includes among its beneficiaries former Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Salvationists, Congregationalists and a Seventh Day Adventist minister. What is noticeable is that while in the past such conversions were somewhat rare, they are now becoming rather more frequent.

The Society thus expects that demands upon it will continue to be greater than in the past though it is possible that the composition of those it helps may be changing.

### **THE SOCIETY'S PRESENT NEEDS**

The Society relies on Catholic clergy and laity to bring eligible needy cases to its attention or to introduce the Society to those who are not aware of its charitable work.

The Society's Board and its Staff constantly have to make decisions which require very sensitive judgement. One way in which every Catholic can help is by prayer. The Society needs wisdom and generosity and prudence.

The Society's beneficiaries also need the support of prayer. Those who take this step find themselves and their families in great insecurity and anxiety. To lose home and income and friends and work and pension and to become dependant on the charity of others in mid-life can have a devastating psychological effect.

The Society needs financial support, both in the form of particular donations and long term regular gifts. In the U.K and Northern Ireland there are tax benefits to charities where a donor makes a gift by Covenant or by Gift Aid.

The Society benefits from legacies, which are normally free from tax. The Society has a leaflet giving advice about how to leave legacies and this is freely available on request.

The Society welcomes interest in its work, and is grateful for those who tell others about what we do.

The Secretary will be glad to answer any further questions and welcomes visitors to the Society's headquarters in Oxford. It is usually wise to telephone before calling. The Secretary can be contacted at:

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Keith C Jarrett Secretary

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