

July

Thursday 2nd July



On Thursday 2nd July, the school chaplain led a welcome service in the school hall for the new cohort of Year 7 students as they prepared for the important transition from primary to secondary school.

The service offered a meaningful first experience of the Catholic life of St Alban's and helped students and parents feel part of the wider school community from the very beginning. It was very much student-led, with pupils from Years 7, 8 and 10 supporting the liturgy by reading Scripture, leading the bidding prayers and helped to create a welcome atmosphere.

During his reflection, the school chaplain spoke about the natural feelings of uncertainty that can come with change, not only for students but also for parents and carers.



Using the parable of the Good Samaritan, he reminded everyone present that St Alban's is a school community where people are called to notice one another, offer kindness and never be afraid to ask for help.



He also quoted the words of the late Pope Francis, explaining that the only time we should look down on someone is when we are offering a hand of friendship and helping them back up. This message helped to reassure the new students that they would be welcomed, supported and encouraged as they begin this new stage of their journey.

The bidding prayers were written especially for the new cohort and included prayers for their classmates who were moving on to different schools, for their parents and families, and for their primary school teachers who had supported them up to this point. In this way, the service acknowledged both the excitement and the emotion of transition.

It gave students a chance to look forward with confidence while also giving thanks for the people and places that had shaped them so far. The occasion was a positive and prayerful way to welcome the new Year 7 students and their families into the life of St Alban's, setting a tone of faith, belonging and encouragement for the year ahead.

Wednesday 8th- Friday 10th July

Seventy-three students from Year 8 travelled to London for a three-day spiritual retreat, beginning with a visit to Westminster Cathedral, the largest Catholic Cathedral in the United Kingdom and the seat of the Archbishop of Westminster, the head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales

This provided a powerful and prayerful start to the retreat, allowing students to experience the beauty, scale and significance of one of the most important Catholic places of worship in the country.



Upon arrival, the group was warmly greeted by Deacon Paul Christian, the Cathedral deacon, who gave them a guided tour and pointed out several key features of the building, including the mosaic of St Alban.

They were also told that Westminster Cathedral was the place where the late Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass during his visit to the United Kingdom in 2010.

The group was able to take part in the daily Mass at the Cathedral, which became the spiritual beginning of the retreat. This gave students the opportunity to pause, pray and enter into the experience with a sense of purpose. After Mass, the group enjoyed lunch on the plaza before travelling on to the Westminster Youth Retreat Centre in Pinner, where the main part of the retreat would take place.

On arrival at the retreat centre, the students were warmly welcomed by the staff and shown to the rooms where they would be staying for the next two nights.

The welcoming atmosphere helped the group settle quickly and gave them a sense that they were entering into a space set apart from the normal routine of school life. The first session introduced the retreat theme, with students taking part in activities and breakout discussions that helped them begin to explore the focus of the retreat in a more personal way.

After a shared evening meal, the group was divided into two smaller groups for prayer and reflection. One group focused on the mysteries of the Rosary, while the other spent time in Exposition in the retreat chapel. These moments allowed students to experience different forms of Catholic prayer and to



reflect quietly on their own faith journey. Once the activities concluded, everyone came back together to watch a faith-based film before the evening ended with lights out.

On the second day of the retreat, students began with the formal prayer of the Church, adapted in a way that was accessible and meaningful for young people. After breakfast, they took part in a range of activities designed to engage, enthuse and encourage them to think more deeply about faith, identity and vocation. During one of the sessions, students learnt more about the recently canonised saint, Carlo Acutis.



This was especially meaningful as he has been chosen as one of the new House Saints for St Alban's, helping students make a direct connection between the retreat experience and the future spiritual life of the school.

After lunch, students took part in workshops that encouraged them to reflect on their own relationship with God. They were invited to write a letter expressing how they see God working in their lives, which gave them time to think honestly and personally about faith, gratitude, hopes and challenges. After the evening meal, students moved around the site to take part in prayer stations. This marked a deeper reflective stage of the retreat, as students were encouraged to slow down, listen, pray and consider what God might be saying to them.

When the sessions were over, the group ended the day with Night Prayer of the Church, bringing the evening to a calm and prayerful close. There was also time for socialising, which helped students strengthen friendships, enjoy one another's company and build a stronger sense of community within the year group.

On the final day of the retreat, students once again began with Morning Prayer of the Church before taking part in workshops exploring how faith can be expressed visually through Visio Divina. This session, which took place in the chapel, encouraged students to look carefully, reflect deeply and use sacred images as a way of entering into prayer. It offered a different approach to spirituality and helped students recognise that prayer can take many forms.





A highlight of the final day was the celebration of Mass, which was led by the youth chaplain, Fr Francis Thomas, who had recently celebrated the third anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

This was a fitting and prayerful conclusion to the retreat, bringing together everything the students had experienced over the three days. After lunch, students took part in a final team-building activity before thanking the retreat centre staff for their warm welcome, guidance and hospitality.

Many students said how much they had enjoyed the retreat and expressed a desire to return again in the future. Overall, the retreat provided Year 8 with a valuable opportunity to step away from the normal rhythm of school, deepen their faith, strengthen friendships and reflect on how God is present in their lives.

Thursday 16th July

As part of the school's 60th anniversary celebrations, staff and students were delighted to welcome the Bishop of East Anglia, Rt. Rev. Peter Collins, to St Alban's to celebrate a whole-school Mass.

This was a significant moment in the life of the school, bringing together students, staff, governors and members of Our Lady of Walsingham Trust to give thanks for six decades of Catholic education, faith and service. As part of the celebration, a number of local clergy also joined the school community, including former priest chaplains to the school: Canon Patrick Cleary, Canon David Bagstaff, Fr John Warrington and Fr Jude Belnas.



The day began with the Bishop meeting the Headteacher, the school chaplain and members of the student chaplaincy team. During this meeting, students had the opportunity to speak about what makes St Alban's special to them and why they value being part of this school community. They shared how faith, prayer, service and belonging are woven into the life of the school, not simply through formal liturgies, but through everyday relationships, acts of kindness, charity work and the many opportunities students have to take part in Catholic life and how they set up their own Bible group.



The Bishop commented on how the school has been at the heart of spreading the faith and was impressed by the reverence with which students engaged with the Mass. Students took an active role in the liturgy through readings, bidding

prayers and altar serving, helping to create a prayerful and joyful celebration. There was also a speech from the Head Student of Sixth Form, who spoke on behalf of the student body and reflected on the importance of the occasion. Mr Corless expressed his gratitude and thanks to the visiting clergy for coming to celebrate this momentous milestone in the history of the school.

The visiting clergy were also very impressed by the images and displays linked to the school's pilgrimage to Rome, particularly the photographs showing students meeting Pope Leo XIV and taking part in such a memorable moment in the life of the Church. These images became a powerful reminder of how the Catholic identity of St Alban's extends beyond the classroom and connects students with the wider Church, both nationally and internationally.

The clergy commented positively on the way Catholic life is clearly visible throughout the school community and how faith is not treated as something separate, but as something that shapes the rhythm, values and mission of the school.

The bishop also noted that the school would soon have a deacon serving as chaplain, as Paul is due to be ordained to the permanent diaconate on Saturday 18th July at the Cathedral in Norwich. This added a further sense of significance to the celebration and highlighted the continuing development of chaplaincy and Catholic life within the school.

For many students, this was the first time they had met the Bishop of East Anglia, making the occasion especially memorable. After the Mass, the Bishop and clergy went into the school chapel, where he blessed the recently commissioned Stations of the Cross, which had been designed by an art teacher.

This blessing added another lasting spiritual legacy to the anniversary celebrations and ensured that the artwork would continue to support prayer and reflection for students and staff in the years ahead. The clergy then met with the leadership team and governors, before sharing a working lunch in the chapel garden.

This marked the end of a very busy year of events within the chaplaincy.

