

Parish Profile



**St Mark's
Ocker Hill**



**THE SEE OF
OSWESTRY**



**DIOCESE OF
LICHFIELD**

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**THE BISHOP
OF LICHFIELD**

A word of welcome to the Diocese of Lichfield

Cradled at the intersection of the Midlands and the North, and the interface between England and Wales, the Diocese of Lichfield is the ancient centre of Christianity in what was the Kingdom of Mercia.

We are rightfully grateful for the inheritance we have from our first bishop St Chad that leads us to focus on Discipleship, Vocation and Evangelism as we live and serve among the communities of Staffordshire, northern Shropshire and the Black Country.

By answering God's call to minister in Lichfield Diocese you will benefit from being part of a wide family, mixing with people serving in a variety of contexts – from the grittiest inner-city neighbourhoods of Stoke and the Black Country, to the leafiest rural parishes of Staffordshire and Shropshire, to the sparsest upland communities of the Staffordshire Moorlands and Welsh Borders.

And we embrace the widest spectrum of church traditions – evangelical and catholic, liberal and conservative, choral and charismatic – as we journey together in mission. As a colleague recently put it, it is our goal to be a 'spacious and gracious diocese'.

It is my determination and that of my episcopal colleagues that your calling to minister with us in Lichfield Diocese will be a time of encouragement, fulfilment, challenge and joy. You will not be alone in your ministry; as part of the wider team our colleagues among the diocesan staff keenly bring their various specialisms both spiritual and practical to offer resource and support as you serve our parishes, fresh expressions, schools and chaplaincies.

+ Michael Ipgrave



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THE BISHOP OF OSWESTRY

The Catholic Faith runs deep indeed in these three wonderful parishes; deep in the historical memory of the people, and deep in their hearts. These are parishes where God is loved and worshipped with great devotion and reverence, and where the liturgical life is thoroughly and unself-consciously Catholic. I wish to appoint a Parish Priest who will vigorously honour that history and worship, renew it in this generation, and secure it for the next. I want a Parish Priest who will love these places and people as much as I do - they are very close to my heart.

Each of the three churches possesses its own distinctive character; and although they share a close geographical proximity, it would be a mistake to believe that S. John's, S. Mark's, and S. Michael's with Holy Cross are identical. They are not, even though all are united and pervaded by the same wonderful Black Country spirit of generosity and humour. The successful Parish Priest will work with great diligence to serve these three churches equally; he will quickly identify the opportunities for evangelization that each local mission field presents, and he will lead each church into closer partnership with the others. There are many areas in which Tipton, Ocker Hill, and Tividale can co-operate further to advance the glorious Gospel of Christ and be built up in 'the faith once delivered to the saints.'

The successful Priest will also have the ability and imagination to work with me and the Vicar-General in appointing an additional Priest (initially we propose for a three-year period) to serve across the enlarged grouping of parishes including the nearby churches of St Peter's Greets Green and St Edmund's Dudley for which that Priest would be responsible. This larger grouping of five churches served by two stipendiary clergy would become the first *Missionary Society* in the See of Oswestry.

What is abundantly clear is that the opportunities for classic Anglo-Catholic parochial ministry are legion. In this appointment. What is as clear is that the Priest whom the Lord sends to these Black Country parishes will be loved beyond his just desserts. These are loving people, endowed like few others with the character of friendliness and warmth. They are ready and waiting to work with their Priest in the most supportive manner. They are strong and noble people who love the culture and neighbourhoods from which they come. Their Priest must serve and sanctify them with singular devotion, building them up into 'the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ.'

✠Paul Oswestriensis

The Rt Revd Paul Thomas *The Missionary Bishop of Oswestry*



THE AREA DEAN

Wednesbury Deanery comprises 11 churches in the Black Country. It is a place with rich history and lots of character. Indeed a 14th Century document described Birmingham as a small town on the outskirts of Wednesbury! Today, our Deanery is largely urban with, industrial, town centre and estate components.



Wednesbury Deanery has had some challenging times in recent years with declining congregations and difficulties in recruiting clergy. I believe however, it is truly turning a corner. As Canon Missioner from the new year and Interim Rural Dean, I am looking forward to working with the Deanery, to form a new and exciting vision for growth which we can all engage in. A large part of that are the advantages of scale that can be found by the churches in the Deanery working collaboratively (whilst respecting ecclesiastical traditions) in order to minister more efficiently and missionally.

Our Chapter currently has a membership of 2 but will be a place for support, prayer, discussion and vision. Please consider joining us and may God bless you in your discernment process.

The Revd Preb.
Ben Whitmore
Rural Dean of Wednesbury

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

St John's Tipton fell vacant in 2020, St Mark's Ocker Hill and the Parish of Tividale in 2023.

This appointment is part of a new and innovative project involving the Oswestry parishes in this part of the Black Country, starting with these three parishes in the Deanery of Wednesbury. It is a project in two distinct phases.

Phase One brings the Parish of Tividale (St Michael's with a Chapel of Ease, The Church of the Holy Cross) together with the nearby parishes of St Mark's Ocker Hill and St John's Tipton under the care of a full-time stipendiary priest. We are not at this stage contemplating major Pastoral Re-organisation and so the appointment will be as Priest-in-Charge.

Meanwhile **Phase Two** will add the neighboring parish of St Peter, Greet's Green, and an extra-parochial place, St Edmund's Dudley, a very short distance away, but over the border in the Diocese of Worcester. This second phase will be supported by the appointment of an additional full-time post, which, it is expected, will be supported by external partners for at least the first three years. All of these communities are under the oversight of the Bishop of Oswestry. It is intended that the two priests should work together across the five churches and the churches under their care should work closely together also.

The classic pattern of managing church decline sees parishes merge, stipends reduced to 0.5 or posts becoming House for Duty. Part time posts are very difficult to fill or tend to be filled for shorter periods of time, all of which often contributes to the culture of maintenance rather than mission, whilst simultaneously causing discouragement amongst hard working and faithful lay people. This classic salami slicing approach works from the local out, seeing parishes through a narrow local lens. It very often leads to decline of varying kinds, and not *merely* numerical.

We would like to look again at mission and ministry in these Oswestry parishes in a different way.

An alternative is to pull back the lens and look across a rather larger geographical area and to encourage parishes in reasonable geographical proximity in effect to federate.

We are calling this a ***Missionary Society*** model.



A warm welcome at St John's

In this ***Missionary Society*** model parishes work together to evangelise and witness boldly to the truth and grace of Christ. It is an intentional exercise in building up the *faithful remnant* in these places undergirded by a thorough commitment to the classic threefold *regula* of the Daily Office, the Mass and the Scriptures.

In order to establish such a lively missionary movement of catholic renewal, we will need to look at how ministry, both lay *and* ordained, is deployed across these places, and undoubtedly certain thought-through and strategic consolidations will be necessary, recognising the Diocese of Lichfield's need to reduce stipendiary posts, it requires what Bishop Paul calls "fresh and disruptive thinking" in order to allow new things to be explored in different ways. The *Missionary Society* model is or response to these realities.

Much of this thinking incorporates the key learning from Fr James Mallon's work on church growth called *Divine Renovation* which many SSC clergy read together in a series of reading groups and seminars during 2022 culminating in a mission conference at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

This Missionary Society model has certain key advantages:

1. It creates critical mass
2. It fosters greater collegiality and collaboration between clergy
 - a. Not working alone but referencing a strong biblical model of going out in pairs
 - b. shared priesthood
 - c. A life of common prayer
 - d. Is essentially collegial and non-hierarchical
3. It additionally provides clergy with colleagues lay *and* ordained with whom to pray and share the highs and lows of priestly ministry with benefits both for emotional wellbeing, as well as for accountability and the good use of different people's God given gifts.
4. It allows full stipend posts to be offered which are much easier to appoint to than part time or HfD
5. It creates the potential for greater creativity with the use of resources and might create ways in for other strategic partnerships to develop with Anglo-Catholic or indeed other charities or funding partners.
6. It has the potential for exciting lay led initiatives, for the Flourishing of Lay Ministries is a core and critical component of this project also.
7. It provides an excellent well-rounded base for the formation of Curates in training

THE CHALLENGE

We are creating something new as we bring these parishes together in a strategic way. We would benefit from a Priest who can help us build effective but light touch organizational structures, to ensure that this works well. Each church has something to learn from others and gifts to share in return.

Discipleship

We need to:

- Develop what we offer to children and young people across the parishes building on what is already working well
- discover more about our gifts and how to use them in God's service
- be taught the catholic faith as the Church of England has received it so we can Give good account to others of what we believe and why
- Continue to develop of our worship, encouraging further active participation
- Work to encourage lay leadership including with those exploring possible vocations to diaconal ministry in the churches

Vocation

We need to

- To improve communication both within the congregation and more especially with the wider parish
- Work to engage more with the wider parish and build relationships with the communities we serve and other organizations and key people for the mutual benefit of all
- Make better strategic use of our excellent church halls both to build up community as well as to support our financial objectives.
- Develop a vision for the effective use of Holy Cross Church in particular

Evangelism

We need to:

- Develop further our links with local schools, nurseries, care homes and others
- Continue to build effectively on relationships developed through funeral, baptism and wedding ministry
- Build on our pattern of social activities mindful of the need to use such activities missionally by developing our confidence to invite others

THE ROLE

We therefore need to appoint a Priest who, especially:

- Is a priest affiliated to the Society of St Wilfred and St Hilda
- Is able to work creatively and strategically to bring into being this first *Missionary Society* as a blueprint for others in the See of Oswestry
- Will Lead us prayerfully in worship on weekdays as well as on Sundays
- Has the ability to help us develop appropriate and effective Governance, so our shared life across the churches can be conducted efficiently
- Can demonstrate a track record of working collaboratively with colleagues lay and ordained

Discipleship

- Is a teacher
- Is able to support the development of our ministry to the young
- Can support effectively those exploring vocations to ordained and authorized ministries

Vocation

- Is confident in inhabiting an incarnational presence and in engaging with those in the wider community
- Can help us build effective bridges with other organisations
- Can enable us to communicate effectively *within* and *between* the churches also as well as *beyond* them

Evangelism

- Has a passion for traditional funeral ministry which flourishes here
- Can help us develop appropriate ways of engaging more deeply with those with whom we have contact through funeral, baptism and wedding ministry
- Will be comfortable in local schools, ministering to their staff as well as their pupils
- Will encourage our own self-confidence in being missional

THE PERSON

We seek a priest therefore who:

- Is warm
- Kind
- Prayerful
- Has a sense of humour
- Is well organized
- Is confident in their own vocation
- Is deeply rooted in a traditional catholic understanding of the Church and of her sacramental life

WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER

- ✓ warm and friendly congregations
- ✓ Real faithfulness
- ✓ Active and supportive PCCs and Officers
- ✓ A number of established links to schools, nursing homes and local community groups to be built on.
- ✓ Well maintained Churches and Church Halls
- ✓ Full reimbursement of expenses
- ✓ Respect for clergy days off and holidays.
- ✓ Laity who are keen to learn and take on new roles to help their new Priest.
- ✓ And excellent refreshments!

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The parishes have full sets of Churchwardens, Treasurers and PCC Secretaries.

Tividale: St Michael's has a person licensed to administer the Sacrament

St Mark's Ocker Hill: has four people licensed to administer the Sacrament

St John's: has two people to administer the Sacrament

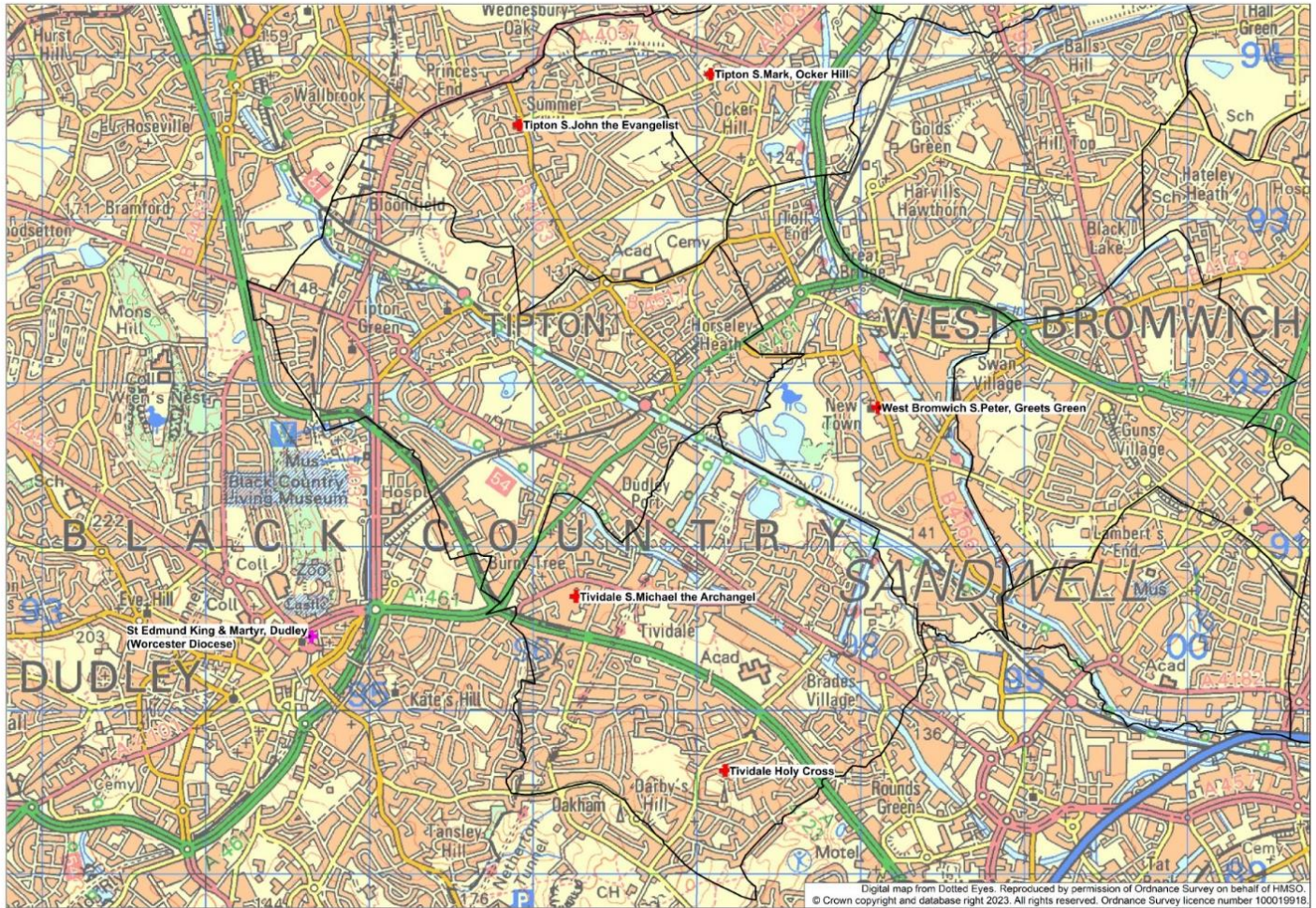
A small number of local retired clergy, led by Fr John Oakes, have offered hugely appreciated assistance during the vacancy.

THE PARISHES

These three parishes lie in the Borough of Sandwell, Wolverhampton to the north, Dudley to the west and West Bromwich to the east. They form part of the historic Black Country. Historically Tipton was part of Staffordshire and lay on the border with Worcestershire. The parishes of St John's Tipton and St Mark's Ocker Hill are adjacent to one another and the church buildings are only three quarters of a mile apart. Tividale lies due south, it is just two miles to St Michael's Church from St John's. Phase Two will bring St Peter's, Greet's Green into the Missionary Society, it lies between the Tipton parishes and Tividale and shares a parish boundary with all three and St Edmund's, Dudley, which is within walking distance of St Michael's Tividale.

Tividale is bisected by the Birmingham New Road, and as well as St Michael's on the eastern side there is also a well-used Chapel of Ease, Holy Cross, on the western side of the main road. Holy Cross has not been used for public worship since the Pandemic but remains a significant building in terms of community outreach, it is hoped worship might recommence too.

Following the closure of its building a small group of worshippers from the former church of St Paul's worship in St John's Church Hall on Sundays. They organize their own BCP services and give their collection to St John's.



All the parishes serve areas of significant deprivation. Community life is strong with many long-standing residents, and the churches, especially in Tipton and Ocker Hill still undertake significant pastoral work, and all three parishes have huge potential to further develop their community outreach as Local Authorities implement cuts to services.

Whilst Tipton and Ocker Hill have smaller numbers of other faiths, over 25% of the population of the population of Tividale is either Sikh or Muslim. Roughly 28% of the population is 18 or under.

	Population	Deprivation Index	% White British	% Under 18	% Christian	% Other Religions
Phase 1						
St Mark's	6,986	362	80	28	45.3	10.8
St John's	11,153	147	80	30	46.6	8.5
Tividale	20,974	1709	56.9	28	39.0	27.5*
Phase 2						
St Peter's	6,579	408	59.5	27.7	43.5	25.8*
St Edmund's	None	n/a				

*Split roughly equally between Sikh and Muslim

MUCH IS HAPPENING ALREADY

	St Mark's	St John's	Tividale
Parish Activities & Programmes <i>Social events, trips, pilgrimage, teaching groups, lunch clubs, cafes social groups</i>	Lent Study Groups Place of Welcome Coffee Morning on Tuesdays Glastonbury Pilgrimage	Monthly Tea & Coffee Club with Bingo! Walsingham Pilgrimage – with other local churches Social events – Quiz nights, Skittles evenings, Coseley Male Voice Choir Concerts	Wednesday Foodbank Day Pilgrimages to the National Pilgrimage and to the Glastonbury Pilgrimage <i>Tividale on Tour</i> : regular visits to other churches for special services
Children and Youth Work <i>Sunday Schools, under fives, youth groups and events, ways in which children are involved (serving at the altar)</i>	Children's Dance Group at the Church Hall Altar Servers	Weekly Youth Group & T'Gen Life In Community, who use the Church Hall for various activities eg Parent & Toddler Group, Debt support, Homework Club During Mass Children bring gifts to the Altar and take collection	Sunday School covering two age groups Tots and Toddlers Group weekly in term time
Schools Work <i>Which schools are there? What connections are there already?</i>	Existing links with: Three infant and junior schools and one secondary school. The infant/junior schools come into church at Easter and during Advent. Year 7 pupils are coming to Church in September for prayers and a lesson on morals and values.	The following are in the Parish: Summer Hill Primary Academy; Joseph Turner Primary School; Q3 Academy; Unicorn Nursery No current links but there have been in the past.	Existing links with: Burnt Tree Primary Tividale Hall Primary Rounds Green Primary
Communication <i>Website? Email? Sunday Bulletin? Magazine? Noticeboards?</i>	Facebook Website Noticeboards	Facebook Noticeboards – recently refurbished A Church Near You Instagram Weekly News Sheet	Facebook Website (maintained professionally) PCC WhatsApp Group Exterior Noticeboard

STATISTICS FOR 2023

	Electoral Roll	USA	Marriages	Baptisms	Funerals in Church	Funerals at the Crematorium
St Mark's	38	30+2	3	5	26	10
St John's	50	18+4	2	5	23 Church & crematorium	
Tividale	28	17+4	0	4	1	1
total	116	65+10	5	14	50	11

It is worth noting that all three parishes continue to produce **candidates for Confirmation** 14 were confirmed last year and further candidates are to be presented this autumn.

WORSHIP

Worship is Eucharistic and liturgically Anglo-Catholic in all the churches with incense, vestments and the Reserved sacrament.

The Current Vacancy worship pattern is:

9.30am Sung Mass at St John's

11.00am Sung Mass at St Mark's

4.00pm Sung Mass at St Michael's

It is highly desirable that Sunday morning worship can be restored at St Michael's as soon as possible, lack of clergy cover necessitated an afternoon Mass during the vacancy but this has had a negative impact on attendance.

Given the number of vacant parishes locally and the shortage of available priests, there has been limited weekly weekday worship in the churches and no regular worship at all at Holy Cross, Tividale.

It is hope that a suitable pattern of daily worship might be introduced across the churches.



Altar at St Michael's

MUSIC

Tividale: use a tablet via a sound system for music for both Mass settings and hymns. Hymn sheets are available for each week. We do not have an organist since Covid. The music is played on licence (One License). Mark Aston acts as a cantor, and he leads the psalm.

St Mark's: uses a sound system mostly, but has access to an organist for special occasions.

St

John's: CDs using the sound system, very occasionally an organist; Three strong group of cantors lead the Sunday Mass.

CONGREGATIONS

All three parishes share the same recent experience. Older worshippers have died or are now unable to attend, whilst all the churches have also gained new members who are younger and much more ethnically diverse than previously was the case, including, amongst others, people of Polish, Albanian and Portuguese heritage as well as Afro-Caribbean and others. New members are typically younger, including children and some young adults.



Christmas fun at St Mark's

Carols in the Car Park at St John's



Fellowship in Tividale



BUILDINGS

St Mark's Ocker Hill celebrates its 175th anniversary in 2024

St John's is Grade 2 listed. The tower dates from the 17th Century whilst the remainder of the building is Victorian.

The parish of St Michael's, Tividale dates from 1878 with the construction of a large church which, due to structural issues, was demolished in 1984. The current building dates from 1925 and is the former church hall. A new church hall was built attached to St Michael's in the 1990s. Holy Cross, Tividale, was built in 1966.

All three Parish Churches have well equipped Church Halls adjacent to their buildings.

CHURCHYARDS

St Mark's Ocker Hill's churchyard is open for both burials and burials of ashes.

St John's and St Michael's have areas available for the interment of ashes only.

CHURCH FINANCE

St Mark's and St John's, as well as Holy Cross (which has separate financial accounts) are holding their own financially. St Michael's is less robust financially at present in terms of its day-to-day finances, but is in a stronger position in terms of restricted funds for the maintenance of the building and other specified tasks.

THE VICARAGE



The Vicarage is adjacent to St John's Church.

It is a pleasant four bedroomed family home.

It is a 3 minute drive or 15-minute walk (0.75 miles) from St Mark's and an 8 minute drive (just over 2.2 miles) from St Michael's, Tividale.

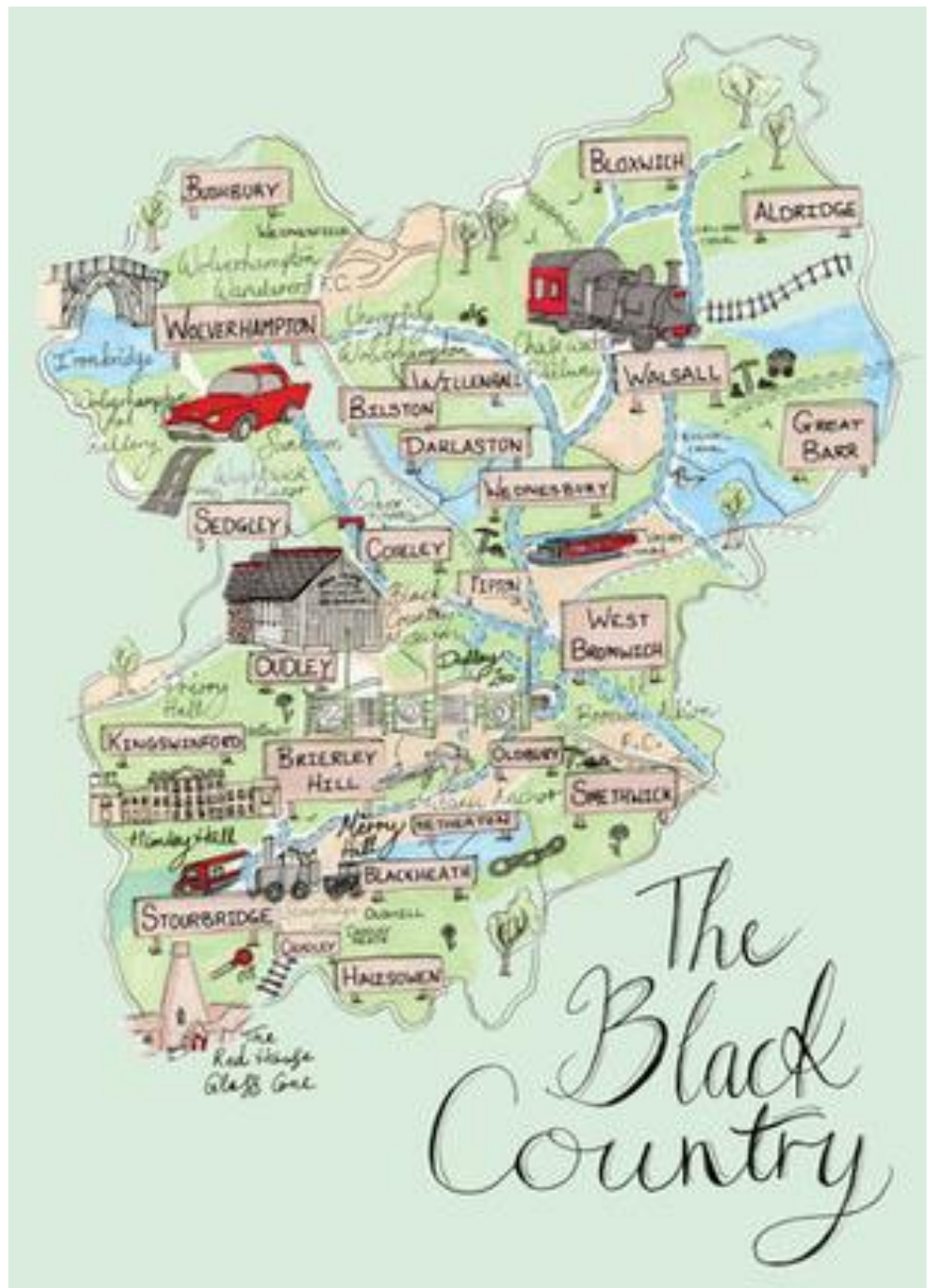
The Diocese is retaining the clergy houses adjacent to Holy Cross Church, Tividale, St Mark's, Ocker Hill and at St Peter's Greets Green, for potential future use. One property will be required for stage two of the creation of the Missionary Society, and there remains the potential for the Parish receiving a stipendiary curate in the future.

THE AREA

The Black Country is of course at the heart of the Midlands and therefore all the key roads including the M6, M5 and M40 are all nearby. The main railway line from Wolverhampton to Birmingham New Street passes through the parish, there are local stations at Tipton and Dudley Port and a mainline station at nearby Sandwell & Dudley with direct trains southbound to London Euston via Coventry & Milton Keynes (London 1hr50 minutes) and northbound to Edinburgh and Glasgow via Crewe and the Lake District; to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli via Shrewsbury; Holyhead via the North Wales coast; Chester; Blackpool. There is an excellent network of local bus services too. The local tram is being extended currently with a new line passing through Dudley town centre just below St Edmund's, Dudley.

Nearby attractions include: Dudley Castle; Dudley Zoo; The Black Country Museum; the local canal network; a cinema complex at Dudley; as well as the Merry Hill Shopping Centre. Himley Hall Gardens and Wightwick Manor are nearby and open countryside including Kinver and the Clent Hills, both scarcely half an hour away. Theatres are to be found in Wolverhampton and also in Birmingham, the latter boasting significant museums and music venues and much else besides.

If sport is your thing, then the home grounds of Walsall, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Bromwich Albion are nearby, (and indeed Aston Villa), as is Dudley Golf Course and Tipton Harriers Athletics Club amongst others.



DIOCESAN VISION

The vision, mission and ministry of the Diocese is focused around the three priority areas of discipleship, vocation and evangelism (DVE) - following in the footsteps of the first bishop of Lichfield, St Chad.

Our shared diocesan vision, which is reflected in the video below, is:

"As we follow Christ in the footsteps of St Chad, we pray that the two million people in our diocese encounter a church that is confident in the gospel, knows and loves its communities, and is excited to find God already at work in the world. We pray for a church that reflects the richness and variety of those communities. We pray for a church that partners with others in seeking the common good, working for justice as a people of hope."

Bishop Michael introduces the vision in this video:

<https://youtu.be/CPg826M414Q?si=G8aj5DSBL6ouanSx>



Shaping
for Mission
Strategic
Framework
2024 -2030





Lichfield Cathedral

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