



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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VICARIATE FOR CARE OF THE CLERGY

Launch of the Clergy Training Fund 2022

Dear Friends,

It is a privilege to write to you on the launch of the Clergy Training Fund 2022 and to call upon your generosity in prayer and financial support for those training for Priesthood and Permanent Diaconate in Hexham & Newcastle Diocese.

The Covid pandemic has affected our ability to collect much needed funds in our parishes during the last two difficult years. Nevertheless, this has been a fruitful time for vocations in our diocese. In 2020 Fr. Jonathan Bowes was ordained priest and in 2021 Fr. Luke Wilkinson too was ordained priest for Hexham & Newcastle. Our diocese is currently blessed to have six men in formation for the priesthood, studying in Rome, Valladolid and Oscott. There are also a number of men discerning a call to priesthood who meet with myself and Fr. Shaun Purdy, Vocations Promotor. This summer Rhodie (Bong) Nidea, Gareth Rowe and Carl Watson were ordained as Permanent Deacons. Please pray for them and for more priestly and diaconal vocations in our Diocese.

The readings this Sunday call us to be humble, finding joy in service of God and one another. St. Paul generously poured out his life in service of the Gospel. Writing to the Thessalonians he reminds us that all we do in faith comes from the power of the Lord and although we are unworthy we pray that the Lord will make us worthy of our calling. Responding to God's call leads to fulfilment and ultimately peace. That joy can be ours too when we discern God's individual call to us.

In the life of Church, in our parishes and partnerships, we rely upon the service of one another to build up the Kingdom of God. It is through humility, in the quietness of prayer and the joy of serving others – by losing ourselves, that we find our calling in Christ. Among the various ways God calls us; in a very special way, Jesus himself established in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

Through those men called to Holy Orders he continues to minister to His people today. Through the laying on of hands, priests and deacons share in a very special way the ministry of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. Our priests walk alongside us in the good and more challenging moments of life, they celebrate the Sacraments for us, particularly the Holy Eucharist. Priests preach the Gospel and are a reminder to us of the love of Jesus.

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Today, we pray for the gift of vocations to the priesthood and diaconate in our Diocese.

In a sense all of us can be promoters of vocations and your prayers for and the encouragement of vocations across the diocese are vital. I ask you to be generous in making your parishes places of prayer, nurturing our men to hear and respond to God's call.

There are a number of initiatives in our diocese which encourage and help men who are enquiring or discerning a call to priesthood. For enquirers to the priesthood there are bi-monthly evening meetings at the Cathedral Café in Newcastle. These consist of a guest speaker and discussion followed by an informal meal together. In the new year there will be an overnight Vocation Retreat held at the Emmaus Youth Village, following a successful retreat which was held at Minsteracres Retreat Centre earlier this year.

The diocese also has an icon of Jesus the Priest, blessed by Bishop Robert, which will tour our schools, university chaplaincies and parishes over the coming months. Jesus is portrayed wearing priestly vestments; close to His heart is Saint Cuthbert's Cross, the symbol of our diocese. The Icon reminds us that Jesus continues to call others to follow Him and lay down their lives in His service as priests.

Finally, please could I ask you to be generous in your financial support of the Clergy Training Fund. As I mentioned earlier, Covid has affected our ability to collect money for the fund in recent years. Because we are blessed to have a relatively good number of men in formation this has led to a greater demand on the fund. Inflation too has caused education fees to rise considerably.

The Clergy Training Fund is the sole means of supporting the formation of our seminarians, we receive no funding from the state. The Clergy Training Fund also supports the training of Permanent Deacons and the ongoing formation of all our clergy, helping them to grow and adapt in their ministry. Your kindness, through the annual collection, legacies and bequests is more vital than ever and is very much appreciated by those preparing for ministry. It is thanks to parishioners, like you, past and present, that we can support the priests and deacons of tomorrow and ensure the flourishing of our Church.

With every good wish in the Lord,

Father John Bagnall

Diocesan Director of Priestly Vocations