

Diocese of Hallam

Pastoral Letter

To be read at all Masses
On the weekend of 11/12 May 2019
Vocations Sunday

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to be with you through the written word today, Vocations Sunday.

In the gospel chosen for today's Mass we hear the final words of Jesus in which He makes reference to Himself as the Good Shepherd. He uses the image, to help the people catch a glimpse of who He is and the special relationship He has with them and they with Him. We note, for example, that he is aware that the Father has entrusted to Him the whole of the human family and chosen Him as leader, protector, and nourisher. This is a role He plays to perfection to the point of laying down His life for those entrusted to His care.

Within the family of the Church we are all called at different times in our lives to guide, to protect, and to nourish those who are placed in our care. However, the title "shepherd" is used in recognition of those who exercise a particular role of service within the Church – sister, brother, priest, deacon, bishop. Today, Vocations Sunday, we are asked to remember them in prayer especially and, in particular, to pray that others will join their ranks.

At the end of the homily at the Chrism Mass almost a month ago, I invited the people gathered that day to pray for three intentions. Firstly, I asked them to pray for your priests and bishop that through our words and actions you will always experience the protection and love of the Good Shepherd. Secondly, I invited them to remember in prayer those who are already on the journey to full time ministry that they be open to what God asks of them and the courage to follow. And, finally, I asked them to pray that new hearts will hear the call to the priesthood and religious life here in the Diocese of Hallam. I would like, for a moment to reflect on the third intention.

When I was growing up there was, what could be called, a vocations culture in our parishes, our schools, and in our homes. I think that it is fair to say that this is something we have lost in recent years for a variety of reasons. It is not necessary to list those reasons here. Now, I believe, is the time to be bold enough to reclaim it and positively encourage our young people (and not so young!) to seriously consider priesthood and religious life! When I was Vocations Director in the early eighties, I coined the phrase, "People have the right to be asked". It is no less true today.

Vocations promotion is the work of the Holy Spirit and prayer is at its heart. If we do not ask for vocations, we should not expect vocations. This is why I am launching a prayer campaign for vocations in the diocese today. You will have received a prayer card on the way in to church today. I would like this Prayer for Vocations to be recited every time you come together to pray in your parishes. It is a very simple way for the parishes to exercise their responsibility for promoting vocations. It would be wonderful, too, and I strongly encourage it, if the prayer were recited at home.

Finally, a word for those who are listening and maybe thinking about priesthood or religious life. If you would like to explore further the idea that the Lord might be calling you, I invite you to meet with me at Bishop's House, 75 Norfolk Road, next Saturday at 11 am over a coffee. No strings attached!

In his message for today, World Day of Vocations, the Holy Father has these words for you:

Do not be deaf to the Lord's call. If He calls you to follow this path, do not pull your oars into the boat, but trust Him. Do not yield to fear, which paralyses us before the great heights to which the Lord points us. Always remember that those who leave their nets and boat behind, and follow Him, the Lord promises the joy of a new life that can fill our hearts and enliven our journey.

We ask the prayers of Mary, Our Mother of Perpetual Help and Patron of our diocese, to help us all discover the Lord's plan in our lives as it unfolds day by day and the courage to walk in the path that He has chosen for us.

Yours sincerely in Christ, the Redeemer.

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