



Good Shepherd Sunday
Fourth Sunday of Easter, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Last year, our Diocese was blessed with the Ordinations to the Priesthood of two young men; Fr Anthony Rosso in February and Fr Sean Crawley in July. In July this year, we look forward to the Ordinations to the Priesthood of Rev Timothy Whitwell and Rev David Murray. We currently have six other seminarians currently in formation for the Priesthood: one at the Royal English College, Valladolid; one at Allen Hall Seminary, London; and, four at the Venerable English College, Rome.

We give thanks to Almighty God that men such as these continue to respond generously to the call to serve the Lord and His Church as priests in our Diocese. I ask you to pray for them this weekend.

Formation for service in the priesthood normally takes at least six years. This formation includes courses and placements for seminarians arranged by the seminaries they attend and by the Diocese. In addition to their human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation, it is important that they are given pastoral experience in parish communities and with agencies that are able to provide them with direct experience of working in schools, hospitals and prisons.

It is important that we raise the funds to train the seminarians for our Diocese and for those who, we hope and pray, will follow them in the years ahead. Each year we have a Special Collection on this the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday, for the Priests' Training Fund. This collection helps the Diocese to meet the education and training needs of our seminarians and clergy both now and into the future. The collection this weekend has traditionally differed from other second collections in that it has been taken after Communion to highlight the connection between priesthood and the Mass.

So on this Good Shepherd Sunday, I come to you with three requests. Firstly, please pray with all your heart for vocations to the Priesthood. Secondly, please encourage priestly vocations in any way that you can and, thirdly, please help us to meet the financial cost of the formation of our seminarians. It costs from £20,000 to £25,000 a year to train a seminarian for the priesthood and I would deeply appreciate your help in meeting this large but very worthwhile expense.

Your donations, gift-aided if you are a taxpayer, will help us meet these costs. There are also standing-order forms available at the back of the church if you would like to donate on a regular basis.

This year, we received some legacies from people who left donations in their wills for the Priest's Training Fund. Through their generosity, these kind donors continue to help the Church in its ministry of evangelisation. They deserve our deepest gratitude and our prayers. If you would like some information on how you might help the Diocese in this way by leaving a legacy in your will, please contact the Diocese of Leeds Finance Office at Hinsley Hall.

At his Wednesday Audience on 21st April 2013, Pope Francis said: "Behind and before every vocation to the priesthood there is always the strong and intense prayer of someone: a grandmother, a grandfather, a mother, a father, a community...Vocations are born in prayer and from prayer; and only through prayer can they persevere and bear fruit". It is appropriate that the prayer for an increase in vocations to the Priesthood should have a special place in our parish prayers this weekend but not an exclusive place. Our prayers must not be just that those who are called to be priests may hear and follow the voice of the Good Shepherd but that each and every one of us whether lay or ordained may hear that voice and take personal responsibility for making the Gospel of Christ known.

Please pray that there will be an open hearted response to the call of the Lord to serve Him in the Priesthood and please do give as generously as you can to help support the training of the future priests for our Diocese.

With my blessing

+ Marcus Stock

✠ Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds