



**PASTORAL LETTER ON VOCATIONS TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD**  
**GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY - FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - 10<sup>TH</sup>/11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2025**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On this Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Catholic Church throughout the world celebrates 'Good Shepherd Sunday', called so because in each of the three lectionary cycles for this day, a distinct passage is taken from the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St John's Gospel in which Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of Himself as the 'Good Shepherd'.

In 1963, during the Second Vatican Council, Pope St Paul VI designated this day as a World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The Council's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, reminds us that every baptized person is called to *"the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity"* (§40), that is, we are called to holiness. This is the fundamental vocation of us all.

In the message which Pope Francis issued just a month before his death for this 62<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Holy Father wrote: *"A vocation is a precious gift that God sows in our heart, a call to leave ourselves behind and embark on a journey of love and service. Every vocation in the Church, whether lay, ordained or consecrated, is a sign of the hope that God has for this world."*

The Pope urged us all to support especially young people as they seek to discern the vocation to which God is calling them. He said: *"A vocation is never a treasure stored away in the heart; rather, it grows and is strengthened within a community that believes, loves and hopes. No one can respond to God's call alone, for all of us need the prayers and support of our brothers and sisters"*.

Today, I wish to write to you specifically about the vocation to ministerial priesthood; the call to serve Christ and His Church as an ordained priest. I do this without in any way diminishing the importance of the many other forms of vocation to which we, both men and women are called, through our baptism and confirmation, to build-up Christ's Body, the Church.

Yet, as the Preface of Priesthood in the Roman Missal says: *"Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own, but with a brother's kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands"*. My focus today is a recognition of the growing interest in a vocation to the priesthood being expressed by a surprising but welcome number of men across our diocese.

There is an increasing awareness and appreciation, especially amongst young adults, of the richness of our Catholic faith. Large numbers are discovering afresh the beauty and holiness of the Church, and the sacred truths to which it holds: the deposit of faith handed down through the ages. They understand that the teachings of Christ and His Church are not a means of avoiding life's challenges, but rather a source of strength and guidance in navigating them. They recognize that the Gospel's message of love and forgiveness provides the power to face adversity with serenity and resilience. They are experiencing too an increasing thirst for authentic love, goodness, beauty and truth in the world around them, a longing for forgiveness, and a hunger for communion with God and with one another. They are craving for the Bread of Life!

God our Father has given us a remedy for these yearnings in the priesthood of His Son, Jesus Christ and in the community of the Church. That same sacred priestly ministry of Christ, which he entrusted to His Apostles and their successors, is shared with you today through my apostolic ministry as your bishop and through the priests who serve you in your parishes and in the various other pastoral ministries which they exercise across the diocese.

Through the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, it is Christ Himself who proclaims His Word in the ministry of the priests He has called to be the shepherds of His people. It is Christ who feeds us in the Eucharist with the Bread of Life, heals our sickness with holy anointing, reconciles us to God and to one another in penance, blesses unions of love in marriage, comforts those who mourn, and leads the flock towards the Kingdom of God.

Above all, an ordained priest is one who, by his consecration, lives for others. The title, 'Father', like the title, 'Shepherd', expresses a relationship of loving service to others in everything he undertakes. This is why the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is at the heart of a priest's spirituality and ministry; his celebration of the Eucharist at the altar for Christ's flock and for the salvation of the world makes present the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and to lay down His life for His sheep.

To any man who is now hearing or reading this letter, I say this to you from my heart: if you feel that the Lord may be calling you to be a shepherd and bridegroom with Christ; to watch over Christ's flock and care for His Bride the Church; to be a father and brother to God's holy people, and to feed them with Christ's own Body and Blood, the Bread of Life - if these thoughts are stirring in your heart, I invite you now to come and spend some time with me on the Solemnity of Pentecost\* to discover a little more about the life of an ordained priest.

Finally, I ask everyone to pray regularly for vocations to the priesthood in our diocese, and particularly during the novena of prayer, the nine days from the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord to the Solemnity of Pentecost. May the Lord send labourers into His harvest, and may the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, intercede for us all and give us the assurance of the unfailing help of her Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

✠ Marcus  
**Bishop of Leeds**

*Given at Leeds on the Memorial of St Athanasius, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish distribution systems, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>/Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2025.*

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\* The meeting is open to men of any age, from 16 years and above (those under 18 years of age must be accompanied by their parent or guardian). Those attending this meeting will be able to ask any questions they might have about a vocation to the priesthood. The meeting will take place on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June and be for a period of about an hour from 2:00pm to 3:00pm. Tea and coffee will be available from 1:30pm. The meeting will be held at Hinsley Hall, 62 Headingley Lane, Leeds, LS6 2BX. If you intend to come to the meeting, I kindly ask you to inform my secretary, Miss Anne Cooke, in advance by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025, either by email: [bishop.secretary@dioceseofleeds.org.uk](mailto:bishop.secretary@dioceseofleeds.org.uk) or telephone: 0113 261 8015 (a message can be recorded if no one is available to take your call).