



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

Launch of the Clergy Training Fund Appeal 2024

Dear friends,

It is a privilege to write to you on the launch of the 2024 Clergy Training Fund Appeal. This year's appeal begins today, on the 30th Sunday of the Year, and runs until the 24th November. I am appealing for your generosity in prayer and financial support for those training for the Priesthood and Permanent Diaconate in Hexham & Newcastle Diocese and for the ongoing formation of the clergy of our diocese.

Bartimaeus, the blind man in today's gospel, was dependent on others for sight. But he could hear well. He heard Jesus of Nazareth walking by so he called out to him. Bartimaeus was healed by Jesus. And then, Bartimaeus did something a blind person cannot do. He followed Jesus, not just figuratively but literally. Bartimaeus walked behind Jesus, along with the other disciples of the Lord.

As fellow disciples and followers of the Lord we rely upon the service of one another to build up the Church. It is through prayer and the joy of serving others that we find our vocation, our calling in Christ. We all have a vocation but among the various ways God calls us Jesus himself established the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons.

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. As the writer of the Letter to Hebrews says in today's second reading, "no-one takes this honour on himself but each one is called by God."

Once a follower of Jesus discerns and accepts the call to ministry, either as a priest or a permanent deacon, they make a commitment to serve the people of God, to provide spiritual care and practical charity for those in need. They do so in parishes, in prisons, hospitals and schools, and in many other ways, preaching, teaching, and being there to offer support and guidance. Above all they sanctify God's people by presiding at the Church's Liturgy and Sacraments.

The calibre of those who have answered God's call to serve as priests or deacons gives us hope for the future. We must prepare these men as best we can for all the challenges that the world can throw at them. As a church we are committed to ensuring that they receive careful preparation under the guidance of expert mentors.



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The challenge of a lifelong commitment to serve God and God's people is daunting. But those who enter seminary or local formation know that they are supported by family and friends in their home diocese. Priests are called to live simple lives but high-quality training comes at a price. Yet following ordination a priest may give back more than 40 or 50 years' service, so the investment brings a considerable return.

Each year we make an appeal to support the Clergy Training Fund in response to the ever-increasing costs of training priests and deacons to serve in our diocese. There is no state funding for seminaries or for the formation of permanent deacons and so the money required to provide each student with accommodation, living costs and tuition for a number of years needs to be found from the generous support of people who contribute to this fund.

At present Hexham & Newcastle has two men training for the priesthood, one in St. Mary's College, Oscott and another at Allen Hall in London. There are also approximately ten enquirers who meet at the monthly priestly discernment meetings at St. Joseph's Stanley with myself and Vocations Promoter Fr Shaun Purdy. We also have six candidates who are currently being formed to serve as permanent deacons. Deacon Shaun McGee was recently appointed Director of Formation to the Diaconate.

This summer our diocese had the joy of the ordination of a new priest. Joseph O'Brien was ordained by Bishop Stephen at St. Mary's Cathedral on the 20th of July. We wish Fr. Joseph many years of joyful service in our diocese.

I ask you to pray for our priests and deacons and pray that God will touch the hearts of those who feel called to serve as priests and deacons in our diocese.

Your kindness, through this annual collection, legacies and bequests is vital and very much appreciated by those preparing for ministry. It is thanks to parishioners like you, past and present, that we can support the clergy of tomorrow and ensure the flourishing of our Church.

With every good wish in the Lord,

Father John Bagnall

Diocesan Director of Priestly Vocations



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