

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



*✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



Pastoral Letter – Clergy Training Fund 2017 to be read in all parishes weekend of 28/29 October

My dear people

After working together as a diocese, we have reached the stage in our review process when partnerships are now up and running and we are forging ahead making new bonds while strengthening bonds that have always existed between our communities. Our readings today are encouraging us to continue with this vital work for the building up of God's kingdom here in Hexham and Newcastle.

While at times challenging, working in partnership offers us wonderful opportunities to use the gifts we have been blessed with and to be creative in all we do. Filled with the Holy Spirit we can make a real difference in our troubled world as the enthusiasm we generate by encouraging one another, working together and valuing one another's input helps our communities shine out as beacons of light and hope, attracting others to want to join us as we serve the Lord. Seeing all of this being put into action in and around our partnerships makes me feel very grateful for your hard work and commitment.

I am also very grateful to the clergy of our diocese who offer so much through their ministry to the people of our parishes and partnerships. The generosity they show to others is exemplary considering the amount of extra work they have to undertake.

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. At present we have two candidates training for the priesthood in Oscott and one candidate who has begun training this year in Valladolid. There are also enquirers who meet monthly at the discernment meetings at St Mary's Cathedral. We also have four candidates who are currently being formed to serve as deacons. There is no state funding for seminaries and so the money required to provide each student with accommodation, living costs and tuition for six years needs to be found from the generous support of people who contribute to this fund. The Clergy Training Fund is also used to finance the on-going formation of clergy whether it be for professional studies or to support the educational costs for those on sabbatical.

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All of us through the priesthood we receive by our common baptism are reminded in our short but very poignant Gospel today just how clear the Lord is being in his response to the question coming from the Pharisees "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole law, and the prophets also." In this teaching we are having the Law simplified in a loving and compassionate way so that we are able to absorb it more easily in the hope that we then radiate it back out to others.

The love of God needs to be felt and witnessed by all if our communities are going to grow and be successful and so they therefore need to be supported by the Church's ministerial priesthood. We therefore need to pray for our priests and pray that God will touch the hearts of those feeling called to serve as priests in our diocese.

I ask you to be as generous as you can on the occasion of our annual collection to support those in formation to become priests and deacons.

With my very best wishes

+ Séamus

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