

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



**Pastoral Letter to be read in all Parishes on
Weekend of 2nd / 3rd May 2009
Good Shepherd Sunday**

My Dear People

When I was appointed as your Bishop, I gave much thought to the priorities I wish to share with you in my new ministry. One of these is, with your support, to promote and encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Today let us pray and reflect seriously about this as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, the Annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, tending his flock and ready to give his life for us. We respond to His tremendous care and love by our own reaching out to others, helping them to find a sense of belonging, encouraging them to see their value and dignity as members of God's family.

Prayer is always at the heart of this outreach. We need to speak and listen to God every day, asking Him to be the beginning and end of everything we do and say, to guide our decisions and choices, our plans and our hopes. My deepest wish for all of us is that through prayer we seek to deepen our life with God in the family of the Church.

Within this family, Jesus first passed on to His apostles His ministry of shepherd, and they in turn chose others – bishops, priests and deacons – to carry on this ministry of service. I ask you, through your own life of prayer, from within the depth of your personal knowing and loving of Jesus to do all you can to encourage those who may be thinking of offering themselves to share in His ministry of priestly service.

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Every school and parish has a prayer day allocated for this intention and I ask you not only to use these days to reflect on and ponder Jesus' call to you personally, but above all, to support those He is calling specifically to priesthood.

Our House of Hospitality at Penshaw continues to offer the possibility each month for people to come together in an atmosphere of trust and sharing to discern their vocation. About fifteen men of varying ages and backgrounds regularly attend this meeting. Three of these have made formal application to begin seminary training in this academic year. If you feel you may be called by God to priesthood, why not take the risk and step out in faith to benefit from this monthly opportunity.

Finally, our Diocesan family is blessed this year with the Priestly Ordinations of Lee Barratt, Thomas McHale and David Smith and of Malcolm Jackson, Daniel McKie and Jurgen Muller to the Permanent Diaconate. Marc-Lyden Smith will be ordained Deacon at Ushaw College in June in preparation for his priestly ordination next year. We also have two students completing their first year of studies at Ushaw and a student in second year at Beda College in Rome. Please keep them all in your prayers as they continue their path to the priesthood.

Our Risen Lord calls each of us to know and love Him more and more each day. In this Easter Season let us seek the chance to respond to His love by our encouragement of those called to follow Him in His ministry as our Good Shepherd.

God bless you all.

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