

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



Pastoral Letter – to be read in all Parishes weekend of 20th & 21st June 2009 A Year for the Priesthood

My dear people

This is a personal letter to each one of you. I'd like you to join me in a special project to celebrate what it means to be a priest.

This weekend marks the start of an international year for the priesthood. On Friday 19th June the Holy Father formally launched the year at Solemn Vespers in Rome with the relics of the Curé d'Ars brought from France to St Peter's in honour of the occasion.

St John Vianney is the patron of parish priests and Pope Benedict XVI has made it known that during the year he will declare the Curé of Ars as patron saint of all the priests in the world. After a year of study, prayer and festivities he will host a world meeting of thousands of priests in St Peter's Square, Rome next June.

The Pope has asked us to launch the year in a special way at every level and I'm asking you all to start today with an appropriate prayer or kind gesture that will signal to your priests that you are happy to join in – that you mean business and that we're under way already.

- It might be that your priest will devise a special prayer for you to say together before the end of today's Mass.
- I hope you might also find it in your heart to offer him a special word of encouragement and support as you leave church after Mass.

Let me know that you are on board. I'll tell you why.

Your priests deserve your love, respect and support. I also believe that in our great Catholic tradition the people of Hexham & Newcastle diocese undoubtedly love their priests and want to see them happy, holy and joyous in their daily apostolic labours. They deserve as much in a demanding, challenging world.

There is another reason for you to show your support. During the coming year all your priests are being asked to renew their gifts of sanctification, teaching and leadership. Good priests yearn for moral and spiritual perfection – and are encouraged to continue their formation as servant-leaders, reaching out to the vulnerable and those on the margins.

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The Holy Father intends to publish a collection of thoughts on essential aspects of the life and mission of the modern priest for our times. He emphasised that without priestly ministry, there would be no Eucharist, no mission and even no Church. So, there will be much more news about the Year for the Priesthood. Sufficient today to announce:

- I am inviting all the priests of the Diocese to join me to celebrate Mass at St Mary's Cathedral on 7th July 2009 at 7.00 pm, which I hope as many of you as possible will join us to formally launch this Year of the Priesthood;
- A retreat on the Holy Father's theme for the year of *Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests*. It will be held in May 2010 at Ushaw College for all our diocesan priests with a special day to include lay people; and
- An open invitation to people and priests to send me ideas on ways to celebrate the Year in parishes, at deanery festivities and diocesan occasions.

I assure you, every letter and suggestion will be welcome so we can pick the best ideas to make this a wonderful year for priests and new vocations to the priesthood.

Please pray for all of our Priests and support them as we begin this special Year of the Priesthood.

God bless you.

With very best wishes,

✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle Diocese