

# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



## PASTORAL LETTER – CLERGY TRAINING FUND 2015

My dear People

Jesus is the one who brings hope, light, healing and forgiveness into our world and into our lives as individuals, so it is with the Psalmist that we can proclaim, 'What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we are glad.' We as baptised brothers and sisters in Christ are called in turn to bring the marvels of the Lord to others, a task that is not so easy in today's world which finds it difficult to recognise the true message of Jesus and the freedom He brings into our lives. It is interesting to note that at first the crowd around Jesus, in our Gospel today, tried to keep the blind man Bartimaeus away from Jesus, merely because Bartimaeus was a beggar – a nobody in their eyes; they failed to see what Jesus could see. Once Jesus acknowledges Bartimaeus his status changes, the crowd encourage him to seek out Jesus, and he too throws off the cloak that was a symbol of his burden as a beggar. The crowd bring Bartimaeus to Jesus and then Jesus brings hope, light and healing into the life of Bartimaeus, Jesus brings the faith of the blind beggar alive. We are called to do nothing less for those around us who are suffering or over-burdened, we are called to bring them closer to God and to reveal God's marvellous works to them.

The vocation to be a Christian is probably the most difficult vocation in the world, for it is not in our own power that we are called to succeed, but rather in the power of someone else, as Jesus reminds us in His question to the blind beggar, 'What do you want me to do for you?' For it is in surrendering ourselves to the marvels of the Lord that we discover our true potential and vocation as we see with Bartimaeus, for, 'immediately his sight returned and he followed Him (Jesus) along the road.'

We are all called to surrender ourselves to the Lord and to follow Jesus along the road and as priests we are called to this through a particular calling or vocation. As priests we are called to lead others to God and to be an intercessor for others with God, so we too must come to know God. We are told that Jesus during his Hidden years, 'grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom,' (Luke 2:40), and that in his Public Ministry Jesus would spend long hours in prayer by himself (Mark 1:35), so even Jesus had to prepare himself for the mission he was embarking upon. Priests in their training and in their public ministry are called to be in a close relationship with God and His people, this in turn involves many hours of prayer, and opens them up to a great variety of pastoral experiences which are nourished with academic study, reflection and further prayer. As those in formation and as my brother priests and I grow in our relationship with God we hope to be sources of God's light and healing for the world and individuals; it is a great and humbling calling. It is, as mentioned last year, a lifelong task requiring a lifelong commitment from us.

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Today we open our collection for the Clergy Training Fund. It is an opportunity to help and support, in a very practical way, the training and formation of our seminarians at Valladolid, Oscott and Rome. Priests also need to be nourished with On Going Formation during the Liturgical Year, and sometimes priests request a time on sabbatical, all of which is supported through the Clergy Training Fund. For this support my brother priests and I thank you for your generosity, both financial and spiritual. I am ever thankful for the prayers and the hard work that the clergy of our Diocese offer to individuals and to their parishes in general. The generosity of priests in bringing people to the Lord is as ever an inspiration to me, and I ask that you continue to pray for your priests as they care for you both spiritually and pastorally. May we all, together, follow Him (Jesus) along the road.

This year we had one ordination, John Bagnall, and currently we have three students in formation, two at St Mary's College Oscott, and one at the English College in Rome.

I wish to extend my thanks and prayers to those who are involved in the formation of our priests and deacons. I ask in particular for your prayers for vocations this coming year, that we as a faith community will be able to say as often as possible to those men around us who seem to have a relationship with the Lord, 'Courage, get up; he is calling you,' as we hear in today's Gospel, and that they in turn may throw off the cloak of doubt or worry about the world and decide to jump up and follow Him along the road of discernment and formation.

I thank you once again in anticipation of your generosity towards our annual collection to support those in formation and for the on-going formation of our clergy.

With my very best wishes

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