



Pastoral Letter
To be read at all Masses on
Trinity Sunday, 2nd and 3rd June 2007

My dear Friends,

I want to begin this letter by quoting Pope John Paul II, who said, "God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them." John Paul is referring to God's words in the prophecy of Jeremiah, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart".

"Without priests the church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the heart of her existence and her mission in history, an obedience to the command of Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" and "Do this in remembrance of me" an obedience to the command to announce the Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world." (*Pastores Dabo Vobis, 1*)

You will be pleased to learn that at the present time there are five men in the seminaries studying for the priesthood in the Diocese of Nottingham. However, this is not enough to replace those priests who will retire in the next few years, but I do not want you to be downhearted because the good news is that at least three more men will join them in September this year. To pay for their fees and maintenance during the long years of formation the Diocese has a special fund, known as the Ecclesiastical Education Fund. This is one of our oldest funds but its purpose is restricted. It can only be used for the education of future priests. Thanks to the generosity of parishioners and the substantial number of legacies it has received and is still receiving nobody needs to be deterred from seeking training for the priesthood for financial reasons.

Apart from appealing to your generosity, once again, there is another reason why I am writing. The fund was set up, in strictness, for the education of future priests. However, in terms of the provision of sacraments, the calls on our finances are different from what they were when the fund was set up. There are three areas which need funding that are not covered by the Ecclesiastical Education Fund: ongoing formation of Priests and Deacons, the initial formation of Deacons and the promotion of vocations.

In common with most walks of life, ongoing formation for Priests and Permanent Deacons is expected and is a necessary part of their ministry. Ongoing formation goes on throughout the life of the priest or Deacon and does not finish at normal retirement date or even when the Priest or

Deacon withdraws from active ministry. It continues for the whole of his life.

The Permanent Diaconate is now re-established after a break of many centuries and our deacons are taking up a fuller life in the sacramental ministry of the church. Provision has to be made for their formation, and this can be costly. Up till now the cost has been borne by the parishes from which the prospective deacons come, but not all parishes are able to afford this expense.

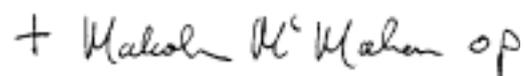
Lastly, as many of you will know, I have appointed a young Priest, Father David Cain, to work full time in encouraging vocations. I hope many of you will have a chance of meeting him. I particularly hope that those of you who are at school or in further education will also have the opportunity of meeting him. You will be able to talk to him about the life of a Priest or Religious Sister or Brother and consider with him whether God may be calling you in this special way. Although the seeds of a future vocation may take years to grow it is important that they are sown.

In order that your kind gifts can also be used for these additional purposes, the Trustees have decided that the collection traditionally taken for the education of future priests will be taken henceforward under the name of the "Clergy Formation Fund".

I am very hopeful for the church in our Diocese, and its future depends on developing a diversity of ministries. However, at the heart of all that we do is the sacramental life of the Church, and this simply cannot happen without Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament. We have a responsibility to see that they are well prepared and supported. I know that you do this in many ways already but my hope is that this new fund will enable our Diocese to be better able to meet the new challenges that I have described.

Pope John Paul reminded the Church that it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who keeps vigilant watch over the growth of vocations and priestly life in the Church (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 82). Let us take these words to heart and pray daily for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, that Mary will show a special care for our Diocese and intercede with her Son for us.

Thank you for your kind and generous support to those who will be providing for the sacramental life of the Church in the future.



Malcolm McMahon OP
Bishop of Nottingham