



**Pastoral Letter  
To be read at all Masses  
13–14 May 2006**

***Vocations***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last weekend we celebrated Vocations Sunday and I want to follow that up by asking you to reflect on your vocation.

Everyone who has been baptised has been called to holiness. That call is unique to each of us. Our particular journey through life in response to God's loving purpose for us is different from the person sitting next to us. Some of us live out our vocation in a particular way such as by being married and having a family. Others will live in a religious community. Many people respond to the call to holiness through the work they do, perhaps as a teacher or in a caring profession. There are as many ways of hearing God's call and answering it, as there are people on this earth. Our responsibility as Christians is to listen to God's word and hear how he is calling us individually. Although the call is particular to each of us, the way we find holiness is through each other in the church so that we may be one in Christ.

This year the theme of Vocations Sunday recognised the ways in which football and Vocation unite in a common expression of Pride, Passion and Faith. I often say how proud I am to be your bishop and to work with such good priests and people here in our Diocese of Nottingham. In a few weeks time I will be meeting with the priests and deacons of our diocese for our annual Clergy Conference. When I look around the room, I will see a variety of personalities with differing skills. Different ages, different abilities and very different characters but each one adds a unique quality to the Church they serve.

However, this is not to say that our priests are perfect. Despite an expectation that they ought to be perfect they remain, like each of us, a fragile human being. But as Pope Benedict noted in this year's Vocations Message "Weaknesses and human limits do not present obstacles, as long as they help to make us more aware of the fact that we need the redeeming grace of Christ."

It is therefore essential that we allow the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work in

and through us. By doing so, we are able to understand more fully the life to which we are called. Be in no doubt that if we accept that the Spirit is at work, every one of us is called to a particular Vocation.

With such a foundation of hope, why is it that Vocations Sunday can often be a time of fear for the future shape of a Church with fewer priests. Put simply, it is because fewer men are answering their call to priesthood. If this is you, perhaps you are even delaying an answer in the hope that God might forget or let you off the hook. We must accept that not every man is called to priesthood but I would hope that the odds are slightly better than the "99% need not apply" tag line of the Royal Marines Commandos advertisement.

We need to pray more than ever for the Spirit's gift of 'Courage' since Courage is the key to taking that positive step and speaking to either your own parish priest or Diocesan Vocations Director. When you do answer that call, this is the beginning of your journey of discernment with the Church. If you are accepted for ordination, you will be welcomed into a tremendously diverse and gifted team of priests who enjoy some of the most challenging yet fruitful Vocations that God offers. I look forward to the day when I will be celebrating the ordination of some of you who have heard this letter today.

Pray for that day!

Wishing you every blessing,

**Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon OP**  
**Bishop of Nottingham**