

World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2021

Dear sisters and brothers,

“The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.”

Do we take the Lord at his word? Do we believe that what Jesus says in the Scriptures is true, valuable and meaningful for our lives today? Over the centuries, as a result of continuous and trusting prayer, the Lord has sent priests and consecrated persons to preach the gospel and to witness to the presence of God’s kingdom breaking through into our world. Our first response to this should be one of thanksgiving and a greater commitment to continuous and trusting prayer.

Do we doubt that the Lord will call labourers to his harvest? My experience is that the Lord is certainly still calling many of his people to serve the Church as priests and in the consecrated life. The problem is a lack of response, a spiritual deafness, a lack of trust in God’s providence and an inability to recognise the values of the Kingdom of God in our world.

Yes, I really believe that God is still calling many to priesthood and the religious life. He is still choosing men and women to serve in a spirit of thankful self-giving and with an uncompromising desire to follow and live out the gospel. However, I would say that the secular and spiritual climate generated by our culture is not favourable to these vocations nor do they nurture a free and mature response to the call. Here I am not just talking about the wider society; I am talking about the Church, and the particular Church in this diocese of Middlesbrough. It is from our own that priests and religious will come, from our own diocese, from our own parishes, from our own families from our own sons and daughters. It is we who will create a culture favourable to responding to God’s call; no-one else.

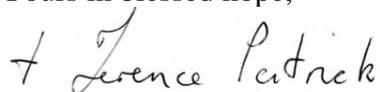
Just allow me to tell you as your bishop; I have been a priest for 46 years and it is a wonderful calling, an exhilarating calling, a privileged calling. Yes, there are difficulties and problems; stress and loneliness are involved, but that is true of everyone’s life and calling; these are not restricted to the priesthood and consecrated life. I can witness to the fact that when you respond to the Lord’s call in freedom and truth, he will give you the wherewithal to fulfil your calling and mission. As you say “yes”, like Mary and the Apostles, he will say to you, *“You did not choose me, no I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”* (John 15.16) This is where our confidence and hope abides.

Today is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to Priesthood and to the Consecrated Life. I want to urge you, brothers and sisters, not to be discouraged in any way. Trust in God’s plan for us and his Church. Listen to what the Lord Jesus has told us and put it into practice. Pray continuously and trustingly for vocations. Do all you can to promote a favourable climate so that those whom the Lord is calling to priesthood and consecrated life are enabled to respond. And remember, he is calling people from this diocese, from your parish, from your families, your sons and daughters. Nurture and encourage them.

We have one candidate who will begin his time of discernment and training in seminary this year. His name is Alex Corser. He is presently on pastoral placement at the Cathedral. Also Paul Griffin from St Joseph’s Scarborough will be ordained to the permanent diaconate in July. There is a small group beginning the process of discerning God’s will for them. Please keep them all in your prayers.

Like everything in our world, the cost of training future priests continues to rise. Please be as generous as you can in contributing to the priests’ training fund and perhaps there are some who might consider this particular cause when making their will. But most of all pray for and encourage vocations. Create opportunities to speak about vocations and to nurture a climate and culture favourable to hearing and responding to God’s call.

Yours in blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lence Patrick".

Bishop of Middlesbrough