"I am very keen to encourage and nurture vocations to the priesthood from among our own young people, many of whom have strong faith and great gifts to offer our Church." – Archbishop Eamon

Pastoral Message

Pope Francis likes to remind young people that they are not just the future of the world and the Church, but they are very much its present – "You are the 'now' of God!" he tells them in his apostolic exhortation published in April, *Christus Vivit* (*Christ is Alive*).
It is beautiful to look at a young person today and see in them already the qualities of a future father, mother, husband, wife, priest or consecrated person.

The Gospel Acclamation for today, the Day of Prayer for Vocations, reminds us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd: *"I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my own sheep and my own know me (Jn. 10:14)".*
The Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows our young people personally. He knows their strengths and weaknesses their joys and their fears, their worries and their hopes and dreams. He continues to call them to serve Him in many ways. Sometimes it is difficult for them to hear the Lord's call among so many other competing voices.

The Lord has not stopped calling some young people to serve Him in the priesthood – in fact, as Pope Francis writes, "he doubles the stakes, for he never ceases to care for his beloved church" (CV275).

For many years the families and parishes of Ireland provided large numbers of priests for both home and for the missions overseas. We are blessed in the Archdiocese of Armagh to have twenty-one young men preparing in Dundalk, Maynooth and Rome to serve as priests in our diocese. Most of these are coming to us from abroad. However I am still very keen to encourage and nurture vocations to the priesthood from among our own young people, many of whom have strong faith and great gifts to offer our Church. How might this be done?

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis cautions against "pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions" without appreciating the emergence of "new sensitivities and…new questions" (CV65).
In that spirit, I am inviting all people in the diocese to prayerfully reflect in the coming weeks on two questions that will help us plan for more vocations to the priesthood in our diocese:

1. *What is the most important role that the priests of tomorrow will play in our diocese?*
2. *What qualities will the priests of tomorrow need to have for our diocese?*

Please consider these questions – at home around the kitchen table, or in school, or out with friends, or during your coffee and lunch breaks at work. Share your thoughts with me and with our Diocesan Vocations Commission. You can send your responses via email to armaghpriest@gmail.com or via post to Diocesan Vocations Commission, Ara Coeli, Cathedral Road, Armagh BT61 7QY. Responses can be returned by June 30th 2019.
All of us share in the responsibility of nurturing future vocations, and of supporting our young people to "discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognise potential where others only see peril" (CV67).

Thank you for considering this message and please pray with me for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and to generous Christian service in marriage and the single life:

O Jesus, send labourers into your fields which are awaiting holy apostles,
saintly priests, heroic missionaries and dedicated sisters and brothers.
Enkindle in the hearts of men and women the spark of a vocation.
Grant that Christian families may desire to give your Church
helpers in the work of tomorrow.
(Prayer for Vocations, St. Joseph Young Priests' Society)