

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY PASTORAL LETTER 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the risen Lord as our Good Shepherd, the one who knows his flock, the flock that listens to his voice and follows him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gives his flock eternal life and who promises that the flock will never be lost. How blessed we are!

But who introduces us to the Good Shepherd? Who sows the seed of faith we have in Jesus? For me, it was certainly my parents, and then the different priests in the parishes to which we belonged. For others, perhaps it was the example of a Catholic friend or a priest or a religious sister.

That is why this World Day of Prayer for Vocations is so important. What are we praying for? Firstly, that all of us who are baptised may respond to God's call to be holy, to be whole and healthy, in living our faith, within the family of the Church.

That calling can be expressed in so many different ways and, without excluding any of them, I would like to concentrate on three vocations, the vocation to marriage, the vocation to the consecrated life as a nun or a monk, and the vocation to the priesthood. In each of those vocations, the emphasis is on God's call. Is God calling me to this or that way of life in his service?

In our uncertain world, people shy away from a long term commitment. Yet Jesus has made an eternal commitment to every one of us. At the heart of our communities must be couples who reflect that eternal commitment in the Sacrament of Marriage. That is what is so different from just living together. A married couple reflect God's ever-faithful love, sharing their life of faith and bringing new life into the world. The families we build are not perfect, but they are schools of love and faith and sacrifice. I want to urge our young people

to buck the trend, to commit themselves to each other in the sacrament of marriage and, if so blessed, to a family.

It is couples who live their vows for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, who seek the common good and cherish life, who then sow the seeds for other vocations.

How much we need the witness and support of men and women who, in the consecrated life, give their whole being to Christ the Good Shepherd in the service of the Church and the world.

And, finally, please pray that some men may be open to the call to the priesthood. We need men of great generosity and faith to have the courage to answer God's call. Not one of us is worthy. It is only God who can lead us on to the life of priesthood. And please pray for the six students studying for the priesthood. Two of them are due to be ordained priests later this year.

And, as we pray, let us accompany one another in our different vocations as single people, married couples, religious or priests.

As I complete my fifty first year as a priest, I want to end on a personal note. Earlier this month I was seventy five, the age at which bishops submit their resignation. I continue as your bishop until my successor is appointed. Currently, this seems to take eighteen months plus. Please take a prayer card, and pray for a new bishop who will shepherd God's people in Northampton Diocese with good priests, deacons, religious, families and lay faithful. I certainly thank God for the privilege of serving you as bishop with your wonderful help and support.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Peter". The plus sign is on the left, and the name "Peter" is written in a cursive style to its right.

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the weekend of the 11/12 May 2019.*