

DIOCESE OF SALFORD



CALLED: WELCOME TO OUR *Vocations Newsletter*



This weekend, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and to mark this year in a special way, we're delighted to share with you updates from our diocesan vocations team in our inaugural edition of "Called".

We hope this newsletter will provide an opportunity for us to keep you informed of some of the latest developments happening across the diocese in terms of vocations to the priesthood and the permanent diaconate.

(Continued)

In this newsletter you will find:

Vocations stories | updates on our enquirers' process | the latest on our permanent diaconate programme, upcoming Masses, and more!

Welcome (continued)

In this newsletter, we aim to keep you posted on upcoming events, to celebrate the vocations we have and the wonderful variety of these two fulfilling ministries, to encourage prayer and promotion of vocations, and to open conversation around any potential vocations taking root in your parishes.

We are delighted to see our seminarians back from their studies to speak in parishes this Good Shepherd Sunday. We're also pleased to welcome the return of our Deanery Masses for Vocations to the Priesthood. The first of these Masses will be in St Ambrose Barlow deanery at St Catherine of Siena's in Didsbury on Tuesday 23rd April, 7.30pm.

God is certainly calling men in our diocese to serve him as priests and permanent deacons, and we ask for your help and support as we seek to guide them in responding to that call. If you would like to put on an event to promote vocations, such as a Holy Hour, a Vocations Day or panel discussion in your parish community or deanery, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

As always, please do keep all those discerning a vocation in your prayers and thank you for all you do to promote vocations in your parishes and communities. Please pray for us too and let us know if we can assist in any way.

Fr Mark Paver and Fr Michael Deas
Vocations Directors.

Growing the Permanent Diaconate in our Diocese

Fr Chris Gorton

Director of the Permanent Diaconate Programme

The permanent diaconate is open to men who are in a position to receive the sacraments in the Church. This includes men who are married, whose marriage is recognised by the Church, as well as single men who are willing to choose a celibate life for the Kingdom.

We now have six permanent deacons in our diocese, four of whom were ordained in our diocese in 2022, and two more have joined us from other dioceses. Over the last 12 months, a team has been gathering to put a system in place to help enquirers for the permanent diaconate. This team covers the four different areas of discernment and training: spiritual, pastoral, human development, and academic. With help from the diocesan communications team, the profile of the permanent diaconate as part of our diocese



has been raised. Different deacons have shared their own story on the diocesan website and social media, and publicity is being developed for enquirers and parishes.

We now have a clear system in place from the moment someone states an interest. The first point of contact is to speak with his parish priest, as this vocation of service comes from within parish life. It is important that someone is known by and has the support of the parish priest, is involved in the life of the parish, is in a position to be a candidate for the permanent diaconate and the community, and is settled in that place. Then, contact will

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Update on our Permanent Diaconate Programme (continued)

be made with Deacon Stephen Scott, assistant director of the permanent diaconate programme in our diocese, who will have an initial conversation with the enquirer. The journey continues with meeting a priest of our diocese and a home visit from one of our permanent deacons to help with the discernment.

After an application process, which will include a medical, a psychological assessment, and a panel interview with Bishop John, a successful candidate will complete a four-year programme of tailored formation as part of the Northern Diaconate Formation Programme.

Is God calling you to the permanent diaconate? This is something to discern in prayer, discuss with your parish priest, a permanent deacon you may know, and find out more through the diocesan website and other information that is available. Nobody has the right to be ordained, this is a call to service, not status, and will not make you richer or poorer in material ways, but if it's God's calling for you, please take a step in faith and find out more. Get in touch via the contact information below:

Fr Christopher Gorton
christopher.gorton@dioceseofsalford.org.uk
 Deacon Stephen Scott
stephen.scott@dioceseofsalford.org.uk



Discerning a Vocation to the Priesthood in our diocese

Fr Michael Deas, Vocations Director

Are you a priest with a parishioner who you think might have a calling to the priesthood? Are you - or do you know - someone looking for a little guidance in discerning the direction for his future? Are you simply looking to get people talking about vocations in your parish? It might be helpful to know what resources there are available and to learn a little more about the process.

Community

The first thing to say is that vocations grow and are encouraged in community. As well as the parish community, which is central to our lives in the diocese, those on the younger end of the age range may like to engage in our vibrant

young adult community in the diocese. From our diocesan monthly Masses for young adults, regular events to connect with other young Catholics, and a whole range of fantastic opportunities in parishes across the diocese - this is a great way to help our young people focus their minds on what God is asking of them. It may be particularly fruitful to consider taking part in a pilgrimage, such as the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, a World Youth Day pilgrimage, or the upcoming young adult pilgrimage to Rome for the Jubilee Year in 2025. Whatever speaks to them, the key is connectivity, so please do share our events and invite them to follow us on Instagram by searching @salfordyouth.

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Discerning a Vocation to the Priesthood in our diocese (continued)

Enquiry Process for Priesthood

The first port of call for any man who thinks he may have a vocation to the priesthood is his parish priest, or a priest he knows and would find it easy to talk to. This should allow for a relaxed exploration of the idea and give the man a chance to be affirmed in his sense of vocation. Our Vocations Team, made up of Fr Michael Deas and Fr Mark Paver, are here to support anyone from that point. Feel free to contact either of them using the contact information on the back page of this newsletter. Fr Michael typically will meet a person first and may do so over a period of several months. During this time, he will be encouraged to develop his prayer and sacramental life, establish himself in the parish and be beginning to demonstrate the inclination to service. It may also be a good idea for him to begin to see a Spiritual Director to help the man discern what God is asking and where the Holy Spirit is working.

Enquirers' Group

To supplement the individual meetings, we also have an enquirers' group which meets every two months, where we pray together, eat together, and listen to a guest speaker who will talk about the theme of priesthood. The purpose of this group is for those with a genuine openness to a vocation to the priesthood to know that they're not alone, and to share experiences with and get the support of others going through a similar journey. Quite often, good, lasting friendships are made in such groups. The enquirers' group currently has between 8-10 men who are all at different stages of exploring the possibility of a vocation.

Discerning a Call to Priesthood

There is no hurry in discerning God's call and no pressure. After at least a year, if the call continues to be strong, a discerner will then begin to meet with Fr Mark and, together with Fr Michael, a decision will be taken about whether it is the right time to make an application to begin a programme of formation to the priesthood.

Prayer

One of the best ways of promoting vocations is something that we all can do: pray that more people recognise their calling from God. This can come in the form of the Deanery Masses that will be taking place, or in a parish Holy Hour or any event on a more local level. Hopefully, by being more visible in our desire for more vocations, we will then create a culture where people feel comfortable talking about the idea of vocation, and it then feels natural to continually encourage and talk positively about priesthood in particular.

Resources

In terms of resources, there are lots of websites to visit. A good place to start is the National Office of Vocations website, here: <https://www.ukvocation.org/> or the related website <https://www.ukpriest.org/>. There can be found information about life as a priest, stories and good points of contact.

A Ministry of Love and Service



Earlier this year, Bishop Terence Brain – Bishop Emeritus of Salford – celebrated his diamond jubilee and spoke to our vocations team to share his memories, thoughts, and findings from 60 happy years of ministry.

Childhood aspirations are fond memories for each and every one of us, but sadly, our dreams of becoming an astronaut, spy, or president of the United States rarely come to fruition in adult life.

But Bishop Brain's childhood dream of becoming a priest was the exception to prove the rule, as he recalls the first time his vocation stirred in his mind.

"When I was little, it was common. It wasn't out of the ordinary at 11 or 12 to say you wanted to be a priest - it was just one stage away from saying you wanted to be a fireman.

I was in Year 6 in primary school and there was a family who lived in the parish where I lived in Coventry and they had a son, who had become a priest with the Missionaries of Africa. It must have been the year he was ordained, and he came back to school and came around the classes and I remember him coming to our class and talking to us about being a priest in Africa.

"I remember sitting there thinking, "that's brilliant" - so I went home and told my mother I was going to be a priest and go to Africa. It was a total venture of the imagination but that's the first idea I had about it."

Over the years, influential figures such as an uncle in the priesthood, a priest who prayed with him and brought Holy Communion to him during a long stay in hospital, and a motherly teacher who exuded a sense of holiness and goodness had a subtle but lasting effect on the young Terence Brain.

“My mum - it always starts with your mum”, Bishop Brain explained, “I’d told her about wanting to be a priest and I must have mentioned it to her more than once in different ways because she asked me if I was serious about it. But, you see, at the age of 11 or 12, what does serious mean? What do you know about it? So, it wasn’t set in stone, but she went to see the parish priest and asked for his advice.”

Eventually, it was decided that he would apply for The Bishop’s Scholarship, and after passing the exam, he was enrolled at Cotton College, which was a school run by the Archdiocese of Birmingham in North Staffordshire.

The school provided a top-quality education for boys in an environment that was Church run, with around 25% of pupils expressing a desire to join the priesthood.

Bishop Brain recalled: “There were 17 boys in my class wanting to become priests. Two of us were ordained. You see, we were 11 - the time you grew up, reached 15 and got pimples, it didn’t make sense anymore. Some found the academic side challenging, others came across other circumstances that drew them away - there was no one reason.”

After six years at Cotton College, Bishop Brain went to seminary before being ordained in 1964.

“I never had any doubts. It sounds arrogant but I never doubted I would be ordained a priest - I never expected any of the things that happened after, but I never doubted I would be a priest.”

Bishop Brain’s first appointment was at the parish of St Gregory’s in Longton, Stoke on Trent. Just one year after the start of the Second Vatican Council, the beginning of Fr Brain’s ministry was a time of incredible upheaval and change for priests and parishioners alike.

Reflecting on this time, Bishop Brain said: “I wasn’t a clerical sort of priest. For me it was about being involved with the people. I like people - they’re made in the image and likeness of God! It’s about encouraging them to fulfil themselves by

helping them meet God and helping them get to know him.”

This idea of finding fulfilment and closeness with God is highlighted by Bishop Brain as a key part of the discernment process, who recommends a simple, quiet pattern of prayerful conversation with God to unpick that sense of vocation.

He said: “Talk to him about it. Just say, “Thank you for today. Did I go where you wanted me to go today, God? Did I come up to scratch? I need you to guide me; I need you to talk to me. And the trouble is, God, I don’t really know how to listen to you.”

“It’s about having that confidence to be yourself for God. Just be you and he’ll look after all the other bits.”

A few years into his ministry, Bishop Brain took up the position of hospital chaplain at Dudley Road Hospital, Birmingham.

He said: “When you’re in hospital, you’re not in your own space anymore: you’re in someone else’s space, you’re not in control. In hospital it all looks structured and efficient and without you being involved. This can make us feel anxious, isolated. So, I learnt to say “Hello” and “Good bye” in the languages of the patients - many of whom did not speak English as a first language - as a simple way of acknowledging them as persons.”

Bishop Brain shared one story of a salt-of-the-earth woman who was in hospital for many number of weeks.



“You need to love your people. If you can’t love them, you won’t be happy, you won’t want to be there with them. And if you don’t want to be there with them, you’ll never lead them anywhere.”

Greeting Fr Brain each visit with a broad Birmingham accent, she became a familiar face during his visits, always saying: “Don’t you worry about me, Father, you go and talk to one of them that needs you. I’ll let you know if I need you.” Repeating this same exchange week in, week out, Fr Brain never expected the woman to say any more until one day she stopped him and said: “You know that prayer you’re going to say for me, Father? You can say it now, I think I’m going to need it now.” She died that night.

“It’s little things like that over your life that takes the arrogance out of you,” Bishop Brain said. “You think you know it all because you’ve read the books for so long, but you don’t.”

These human interactions became the hallmark of Bishop Brain’s vocation as he championed a priesthood that puts people, love, and service at the centre of the ministry.

He explained: “The professors at seminary would say not to read your theology as an academic exercise. You can get enthused from the academic stimulus of working out the logic but that’s not what theology is. Theology is meeting God. You’ve got to meet God.

“You find people in your life who have met God and they’ve never even opened a theology book. They might not even read scripture all that much but recite an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be for their prayers. But they’ve met him.”

This virtue of accompaniment and sense of walking with people is a legacy of his priesthood that followed Bishop Brain to Salford, as he worked to manage the structure and organisation of parish communities in our diocese.

Acknowledging that the success of any organisation - including our own diocese - relies on a sense of collaboration, Bishop Brain was keen to ensure the happiness of his priests to nurture the best of their ministry.

He said: “You try your best to consult people and work with people, so I’d ask priests if they could go to this parish or that parish, but I’d say to them: “You need to love your people. If you can’t love them, you won’t be happy, you won’t want to be there with them. And if you don’t want to be there with them, you’ll never lead them anywhere.”

Although retired now, Bishop Brain remains a popular and welcome face across the diocese, offering a helping hand to his parish priest whenever called upon, and cherishing the connections and relationships he forged over 17 years at the helm of our diocese.

Reflecting back over 60 years of priesthood - and back to that very first sense of calling as a primary school pupil - Bishop Brain laughs as he describes his ministry as “happy, enlightening, and rewarding.”

He said: “It’s brought me contentment as a person. If I were to speak to someone discerning now, I would say, “Don’t be afraid of the priesthood - don’t think you won’t be happy. If you embrace it, you will be. It won’t necessarily be easy - we all have our crosses but it’s our crosses that make life stimulating, because we have to find ways around the problems we face.”

“When I look back over my life, if I’m honest I’ve got to say I’ve enjoyed it! I mean there are all the ups and downs of life but someone said to me the other week: “60 years - it’s a long time. Would you do it again?” And I said, “Oh yes, I would. But I’d try and do it better.”



Police honours Salford priest for dedicated service

A Salford priest has received special recognition for more than 20 years of service with Greater Manchester Police.

Fr Barry Lomax, Force Lead Chaplain for GMP, was awarded the Long Service Certificate from Chief Constable Stephen Watson QPM in a celebration event on Tuesday 26th March.

For the past 23 years, Fr Barry has served as a chaplain for Greater Manchester Police, providing a listening ear and much-needed support for force officers and staff of all faiths and none.

Fr Barry explained: "I became a volunteer chaplain with GMP in the summer of 2001 and was appointed to serve Q District Oldham. Sadly, a few months prior PC Alison Armitage had been killed 5th March whilst making an arrest. Some years later, PC Nichola Hughes and PC Fiona Bone were also killed on duty and I remember well, like so many others, that terribly sad day.



"These tragedies - as you can imagine - had a devastating effect on the division, the whole of GMP and the community, but it highlighted the ministry chaplaincy could offer."

At the beginning of his service, Fr Barry was part of a vibrant team of volunteer chaplains.

Twenty years on, and the team is stretched with vacancies to fill across Greater Manchester.

Fr Barry said: "Looking back, we certainly enjoyed better times, but as those who know me will also know, I'm passionate about Police Chaplaincy and my aim as Force Lead Chaplain is to try and bring chaplaincy back to where it once was by being a presence around the force, and by recruiting ministers from the many faiths that serve our various communities who are pleased and able to give support to our officers and staff."

On the beat in an ever-changing world, the role of policing today presents increasing challenges for our police officers, who may find themselves in dangerous and unknown situations every day of their working lives.

Regardless of rank or religion, Fr Barry and his fellow chaplains are known and cherished throughout the service as a guaranteed offer of a listening ear and helpful conduit - confidential, impartial, and compassionate.

Approaching his second year as Force Lead Chaplain for GMP, Fr Barry urges his brother priests to consider if the Lord is calling them to share in the joys and challenges of chaplaincy.

He said: "Being part of GMP as their Lead Chaplain has allowed me the privilege of being part of the lives of our officers and staff too. To some, the recent award I have received may be just a piece of paper in a frame, but for me, my family, friends and colleagues, it's a proud moment in my continued journey with GMP. It has been and remains to this day, a privilege for me to serve those who serve us."

For more information about chaplaincy with GMP, please email barry.lomax@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

Milestone Moments

*Congratulations to Deacon
Luke Bradbury!*



We also offer our congratulations to Deacon Luke Bradbury, who is approaching his sixth month anniversary as a transitional deacon.

Transitional deacons differ to permanent deacons as their ministry typically continues into priesthood. Reflecting on what advice he would give young men looking to follow in his footsteps, he said: "Keep Christ at the centre of all you do, stay close to Our Blessed Lady and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in this time of discernment. The first move and conversation are normally the hardest, but "bite the bullet" and speak to your parish priest, he will guide you."

Upcoming Masses

Tuesday 23rd April, St Catherine's Didsbury, 7.30pm

Thursday 23rd May, Our Lady's, Moss Side, 7.30pm

Saturday 22nd June, St Charles, Swinton, 12pm

Thursday 4th July, St Mary Magdalene, Burnley, 7pm

Diocesan Prayer for Vocations

Heavenly Father,
In the great love you have for your people,
We ask you to inspire men in our diocese
To respond to your call to love and to serve.

Mould their hearts, Lord,
After the Sacred Heart of Your Son,
So that they may grow in love and serve with joy.

Through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, pray for us.
St Joseph, pray for us.



Get in touch

If you would like to speak to someone about a diocesan vocation
to the priesthood or permanent diaconate, please contact:

vocations@dioceseofsalford.org.uk

or

0161 817 2226