

NOV Press Release

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Call to priesthood and religious life goes out to parishes, schools and university chaplaincies

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Highest number of priests in training for several years



Next weekend (Sunday 13th April) the Catholic Church in England and Wales launches its annual campaign to encourage young men and women to consider whether priesthood or religious life might be for them. Over 4000 posters and other materials have been distributed amongst parishes, university chaplaincies and schools. This event takes place each year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as Vocations Sunday.

The materials for schools and colleges explore some key events taking place this year including July's World Youth Day in Sydney, the 150th anniversary of Lourdes and the Beijing Olympics, all from a related vocational aspect. The Olympics workshop encourages sixth formers to look beyond the games and study how the Chinese state approaches religions, especially the 'underground' Catholic Church, which often sees its bishops and priests imprisoned for their faith, and how these clergy remain steadfast in their calling.

This coming week, the bishops of England and Wales, meeting in Leeds, will see statistics compiled by the Church's National Office for Vocation. These reveal that there are currently 160 men training to become priests in England and Wales, the highest figure for a number of years. In 2007, 44 men began priestly formation – the same as the previous year, which was the fourth consecutive year in which the Church reported an increase in the number of those beginning seminary.

Whilst the outlook has been more positive over the past few years, the Director of the Church's Vocations Office, Father Paul Embery, is not complacent and is aware of the challenges: ?

During the 1960's we saw a large number of priests ordained, which was atypical of much of the Church's history in this country. Many of these are now coming up to retirement age and currently, there are not enough men being ordained to replace them; this has led to many dioceses having to rationalise their deployment of priests as well as trying to encourage a younger generation to consider this calling.?

In addition to this year's national campaign, individual dioceses are also promoting various local initiatives. Earlier this year, Leeds Diocese published a calendar showing the human side of 12 different priests and Clifton Diocese* has recorded a series of videos for Vocation Sunday featuring young men talking about why they decided on priesthood and what life is like in seminary.

Current interest in vocations is encouraging. At a recent weekend of discernment put on by Southwark Diocese, 20 young men turned up wanting to explore an interest in the priesthood.

** Clifton Diocese covers Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire*

Related local links:

<http://www.cliftondiocese.com/vocations>

http://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk/priestly_vocations/recent_events/fullstory.php?newsid=163

Notes to editors:

More about Vocation Sunday

Each year in the three-year cycle of readings for Mass in the Catholic Church, the gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Easter is that of the 'Good Shepherd'. This particular Sunday each year is designated as a special day of prayer for vocations to priesthood and consecrated religious life.

Pope Benedict XVI's Vocation Sunday message can be found here:

<http://www.vatican.va/>

Websites

www.ukpriest.org (Official site for Diocesan Priesthood in England and Wales)

www.wyd2008.org (World Youth Day website)

www.lourdes-france.org (Lourdes website)

Entrants to Seminary

Entrants to Seminary for dioceses in England and Wales

Year	Entrants
2003	24
2004	27
2005	31
2006	44
2007	44

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