



PASTORAL LETTER  
ON VOCATIONS  
1984



Dear priests,

Brothers and Sisters,

This pastoral letter deals with vocations.

At the end of my first year among you as spiritual shepherd, I want to share a wish and a concern. Your warm welcome last January, your desire to cooperate, your faith and generosity encourage me to come to you with confidence.

Although this letter treats the subject of Vocations in their general aspects and varied forms, it will centre its emphasis on the priestly vocation. There is an urgent reason to do so.

I am responsible for the appointments of priests to the different fields of apostolate in this diocese. Their increasing scarcity calls for our common attention without delay. Our clergy is overworked. Some had to retire before the regular age on account of bad health. Replacement is fast becoming a problem. Seminarians are less than few.

Need I tell you how Much I count on your prayers, interest and action for the blossoming of vocations in our midst. Our younger generation is full of great desires, and capable of generosity. Some hear the call to serve the Lord and his Church. Many feel the desire to dedicate their lives to the service of the Gospel, to help the poor, to share their talents and muscles with the less fortunate.

But they are solicited at the same time by many other loud voices that invite them to immediate gain, easy pleasure, fast money. The choice seems impossible, torn as they are by their desire to serve and the impulsion to quick results. This is why I tell you after the Lord « The harvest is rich; the workers are few. Pray the Harvest-Master to send workers to his harvest » Lk 10.2.

Allow me to say a few words about the **vocation in general**, before I come to the priestly vocation. A vocation, in the field that interests us, is a call from God. We are called by God to become saints by living and serving others. That is what Baptism and Confirmation are all about. They make us children of God, members of the Church, witnesses of Christ, responsible for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. To be called by God is a mystery of his love for us. God wants us to share his life, his love and sanctity in full liberty, with the help of his grace. A vocation is a free call from God who wants a free response from us. We are not forced to become saints; we are invited and helped by God to say « yes », and act accordingly. This we call the general vocation of humankind. It can be attained in every state of life. There are special vocations, or situations which facilitate personal sanctification: christian marriage, celibacy in the world for the Kingdom, religious life, are forms of vocations that help to attain sanctity. Other vocations called ordained ministries, (bishops, priests, deacons) are first for the service of the faithful, with, of course, a personal obligation to work for self-sanctification, These ministries are called « ordained » because they are given by the imposition of hands within the ceremony of Ordination.

Thus you see that the vocation to sanctity is for everyone, but that there are some called to help by their ministry the obtention of sainthood, Those whose ministry it is to be witnesses and models of sanctity, and make it a profession or a vow to work towards that goal, are called 'religious'. Those whose ministry it is to help both religious and lay to sainthood, are called priests, deacons, bishops.

At the Last Supper, Our Lord Jesus gave us the Blessed Eucharist with the command to do it in memory of Him. To this end, he gave his Apostles the power and the mission to perpetuate this mystery. Since the Church is a sacrament of salvation « till the end of times », we must have today the possibility to obey the command of the Lord. The Church teaches that Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and priests their cooperators in

all the necessities of the faithful. « Priests are for the Eucharist », said Pope John Paul II in Canada lately. The Church, he added, cannot be imagined without the Priesthood. It is the will of her Founder.

In faithfulness to Christ and to my ministry as responsible for Ordinations in this diocese, I write you this letter, assured that religious Congregations will work towards raising vocations for their particular institutes.

The priest is a man of God. In this capacity, he welcomes new members in the Church by Baptism; he forgives sins; teaches the Gospel; gathers the faithful for the Eucharist, strengthens the weak in faith, presides at weddings, assists the sick, consoles those who near the completion of their earthly pilgrimage. He is a friend to the friendless, a brother to all. He acts in the name of Jesus, Head of the Church.

Not everyone is called to be a priest. Not everyone called accepts the challenge. There are many causes for the shortage of vocations. Some will blame it on the lack of faith, the fear of commitment, unlimited desires for liberty and pleasure. Others speak of the little encouragement received in the home, if not pure opposition, often the loss of spiritual values. Of course other reasons are worth mentioning: our families are smaller; many priests and religious have left not without sharing some convictions; a larger place is made to lay ministries; the status of priestly or religious life does not appeal as much as before: it is no longer seen as an honour. Pope Paul VI said that a community that does not generously live the Gospel cannot but be poor in vocations. Besides all that, we do not hear about vocations nowadays.

The Church remains strong though, and young as ever. The Lord is with her 'until the end of times'. The ship is not sinking. The pilot knows where he is going. He offers us to share the responsibilities aboard.

Time is for action. I invite you to be alert and willing. It is our common duty to pray for vocations, to deserve them. Our communities must encourage and facilitate the growth of vocations, and we must search our ranks for those who show signs of a possible calling, going so far as challenging their generosity to the service of the Lord and the Church.

Parents and families will provide the example and the atmosphere that will create a milieu where vocations can blossom. If pressure and insinuations are out of place, a warm welcome to a possible call from God in the family will be a needed support for those concerned until a discernment and official call of the Church seals the voice of God. I invite the priests to be awakened to the need of assuring their succession as pastors, to make themselves benefactors, spiritual directors and promoters of vocations in their parish. With their pastoral council, they should interest the whole community to the raising of priestly, missionary and religious vocations in their midst.

I count on the help of schoolteachers and those responsible for orientation, to keep the priesthood high on their list of priorities. The young must be protected against the 'peer groups' and human respect. I beg the catholic organizations like the Knights of Columbus, the C.W.L. and the Daughters of Isabella and others, as well as Social Clubs to be of assistance to us, as we count on them.

To the young I say:

You want to achieve something useful; you want to improve the world in which you live; you want your life to be a success, why not accept the challenge of helping Christ to save your brothers and sisters by being shepherd, father and friend? You think you are strong: I dare you to be a priest!

If the Lord has shown you so great a trust that he put in your head a secret desire to consecrate your life to his service, do not close your ears, open your heart, say « yes », I come, to serve!

You will be a happy man if you are faithful. See your pastor. Write me. I would like to know you, and if needed, to help you. I count on you, we all do.

Brothers and sisters, our small diocese is very much alive. It has been generous in the past. We have 54 missionaries spread around the world. Our history is worthy of praise. We must continue. Help find the workers for your own spiritual benefit. Take this appeal seriously, coming as it is from a brother whom the Church has made your pastor and servant, less than a year ago.

With my particular Blessing,

+ Gérard Dionne  
Bishop of Edmundston, N.B.

November 25, 1984

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### Prayer for Vocations

Lord Jesus, priest and Saviour, awaken in us the desire to love and serve you.

Grant us the gift of Vocations. Choose among us priests and religious for your Church and the suffering world with the generosity to answer 'yes' to your call as Mary did to the Angel.

Protect our diocese of Edmundston.

+ Gérard Dionne  
Bishop of Edmundston

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