

**A PASTORAL LETTER
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER
FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
(VOCATIONS OR GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY)**



Appointed to be read out at all public Masses in the Diocese of Lancaster over the weekend of 21/22 April 2018.

My dear people,

Please pray for vocations to the Priesthood. Please pray for Canon John Watson the Diocesan Vocations Director and Father Daniel Etienne his assistant. Please pray for our three seminarians, Stephen Talbutt, Stuart Chapple and Philip Wrigley. Please pray especially for our young priests, and look after them – we want them to last a long time. Please pray that young men offer themselves as students for the Priesthood for our Diocese. Such prayers have been answered before. Here is some evidence. (As you hear the names of these individual priests keep in mind how they form one presbyterate, working for one Lord in their splendid diversity):

Father John Conway was the first priest I came to know, he was Parish Priest of Garstang for ever! I remember several curates, Father Tony Foulkes playing football with me in the school yard at dinner-time because my classmates took school dinners and weren't back from the assembly rooms so I had no one to play with. I remember Father Harry Doyle joining us in the yard for football one morning before school began. His big feet were merciless! Then there was Father Tony Atkinson followed by Fathers John Cullen, Michael Murphy and Tony Walsh, all good men and priests, bright youngish things. The last curate was Father George Pennington who struggled to take his diabetes seriously, but he certainly took being a priest seriously. Each was his own man, each brought something different to the parish.

Father Robert Horn was my Mum's cousin. We didn't see much of him but knew him as an extremely dedicated priest. As a child, whenever I saw him praying in church or celebrating Mass I thought he was the living example of the Lancashire martyrs. He helped me to sense being in the presence of holiness. Father Adrian Towers was my father's cousin's son. He was a year older than me but went to a different school in a different town. Our paths rarely crossed but I saw him serving Mass and Benediction and knew he was going away to study for the priesthood. He always seemed to know what he was doing. His example helped me pluck up courage to mention that I was interested in that too. That's how I met a wonderful priest called Father Ron Ward, then Vocations Director for the Diocese. He was what they called a 'late vocation', but if that's a fault he'd certainly caught up by the time I met him!

During six years of training I was privileged to share different parish experiences with a number of outstanding and interesting priests. (Some were both outstanding and interesting, others were one or the other. I leave you to decide who fitted which.) Fathers Bob Bickerstaffe, Tony Quinn, Ken Hind in Barrow, David Murphy, John Watson and Peter Sayer in Whitehaven, Gerry Dunn in Carlisle.

Following my ordination in 1982 came the years as a curate, rich and varied experiences! Fathers Ken Hodson OBE at St. Mary's, Kells, Joe Hothersall at St Maria Goretti's, Ribbleson, with Father Joe Gallagher joining us. Then Father Larry Wells at St Cuthbert's, Blackpool. Here I also knew Fathers Pat Doyle and Tom Ward who was recovering from a stroke, timid as a lamb, but with a laugh to waken the dead!

Father John Walsh took me to Zambia and taught me much of the practical art of being a Parish Priest. During the years abroad, at different times I enjoyed the company of two other Lancaster priests, the irrepressible Father John Baron and the meticulous Father Jerome Ainsworth. (The sheer variety of character and extremes of talent to be found in the Priesthood are staggering!) On my return, Father Tom Singleton graciously opened his Preston home to me for those first months of readjusting to life back home. His ability to put modern technology at God's service amazed me. I remember my first phone call to him. I phoned the presbytery and he answered from the top of a mountain in the Lakes!

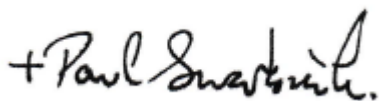
More recently, Father Michael Docherty welcomed and settled me in as Parish Priest of Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Michael, Workington, but he didn't hang around for long, rapidly being moved up to Warwick Bridge. Father Paul Harrison joined me as a second new face in Workington and remained a wonderful, wise and loyal companion through several eventful years. The first phone message I received after arrival in West Cumbria was a hearty message of welcome from the legendary priest that was Father Bede Moore OSB. Then came Father Thomas Karapurackal, a canon lawyer who could charm the birds from the trees with his smile, but struggled to understand broad Cumbrian! Now I share a home with Father Billing, and this will not be the end of the procession of priests who have blessed my life and yours. I give thanks to God for all those who have been chosen and, even now, generously persevere. Please God, so many more will be there to bless and guide our future.

For that to happen I ask this of you: Talk positively at home and with young people about priests who have been there for you, recently and in the past. Overcome fears and misgivings that dwell only on the negative or challenging aspects of priestly life. The priest is a sign of Christ's love for us. To any young man interested in studying for the Priesthood I say: Do not set your heart *first* on becoming a priest. Rather, set your heart *first* on knowing Christ, then if Christ wants you to follow Him by being a priest you will, but if He wants you to follow Him in another way that will be fine for you. He will guide you. Be confident that some are being called to serve Christ and the Church in the Priesthood. Do not be afraid to talk with any priest about your thoughts.

May Mary, Mother of Priests intercede for our Diocese as she has in the past, that we may rejoice with her to see young men finding Christ and following His call to become shepherds of His flock.

With every good wish and prayer this Eastertide,

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul Swarbrick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

✘ Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster