

PRAY FOR PRIESTLY VOCATIONS

‘What is Jesus calling us to do?’

By the Most Rev. John B. Brungardt

Recently I celebrated my 20th anniversary as a priest of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church. On May 23, 1998, Bishop Eugene Gerber (our former bishop here from 1976-1982) ordained me at the Cathedral in the Wichita diocese. Sharing this Ordination Mass with my family, friends and the faithful was glorious, as the Lord blessed me so much. As your bishop, you all have blessed me as well these past seven years with your prayers, letters, cards, and acts of kindness. Thank you! My priesthood has been a grace-filled journey: celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism with parents and their firstborn, having a question-answer session with a youth group, comforting a dying person and her family in a hospital, and many other holy times of ministry.

In the midst of this joy, we are facing a grave shortage of priests in our diocese. We are going from 31 full-time priests to 27 by mid-summer, due to one retirement and three missionary priests leaving. Eleven of our remaining priests are missionary priests. Half our incardinated priests will be over 60 years of age this calendar year. Only 27 priests to serve our 48 parishes in 28 counties. What is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calling us to do? I begin today, on Corpus Christi Sunday, our **Prayer for Priestly Vocations** project.

Single men and boys: How do you learn of your vocational call? Does Jesus text you or call you on His cell phone? Jesus speaks to your heart in prayer. Guys, spend time every day in silent prayer with God. Diligently pray, humbly listen, and courageously follow. If God calls you to be a husband and dad, that will make you most happy. If God calls you to be a priest, that will bring the most joy to your life. Guys, if you feel an initial call to be a priest, a hint from God that He wants something *extraordinary* from you, *what is the next step?* Speak to someone about it: parents, your parish priest, a priest on the vocation team, another adult, or me. Continue to pray. Jesus wants to speak and listen to you, He wants you to speak and listen to Him, He loves you so much!

Parents: You have a graced role in the vocational call of your children. For your son, open your hearts to his possible call to the priesthood. “Wait a minute,” you say, “I don’t want that! I want my son to be a husband and dad, and have my grandchildren!” Our Loving Lord had a plan for your son before time began. He has called your son by name. God has carved your son in the palm of His hand. The vocational call that will make your son most holy and happy is God’s

plan for him, not yours or mine or Pope Francis'. God's plan. Trust in Jesus to lead your son to follow, and you his parents, to accept that plan. Pray for this. If your son's vocational call is to be a husband and dad, we rejoice! If it is to be a priest, we rejoice!

Everyone: Two years ago we began our Vibrant Ministries appeal, of which one of the goals was *Alms for Priestly Vocations*. Last Lent, we began *Fasting for Priestly Vocations*. Thank you for your faithfulness in these efforts. We are now beginning an intensive **Prayer for Priestly Vocations** project. We will have a series of articles the next few months on the Eucharist, the source and summit of our lives. Only a priest can act in the person of Christ and change ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We will have a series of articles on Parish Prayer for Priestly Vocations (below, center), *Family Prayer for Priestly Vocations*, and *Individual Prayer for Priestly Vocations*. I ask all the faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City to participate. Pray, asking the Lord to send our boys and single men into the harvest of faith as seminarians and future priests. Pray, opening the hearts of these guys to pray, listen, and follow Jesus. Pray, also for all vocations: the consecrated life and matrimony.

In my years in the Wichita Diocese, Bishop Gerber often taught to be hope-filled, to resist the temptation to be jaded or discouraged. The Lord gives us "**a future full of hope**" (Jeremiah 29:11). I trust that God will provide us with bountiful vocations: happy couples and parents, holy religious, and dedicated priests for the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City. Our Catechism teaches that "Holy Mass ... concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives" (#1332). Let us go forth in **Prayer for Priestly Vocations**, and follow Christ. Thank you for your faithfulness and love.