



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

June 12, 2015
Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

My dear brother priests:

On the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus I want to write to you to offer you my grateful prayers for each of you and for the priestly ministry all of you share with me in the service of the People of God of this blessed Diocese. In that spirit may I offer you the fruit of my recent prayer and reflections on our priestly life and the needs of our Diocese.

Let me begin by calling your attention to the **Biking4Vocations Pilgrimage** that will arrive this coming Sunday, June 14, at the front of Saint Agnes Cathedral. I will greet Father Joe Fitzgerald, Father Marc Swartvagher and three seminarians, Stephen Rooney, Dominik Wegiel and Steven Diaz, who are covering a 1400 mile journey to spread the message that a call from God to be a priest is the greatest gift any man could receive from a loving Father who calls priests by name to follow his Son, Jesus Christ. In a real and concrete way Father Joe's initiative is the kick-off and the symbol of what I want to say to you on this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

You all know that I will not use the term "priest shortage" because it is negative and it has become a buzz word for people who want to advance alternatives to the priesthood that would endanger the very inner fabric of our life as a Church faithful to the teaching and the command of Jesus Christ. Still, I recognize and am deeply conscious of the reality we face as this local Church. Pope Saint John Paul II in 2003 wrote to priests on Holy Thursday, *there will never be sufficient priests for the preaching of the Gospel and the pastoral care of the People of God*. We know that is surely true here. You, my brother priests, deserve the applause and the support of us all, beginning with me, for your generosity and your priestly zeal!

While I have the chief responsibility for encouraging vocations and have been blessed by excellent vocation directors throughout these fourteen years, I am asking you, my brother priests, to join me and Father Joe in a new and concerted effort to deepen awareness of the need for vocations to the priesthood in our Diocese. This is a responsibility we all share as priests. Yet it is equally true that, in different ways, this aspect of our life as Church belongs just as much to all the faithful of our Diocese.

First, **we** have to be the leaders in creating a culture that prays for and encourages vocations to the priesthood for our local Church. There is no question that the priests I have had the joy of ordaining these past thirteen years are fine men who enrich a presbyterate that has been marked by outstanding priests for whom I have the greatest admiration and affection. I am proud to be part of this presbyterate and I pray daily thanking God for you and asking His Son to accompany and inspire you in all you do.

Because of this I do not hesitate to ask you to re-commit yourselves to praying for and encouraging vocations as an integral part of your priestly witness in our parishes, schools and places of formation and witness. Integral to this is a determination that we priests will be the leaders to awaken in our lay faithful a new consciousness for a culture of vocations.

Second, I cannot do it alone. Joe cannot do it alone. We priests together cannot do it by ourselves. We need to harness the power of prayer and the enthusiasm of our people to make vocations to the priesthood a major part of our life as Church. We are not embarking on a “program” for vocations. Any group can do that. As Church we are a network of relationships, all held together by the powerful inner dynamic of the Holy Spirit. And we all bear a co-responsibility for the good of this local Church. This building up of a **culture of co-responsibility** embraces families, parishes, schools, priests, deacons, consecrated women and men and us bishops. We all have a stake in praying for, encouraging and supporting men who may be open to hear a call from God and respond to that invitation to “follow me”. Think of how the Spirit can give new life and hope to us if we all let God’s love sweep us up into a culture of co-responsibility for vocations to the priesthood on Long Island!

With this in mind I am calling you, my closest and most faithful collaborators, to begin this new effort, this challenge, this opportunity beginning this Fall. During the summer Father Joe and I will be sending you a packet and will be asking you to join us in the following ways.

- During September and October, have very specific intentions for priestly vocations at all Masses. Many of you already do that and I thank you. Common petitions we all can use will be provided.
- The packet we will send will have prayer cards for priestly vocations. Distribute them widely. Use them at parish meetings and gatherings. Urge families to use them at home. Thus we fulfill the Lord’s command to *ask the Master of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest*. Thus we help open up the hearts of our people in their families and in all parish gatherings to promote and encourage vocations.
- The weekend of October 3/4 I will be asking EVERY PRIEST to preach on the co-responsibility we ALL have to pray for and encourage vocations. Materials including readings and homily outlines will be provided during the summer.
- On Saturday October 10 we will have a FAMILY FEST FOR VOCATIONS at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Huntington. Come with as many of your parishioners as you can to share in that day of entrusting our prayers and efforts to the Lord. Father Fitzgerald will be providing you with details about that day once they are finalized this summer.

In the second reading for the Mass of the Sacred Heart, Saint Paul tells how beautiful is the gift that was his and is ours: *To me this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ and to bring to light for all what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the Church...* By our prayer and by our witness, may we priests with our people be blessed with new vocations to the priesthood so all the People of God may have priests to offer them Christ’s life so that all *may be filled with the fullness of God!*



Bishop of Rockville Centre