

Diocese of Oudtshoorn Vocations Pastoral Letter 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Risen Lord,

At the Diocesan Pastoral Council meeting last month, I said that our diocese is facing a crisis in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In the last 8 years only one priest has been ordained and we at present have only one young man at the seminary. Is this what God wants? I don't believe so. God wants to bless the Church with many priests and also with the witness of the religious life, a life consecrated to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. But why is there a shortage of vocations?

I learned recently that when Jesus says in the Gospel: 'many are called but few are chosen' – in the original Aramaic language which Jesus spoke, it can mean 'many are called but few choose'. Let us reflect on that for a moment. Many are called but few choose to respond to that call. **God is calling but many are choosing to look the other way.**

And so we pray today not so much for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life but rather that young people will listen attentively to that call; that the community will help them to discern the call and that the Lord will give them generosity of heart and a deeper faith to know that to be a priest and to be a religious sister or brother can be a very meaningful life.

There are three things that can help young people to discern whether they should choose priesthood or religious life.

Firstly, a good family life. Yes, the family that prays together stays together. A family where there is love, where family members care for each other and work together, help one another and contribute to build up the family. An environment where young people are formed to sacrifice their own desires and to be sensitive to the needs of others. Such a family will be open to hear the voice of the Lord.

Secondly, a good parish life. The parish community that gathers every Sunday for Mass is a family. The ward that comes together every week for prayer is a family. Is there true love in our parishes? Do we care for one another? Do we do the work of this family together or do we leave it to a few people? Somebody complained the other day: it is always the same people that must do everything in the church. Sometimes it could be someone who has been in a particular ministry for many years who does not want to make space for the younger generation. No, the parish is a community of servers. Each of us takes on a particular service for the good of the parish. We are responsible for each other. We help each other, we encourage each other, we are sensitive to the

needs of each other, we do not judge one another, we do not exclude someone, there is no competition, we are not boastful. We in the parish are a believing, praying and caring family.

Thirdly, holy and happy priests. As Pope Francis said, we cannot preach the Good News with long faces. And if young people do not see true holiness in priests they may not become aware of the attraction of priesthood and religious life. A holy and happy priest is not the one who gives the best outward show, who acts as if he is holy. It is not the most popular priest. It is not the best organiser, the priest with the most successful programmes, the best preacher. No, some of these things may occur together with holiness but they are not necessarily the same thing. The holy priest is one who looks like Christ in what he says and does. He is another Christ. Jesus had a magnetic effect on people, he drew people to him. The same with young people today, they are drawn to the Christ they see in priests.

Come, do not be afraid to ask whether God is calling you, young person, to be a priest or a religious sister or brother. Do not keep your children, dear parents, from listening to this calling of the Lord to your child. He is a generous God and will bless you and the church and the world abundantly. Many are called to follow Christ in the priesthood and religious life. Let us pray that many in our diocese will choose to respond to that call.

May the Good Shepherd lead us to green pastures!

+ Bishop Frank de Gouveia