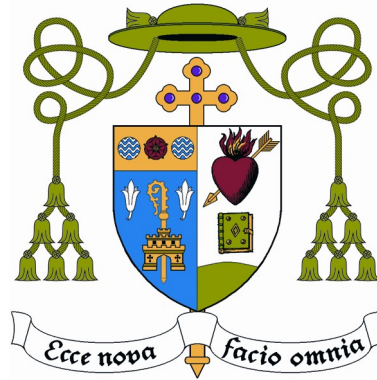


PASTORAL LETTER
FOR THE
YEAR FOR PRIESTS



**TO BE READ PUBLICLY IN ALL CHURCHES OF THE DIOCESE ON THE WEEKEND OF
SATURDAY/SUNDAY 4-5 JULY, 2009**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A few weeks ago on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Pope Benedict chose to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney, the Cure of Ars and patron saint of parish priests throughout the world, by declaring a *Year for Priests*. What Pope Benedict had in mind was the renewal of priests in their life and ministry, helped especially by the prayers, support and encouragement of the people they serve in their parishes. As bishop, I write this Pastoral Letter to offer my own support and deep appreciation to the priests of our Diocese of Lancaster for all that they accomplish, often quietly and unseen, in their various parishes and ministries for the spiritual good of Christ's people entrusted to their care.

In order to come among his people, Christ depends on his priests. Their life of service in word and sacrament continues to make his incarnation an enduring reality for each successive generation of believers. Each one of us has occasion to be grateful at some point in our lives for the healing word and sacramental ministry of a particular priest. Christ continues to walk among us as our Lord and saviour through the faithful, daily witness and ministry of our priests. At his ordination a priest is asked to make a personal gift of himself to the Lord, to be in a mysterious but very real way "another Christ" to God's people for the rest of his life. When we consider the many years of service and sacrifice given to us by our priests here in the Diocese of Lancaster we are indeed humbled, and grateful to God for such unstinting generosity in the Lord's service. Their priesthood is truly a gift of Christ to his Church.

In recent years we have been made all too painfully aware of the personal sins and failings of some priests and the hurt and damage they have inflicted on others, in

particular the young. The deeds of these priests have brought shame on all of us, and on the Church at large, and are a gross travesty of what Jesus Christ intended his priesthood to be. Our deepest sympathies go to the victims of such evil behaviour. However, the misdeeds and evil actions of a relatively small number of priests should not be allowed to undermine or cast a shadow on the exemplary lives and excellent pastoral work of the vast majority of our priests. I pray that this *Year for Priests*, dedicated to the memory of St. John Vianney, may be a continuing inspiration and encouragement to all our priests in their service of God's people.

For many years our Diocese of Lancaster has been blessed with sufficient priests for the needs of our people, but those years of plenty are now coming to an end. Many of our priests are growing old and we do not have the same number of young priests to replace them. I appeal to you, dear people of Lancaster, to renew your prayers to the Lord of the harvest that our diocese will always have sufficient priests to minister to the faith of those who will come after us in the Church of tomorrow. I ask parents of families to be generous in their response should the Lord be calling one of their sons to the priesthood. Remember, parents, that the Lord is never outdone in generosity.

Throughout this *Year for Priests*, I strongly recommend that Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and a Holy Hour for our priests and for vocations take place at a suitable time in every single church of our diocese. In this way the whole diocesan family will be united in prayer to the One who is our great High Priest, Jesus Christ himself.

Assuring you, brother priests, of my renewed appreciation for all that you do, and with a blessing to you and all the faithful people of the Diocese of Lancaster.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael G. Campbell OSA".

+Michael Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster