



DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

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Pastoral Letter **Good Shepherd Sunday 2021** **25th April 2021**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today, throughout the Universal Church, we celebrate *Good Shepherd Sunday*, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and the Consecrated Life.

As I write to you our parish communities are just at the beginning of a process of recovery from the Global Pandemic. It will hopefully be a time both of *healing* but equally of *memory*. As we reach out to a new future, we will also want to take time reflect on the events of this last year and how they will no doubt serve to shape the time ahead in our Diocese and our country.

It is too early to predict which image from the pandemic will prove most iconic around the world in the years to come when, please God, the last test has come back negative. Perhaps it will be the sight and sound of clapping for our heroes in our NHS and care homes, or families grieving loved ones, or the socially distanced queues outside supermarkets or our quieter schools and our empty football stadia and airports.

For me, at least, it will be the image of Pope Francis leading the world in prayer last March during his extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi*. I think, for all of us who watched on that night, the solitude of the Pope as he walked through a dark, dank and empty St. Peter's Square will remain one of the defining images of our time. The whole occasion was haunting but unforgettable.

That night Pope Francis showed all of us what the Priesthood is all about. He stood before God with all the world's fears and anxieties, its pain and sorrow; and, at the same time, he stood before humanity offering us the peace, comfort and hope of the Gospel. That night we saw in Francis the perfect witness of a priest – that is a bridge or real connection between God and humanity.

The months ahead are going to be a time of challenge and change for all of us. As old certainties fade away we will need our priests, more than ever, to bring us to God and to bring God to us– through the Sacraments, their preaching of the Word and their spiritual fatherhood over us.

Can our parish communities respond to this need? Can they become places where vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life are fostered, nourished and

sustained? I am counting on you to rise to this challenge to work and pray earnestly and without ceasing for vocations from the younger generation of our parishes.

I know you will want me to thank our beloved priests of Paisley Diocese for reaching out and remaining so close to us in our spiritual needs this past year. Even though our churches were closed, our priests carried on their daily pastoral care: tending our sick, comforting our dying, consoling our bereaved, reaching out to those on the margins whom it is so easy to forget. Very far from the 'hired hands' of today's Gospel, they proved steadfast, loyal and faithful shepherds to all of us in our hour of need.

In the past year we have missed gathering together for Holy Mass! Yet through it all our Church has still been there to offer us hope, light and peace, just as it always does, and in no small measure due to our priests, God's *Good Shepherds* among us.

Dear friends, on *Good Shepherd Sunday*, and every day in the life of our communities, I urge you to pray for and support our vocations. In the last four years your prayers have ensured that four fine, young men will have been ordained as priests for our diocese, and one young woman from our diocese entered religious life; proof that the Lord really hears and answers our prayers for vocations!

May Blessed Mary, Our Lady of Paisley, touch the hearts of our young men and women to help them discover with joy the call of the Lord in their lives, and may She accompany us and intercede for us always.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and your loved ones, may God bless,

Bishop John