

# VOCATION MATTERS



NATIONAL VOCATIONS OFFICE  
IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Newsletter of the National Vocations Office

[www.vocations.ie](http://www.vocations.ie)

Summer 2019

It has been a busy number months for the National Vocations Office since the last newsletter. The highlights of the past few months have been the televised broadcast of Mass for the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations** from the studios in RTE and running of the second **National Come and See** retreat in Maynooth. In total 28 men attended these two retreats.

We attended the annual EVS (**European Vocation Services**) meeting, which this year was held in Rome. There was a very special moment in this meeting, where we had an audience with **Pope Francis**. The Holy Father departed from his prepared script and spoke from his heart. He said we must learn to speak the language of young people and the



Church must help young people learn how "to dialogue with the Lord" and how to ask him, 'What do you want from me?' "This is important, it is not an intellectual conviction," the pope said. "No, the choice of a vocation must be born from dialogue with the Lord, no matter what their vocation is."

It was coincidental to hear Pope Francis saying this, as for some months now, we have been reflecting in the **Council for Vocations** about how we go about promoting vocations. Some members have suggested that we should meet with young adults to solicit their views, to listen to them and to learn their language. With this in mind, Bishop Cullinan (Chair of the Council) suggested we meet with representatives from the various groups involved in youth evangelisation. He proposed that the **Youth 2000 summer festival in Clongowes** would provide such an opportunity.

I also attended a short conference in **Valladolid** accompaniment and discernment in light of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* which provided a valuable insight into their Propaedeutic formation programme.

Finally, the Office is arranging a short conference for the Irish Diocesan Vocation Directors in November on the **Spirituality of Accompaniment and Discernment**. This is being led and facilitated by **Br. Paul Bednarczyk CSC**

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# GETTING YOUTH'S PERSPECTIVE ON VOCATIONS



At the last Council for Vocations meeting, there was a discussion about Vocations promotion among Youth and it was suggested that would be important for us to hear from our young people about what they think about vocation, and the language that should be used. Bishop Cullinan proposed that the Youth 2000 Summer Festival was on in Clongowes Wood College (Clane, Co. Kildare) from 15th to 18th August, and that this would provide an unique opportunity to have an initial brainstorming meeting with representative leaders from the various groups that are involved in youth evangelisation.



Bishop Cullinan has arranged for a room to be made available on Saturday 17th August for a working lunch meeting, which will run from 1pm to 2:45 pm. He has written to the key groups (Net Ministries, Youth200, Pure in Heart, etc.) inviting them. He has asked me to extend this invitation to all the Vocation Directors, who may wish to participate in this. All vocation directors are welcome to attend.

## Clongowes Wood College

**1 Pm to 2:45 pm**

To attend:

Email: [eric.cooney@vocations.ie](mailto:eric.cooney@vocations.ie)



## A REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL COME AND SEE RETREATS



### ***Two events – 28 Men – 6 Months***

In May we hosted the second National “Come and See” retreat for men seeking to explore a vocation to Diocesan priesthood. This second retreat was hosted in the Seminary in Maynooth.

Coincidentally there were fourteen men, (we also had fourteen men also at the first retreat last November in Mount St. Anne’s) ranging in age from 19 to their mid-forties. It is interesting that in the space of six months, there have been 28 men who have attended an over-night weekend retreat to explore priesthood. Some points worth reflecting on:

- There was no overlap – i.e. none of the men attended both weekends!
- The majority of the men were between 28 and 38
- Only a few of the men were already know to their vocations director, i.e. they came on the weekend

because they either were told about it, or saw a poster or email about the retreat.

The feedback that we received from the seminary staff and the various Vocation Directors involved were of the overall ‘quality’ of those who attended. I put this down to the fact that all applications were channelled through the vocations director of the diocese where they lived. So this allowed for a certain level of validation of the applicants suitability, unlike an “open day” where you do not know who is going to turn up on the day. Another benefit of this process was the very low number of men who cancelled at the last minute.

One benefit of hosting the retreat in the seminary was the opportunity for the men to meet and talk with the seminarians who were present. A surprising benefit was the feedback I received from the seminarians that they were encouraged to see that there were others exploring priesthood and discerning a vocation.

The National Office are very appreciative of the support welcome and hospitality provided by the staff and seminarians for the duration of the weekend.

***“They spoke to each other of all the things that had happened” (Lk 24,14)***



*Bishop Donal McKeown, Deacon Eric Cooney, Margaret Cartwright, Fr Willie Purcell and Archbishop Jorge Carlos Patrón Wong, Secretary for the Council for Clergy with responsibility for Seminaries*

Bishop Donal Me Keown, Deacon Eric Cooney- Administrator of the National Vocations Office , Margaret Cartwright of Vocations Ireland and Fr Willie Purcell National Diocesan Vocations Coordinator recently attended the European Vocations Services Meeting in Rome. Some 50 delegates from 22 European countries met in Rome, from 4 to 7 June, to attend the annual meeting of the heads of the vocations ministry of the Bishops’ Conferences of Europe. It’s theme was: **“They spoke to each other of all the things that had happened” (Lk 24,14)**. We had questions and perspectives after the Synod, three days of prayer, testimonies and reflections on the vocation to the priesthood and to the male and female consecrated life, to marriage in the light of the synod on the youth, and the final document and Apostolic Exhortation ***Christus Vivit***.

The pinnacle moment of the conference, the audience with Pope Francis who, in his impromptu speech, reminded the participants that a vocation *“is not proselytism. It’s not looking for new members for this club. No! The work for vocations must move along the line of growth that Benedict XVI said so clearly: the growth of the Church is by attraction, not by proselytism.”*

The Challenge for the Church, the Pope continued, is *“communicating with young people. Working with them*

*requires a lot of patience. A lot of listening skills... It is necessary to understand their language, which is a poor language of communion, because although they know so much about contacts, they don’t communicate. We need to accompany, guide, and help the youth so that the encounter with the Lord will show them the way in life. Young people are all different; they are different in all places, but they are equal in their anxiety, in their thirst for greatness, in the desire to do good, they are all the same.”*

*“In the current almost univocal cultural context, vocations have diminished, but neither the enthusiasm of the proposal nor the certainty that the Lord will not fail in giving ministers to His Church has been extinguished; the call to a special consecration is still attractive and timely. Young people are the recipients of our commitment with a look of benevolence, esteem and trust; they want to be loved within so much loneliness that they experience. They are strict with the Church but if they find credible witnesses from within it then they are attracted to it. They want to be involved in the Announcement to become first witnesses for other young people. They must be accompanied so that they recognize the work of God in their personal experiences and are available to listen to God who asks something more of them.”*

Fr Willie Purcell

## PROPAEDEUTIC FORMATION - VALLADOLID

### *Accompaniment, Discernment, Selection and Propaedeutic Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*

In July, I attended a conference for Vocation Directors, which was being run by the staff of the Royal and Pontifical English College of St Alban in Valladolid and facilitated by Rev Dr. Gerard Fieldhouse-Byrne from the St. Luke's Centre in Manchester.

In the light of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, this conference explored the first steps of the formation journey, looking at each stage in detail. Sessions covered:

- The accompaniment and discernment stages addressing issues around safeguarding and safer recruitment.
- Elements of the selection process with particular reference to the psychological assessment of candidates.
- Explanation in the use of candidates' Psychological Reports.
- The propaedeutic stage and its content.

The Propaedeutic stage prepares each individual candidate for the priesthood for the journey ahead. It gives them time and space to develop a grounded spiritual life and helps them to prepare for the prolonged study that the formation journey demands. The year-long programme recognises that candidates for the priesthood today come from many different backgrounds and all have unique circumstances. As a result, the formation process takes nothing for granted. The programme helps students develop a solid, missionary vision for the priesthood and understanding of the Catholic Church.

At the end of the Propaedeutic stage a candidate should be aware of the challenges that lie ahead and well prepared to give himself fully to his formation for a life of ministry within the Universal Church. The Propaedeutic stage is the indispensable period of intellectual, spiritual, human and pastoral formation of candidates for the priesthood. These are vital areas of growth in developing the skills necessary to enable seminarians to look towards the next stage of formation with greater personal self-awareness and honesty. It gives the student an opportunity to explore the faith, so that when they move on to the next seminary phase, where the academic element is substantial, this challenge will seem less daunting as they will have constructed more solid foundations.

The conference was attended by 18 Vocation Directors and collaborators from across the UK and Ireland. There was a good representation from Ireland comprising six vocation directors and myself. I came away with a very good sense of the importance of a propaedeutic programme and the importance of a candidate having a psychological assessment.

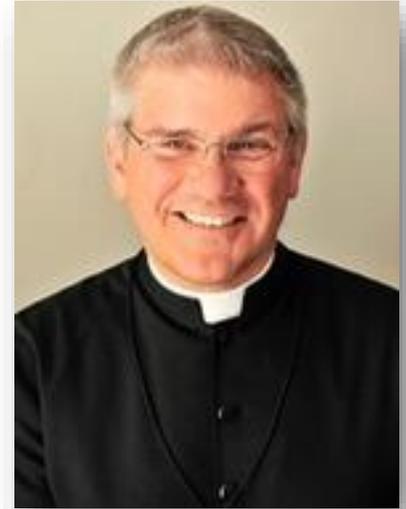


Left to right: Fr Philip Carroll (Spiritual Director), Fr Damien Quigley (Armagh), Fr Ian O'Neill & Fr Martin Whelan (Galway, Kilmacudagh and Kilfenora), Fr Damian Cassidy O'Carroll (Vice Rector), Fr Enda Cunningham (Dublin), Canon Paul Farrer (Rector), Deacon Eric Cooney (Vocations Office), Fr Séamus McEntee (Dublin)

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF ACCOMPANIMENT & DISCERNMENT

### *A Collaborative Conference facilitated by Br. Paul Bednarczyk, CSC*

At our last National Vocations Director's gathering, there was a request for additional input on accompaniment and discernment. To deliver on this request, the National Vocations Office has been fortunate to secure Br. Paul Bednarczyk CSC to come to **Maynooth** to facilitate and present on these vital stages of candidate selection for priestly formation.



Br. Paul Bednarczyk, CSC, a Holy Cross brother, teacher, and national leader in vocation ministry. Br. Paul served as Vocation Director for his province for nine years. He also worked for three years as Formation Director and has served several terms on his Provincial Council. In July of 2002, Br. Paul assumed the role of Executive Director of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC), where he oversaw this professional organization of religious vocation directors consisting of over 900 members in 15 countries. Within this capacity, he served as a consultant to the U.S. Bishops Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. He has served as a member of the Advisory Board of Praesidium Religious Services, the Corporate Board of Holy Cross Family Ministries, and on several international Holy Cross commissions.

- Br. Paul has published several articles on vocation ministry. In addition to his retreat work, he has been invited to give workshops in vocation ministry throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.
- Br. Paul spearheaded four major studies on religious vocations, the most famous being the 2009 NRVC/CARA Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life.
- At the invitation of Cardinal Sean O'Malley, in 2009, he addressed the entire assembly of U.S. Bishops on the study results.

Br. Paul was still serving as Executive Director of NRVC when the 2016 General Chapter elected him the Congregation's First General Assistant and Vicar. In this new leadership role, he now resides in Rome in the Holy Cross Generalate, where he works fulltime.

Commencing with supper at 6pm on the evening of **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup>** and finishing with lunch on **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**.



**Further details and application form will be sent out to the Vocation Directors in the next few weeks.**