

“The vocation to the priesthood so greatly exceeds ordinary human strength that its germination, its growth and its fruitfulness are entirely dependent on the prayer that must precede, sustain and accompany the life of every priest.”

Fr Werenfried van Straaten

Ready to serve at God's Altar: Seminarians being ordained at Redemptoris Mater and St John Paul II Seminary La Punta, Peru.

MIRROR



☎ 020 8642 8668
www.acnuk.org

No 1 • January 2019
Published eight times per year

Dear Friends,

A central theme of the recent bishops' synod on youth was the question of vocation. The synod fathers stressed that all of us have a calling from God. And indeed, the vocation of each one of us is this: to belong to Christ through Baptism, to be marked by the seal of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and to become one body with him in the Blessed Eucharist. The mystery of the priestly vocation is closely tied up with the administration of the Sacraments. But at the same time, the Sacrament of Holy Orders is a gift that exceeds our human nature. It is a calling that we do not merit. God chooses whom he wills. Often he chooses men who are altogether unprepared for his call. Therefore every priestly vocation is a story of marvels, in which the future miracles that God intends to work through his priest are already implicitly contained.

One of these many marvellous stories was related to us by Fernando, now in the seminary in Montevideo, Uruguay. The country is highly secularised and, for decades now, Masonic influence within government has banished everything religious from public life. Consequently, a religious vocation

here is a miracle in itself. Fernando, now 21, has been preparing for ordination for four years. His story began some years earlier, on a day like any other. “I was at school when the shocking news came through that Father William, our local parish priest, had been killed in a car accident. He was very close to our family. I couldn't believe it, but when I arrived home, people were already flocking



“The Sacrament of Holy Orders is a gift that exceeds our human nature.”

into the church where his body was laid, to bid him farewell. I went there with my mother. Looking around inside the church, I saw nothing but distraught, perplexed and helpless faces around me, and on their faces the question: Why him? Why this 57-year-old priest of all people? I too was at a loss. And yet at the same time a question arose within me, which was repeated again and again: What can I do for these people? I felt I had to rise above myself. I looked up at a large picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which hung there and asked the question that burned in my heart: Lord, what do you want me to do? Then I looked down and saw

Fr William's coffin. That was my answer: become a priest. Immediately, all the objections began. My future plans were clear, everything had already been marked out. Yet the answer burned in me like a fire. And in my mind I saw a simple, poor priest like Father William, close to the people, visiting the sick. At this, the 'castle' I had built for my future simply collapsed and another 'castle' sprang up in its place, in which I had not laid a single brick. Other signs of God's mercy followed, till finally I said yes to God's call.”

Dear friends, Fr Werenfried often used to say when preaching that he would gladly give up the

entire collection if just one young man in the congregation were willing to place his life in the service of the Lord. Today there are many young men who have followed the call of the Lord and now need the help of your generosity. Most of them are poor and cannot afford to pay for their own training. Yet later they will repay everything they have been given by the Lord and work miracles in his name.

My grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Fr Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



“Lord, let me know your will”: seminarians in Pakistan.

A journey of discovery with God

“The fundamental question of our priestly life is this: Where is my heart directed? It is a question we need to keep asking, daily, weekly. Where is my heart directed?” So pondered Pope Francis.

This question lies at the heart of every vocation. It was what Jaroslav, now at the seminary of Vorzel in Kiev, [Ukraine](#), first asked himself when, more from curiosity than devotion, he began to prepare for his first Holy Communion. Before then he had found “everything boring: going to church; the sermon by a man I didn’t know; praying to a God I couldn’t see...” Now he recalls, “It was curiosity that opened my heart. I asked myself, How can it be that people devote their entire lives to God? That was the way God chose to knock on the door of my heart. And then came the moment when I said

‘Amen’ – an Amen from the depths of my heart. It was the beginning of my vocation, the beginning of a journey of discovery with God throughout my life.” Now he is at the Sacred Heart Seminary, preparing – with 23 others – for a life following the Lord. Pavlo is another of the seminarians who felt the same questions burning within him: “Where is my heart leading? Which road does it long to follow?” He was on retreat when he realised: “The priesthood is the path for me.” But there was still a slight sense of uneasiness. It was only when he entered the seminary chapel, where the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was taking place and they were chanting the Litany to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. “I was overcome by a feeling of profound peace and I knew: this is my heart’s true home.” However, Pavlo, Jaroslav and the others need our help to continue their journey to the priesthood. We have promised the seminary **£12,000** for the year ahead.

Bongaigaon Diocese, in northeast [India](#) is a young diocese which is growing fast. First founded, just 19 years ago, with 14 parishes, it now has 34, along with numerous out-stations. Priests are in short supply. Vocations are plentiful, and there are 23 seminarians, but their training is still costly for this poor diocese – and yet the diocese will not



“Here I am, Lord”: candidates in India.

compromise over the quality of their formation. Bongaigaon is classic mission territory. Many people in the villages and tribal groups are hearing the Good News of God’s love for the first time. The seminarians also visit the people, and then share their experiences with one another back in the seminary. They need our help, and we have gladly promised them **£8,100** for the current academic year.

In [Pakistan](#), in the diocese of Multan, similar experiences of community are vital. Confident of your generosity, we immediately said yes to Bishop Benny Travas when he asked for help (**£6,600**) to hold week-long retreats and days of recollection for his 33 seminarians. These are essential for Christians living in such a hostile environment, so they can reflect on their future priestly journey – and find rest for their hearts in God. ●



“Follow me”: a procession in Kiev.



Springtime of Providence

Caught by a wave: future fishers of men on the shore by Saint Petersburg.

According to Pope Francis, a priestly vocation is like a “diamond in the rough”, which needs to be “carefully polished with respect for the conscience of the candidates and with patience, so that they may shine among the People of God”.

In the seminary of Mary, Queen of Apostles in Saint Petersburg, **Russia** there are six of these “rough diamonds”. One of them has come almost from the ends of the earth – from the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far east of Siberia, some 12 hours away by plane. Kamchatka belongs to the diocese of Irkutsk. Yevgeni studied tourism, and it was as a tour guide that he met a Catholic priest who became “an example for my life”. Later, in the army, he saw how many soldiers had lost all inner peace and were deprived of spiritual nourishment. He prayed with them, as he had learnt from his priest friend: the Our Father, the Rosary, the Creed. He felt God was calling him. “I could have done every possible thing in the Church”, he says, “but there is one thing that only the priest can do, namely forgive sins in the name of Christ and make Christ truly present in Holy Mass.” This is what he felt called to do. “By the grace of God, I am now the only seminarian from the largest diocese in the world”, he says.

Gregor also felt the call. He was an electrical engineer and loved to party. One morning, after a night’s heavy drinking, he was sitting



Many of them died as martyrs: Seminarians at the main entrance to the seminary – pre-1917.

on the bus, bleary-eyed and late for work – and worried that he would be fired for being late. Then he remembered his Bible, opened it and read: “... from now on you will be catching men..., they left everything and followed him” (Lk 5:10-11). But Gregor still hesitated, wanting to see a sign. A mishap at work meant that his late arrival went unnoticed in the chaos. He took this as a sign and soon afterwards, Gregor was on his way to Saint Petersburg. Each of the six seminarians has his own story to tell, as have the six men who are preparing for the permanent diaconate. They all represent the latest chapter in a greater story, that of the seminary itself. Founded in 1879, and confiscated by the Bolsheviks in 1918, for decades it was used by Communists as an administrative building, then finally it was returned in a dilapidated state to the Catholic Church after the end of the Soviet Union by a decree signed by the then vice mayor, Vladimir Putin. It is more than a seminary, it is a place of profound symbolic importance, a historical treasure. 700 priests have passed through its doors, many died as martyrs, two have been proclaimed saints. Since it reopened in 1993, 64 priests have been ordained. A seminary is the heart

of the diocese, as then Apostolic Administrator of Moscow, Bishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz once said, “This seminary is the heart of the Catholic Church in Russia.” In short, it is a treasure in need of renovation. We are contributing towards the cost, which will run into millions. We have also assumed the running costs of **£69,900** per year for the entire complex. But they will decrease once the pilgrim house they are setting up opens its doors. “Mariya Tsaritsa Apostolov” – Mary, Queen of Apostles – is a symbol of religious freedom and the eternal youth of the Church. As Pope John Paul II said, it symbolises “the Springtime that blossoms from the hand of Providence”. ●



From tour guide to seminarian. Yevgeni, the only seminarian from the largest diocese in the world.



A sign from God for his 90th birthday

The country of **Malawi** in south-east Africa is one of the poorest in the world. Around a fifth of its 19 million inhabitants are Catholic. For the priests, Mass stipends are essential for their survival, and not least for the elderly priests. For Emeritus Bishop Allan Chamgwera of Zomba the stipends arrived on the day of his 90th birthday. "It was like a sign from God", he writes, "that he continues to hold his hand in blessing over me." He thanks us for our "generous support" and prays to God "that he may continue to sustain your enthusiasm for the Faith and the creativity to continue spreading the Good News".



Thomas Heine-Geldern,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

Almost 15 years ago one of our sons informed us that he felt God was calling him to the priesthood and that, after completing his studies in Architecture, he intended to follow this call.

The emotional response of family members was initially somewhat contrary to the joy one would expect when the Lord calls a new labourer into his vineyard. We were particularly concerned about how we could help prepare him for the many ongoing spiritual, intellectual and human challenges that he would encounter when following his vocation.

These concerns made us all very conscious of the importance of the family's spiritual formation and accompaniment of seminarians. No stone should be left unturned in helping them to develop in maturity, in supporting their faith, and thereby providing our future priests with the best possible preparation for the responsibilities of their future mission.

Thanks to your prayers and your generous donations, ACN is able to support one in every nine seminarians around the world on their not always easy path to priesthood. My heartfelt thanks to you all, along with the fervent plea to continue with your unfailing support.

With sincere good wishes,

Thomas Heine-Geldern

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Thankful for ACN

I give thanks for the existence of ACN and for the fact that the great deeds that began in the time of Father Werenfried continue to this day.

A benefactor in Germany

Happy to help

Many thanks for your letter. I am happy to be able to help – even if only in this modest way. I find it hard to imagine how I would bear it if I had to suffer or face persecution for my faith myself.

A benefactor in Slovakia

Christmas greeting and prayers

Our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all at ACN and our thanks for the work you are doing. Let us hope that this new birth of Jesus will bring peace to the hearts of all the

world, particularly where Christians are persecuted mercilessly for their faith. My sister and I both pray constantly to God for the missionaries and for all the people in these places, to give them the strength they need.

Two of our friends in Chile

Securely deposited

I have just received Mirror 8 and although I gave a donation just a few days ago for Christians in the Middle East, I feel I must put another €100 securely away from thieves, in that inviolable safe – the poor and needy. We must help the victims of this war, for which we in the West must bear some share of the blame. May God strengthen those helping our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria, and grant them happier days. May he bless you all.

A benefactor in France

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address is Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA. Please use the Freepost envelope – it saves you money and helps us. If you give by standing order or direct debit, or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

Mirror Editors: Jürgen Liminski & John Newton | Publisher: Aid to the Church in Need
Printed in the UK by Cliffe Enterprise, Eastbourne BN22 8UY
ISSN 0252-2535 *De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae*



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN UNITED KINGDOM

12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA | Tel. 020 8642 8668 | A registered charity in England & Wales (1097984) and Scotland (SC040748) | www.acnuk.org