



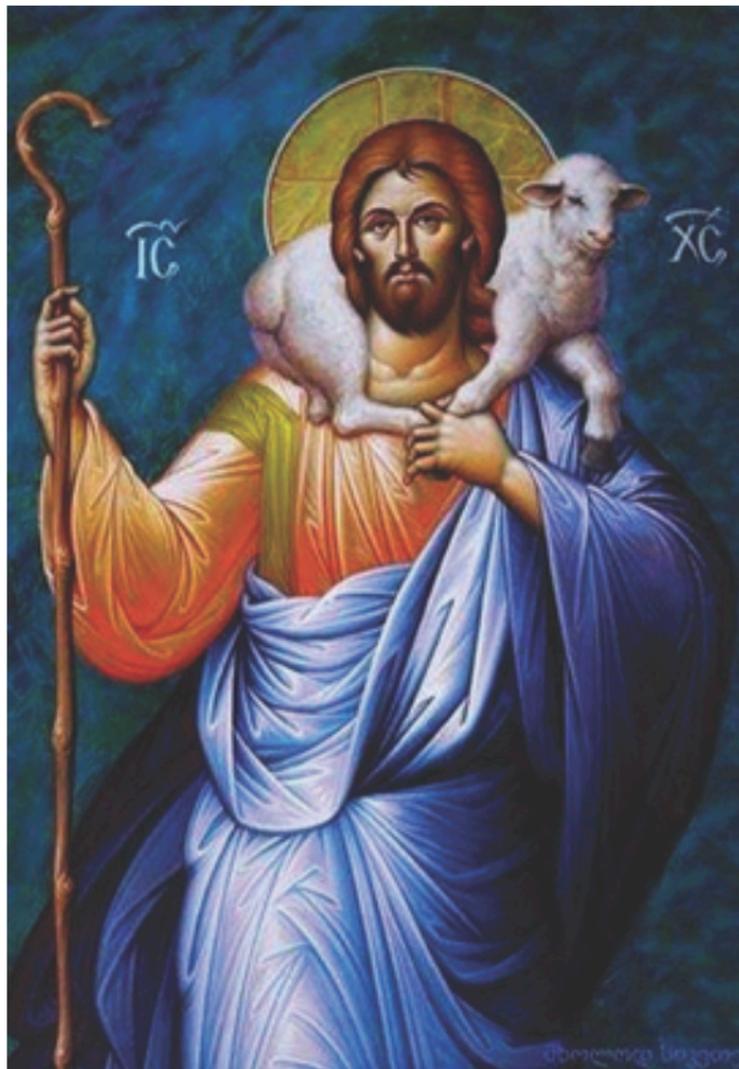
THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM
DIOCESAN VOCATIONS OFFICE

Ask · Invite · Pray



HANDBOOK FOR DEANERY VOCATIONS GROUPS

A Guide to Fostering a Culture of Vocation
in the Parishes of your Deanery



www.vocations.org.uk

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

- Matthew 9:35-38

DIOCESAN PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Lord Jesus, send labourers into your harvest.

*Inspire, in the hearts of your people, vocations to the
priesthood, diaconate and religious life.*

Bless our families with a spirit of generosity.

*May those whom you call to the priesthood, diaconate and
religious life have the courage to give themselves to your
Church as co-operators in your work.*

Amen.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| • Introduction | 3 |
| • What is Christian Vocation? | 4 |
| • Deanery Vocations Groups | 6 |
| ○ What is a Deanery Vocations Group? | 6 |
| ○ Setting up a Deanery Vocations Group | 7 |
| ○ How to run a successful meeting | 10 |
| • Vocations Promotion Activities | 11 |
| • Appendix: Deaneries of the Archdiocese of Birmingham | <i>Inside back cover</i> |



Schools promotion activities (L-R): Adoration and prayer for vocations, primary workshop, secondary careers fayre stall.

INTRODUCTION

The expression 'culture of vocation' is used to mean an environment in which we acknowledge that we are called to holiness and that we need to take time to discern our vocation. The work of the Diocesan Vocations Office primarily focuses on promoting and supporting vocations to the diocesan priesthood. However, promoting vocations to the priesthood cannot take place in isolation from other vocations because promoting vocation is the task of encouraging people to seek an encounter with Christ in which he will reveal the specific vocation he has in mind for them. Their generous response to that call will be greatly fostered by the Diocesan Vocations Office and communities that value vocation.

This handbook for Deanery Vocations Groups is offered to the priests and people of the Archdiocese of Birmingham as a guide to establishing deanery vocations groups. It is a useful aid to promoting a 'culture of vocation' within the deaneries. A Deanery Vocations Group is a core team that identifies and strategically plans vocation promotion in schools, parishes and at the deanery level.

For ease of use, this handbook is divided into three sections. Section one provides an explanation of the concept of vocation within the Church. Section two explains briefly what a deanery vocations promotions group is and how it can promote vocations. It offers some practical advice on how to establish and run a vocations group, including suggestions on how to choose team members and how to get the most out of a meeting. The third section provides details of some suggested vocations initiatives that have been successful in other Deanery Vocations Groups. However, you may have new ideas or already have established other activities. If so, we would love to hear from you and perhaps we can give them wider publicity.

We hope you will find this handbook a useful resource.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN VOCATION?

The nature of a Christian vocation

Vocation is a calling from God for a special mission in life that he has given no other. Every vocation is a vocation to love. Those who discern their vocation are free to respond to God either with a 'yes' or 'no'. However, those who respond with a 'yes' feel fulfilled once they make the decision.



Caravaggio – *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599-1600)

The Church - The assembly of the called

The Greek and Latin word for Church is "*ecclesia*," meaning "the assembly of those who have been called." Every Christian has been called by God: "I have called you by your name, you are mine."¹ By virtue of our baptism, we are called to holiness and we become children of God and members of the Church.

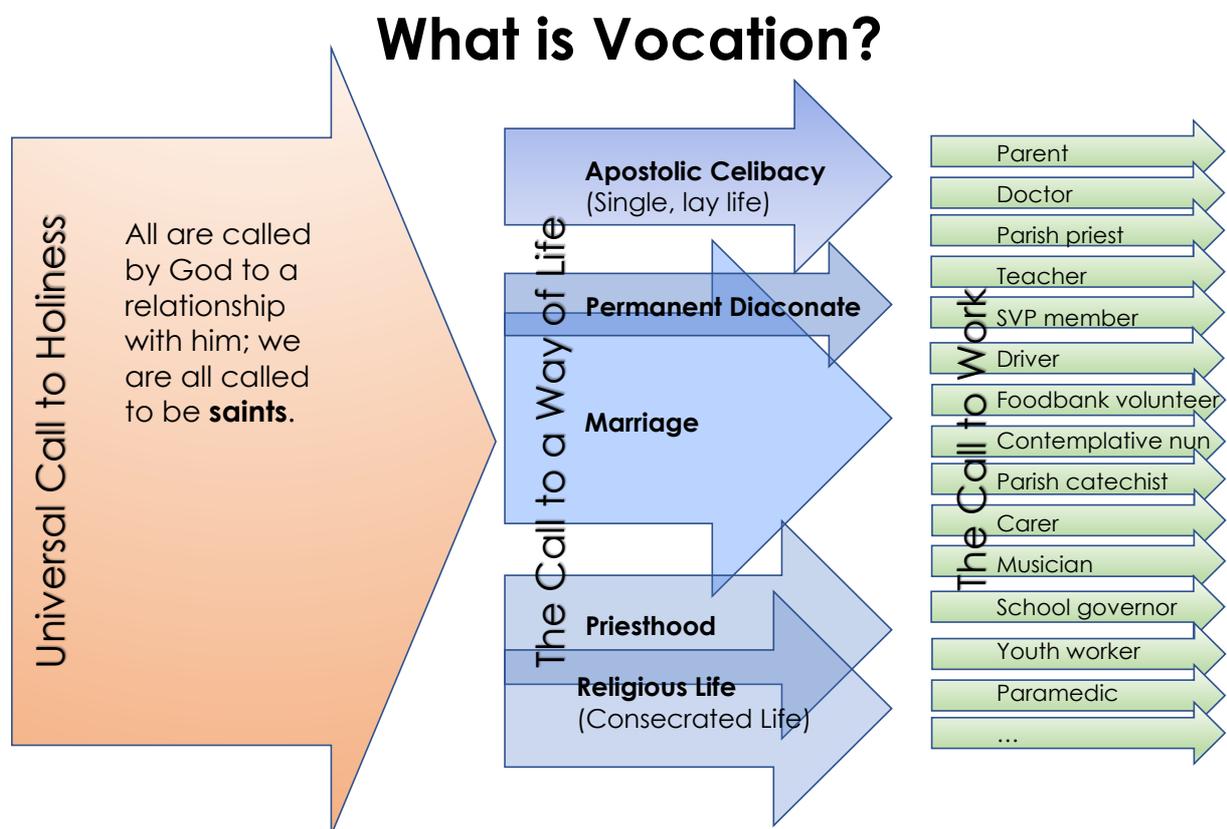
¹ Isaiah 43:1

Personal vocations

According to the Church teachings, there are permanent and temporal vocations. Permanent being the following states in life: priesthood, diaconate, religious life/apostolic celibacy, married life and single life. Some men and women simply choose to remain unmarried in order to dedicate themselves more fully to the task of sanctifying themselves and the Church. Others may join secular institutes or movements in response to a special call to live in the world as a consecrated lay person, for example, third orders. Temporal vocations (the call to work) change in different stages of one's life – for example, jobs.

The importance of encouragement

A very common response to the sense of a vocation is a feeling of fear or unworthiness. A young man discerning Christ's call to priesthood may similarly feel unworthy or not up to the task. Sometimes this is interpreted as a counter sign, evidence that there is no vocation, but nothing could be further from the truth. At some point, a person considering his or her vocation has to approach someone to talk about it. The Diocesan Vocations Office organises a number of discernment weekends throughout the year for men considering a priestly vocation. Religious congregations also advertise their discernment days/weekends on their websites and the Diocesan Vocations Office social media.



DEANERY VOCATIONS GROUPS

WHAT IS A DEANERY VOCATIONS GROUP?

A Vocations Group is a team of people who work within the structures of the parishes within a set deanery context to promote a culture of vocation at the parish and deanery level. St. John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Pastores dabo vobis*, speaks of the work of fostering vocations as a responsibility of the whole Church “from the particular Church to each of its parishes and to every part of the People of God ... There is an urgent need, especially nowadays, for more widespread and deeply felt conviction that all members of the Church, without exception, have the grace and responsibility to look after vocations.”² A particular responsibility of a vocations group is to find ways, appropriate to the circumstances of each parish, of fostering prayer for all vocation within the Church, especially vocations to the ordained ministry and the religious life. The purpose of a deanery vocations group is to promote a culture of vocations through:

- Encouraging prayer for vocations;
- Fostering an awareness of all vocations in the Church;
- Facilitating participation in vocations events.



Why establish a Deanery Vocations Group?

A Vocations Group, working in collaboration with the clergy of the parish, can ensure that parishes are united in prayer for vocations and that vocations are given a proper prominence in the life of the parish. In a very short space of time, a functioning Vocations Group can contribute to a transformation in the understanding and appreciation of vocations in all areas of the parish life. Furthermore, some parishes do not have resident

² *Pastores dabo vobis* 41

priests or religious sisters. Therefore, this initiative will help such parishes to become more vibrant.

SETTING UP A DEANERY VOCATIONS GROUP

At least at the beginning, the core team may need to approach people to ask them to join the deanery vocations group. A group could consist of as few as four or five members.

Group members

Preferably, schools and universities within a deanery should also be represented and people from various states of life, to include priests, permanent deacons and religious; married and single; young and the more experienced. There needs to be someone to organise and run its meetings; a chair and secretary could be appointed by the group.

All the members can be expected to show the following personal attributes:

- A strong desire to promote a culture of vocations;
- An openness to learning more about the Church's teaching in this area;
- A willingness to devote time and energy to helping the other group members, parishes and deanery as a whole to understand better their role in fostering vocations.

Tasks all members of the group members might be expected to perform include:

- Placing announcements in the parish newsletter;
- Requesting notices at Sunday Mass about forthcoming vocations events;
- Arranging for up-to-date notices to be displayed;
- Distributing vocation material to various groups and schools within the deanery;
- Being present at parish/deanery vocations events;
- Affirming all those involved in active ministry in the parish;
- Praying for seminarians and students for the permanent diaconate;
- Encouraging participation in Eucharistic Adoration for vocations;
- Asking the sick and the housebound to pray for vocations by giving them our *Prayer Chain of the Cross* prayer card.

Responsibilities

All members of a Deanery Vocations Group commit themselves to pray daily for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life. They are willing to learn more about the various vocations that exist within the Church. They accept and carry out the tasks assigned to them by the Deanery Vocations Group and are happy to report back.

Chair

The person chairing the Deanery Vocations Group needs to be someone with the following personal attributes:

- Skills in communicating with others and team building;
- An ability to speak publicly on behalf of the group;
- Willingness to ensure that the Deanery Vocations Group remains vibrant by being well-organised and effectively planning activities for the deanery;
- Readiness to serve as a link with other Deanery Vocations Groups and the Diocesan Vocations Office;
- Has the support and approval of the deanery clergy.

Once the chair and initial members of the group have been appointed, the following eight steps can help set up an effective vocations group:

1. Get organised

Appoint a secretary to take minutes and prepare and distribute the agenda for each meeting. It is sufficient to meet once a month or even once an academic term.

2. Plan activities

Make sure all the activities organised serve the purpose of the Deanery Vocations Group, which provide a useful point of reference to make sure you are on track. Don't try to start too many at once and always evaluate how things are going at your next meeting. This enhances mutual trust and friendship.

3. Check with the parish priests

It's best that there is a parish priest from the deanery present, so he can inform other priests and deacons during their deanery meeting of the ways in which the group promotes vocations in the deanery. Provide the priest with a report of your activities. If the group receives any feedback from priests, be ready to listen and take their advice

with humility and open-mindedness. He may decide to take an active role or may attend quarterly/ annually. It is likely that he will take an advisory role, which is much needed.

4. Let the parishes and schools know what's going on

The idea is to raise the profile of vocations in the deanery, across all of the parishes and schools. You can't do this if the parishes don't know you exist! The best way to do so is to publicise the presence of the Deanery Vocations Group in newsletters, on websites, by announcements and word of mouth.

5. Work with other groups in the deanery

The Deanery Vocations Group doesn't work in isolation. The group collaborates with other groups in the parish/deanery and so it is important to identify who these groups may be. It might also be possible to invite one of their members to attend one of your meetings. These groups might include school chaplains, youth ministers, young adult groups, prayer groups, ministers to the sick, parish ethnic communities and parish catechists. See ways in which groups can work together to promote vocations in the deanery.

6. Stay informed

You can check the Diocesan Vocations Office website frequently for ideas and upcoming events. The Diocesan Vocations Office sends out regular updates to keep you aware of what is happening and what resources are available. Support is available at any time from the Vocation Promotion Outreach Fieldworker that works with your deanery.

7. Network

Do try to stay in contact with your deanery's Vocation Promotion Outreach Fieldworker and other vocations groups in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. They can be a source of support and new ideas. It may also be possible to organise joint events. Keep the Diocesan Vocations Office informed of your activities by sending reports of resolutions, minutes from your meetings and other activities.

8. Find new members

Look out for potential new members for your group. It is good to bear in mind that after a time, some people may want to stand down to make room for new members. Invite parish youth group members to be a part of it. Teens and pre-teens are discerning and contemplating their future. Therefore, this is a good opportunity for them. Their creativity can make a big impact on the youth of the parish.

HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Before you call a meeting

Know why you are holding the meeting: what outcomes do you want to achieve? What are the tasks that is going to be addressed?

Give plenty of notice and distribute papers in advance

Try to keep your meetings to the same day and time each term or month. If your group members have busy schedules, it is good to get the dates in the diary at the beginning of the calendar or academic year. Make it clear that members are expected to have read and considered all paperwork in advance.

The agenda

Make sure people know how they can add items to the agenda. Avoid repeating items just because they were on a previous agenda; they rapidly go stale. It is good to establish that if someone wishes to raise an issue under "Any Other Business," they should mention it before the meeting starts. AOB items should be brief points of information; anything more substantial should be an agenda item (if necessary, deferred to a future meeting).

Keeping the meeting on track

It is important to ensure that the meeting will end at the established time. Use the agenda to keep the meeting on track. Let the group know the time frame and guidelines for working together. You can do this by summarising the purpose of the meeting at the beginning, for example: "We have only forty minutes today. I've asked Mary to update us on the vocations cross programme and then I'd like us to brainstorm some solutions to the challenges of reaching the young people in the deanery." The priest overseeing the group could attend perhaps quarterly or annually to make sure that the work is heading in the right direction, or to see if he wishes to take a more active role in the group's work.

The future

Set a date for the next meeting whilst people are together with diaries to hand. Be aware of the liturgical calendar and events in the life of local parishes and schools. Ensure enough time before the next meeting to allow agreed action points to be achieved. It is no surprise that obstacles will occur often when engaged in God's work. Knowing and accepting this will keep the Vocation Group on track amidst difficulties.

VOCATION PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

You may come up with your own ideas and we would certainly like to hear from you of any activities you develop that other deaneries/parishes might be able to adopt.

Some of the events that vocations promotions groups can organise within the deanery could be:

1. Decide a month of prayer for vocations for the deanery. Encourage parishes to say either the Rosary, go to Adoration or pray the Stations of the Cross etc during that month. The parish can choose which activity to undertake. The Group is encouraged to record what each parish is doing and remind all parishes of what is happening in other churches in the deanery. Prayer is the key to bear much fruit.
2. Organise an annual deanery vocations Mass in different parishes each year. Deanery secondary schools take it in turns year-by-year to organise the Mass. A good forum of chaplains could meet together twice a year to support the planning of the vocations Mass. Every primary and secondary school in the deanery is represented at the Mass.
3. Organise the formal publication of vocations news for the deanery, which could include dates for your diary, events organised, prayer to know one's own vocation, the new priests or deacons to be ordained, news from the Clergy Training Fund. It could include a day for vocations for each parish. This could be a traditional printed newsletter sent via post and email, a website or blog, and/or social media accounts.
4. Establish praying the *Diocesan Prayer for Vocations* before or after Mass in every parish of the deanery.
5. A travelling programme that focuses on prayer. Each deanery would use a chalice/ statue/cross/candle or any icon to take from one parish to the another over the course of one or two years. The icon would stay in that parish for one month. With the icon, a parish would receive some prayer resources to pray with.
6. Inviting a guest speaker to Sunday Mass, for example a permanent deacon from a neighbouring parish or a member of a religious congregation. Oscott College sends

out seminarians on Vocations Sunday to churches. However, we are aware that they cannot reach a large number of churches.

7. Encourage all primary and secondary schools within your diocese to have a vocations day. Please ask them to contact the Vocations Promoter of the deanery to get support and advice.

8. Promote the Diocesan Days of Adoration and Prayer for Vocations by encouraging parishioners to attend the days in neighbouring parishes by advertising them when approaching on the calendar.

9. Organise pilgrimages and trips for parishes to places of significance, perhaps convents, seminaries, places of apparition etc.

10. Organise a vocations event for the youth with prayer and sharing. Inviting young adults from CathSocs (if there are any universities in the deanery), secondary school students and any members of any youth groups in the deanery.

The book *Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry* by Rhonda Gruenewald offers useful advice on why parish vocation ministry is important, phases of a vocation ministry, and 57 activities that you can implement in your deanery's parishes with a step-by-step guide. We highly recommend this book, whether your Deanery Vocations Group is well-established or just starting out.



THE ARCHDIOCESE
of BIRMINGHAM

DEANERIES



DIOCESAN VOCATIONS OFFICE

“If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire.”

– St. Catherine of Siena

The Vocations Office exists to build up a culture of vocation across the Archdiocese of Birmingham. We support our seminarians and men in formation to be permanent deacons, as well as providing for the ongoing formation of clergy. Through our vocation promotion work, we engage with schools, university chaplaincies and parishes. We produce a range of prayer materials to help build your relationship with Christ. We also administer the diocesan Guild of St. Stephen, supporting altar servers in their commitment to God and his people.

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