



Office of the Bishop

**Pastoral Letter of the Most Reverend Bishop Ken Nowakowski,
Eparch of New Westminster**

**On the Proclamation
of the Year 2009 – the Year of Christian vocation
with the special emphasis on the priestly vocations**

Given on the 28th of March 2009 at the Cathedral of the Holy Eucharist

To the Reverend Clergy, Religious, and the Faithful
of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of New Westminster

Dearly beloved in Christ!

As resolved by our Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, held in September 2008, we are invited to continue to pray and meditate on the theme of Christian vocation, but with a special emphasis on priestly vocations. You have had an opportunity to read the Letter of the Head of our Church – His Beatitude Patriarch Lubomyr, in which he stresses the extreme importance of priestly vocations for the development and strengthening of our Church. Why it is so important? Because for its growth the Church needs good spiritual leaders, which means, first of all, priests who are well-qualified and duly-appointed for ministry. As your Bishop, echoing the call of the Synod of Bishops, I invite all of you to reflect on the priestly vocation in its various aspects:

CHRISTIAN FAMILY AS A CRADLE OF THE VOCATIONS

In his address His Beatitude particularly pointed out that when we think of good priestly vocations, we usually understand that to mean that there needs to be a sufficient number of vocations in the Church, in other words, that we have enough candidates in the seminaries. This is certainly an important issue, but not the only one, nor the most important. Vocations to the priesthood arise and are fostered long before a young man decides to enter the seminary. The first Christian school is the family, which inculcates a child with those values, which will accompany that child throughout his or her life. The family is like a cradle for new spiritual vocations. In the true Christian family a priest is always treated with great respect. Even in cases of unworthy behavior, the matter is dealt with in pain and compassion without any malice. In such a family the priestly vocation is considered one of the best possible, and when noticed, it is encouraged in different ways. Emphasizing the crucial role of the family in the formation of a priestly vocation, Pope Pius X said following: “Every

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priestly vocation comes from God and passes through the heart of the mother". As all other vocations the priesthood is a gift of God, and we all share responsibility, that it be worthily received.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS THE SCHOOL FOR THE VOCATIONS

The second and no-less important school of priestly vocations is the parish, led by a good parish priest - one who often preaches about vocations and watches carefully over the members of his community, seeking to discern any early sign of a vocation; which, when noticed, is carefully nourished. Also, a good parish is that exemplary community, which serves as fertile ground, giving bountiful fruits of priestly vocations. The priesthood is not a matter of one person. The ministry of a priest is a matter of the whole Church, since the priest is called to serve as a light to the nations through his word, deed and example of life. When his ministry proves to be unworthy, then not only the priest suffers – but the whole community with him.

CHRISTIAN LIFE AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE PRIESTS

His Beatitude stresses another key factor for vocations – the example of our heroes of the faith. Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Ukraine on June 2001, proclaimed 27 members of our Church as blessed martyrs. In doing so he noted that numerous priestly vocations in the seminaries of Ukraine were largely due to these martyrs and their sacrifice. However, we all share responsibility for those priests as well as for candidates to the priesthood. When they are in insufficient numbers, or they are not as worthy as we would wish, then we should look for the source of the problem within our families. Quite often we ourselves are responsible for the spiritual degradation of our family, the lack of respect to the priesthood, the lack of proper preaching and encouragement. We cannot expect an attraction to the priesthood to develop in families where children are solely instilled with the values of money, fame and family fortune.

“ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE” – THE PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

The priestly vocation does not come of itself; it must be nourished by the whole community over a long period of time, born in heartfelt and persistent prayer, and strengthened by the constant example of the pastor and the whole community. Let us ask ourselves how often we pray for priests? Particularly when we see their unworthy behavior or superficial fulfillment of their duties, what is our reaction? Is it spiteful criticism, or is it prayer and support? Nor should we underestimate the persistent attacks of the Church's enemy, who acts according to the principle: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Mt. 26:31).

Prayer is the first and the most efficacious means of support. As His Beatitude Lubomyr stresses, a priest's being and action depends on the power of prayer; not only his own, but also of the community he serves. Following the call of the Synod of Bishops, I encourage all of us to pray in particular for priests and deacons - not only

that there be a sufficient number, but above all, that those who have undertaken this holy office find in it their life vocation and piously fulfill it according to God's will.

It is precisely for this purpose that the Head of our Church asks us to add to the litany of Supplication the following petition: "We also pray for our priests, deacons and seminarians and for their holy vocation". As your Bishop I especially encourage you to reflect on how important it is that we support those who have answered God's call in our own Eparchy. I also encourage every parish and every family to think of a project or activity for this year in order to promote and support the vocation to the priesthood.

As an example, I recommend to you the prayer of the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky for a good Ukrainian clergy:

Lord, O Lord, look from Heaven, survey and visit Your vineyard, which You planted with Your right hand.

May Your mighty hand be always upon this people, whom You love.

O eternal God, grand Your people, in every generation to the end of the world, holy bishops and priests, filled with Your Spirit – pastors and teachers of Your Law, capable of preserving unaltered the truth of Your holy Revelation and lovingly teaching and leading that great people.

Grand to the Ukrainian clergy the grace to never fear any sacrifice, whether it concerns Your glory and the good of the people.

Inflame the hearts of Ukrainian priests with zeal for the salvation of souls. Open before their eyes the wisdom of Your Revelation and grand them a deep sense of the holiness of the task to which You have called them. Bless their work and their intentions. Protect them from every trouble. By Your grace, unite them so that in love they would be one – as You, Father, are with the Son and the Son, with You. Amen.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

Your Servant in Christ,
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