

Priestly Formation



WHAT IS INVOLVED AND WHAT DOES IT COST FINANCIALLY?

Of the approximate £10,000,000 that has been pledged for the Together In Faith appeal, around 10% has been ring-fenced for priestly formation.

Together In Faith donors are encouraged not only to continue supporting the training of diocesan priests financially but also to pray for those who are in training or have a vocation but have not yet considered it.

In order to get a better understanding of the process of priestly formation we talked to Fr. Mark Floody, Director of Vocations for the Northampton Diocese.

1. How much does it cost to train a priest in our Diocese?

The precise cost varies with the individual, depending on their route to training and which seminary they attend, but it is around £145,000 on average. In addition around £10,000 is also required to fund various promotions for the Priesthood; vocation weekends; pastoral support and the Vocations Director Fr. Mark Floody, who provides, as part of his time, support of the Seminarian programme.

2. What is the breakdown of this figure of £145,000?

Up to nine years elapse from the moment a prospective candidate approaches the diocese to consider training for the priesthood to being ordained as a priest. During this time the costs can be broken down as follows:

The period of discernment

This usually lasts for around two years. During this period, the prospective candidate explores if he has a vocation. Prospective candidates come from a wide variety of backgrounds. All require support during this time, although the extent varies with the individual. Costs would not normally exceed £1,000

The preparation year in Valladolid in Spain

This is usually undertaken after the period of discernment and prior to acceptance as a seminarian. It typically costs around £10,000 plus support, books, travel costs, health care etc which average less than £2,000.

The six years of seminarian training

This currently costs £20,000 per annum for a seminarian in Oscott College in England or £25,000 per annum for a seminarian in Rome. To this must be added costs of support, travel, fees, books, health care if required etc. which average around £2,000 per annum.

3. How many men in the Northampton Diocese are now either in training for the Priesthood or undergoing the period of discernment? Where are they in the training process?

In addition to four prospective candidates who are undergoing the period of discernment, there are four seminarians. One seminarian is in his second year of training in Rome. A further three are training at Oscott - one in his second year and two in their fourth year.

4. Will these anticipated ordinations to the Priesthood enable the Diocese to replace Priests who are retiring or leaving due to ill-health?

Although the Northampton Diocese has a relatively strong training programme at present, there are not enough seminarians to replace priests who retire or who become ill. This includes both those who are undergoing discernment prior to acceptance and those who are currently undergoing training.

This highlights the importance of the promotion of vocations and also the need to plan ahead for all eventualities. The Pastoral Areas of the Diocese are developing plans to deal with the reduced number of priests in the future.

5. How is a candidate selected for training?

The climate of vocations has changed in recent years. The typical pathway in earlier times was for sons from established Catholic families to apply for training in a Seminary and to proceed to ordination as a Priest.

The new pattern is often different. Candidates may come from a variety of backgrounds. Some may be formerly lapsed Catholics or converts. Some may be older. Some candidates may have no family support or come from abroad. Promotion of vocations has changed over time to reflect this.

Previously applications would be put forward via the Parish Priest but now some candidates apply to the Vocations Director directly.

Because of this altered pattern of application for training for the priesthood, there are often support needs that were not present previously. For example, there may be a need to provide support with accommodation. The need for financial support has also altered and increased.

Someone who has applied for training for the Priesthood will go to the Vocations Director for the Diocese. He will become involved in the life of the Church and be given spiritual direction.

The preparation time for application depends on the particular candidate. It could be a short period where the candidate has already had spiritual direction and given his application a great deal of thought but in many cases it is an average of two years. This period of two years prior to application, called discernment, includes attendance at vocation weekends with others at either Oscott College, St John's Seminary at Womersley or Allen Hall, the three seminaries in England.

He will also have a psychological assessment to ensure he is equipped to live the life of a Priest. References will be obtained from employers, previous academic appointments and the Parish Priest.

When these factors have been drawn together, the candidate is interviewed by a panel. This panel makes a recommendation to the Bishop. The Bishop then makes the final decision as to whether or not the applicant is accepted for training.

Once the candidate has been accepted for training, a decision as to whether or not a Propaedeutic (preparation) year should be spent in Valladolid is also taken. This year is devoted to preparation and support prior to the commencement of full seminarian training. It is equivalent, in some respects, to a novitiate (the period as a novice before taking vows as a monk or nun).

The period of discernment and Propaedeutic year is not necessary in all cases. For example, a candidate from the Anglican Church would not require the full training but only a period of formation and training in preparation for the Roman Catholic priesthood.

6. What is the content of the seminary training?

In the seminary there is both academic training and human development. The latter includes spiritual, academic and emotional aspects. The purpose of this broad training is to ensure that the priest can meet the challenges of Ministry in the modern world.

The programmes of academic training, both in Rome and Oscott, are similar. In years one to three, the candidate has training in Philosophy. This culminates in a BA (Hons) degree from the University of Birmingham. The final 3 years of training are in Theology. This culminates in a Theology degree, the Sacred Theology Baccalaureate, from the University of Louvain.

Hand in hand with this academic training are pastoral formation, spiritual direction, human development and physical exercise.

During the course of this training, the candidate keeps in contact with the Diocese and has placements in various parishes. One of these placements is prolonged, from September until January. Contacts are also established with other clergy and lay people in the Diocese to enhance learning and support.

At Oscott, the academic year comprises three terms. These are equivalent in duration to school terms, with half terms in the middle of each term.

The terms in Rome are shorter, with no half terms. They are closer in their arrangement to university terms.

7. What skills are those who are about to be ordained expected to possess?

- Academic, sufficient to attain two university degrees
- Pastoral skills
- Emotional skills
- Spiritual skills

8. How will Together In Faith help the training process for the priesthood in our Diocese?

There are many ways in which Together In Faith can assist in the training for Priests. In addition to the costs of training outlined above, there are ad hoc needs for support, depending on the background and circumstances of the applicant. For example some candidates come from religious or monastic backgrounds and have no means of support of their own. Others do not have a family support structure.

Some will require grants and allowances as well as places to stay. The fund will help pay for various promotional activities for the priesthood, vocation weekends and pastoral support.

But Together In Faith donors support should, ideally, also include prayer for vocations to the priesthood and for the men undergoing all aspects of the process.

In later newsletters individual seminarians or recently ordained priests will describe their experiences.