

# DIOCESE OF LIMERICK

# VOCATIONS



MARCH 2021

Chaste  
Guardian of  
the Virgin

St. Joseph, Pray for Us.

## In this Issue...

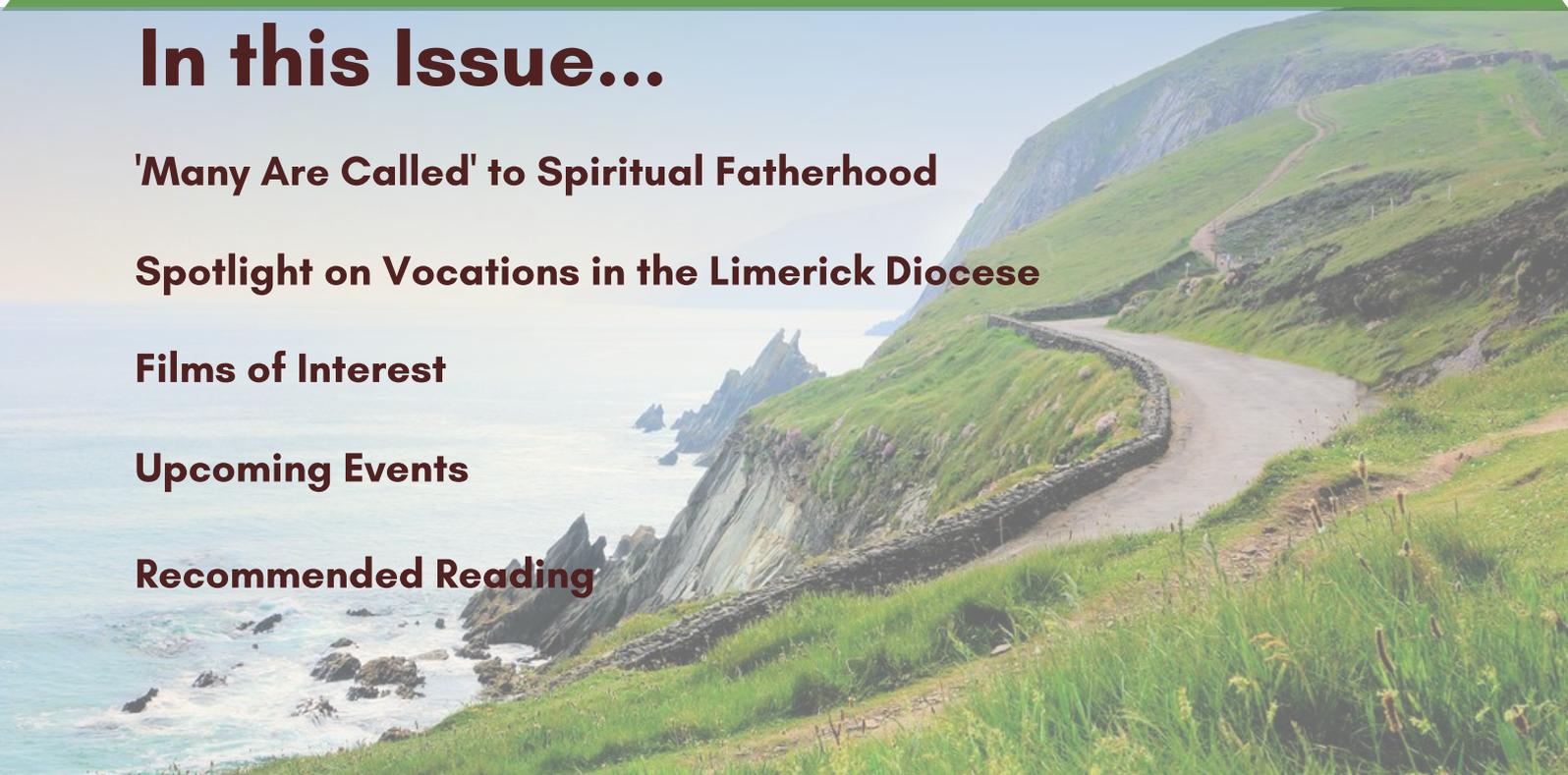
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# 'MANY ARE CALLED' TO SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD

By Daniel Burke

Originally published November 10, 2011 in  
the National Catholic Register

The Greco-Roman world struggled to understand many things about early Catholicism. At first, it was simply regarded as another fertility cult. Rumors of Catholics participating in cannibalism and orgies — primarily misunderstandings of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist — were common. But perhaps it was the issue of priestly celibacy that most perplexed and held the attention of the pagan world. As early as AD 150, Justin Martyr wrote to Emperor Antoninus Pius explaining the practice, and later, the famous emperor Marcus Aurelius discussed the observance with Athenagoras of Athens. It's recorded that the "pagan physician Galen marveled at the [masculinity] of Christian celibates," because of their "self-discipline and self-control." And in the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom reported, "Celibates may have made up more than ten percent of the Christians in a large city like Antioch."

In his work *Many Are Called: Rediscovering the Glory of the Priesthood*, Scott Hahn unearths the biblical and historical roots of the Catholic priesthood. The pagan reaction to Catholic celibacy is recorded in detail in Hahn's excellent explanation, which notes that it was the benefits afforded the men who underwent the vow that truly stunned the pagan mind. For, rather than diminishing in masculinity, the celibate men displayed a unique manliness in the form of a spiritual fatherhood. The priest is called to be many things — a provider, mediator, protector, teacher, judge, etc. — but Hahn's work on the priesthood pivots on the idea that all these things are articulated best when the priest is seen as a "father to many souls."

In what has come to be expected of him, Hahn explores the roots of the priesthood in great Scriptural detail. The Hebrew word *kiddushin* means to be "set apart," and it was used to describe vessels in the Temple as being set apart for divine use. In a very real way, the vocation of the priesthood reflects these sacred items that were presented and kept on God's holy altar. Like the liturgical objects of God, the priest is set apart for holy and divine work. As Hahn states, the items of the altar were not also used for common dinner parties. They were *kiddushin*, or set apart for a holy and sacred purpose.

A man and a woman are set apart in marriage. Holy Matrimony is a sacred and holy union, in which the two become one. It is a harmonious and mutual gifting of each other's flesh and blood — a spousal giving to each other of their whole selves. In the same manner, the celibate priest has "the power to be a supernatural bridegroom, bestowing Christ's flesh and blood with life-giving power of the husband of the Church." In sacrificing the great "created goods" of "earthly marriage and progeny," the priest is able to devote his whole being to God and serve as a supernatural father to God's children.

What is noteworthy about Hahn's approach is that he sets aside the typical competitive presentation of marriage and celibacy. He does not even speak of them as two separate concepts that can be seen in unity, but really as two beautiful acts of love and sacrifice within the same intimate vein. At the heart of this approach is a focus on fatherhood and sacrifice, rather than sexuality. Our current culture's obsession with sexuality implicitly places marriage and celibacy as competitive vocations. Hahn delivers the following antidote: "For a man is not fulfilled when he is sexually active, but when he is a husband and father."

Hahn's concise observation cuts to the core of the issue. In moving the reference point between marriage and celibacy from sexuality to fatherhood, Hahn is able to show the two vocations as participating in the same virtues and sacrifices.

The question is, while celibacy is new to neither the Catholic Church nor the western world, why then is celibacy – and its relationship to marriage – still a controversial and misunderstood issue? After relating the early history of celibacy and classical pagan thought, Hahn notes that the world has become “re-paganized.” It is not that “celibacy has declined in value,” but that we are dealing with a modern world whose abdication of Christian truths has created an opening for the return of pagan confusion.

Rather than despair, Hahn observes that, like the pagan world our forefathers knew, our world is “ripe to rediscover” the virtue and joy of celibacy. As Catholics, we must understand the virtues of celibacy – and be able to communicate those virtues to a neo-pagan world.

Accessed March 11, 2021: <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/many-are-called-to-spiritual-fatherhood>



# DIOCESAN VOCATIONS SPOTLIGHT

Fr. Eamonn  
Fitzgibbon



Ordained: 1989

Episcopal Vicar  
for  
Priestly Planning

## **HOW DID YOU DISCERN THAT YOU HAD A VOCATION TO THE DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD?**

For me that was never a once-for-all moment but rather a continuous discernment. It began for me as a young child - I used to pray a lot as a small child and somehow wanted to serve God and at the time I thought the only way to do this was by becoming a priest. Obviously that journey and sense of calling changed and developed but there has always been a strong undercurrent of being somehow drawn to this life. It used to completely throw me many years ago (especially while in seminary) when people asked 'Why do you want to be a priest?' I could never answer adequately, and my inability to communicate a response caused me to doubt if I had a vocation at all - but now I am more comfortable with that mysterious, 'beyond words' side of it! That might seem like a good way of dodging the question! Anyway, I am still discerning! From childhood through seminary days to early years in priesthood it is always good to be asking that question - to live as if that door is always open but remembering to always act as if it is closed.

## **WHO WERE INFLUENTIAL ROLE MODELS FOR YOU IN YOUR FAITH LIFE?**

Obviously, family was hugely important. It is only now looking back that I realise how faith-filled our home was - I presumed it was like that for everyone (and for many it was!). All the religious pictures and symbols in every room, prayer and Mass etc. Also, my dad took seriously ill when I was 9 and prayer was a natural response within our family. I also had an aunt who was a Sister of Mercy - Sr Al (Aloysius) worked in Peru and nursed in Bantry Hospital. She was a huge influence and inspiration - she was calm and prayerful, very supportive and also seemed so content. I had a teacher in primary school - Mary Raleigh (since gone to God - a sister of Fr Pat Raleigh, Columban) - and she reminded us to pray to God in our own words; that was a great light-bulb moment for me and I talked away to God about everything and anything, developing a relationship. In my years as a pupil in St Munchin's College I came to know the priests there and they too were very influential. We all loved Fr Ger McNamee who had a great grá for the students and he lived by the motto 'there is no such thing as a bad boy'. Frank Duhig was a great help and support when I spoke to him about my interest in priesthood.

## **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF THE DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD?**

Joys – I find this to be a life filled with meaning, it is about what is most real, the important things in life. No two days are the same and I enjoy pastoral work in the broadest sense. I am naturally outgoing and I really enjoy the contact with people, that relational aspect is very fulfilling. A priest is with people in the most important moments of their lives – times of great joy and sorrow. I really enjoy working with people and I had a very positive experience of teamwork during my time in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

Challenges – there are many challenges but I imagine every generation and age has brought its own share of challenges. I remember hearing a priest remark that this is the most difficult time ever to be a priest in Ireland, but I imagine the Penal times weren't much fun either! However, there is no doubt that we minister in a very fluid and uncertain time – none of us who were ordained in the 1980s foresaw all that was to come. It is a challenge that in many ways we are part of something in decline; the scandals and successive reports have greatly impacted morale and have generated a sense of shame and guilt while the Church itself has become something of a 'toxic brand'. There is no doubt that living celibacy is also a challenge – I suppose if it wasn't, there wouldn't be much of a witness value – I have found different stages of life are presented with different challenges by celibacy. In my twenties so many of my friends were in relationships and getting married then in my thirties they have young families on the way and all the joy that comes with this – I am now moving in to the grandfather stage!! In this time of Covid, living alone brings its own challenges as it can be a time of greater isolation.

One of the greatest joys for me in priesthood has been my time with Muintearas Íosa – it has been hugely formative for me as I learnt so much about ministry, prayer, liturgy and the joy of the Gospel.

## **WHO ARE YOUR FAVOURITE SAINTS AND WHY?**

I suppose in answering this question I realise that pilgrimage is my common denominator. I really like the story of St Bernadette of Lourdes – she was courageous and assertive and had a no-nonsense approach. I have also done much of the Camino de Santiago and this pilgrimage walk centers on St James. I have walked many of the different routes in Spain – both alone and with a group – and I can't recommend it enough.

## **WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?**

I have a huge interest in sport – particularly hurling, so these are great years! In seminary I played lots of sports but now at this stage a bit of running and cycling is as much as I manage. I have run lots of marathons – a few of us travelled around European cities over the years doing marathons on cheap Ryan Air flights and that was a great way to see the sights – literally on-foot. I like to read, I loved to read novels but lately I seem to be reading more fact based and work-based material. I enjoy music and again I have a few friends with whom I try to get to at least one good concert every year – my taste tends to be very 1960s, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, Neil Young – if I was born a decade or two earlier I would probably be now happily living in a hippie commune in California!

## **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG MEN WHO FEEL THAT THEY MIGHT BE CALLED TO THE DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD?**

Get a good mentor – a guide who has skills in spiritual direction, counselling and most of all is practiced in the art of discernment. In a letter to the Bishops of Buenos Aires on Amoris Laetitia Pope Francis said that of the pastoral attitudes "the least refined and practised is discernment; and I deem it urgent to include training in personal and community discernment in our Seminaries and Presbyteries."

# FILMS OF INTEREST



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAEeCqpuGaQ>



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_LPbPJ9jeh4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_LPbPJ9jeh4)



EVENTS

JOIN THE LIMERICK DIOCESE

# MEN'S DISCERNMENT GROUP

Meets Monthly on Tuesdays  
7.30-8.45pm

Hosted by Priests of the  
Diocese

Please contact [vocations@limerickdiocese.org](mailto:vocations@limerickdiocese.org) for the zoom link

## Could God be calling you to serve Him as a Diocesan Priest?



**Virtual Discernment Evening**

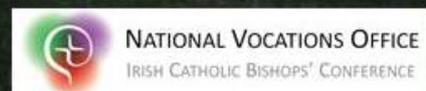
for men (18 years+) exploring

**Diocesan Priesthood**

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 7:30 pm to 9 pm**



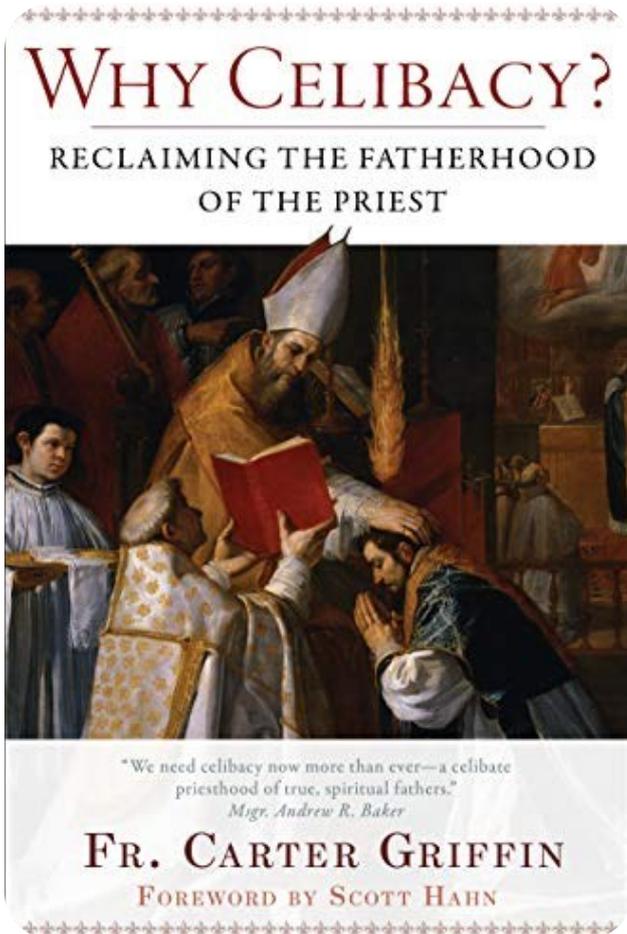
For further information  
& registration form  
Email: [Info@vocations.ie](mailto:Info@vocations.ie)



Hosted by the Cashel Province

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

# RECOMMENDED READING



[https://www.veritasbooksonline.com/why-celibacy-reclaiming-the-fatherhood-of-the-pri-9781949013313-44310/?gclid=CjwKCAiAp4KCBhB6EiwAxRxbpHKqRh\\_xwQrfbNJ2XU1604ahQsevSTPuID9wftZpD9or9qYRRrSS5xoCT2MQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.veritasbooksonline.com/why-celibacy-reclaiming-the-fatherhood-of-the-pri-9781949013313-44310/?gclid=CjwKCAiAp4KCBhB6EiwAxRxbpHKqRh_xwQrfbNJ2XU1604ahQsevSTPuID9wftZpD9or9qYRRrSS5xoCT2MQAvD_BwE)

The Church today demands a profound renewal of celibate priesthood and the fatherhood to which it is ordered."

Priestly celibacy, some say, is an outdated relic from another age. Others see it as a lonely way of life. But as Fr. Carter Griffin argues in *Why Celibacy?: Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest*, the ancient practice of celibacy, when lived well, helps a priest exercise his spiritual fatherhood joyfully and fruitfully. Along the way, Griffin explores:

- the question of optional celibacy
- some pitfalls of celibate paternity
- the selection and formation of candidates for celibate priesthood
- why biological fathers are also called to spiritual fatherhood
- the powerful impact of celibacy on the Church and the wider culture
- In a critical moment for the Catholic priesthood, Fr. Griffin brings light and hope with a new perspective on the Church's perennial wisdom on celibacy.

## SUPPORTING VOCATIONS IN YOUR PARISH?

Please pray for holy vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life regularly. Would you consider having regular Adoration for this intention? Do you currently have any events or initiatives in your parish or schools to support the understanding and promotion of vocations? Would you like to? If we can help to organize something for you, please be in touch!

DIOCESE OF LIMERICK  
**VOCATION OFFICE**

[www.limerickdiocese.org](http://www.limerickdiocese.org)  
[www.facebook.com/dioceseflimerick](https://www.facebook.com/dioceseflimerick)  
[vocations@limerickdiocese.org](mailto:vocations@limerickdiocese.org)