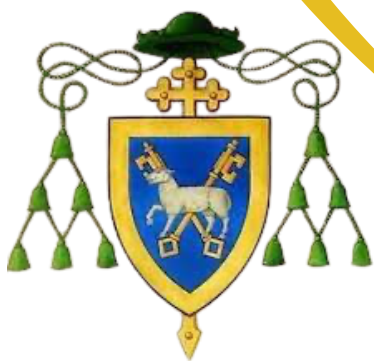




Diocesan Novena for Vocations

Saturday 18th April -
Good Shepherd Sunday 26th April

Diocese of Down & Connor

Introduction



“The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.”

These words spoken by Jesus in the gospels find particular resonance today. We are acutely aware of the fall in vocations to priesthood and religious life. And yet the ‘harvest’ remains rich. How then are we to be accompanied on our Christian journey?

We need to hear again Jesus’ words and pray to the Lord of the harvest for an increase in vocations to priesthood and religious life. We must respond to his invitation generously. One important way is to pray the Diocesan Vocations Novena. In these days, you are encouraged to make time and space to pray the novena and prepare for Good Shepherd Sunday, also known as Vocations Sunday. The novena can be prayed as part of your private prayer, or together with family, friends, colleagues or fellow students, a prayer group or parish community. If you have a loved one in hospital or nursing home, share with them a copy of the novena and invite them to join you in prayer. We ask you to commit to these nine days of prayer so that in all our homes, schools and parishes, our voices may be heard as one before God.

Our hope is that this novena will enable us to grow in our experience of God’s love and encourage all of us to be attentive to his plan for our lives. May this novena prayerfully nurture vocations to the priesthood in every parish and community within our diocese.

Praying the Novena

Make time each day, either on your own or with others, to pray the novena.

Find a quiet, comfortable space, light a candle, play music, perhaps visit a church.

Begin and conclude with a blessing:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read the scripture passage slowly and prayerfully.

Take time to meditate on God's Word.

Use the questions to guide your reflection.

Conclude with the novena prayers, adding an *Our Father, Hail Mary* and *Glory be*.



Daily Prayers

As part of the novena, we encourage you to pray these prayers each day

Vocation Prayer

Lord, make me a better person,
more considerate towards others,
more honest with myself,
more faithful to you.

Make me generous enough
to want to do your will,
whatever it may be.

Help me find my true vocation
in life and grant that through it,
I may find happiness myself
and bring happiness to others.

Amen

Diocesan Vocations Prayer

God, our Father,
at the very beginning of your Church
your Son Jesus chose twelve apostles
to continue the work he had begun.
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
they continued to bring the Good News
of your love to our world.
Send that same Holy Spirit into the hearts
of those you are calling to serve as priests
for your people in our diocese.

Fill them with your gifts of wisdom,
understanding, piety and knowledge
as they discern your will.
Give them the gifts of right judgement
and courage in following their call.
Through the outpouring of your grace
may many come to the joy of knowing
and responding to the invitation of Jesus to
“Come, Follow Me!”

Amen

Day 1: Saturday 18th April

God's Word – Jeremiah 1:4–9 (The calling of Jeremiah)

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”
But the Lord said to me,
“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the Lord.”

Reflection

God knows each of us personally and completely.
Before we were born, we were already loved.
Jeremiah felt unsure and unworthy—but God reassured him.

- Have you ever doubted your ability or worth?
- What might God be saying to you in those moments?
- What do you need to ask God for today?

Prayer

Faithful God, help us to live out our mission in the Church. Help your people know their vocation in life and prepare for it. Give those whom you call to be priests and religious the grace to respond generously and to persevere faithfully.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

Day 2 - Sunday 19th April

God's Word – Ephesians 4:1–9, 11–13 (Unity in the Body of Christ)

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Reflection

Each person has been given unique gifts.

- What are your gifts?
- How can you use them to serve others?

God calls each of us to contribute in our own way.

Prayer

We praise you for your goodness, O God. Strengthen us to live in love and service of others after the example of your Son. Help us to see our vocations as a journey towards you. Make us faithful signs of your presence in our world.
Amen

Day 3: Monday 20th April

God's Word – Luke 1:21–36 (The calling of Mary)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!”

But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

QUIET TIME AND REFLECTION

Mary did not fully understand what God was asking—but she trusted.

- What fears or uncertainties do you carry?
- What might God be inviting you to say “yes” to?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your mother continues to shine as one who fully responded to God's call. May young people throughout the world be graced to follow her example of doing God's will in their lives. Help them understand the joy that comes from serving God and others.

Amen

Day 4: Tuesday 21st April

God's Word: Ephesians 4:1-9,11-13

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit —just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to humanity.”

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

REFLECTION

We are not alone—we are part of a community.

- How can you support others in faith?
- How can your gifts help build up the Church?

PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, you are the source of all life. We praise you for the beauty of creation and the gifts that surround us. Bless us with an enduring sense of unity as each one of us shares our unique talents and abilities to serve you and build your kingdom. Amen

Day 5: Wednesday 22nd April

God's Word: Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

REFLECTION

Peter had worked hard and felt discouraged.

Yet when he trusted Jesus, everything changed.

- When have you felt tired or discouraged?
- Where might God be asking you to trust Him more?

PRAYER

Gracious God, you sent Jesus to proclaim salvation to the world. Make us mindful of those who have not heard the Gospel and bless the efforts of all missionaries. May more of our sons and daughters seek and follow your call to discipleship. Amen

Day 6: Thursday 23rd April

God's Word: John 20:1-18

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. Jesus calls each of us personally.

Reflection

Jesus calls us personally.

- Take a moment to reflect on your own name
- Remember that God knows you and calls you

We are also called to share the Good News with others.

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and minds with the fire of your love. Make us courageous witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus. May the Eucharist enable us to live faithfully the vocation we have received. Inspire more of us to dedicate our lives in service to the Gospel. Amen

Day 7: Friday 24th April

God's Word: Mark 10:17–27 – The rich young man

And as Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

REFLECTION

- The rich young man struggled to let go.
- What might be holding you back from following Jesus more fully?
- What step could you take towards greater trust?

Remember: with God, all things are possible.

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, fill us with a desire for true wisdom. Bless all pupils, students, teachers, chaplains and those who serve in education. Help us understand how you call us to Christlike service. Call forth many priests and religious. Amen

Day 8: Saturday 25th April

GOD'S WORD Matthew 9:35–37 – The harvest is great, the labourers few

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 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 labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

REFLECTION

- Jesus saw people in need and responded with compassion.
 - Where do you see need in the world today?
 - How might God be inviting you to respond?

PRAYER

Dear God, bless your Church with love. Raise up dedicated and generous leaders to serve as priests, sisters, brothers, lay ministers and consecrated members of the new ecclesial movements in your Church. Send your Spirit to strengthen them to serve your people, following the example of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Day 9: Good Shepherd Sunday, 26th April 2026

GOD'S WORD: John 10:27–30 – The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice
Jesus said:

‘The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice;

I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life;

they will never be lost

and no one will ever steal them from me.

The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone,

and no one can steal from the Father.

The Father and I are one.’

QUIET TIME AND REFLECTION

•God speaks to us in many ways.

- How can you make space to listen to Him?
- What might He be asking of you?

PRAYER

Dear God, bless your Church with love. Raise up dedicated and generous leaders to serve as priests, sisters, brothers, lay ministers and consecrated members of the new ecclesial movements in your Church. Send your Spirit to strengthen them to serve your people, following the example of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

