

Interview with Bishop John Sherrington, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster, reflecting on 25 years of priesthood

“My sense of being called to Priesthood developed while studying at Cambridge University where I was involved in the University chaplaincy. Speaking to our Chaplain and then receiving spiritual direction I experienced a clear sense of rightness about getting to know Christ more deeply. This sense of rightness translated into joy and peace within me.

“As I moved into the working world and took up post with a large management consultancy firm, I felt in myself the absence of contentment, a restlessness, and a dissatisfaction with corporate life. I realised there was something missing.

“However, deepening my life in Christ, led me to discern further that I wanted to join the Church. My subjective sense of calling was met by the objective recognition by the Church that I had what was necessary in terms of gifts and resources, to progress into priesthood. The gift of vocation comes from Christ to the individual, and through the Church.

“My advice to those who are discerning religious vocation is take the risk, follow your sense of calling and you will know in time how God is calling you. Whether your destination is the priesthood or not, through the process of exploration you will discover the deepest desires of your heart. That is, how God is speaking to you in the depths of your being. You will then be fully able to commit to the sacrifices it takes to enter into priesthood such as family and a particular career.

“My advice to priests is that in the many demands and busyness of pastoral ministry for the people it is essential that a priest finds time to pray and cultivate a relationship heart to heart in Jesus Christ. Finding time to re-energise one’s self is vital in order to remain sensitive and open to the continuous call of Christ. The holiness of our lives is not sealed. It takes constant renewal through prayer, reflection and resting in Christ to follow His call which is continuous.

“It is also very important to find hobbies that complement priesthood and enhance our spiritual lives. For me walking in the countryside, and also, cultivating a flowerbed, keep me in touch with the grandness and intricacies of God’s created land. These hobbies help toward my sense of fulfilment and connection. They also help me to be more creative in preparing for a homily or serving the people.

“Having a balanced life helps provide energy for serving the people, remaining alert and present to the needs of others. As an on-call hospital Chaplain I sometimes had to wake up in the early hours of the morning to minister to the sick and dying. What can be a difficult experience of being woken up in the middle of the night when tired, can also be a most profound moment. When you know the Sacrament of the Sick has helped a person who is dying. But we cannot do this alone. We rely on Christ, the gift of the Mass, and the prayers of the people.

“Being the priest giving the Mass, being with a dying person, or hearing the sincerity of a confession is a very rewarding and humbling experience. It reminds me of my own limitations, while giving me hope through the strength of faith of my parishioners around me.

Looking to the future, I hope that priests can actively help to build solidarity amongst Catholics and those new to the Church. We are the Body of Christ. Amidst a culture of

increasing individuality, the Church can remind us of the importance of expressing care, support and our solidarity in faith and in action, with others.”