



**ST. KATERI PASTORAL CENTRE**  
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Prot.#: 210619

June 22, 2019

To all the Faithful of the Diocese of Whitehorse,

**RE: Vocations and Seminarians in our Diocese**

Greetings to you on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*).

The Lord, having loved those who were his own, loved them to the end [...] In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, Jesus instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and resurrection and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; “thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

These words from the *Catechism* echo what the Holy Father, Pope Saint John Paul II once wrote to all the priests around the world: “There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”<sup>2</sup> With this letter of mine, I would like to bring to your attention the very important need we have in our Diocese of priestly vocations and the way I intend to address the issue.

As you may already be aware, in 1944 our mission territory became the Vicariate Apostolic of Whitehorse, under the care of Bishop Jean L. Coudert, O.M.I. Later, on July 22, 1967, the Vicariate was raised to the status of Diocese under the leadership of Bishop James P. Mulvihill, O.M.I. Since then, only six priests were incardinated in the Diocese of Whitehorse, with the last priest being ordained in 2003.

This small number of vocations within our Diocese has brought us to the current situation: we have priests who come to serve in our parishes and missions, for three to five years, and then, when they are called back to their own Dioceses of incardination, by their bishops, they must leave. Unfortunately, this leaves a gap within the Catholic community. In order to break this cycle and ensure continuity of pastoral care within our parishes and missions, I feel there is an urgent need for us to develop a concrete plan for ordaining our own priests.

Over the past three years, you may have noticed that there have been a number of seminarians, from different places, such as, Arequipa (Peru), Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton, who have been serving in our Diocese. These seminarians have added to the pastoral care of several parishes and missions. Having them in our midst has given us a taste of what it would be like, if we had our own candidates studying to be priests for our Diocese.

Here in Whitehorse, the actual presence of seminarians has been very positive. These young men have integrated into parish activities, working with children and youth, in schools and even at the jail. In Fort Nelson, for instance, people have been very happy to see these seminarians participating actively in their church life, through various activities, and in fact, now, parishioners expect to have a seminarian there, in their community, every year. Many other small missions have likewise expressed their gratitude for having had the

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<sup>1</sup> CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second Edition. Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text promulgated by Pope John Paul II, with Glossary and Analytical Index.* Ottawa: CCCB, 1994, § 1337.

<sup>2</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, POPE, *Letter of the Holy Father to Priests for Holy Thursday.* Vatican City (March 28, 2004), § 2.

seminarians participate in Masses while travelling with a priest. In short, the seminarians have become very much part of our Diocese.

With these thoughts in mind, and after much prayer, meditation, and consultation with other bishops, clergy, staff, and parishioners, I would like to make all of you, the Faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse, not only aware, but also active participants in and jointly responsible for the need and urgency to train our own seminarians, as well as share with you a concrete plan of action for achieving this. God has already blessed this plan with the spiritual assistance of Most Rev. Gerard Pettipas, C.S.S.R., Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan, and the material support of both His Eminence, Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, and Most Rev. Michael Miller, Archbishop of Vancouver, who are willing to help us in forming priests for our Diocese.

Hoping that we may soon have new vocations here in the North, we need to actively search for candidates to the priesthood outside of our Diocese. These men will then study and do their formation in a seminary of the Archdiocese of Toronto, and upon completion, they will be incardinated as priests here, in Whitehorse. Specifically, our candidates shall be trained at Redemptoris Mater Missionary Seminaries, because we are a missionary Diocese and the seminarians formed in these seminaries have that missionary spirit to go wherever a priest is needed. The Redemptoris Mater Seminaries are international and can be found all over the world. Here in Canada, there are three: in Toronto, Vancouver, and Québec City. The Cardinals and Bishops of the Dioceses, where these seminaries are present, are very pleased to have them in their Archdioceses. They receive these vocations from parishioners, who are members of the Neocatechumenal Way, an international parish-based charism, which was strongly supported by both Saint Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, and was officially approved by Pope Benedict XVI, in 2008. This charism sees diocesan incardination as the most natural means to open the doors of the priestly ministry to those who are called by God. Given the missionary nature of Redemptoris Mater Seminaries, therefore, candidates from these seminaries should be able to adapt well to serving in the reality of the North.

In this project we also see the Providence and Will of God. Catholic Missions in Canada (CMIC) has agreed to provide us funding for the training of these seminarians, in the amount of \$12,000 per person per year. We are thus very grateful for their concrete involvement in this initiative and for their donors' generosity.

As for the timeline, once these missionary candidates will have been found, hopefully as from this upcoming fall of 2019, I will then be able to ask His Eminence, Thomas Cardinal Collins, to host two of them, who will be studying in Toronto, yet as seminarians of our Diocese. This would thus be the start of the founding of permanent diocesan priests in the Yukon and the Northern British Columbia, with a view to ensuring a stable pastoral presence in our own parishes and missions.

I would finally like to thank you in advance for your understanding and support in this pastoral matter, and I ask you to please keep the successful realization of this plan in your daily prayers. As the project develops, we will be providing further information about it on our website ([www.whitehorsediocese.ca](http://www.whitehorsediocese.ca)). Entrusting this project to Our Lady of Guadalupe to whom this Diocese is consecrated, we invoke "the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to His harvest" (Mt 9:38).

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Héctor Vila", with a small cross symbol to its left.

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+Bishop Héctor Vila