

# SUNDAY EXAMINER

11 MAY 2014

## A culture of vocation

ON THIS SUNDAY each year we are asked to reflect on the story of the Good Shepherd and the Church chooses to mark Vocation Sunday on this day each year.

Hong Kong celebrates the day with various activities designed to place vocation in the consciousness of the people and also encourages them to pray for religious vocations especially at this time.

On Holy Thursday, the bishop of Hong Kong, John Cardinal Tong Hon, spoke of the need to foster vocation and later issued a pastoral letter announcing that May has been designated as Vocation Month.

Cardinal Tong points out that the diocese has worked hard at promoting vocations, but to date, to little avail. He questions the depth of concern among the people and wonders whether they feel it is an issue that is not particularly related to them.

He then outlines a long-term plan to promote what he calls a *culture of vocation* to increase both awareness and knowledge of the importance of religious vocation.

The Diocesan Synod of 2000-2001 says it is hoped that the diocesan clergy play will play an important role in shepherding the people of God and in spreading the faith among those outside the Church, implying that fewer priests, sisters and brothers would negatively affect this mission.

Local Churches the world over are experiencing a drop in vocation numbers and statistics in Hong Kong show that only eight have been ordained priests for the diocese in recent years.

While this is not too bad compared with some places, it is well short of the experience of the 1970s and 1980s.

A religious vocation is a spiritual mission rather than a career, a unique gift given by God to a particular person. Those who accept the invitation are asked to make an unconditional commitment.

In today's society, autonomy and self-satisfaction are promoted as ultimate values. They are sometimes in contradiction to the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty asked of a priest, brother or sister.

Consequently, the young people of today face a far bigger challenge in accepting a call to vocation than in the past.

In previous years, there have been numerous inputs, advertising campaigns and activities designed to promote vocation, but it is worth asking how much follow up work has been done.

A culture of vocation aims at instilling an awareness in the entire Church—parishes, families and groups, as a culture that embraces everyone.

It begins with an understanding of the nature of vocation and a realisation that everyone has a responsibility to participate in the overall promotion of religious vocations.

Although the diocese baptises over 3,000 adults every year that should not be the end of the story and cultivating a culture of vocation during after care should be a high priority.

As faith matures, a realisation of the paramount importance of religious vocation should become evident as being an essential part of interacting with God and people.

Promoting vocation begins as a faith life takes root. It includes developing a deep awareness of God's mission and the important role that parents play.

A culture of vocation cannot be built overnight. It needs time to nurture and must be able to withstand challenges over time in an ever-changing environment. *SE*