

## Called to be a Parish in Christ

I'm not sure whether such a notion is possible, but as today is traditionally known as Vocations Sunday, and following on from the disappointing news that our appeal has been turned down, we are no doubt left wondering about our role and how it is going to be affected by this setback.

When we think about our faith community and what it represents, we sometimes overlook the generosity we have and the strengths we possess as essential *charisms* which make our parish work and function. Not only that, but we also tend to look on adversity as a barrier which can act as an agent to undermine those *charisms* and challenge them, testing if they are able to withstand unexpected setbacks and knocks. We sometimes forget that when Jesus called the apostles and the disciples to follow him he didn't hold any sort of audition or interview. No, his method was to speak to people, telling them that the life of the Gospel has at its heart something joyous and life enhancing, but that interwoven within this joy is also the reality of both pain and loss. Now it's true that not everyone could rise to the challenge – remember the rich young man – nevertheless, the call to follow Jesus is one which still resonates, and it is one which for our community has a powerful impact. The things which take place and happen in our parish, do so because they are predicated upon the promise of Jesus to be with us in all that we are and in all that we do. This understanding includes all those moments of shared love and joy, as well as the moments of sorrow and pain. As a parish we share these moments in an old and rather run down building, with somewhat unspectacular fixtures and fittings which barely meet the necessary levels of adequacy, but it is in this building where each week a table is set and bread and wine are broken and poured out to be made into something beyond our understanding. It is in this atmosphere that our vocation is forged. It is into the madness of the Upper Room where our minds return and where we see in that moment of crisis the answer to all the questions we ask. Here is where we wash each other's feet. Here is where Gethsemane is encountered. Here is where the cross is. Here is where resurrection happens. Here is where we receive his peace. Here is where the Gospel is proclaimed. Here is our life, brought into this ramshackle place to be bound up and enfolded with his.

So we carry on responding to his call and we make the things happen that witness to the reality that love will overcome each and every one of our adversaries because Jesus has shown us how. We take that love out into our families and into our wider communities knowing from where it emerged, knowing that in it is our safety. *Anyone who enters through me will be safe.* Of course set backs happen – that's life. And now in the midst of this present upset we are asked to listen once again to the voice of the one who calls us to go on rising to the challenge to proclaim the gospel of love which he gives to all who ask. He will not abandon us nor leave us orphans. He came so that we may have life and have it to the full. Our strength, our *charism* as a parish lies in that resolve to make the most of our gifts and to do so with joy and love, knowing that in them is the expression of our parochial vocation. Therefore we must continue to encourage one another because we have so much to look forward to and all of it will bring its rewards as we grow together in Christ.