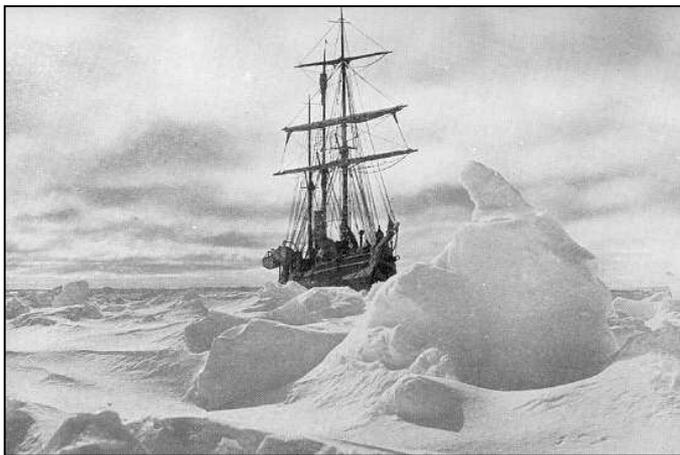


Are you the 50th? - on FSSP vocations boom.

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP – Superior of the Priestly Fraternity of S. Peter's apostolate in England
(December 2010)

MEN WANTED: FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY. SMALL WAGES, BITTER COLD, LONG MONTHS OF COMPLETE DARKNESS, CONSTANT DANGER, SAFE RETURN DOUBTFUL. HONOUR AND RECOGNITION IN CASE OF SUCCESS. SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON. This is the ad that famous Anglo-Irish explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton allegedly placed in a London newspaper seeking recruits for his 1914 Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Who do you think would answer such an ad? Would you answer it? Shackleton actually received more than 5,000 replies, for only 27 places.



(Picture: Shackleton's ship *The Endurance*, caught in the ice)

If just a century ago British and Irish men were flocking to take part in so challenging an undertaking, simply to discover untrodden snow and to win a place in history, what will our young Britons and Irishmen do nowadays in order to ascend to the very altar of God and enter eternal glory? If their ancestors answered such a risky ad, it was surely in part because they trusted in the man who had signed it. A greater Man may be calling you to join his Crew.

In any case, His Vicars on earth have successively visited, approved and encouraged the places and the formation offered by the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter in its two international seminaries. Pope John Paul II blessed the corner stone of our seminary in Wigratzbad and a crucifix (the definitive building was not yet started) for our seminary in America. Pope Benedict XVI when still Cardinal Ratzinger spent the Easter Vigil with us in Wigratzbad and having stayed overnight, he offered a pontifical high Mass in the *usus antiquior* on Easter Sunday 1990. As Pope now, on 28th February 2010, he had the following encouragement expressed to our American seminary in the most formal way, that is, as written by His Cardinal Secretary of State and read by His Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the ceremony of inauguration of our new seminary chapel:

'Your Eminence, The Holy Father has been informed that on the 3rd of March 2010, you will dedicate the chapel of

Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in the Diocese of Lincoln. He asks you kindly to convey his greetings and warm good wishes to the members of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, the Rector, faculty and students and all assembled for the happy occasion. His Holiness prays that the new chapel will always be respected as a sacred dwelling where Almighty God is glorified in His majesty, a centre from which the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith are proclaimed with conviction, and a place where seminarians and teachers alike are inspired to the pursuit of holiness and ever-deeper communion with the Lord and His Church. He encourages them to strive through the discipline of prayer and study to be conformed to the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), to discern His will in their lives and to respond generously to His call to serve Him as preachers of His Gospel, ministers of His Sacraments and heralds of His mercy and love for the poor and sinners. With these sentiments, the Holy Father invokes upon the seminary community and its friends and benefactors the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and imparts the requested Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and peace in the Lord. I am happy to add my own prayerful good wishes for the occasion. Yours sincerely in Christ: Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, Secretary of State'.

On numerous occasions, Cardinal Heads of Roman Dicasteries, the closest collaborators of the Sovereign Pontiffs, have travelled to our houses of formation either to stay with us or to ordain our priests. These include the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship.

In October 1988, only three months after our foundation, the Holy Father has granted us the status of pontifical right which, among other effects, puts our seminaries under the direct authority of our own Superior General and of the

(Picture: Very Rev Fr Josef Bisig, then FSSP Superior General, with Mgr Philippe Tournyol du Clos, FSSP – both among our 12 co-founders, present the corner stone and crucifix to be blessed by Pope John-Paul II during a private audience on 12th September 1999.)





(Picture: Cardinal Levada reads Cardinal Bertone's letter on behalf of the Holy Father, on the day of the Dedication of the new chapel at our American seminary on 3rd March 2010 – sitting: Bishop Fabian Bruskwitz of Lincoln)

Holy See via the Ecclesia Dei Commission, once the diocesan bishop has granted us his permission to open a seminary in his diocese. Already the Bishops of Augsburg (Germany), of Scranton and Lincoln (U.S.A.) have granted us such permissions. The Cardinal Archbishops of Lyon (France) and of Sydney (Australia) and the Bishop of Girardot (Columbia) respectively have granted us permission to open a First Year Seminary and a Year of Discernment in their dioceses. For logistical reasons our seminarians from Scranton have now moved to Lincoln and those from Lyon to Wigratzbad, but we mention these various permissions inasmuch as they express the formal support of diocesan bishops on several continents.

In 2006, the Holy See had definitely approved our *Constitutions* which state that: "10. The Fraternity devotes itself to all the works of priestly formation, and all that relates to it, first for the members of the Fraternity, but also for other candidates for the priesthood, with the agreement of their bishops. It will ensure that the formation to the priesthood reaches its principal object, the sanctity of the priest, which is prepared by a healthy spiritual and intellectual formation. It will be obtained above all else by sacramental grace which sanctifies the priest continually, if he cooperates with it using the means the Church offers by the Conciliar Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 18. The philosophical and theological studies in the seminary will be founded on the principles and the method of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and will thus be conformed to the desires and prescriptions so often renewed by popes, councils, and the Code of Canon Law. Thus the seminarians will carefully avoid modern errors as much in philosophy as in

theology. (See Pius X, *Pascendi*, AAS 40 (1907), 596 ff.; Pius XII, *Humani generis*, AAS 42 (1950), 561 ff; Paul VI, *Mysterium fidei*, AAS 57 (1965), 753 ff.). 11. In the Fraternity, the formation of priests will be conformed to the dispositions of the *ratio studiorum* promulgated by the Holy See. A directory specifies the curriculum at the seminary, in conformity with the law."

This definitive approval of our *Constitutions* provides our members and our applicants with a clear and permanent definition of our institute's identity, a true asset in our times when the very notion of the priesthood is blurred in the mind of so many, as pointed out by Pope Benedict XVI:

"The theme of priestly identity, the subject of your first study day, is crucial to the exercise of the priestly ministry, today and in the future. In an epoch like our own, so "polycentric" and inclined to blur every conception of identity, deemed by many contrary to freedom and democracy, it is important to keep clearly in mind the theological particularity of the Ordained Ministry to avoid succumbing to the temptation to reduce it to the prevalent cultural categories.

In a context of widespread secularization, which is gradually excluding God from the public sphere and tendentially also from the common social conscience, the priest often appears "foreign" to the common perception. This is precisely because of the most fundamental aspects of his ministry, such as, being a man of the sacred, removed from the world to intercede on behalf of the world and being appointed to this mission by God and not by men (cf. Heb 5:1).

For this reason it is important to overcome dangerous forms of reductionism. In recent decades these have used categories that are functionalist rather than ontological and have introduced the priest almost as a "social worker", at the risk of betraying Christ's Priesthood itself.

Just as the hermeneutics of continuity are proving ever more urgent for a satisfactory understanding of the Second Vatican Council's texts, likewise a hermeneutic we might describe as "of priestly continuity" appears necessary. This has come down to our day, starting from Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, and passing through the 2,000 years of the history of greatness and holiness, of culture and devotion which the Priesthood has written in the world" (cf *Address* at a Conference organised by the Congregation for the Clergy, 12th March 2010).

(Picture: Cardinal Ratzinger in our mother house and European seminary in Wigratzbad, Easter Sunday 1990.)



For several years the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter has been blessed with numerous vocations – notably, over 40 new seminarians on each of the last three years. This autumn 2010 brings an even more generous response from God to your prayers for vocations with a record-breaking number of 49 admitted. If you are not the 50th, please pray for him and for many more. These 49 include 3 Britons, one of whom was prevented from joining this year, due to imperative work commitment.

It does not include the more numerous applicants who could not be admitted this year. When vocations are so rare, one would spontaneously wish to admit all those who apply. All applicants indeed would possess some of the following qualities – piety, intellectual abilities, human experience, emotional and psychological balance, generosity, good health, sufficient detachment from creatures, freedom from debt, lasting Catholic practice and specific attraction towards the Roman traditions of Holy Mother Church. Selecting the candidates is a difficult task for the priests involved, as they have to assess primarily if God is calling this or that particular individual to His service in general, and through our Fraternity in particular. As the available space and resources are limited, those whose vocation seems more obvious get selected first.

Seminary Rectors and collaborators surely need our prayers to help them discern what is best for the Church and for the applicants, as it could harm the Church and damage souls if a man were admitted to a seminary when God calls him elsewhere. It could also damage a seminarian's vocation if his formation were interrupted for reasons bearing no relation to his person, such as an unforeseen lack of room or the need of a local parish for a tonsured catechist or sacristan (once ordained deacons though, our seminarians are sent in parishes as part of the official curriculum). This explains why we choose not to accept a candidate unless all practical conditions for his continuous formation are secured, as much as depends on us.

One should also point out that, realistically, the Superiors don't expect every applicant to be perfect from the day he slips his application form into the post box. Indeed the 7-year formation curriculum is designed to improve every seminarian gradually, respectfully and peacefully. This takes place through the formal teaching of spirituality, philosophy and theology and through spiritual direction. But the daily Gregorian liturgy, the horarium and customs of the seminary and the brotherhood among the several dozens of aspirants to the priesthood provide a ceaseless stream of formation permeating the mind and soul of seminarians in an altogether human, concrete and gracious fashion.

So here we are, trying to picture this quite overwhelming fact: this autumn nearly half a hundred young men have packed their bags, kissed good-bye and flown from all over the world to Lincoln in Nebraska and to Wigratzbad in Bavaria for their very first year at seminary. Meritoriously one hundred parents have dried their eyes and offered to God the sons for whose future they may have laid different plans. How many siblings, how many grandparents and godparents, how many anonymous souls – through their prayers, through their sacrifices, through their examples – have collaborated in the communion of saints to bring about this moving outcome?

As General Chaplain of the Confraternity of St Peter, I address here our heartfelt thanks to our 3,500 members worldwide – including 100 consecrated persons (priests, seminarians and religious) – for their daily prayers and yearly Holy Masses offered (nearly 10 Masses a day!) for priestly vocations. Please keep up and possibly intensify your prayers for even more excellent vocations! There are over 180 members of the Confraternity of St Peter in Great-Britain and Ireland, including 8 parish priests and 4 Anglican ministers. (Find more about the Confraternity of St Peter on <http://fssp.org/en/confraternite.htm>).

Certainly, entering seminary is but the beginning of a 7-year process of formation. But it is a decisive step, which expresses depth, courage and generosity. At a time when people travel more easily than when Sir Ernest Shackleton was posting his famous advert, the period of formation to the priesthood is by no means the perilous adventure described by the arctic explorer. Leaving one's native country to spend terms of study in Bavaria or Nebraska is nothing strange, when a large proportion of Irish and British clergy spend years in formation in their respective colleges in Rome or Valladolid, not to mention other pontifical universities or theological institutions in Louvain, Fribourg, Washington or Ottawa, where clergy from these Isles are sent for further studies. It would indeed be strange if those called to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles, after Abraham and Moses and before the martyrs of Douai – were unwilling to spend time abroad, when so many lay students learning secular topics eagerly expatriate in *Erasmus* programs or in gap years.

We now take the liberty of transposing Sir Ernest's virile but very 'horizontal' challenge into Catholic and supernatural terms: "MEN WANTED: FOR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. ETERNAL REWARD, ENLIGHTENING OF INTELLECT, SAFETY IN GRACE AND BROTHERHOOD, TIME OFF EVERY THREE MONTHS. GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE, IN HUMILITY AND IN FILIAL LOVE FOR GOD GUARANTEED. FSSP SEMINARIES". We only now add some practical aspects which would have clashed a bit in the enumeration above,



(Picture: Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for Clergy and President of the Ecclesia Dei Commission Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos with four FSSP priests just ordained by him at our FSSP seminary in Lincoln, NE on 30th May 2008.)

but which may be of interest nonetheless : central heating, en-suite shower rooms, professional kitchen staff, private football grounds (Denton) or nearby mountains and lake Constance (Wigratzbad); rise at 6am, lights out at 10pm followed by grand silence; no Internet or television or guests in bedrooms; no mobile phones; free afternoon on Wednesdays and Sundays, monthly community excursion; weekly spiritual direction, 5-day preached retreat at beginning of term, 4 weeks apostolate each year in parishes or youth camps; Divine office prayed in choir 3 to 4 times a day plus daily Holy Mass in the EF of the Roman Rite always; cassock normally worn all the time from the second year. Lastly, we have just built a large chapel with choir stalls sitting 100 in our American seminary, and are adding a 30-room new dormitory wing in our European seminary.

Please pray for First Year British seminarians Alex and Mark who began their formation three months ago in Nebraska and Bavaria respectively; for Second Year British seminarian James tonsured last month in Wigratzbad; for Third Year British seminarian Ian ordained Porter and Lector last month in November in Nebraska; and for British Deacon Matthew McCarthy to be ordained a priest on 21st May 2011 in Nebraska: come and pray with and for him in London for his First Solemn High Mass at home, on Saturday 28th May 2011 at St James Spanish Place, 3pm.

In conclusion, we now let one of our five British seminarians describe for you his recent ceremony of Tonsure and Clothing:

“Benedictus Deus!

Thanks to the presence of friends and family, generous in spirit, time and wallet, receiving the tonsure felt like a four-day-event, happy throughout. On Saturday Archbishop Wolfgang Haas of Liechtenstein blessed cassocks and surplices for 17 of us. We put on the black, praying: “that these Thy servants who will be clothed in this vestment... will be recognised as dedicated to Thee”. From now on it is, God willing, cassock and Roman collar for me every day. Seeing a priest or seminarian in clerical dress is a delight for those who love the Church; it is a sign of God’s order in the world for those who are astray; and it is a constant cause for us who wear it to remember what we are called to be.



(Picture: Cardinal O’Brien with Fr Simon Harkins and his loving parents Jim and Betty Harkins after his EF First Solemn High Mass in Edinburgh Cathedral on 5 June 2010.)

Then the bishop cut five chunks of hair from the head of each tonsurandi—front, back, left, right, crown, thus making the sign of the Cross—this to remind us of the Five Wounds of Christ. While the bishop cut we repeated after him words from *Psalm 15*: “*Dominus pars haereditatis meae, et calicis mei; tu es qui restitues haereditatem meam mihi*”. It means we no longer seek our fortune, security or home in the things of this passing world, but instead all we want from life is God Himself.

Then the choir chanted *Psalm 23*, singing “This is the generation of them that seek him, of them that seek the face of the God of Jacob.” Those last six words show how personal this is: the Almighty, the Transcendent, the Ungraspable and Unknowable has shown Himself to the world in the flesh so that we can know Him. To know Jesus is to know God the Father, for Jesus shares the self-same essence with the Father and with the Spirit. Here we put on the surplice, all white, and are to wear it whenever we serve in the sanctuary as a sign of having put on Christ: “May the Lord put on thee the new man, whom according to God is created in justice and in the holiness of truth.” We pray: “so that even as they are changed in outward appearance, He may likewise grant them an increase of virtue” (i.e. change on the inside).

Repeatedly we pray in remembrance that all this is done by His power, not ours; by His goodness, not ours; of His mercy and according to His Plan, not ours. Because if we fix our eyes on the human being, some may be scandalized, saying in their hearts: “How can this wretched man, this moral cripple, be on the path to the priesthood!?” And finding the idea too stupid, too outrageous, they reject the reality of the priesthood, or even of God. But when we fix our eyes on God it is simple to see: with Him all things are possible, even the

filling of earthen vessels with grace, the strengthening of the weak, the salvation of sinners. Our part is to co-operate. Then the bishop gave a crucifix to each candidate. During the offertory I stared at mine, realising with new force: “Jesus, You have given all of Yourself to me. I want to give all myself to You.” This is the exchange He asks of us, and it is unspeakably good!

Thanks for all your prayers, which are keeping me afloat. You are all in mine. God is good! Love in Christ, James.”

Priestly ordinations in the FSSP over the last 11 years (in parentheses are the FSSP priests ordained from the UK):

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Average
Total	12	15	12 (1)	19	17	7	14 (1)	8	12	9 (2)	12 (1)	? (1)	12

More information on our UK website <http://www.fssp.co.uk/> or international <http://fssp.org/>.

To contact the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter in England: St John Fisher House, 17 Eastern Avenue, Reading RG1 5RU, Berkshire, England. Tel: +44 (0)118 966 52 84. Locate us on a map [here](#). Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP: malleray@fssp.org
 Next Vocation Discernment weekend at St John Fisher House: 8-10 April 2011
 Next Clergy silent Summer retreat with the FSSP in Berkshire: 4-8 July 2011

O Lord grant us priests! O Lord grant us many priests! O Lord grant us many holy priests!