

Fourteen seminarians welcomed at Ireland's national seminary



St Patrick's Seminary in Maynooth is welcoming 14 new seminarians this year.

Thirteen men hoping to join the diocesan priesthood and one missionary priest have begun their studies for priestly formation at Ireland's national seminary in County Kildare.

In his welcome address to the new candidates along with their family and friends, Mgr Hugh Connolly quoted Pope Francis's address to the seminarians of the Pontifical Leonine College, Anagn in April, saying: "The seminary is the place where we develop our vocation, gaining an in-depth understanding of the Gospel, repentance, the Eucharist and Prayer."

Mgr Connolly went on to remind the candidates of Jesus's words at the Last Supper: "You did not choose me, but I chose you (Jn 15:16) are a reminder to us all, not only those of us who are priests, that vocation is always an initiative of God."

The new candidates to the seminary will bring the total number of seminarians at Maynooth up to 70 but represent a decline in numbers compared with 2013 when 20 new seminarians joined Maynooth. In 2011, Maynooth received 12 new seminarians and 13 in 2012.

Following the announcement by Maynooth, David Quinn, Director of the Iona Institute, a think-tank, said that the Catholic Church in Ireland still had "a long way to go."

Mr Quinn said: "Even if you factor in the scandals and secularisation and the decline in the size of the family, I think vocation figures are unusually low."

He said: "We need to have a sense of urgency about addressing this problem. The priests in Ireland are getting older and older and heading towards retirement and we are due to have big holes left in parishes and yet there is no sense of urgency."

“Vocations directors in diocese have other roles too and so not sufficient time to concentrate on the problems. The order which is doing quite well, by present standards, is the Dominicans because they have a full-time vocations director and we need more of these.

“We also need a change in culture in Ireland, where men are asked if they have considered the priesthood. In the Diocese of Perth for example, this culture has emerged and despite the fact that Australia is a very western secularised country they have managed to buck this trend through this new approach to vocation.

“People also tend to delay their major life decisions and so the Church no longer finds people who are at school and considering the priesthood.”

Four of the new students this year are from the Archdiocese of Dublin and three are from the Archdiocese of Tuam.

The remaining students are from the dioceses of Down and Connor, Ardagh and Clonmacnois, Armagh, Cloyne and Kerry.

Madeleine Teahan - Catholic Herald