

Here I am, Lord

‘I don’t know Who – or what – put the question, I don’t know when it was put. I don’t even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone – or Something – and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal’. In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.’

*Dag Hammarskjöld,
2nd Secretary-General of the UN*



Seminarians, David Vard, Pio Hartnett, Ricky O'Connor and Thomas Small.

As part of the preparations for Vocations Sunday, *Intercom* invited four seminarians, currently in formation at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, to share with readers some of the story of the journey of their vocation.

Third-year Divinity student, David Vard from Newbridge, Co Kildare, studying for the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin; first-year Divinity student, Ricky O’Connor from Our Lady’s Island and the Diocese of Ferns; third-year Philosophy student, Thomas Small from Belturbet in Co Cavan and the Diocese of Kilmore and first-year Philosophy student, Pio Hartnett from Clifden, Co Galway and the Diocese of Tuam; all generously agreed after their morning lectures one spring day to reflect for a while in the Columba Centre, Maynooth, upon the path that led them to the national seminary and to studying for the priesthood.

They had each taken a very individual road bringing a considerable amount of life experience of one kind or another with them. Pio Hartnett, a self-admitted film buff with a love and talent for music and for engaging with people, had a background as a volunteer youth worker and spent three years in Canada working with NET.ministries. This experience had been a life-changing one for him and clearly nurtured his desire to bring a good news message of faith to his own generation.

Thomas Small, a Johnny Cash fan with a love of astronomy and who has discovered within himself a new talent for singing with the college choir in Maynooth, described himself as coming from a traditional Catholic family with devout parents who had both, sadly, passed away in recent years. Thomas spent fifteen years in the family business of antique furniture restoration before deciding to embark on this new life path

and has a mature understanding of what is entailed.

Music featured yet again in the life and talents of Ricky O’Connor, who is also a member of the college choir and whose guitar playing skills have greatly helped him to engage with young people through liturgy and other more informal settings. Ricky had explored a number of spiritual paths during his young adult life and his baptism as an adult marked a decisive and life changing moment for him.

David Vard, now in his diaconate year, came to Maynooth from school and is from a family with a strong interest in rugby. He also enjoys the challenges of the ever-widening field of new technology. David had since visited and helped in Peru on the Maynooth Mission Outreach program with the Missionaries of Charity, helping destitute men and sick children. This was an experience which left a lasting impression.

While each one had their own unique story to tell about the influences and events that led to their moment of decision to study for the priesthood, one of the most striking things that emerged during the conversation was the important role played by individual priests known to the young men and their families in encouraging them over time to consider that they might have a calling to priesthood. While the influence of family members or a particular teacher was also very important, it was the personal, and individual interest from a priest that played a key part in their thinking that perhaps God was calling them to serve in the priesthood. When asked what they themselves would say to anyone who felt similarly called, their response was that no one should doubt that God could call them; ‘no matter how crazy it sounds or how unworthy you feel – everyone is unique and God calls everyone individually.’ Pio was clear; ‘Don’t dismiss it. Give it a go.’ David suggested talking with a priest and visiting Maynooth.

They were equally clear about their hopes for the future and of the need to reach out joyfully to people – to go to them if they’re not coming to us. In Ricky’s words to, ‘Be the bridge in the gap between the Church and the world.’

Mass for Vocations Sunday will be broadcast on RTÉ 1 at 11.00 am on Sunday, 17 April. The celebrant will be Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore



Prayer for Vocations

**LORD of the Harvest,
BLESS young people with the gift of courage to
respond to your call.
Open their hearts to great ideals, to great things.**

**INSPIRE all of your disciples to mutual love and
giving –
for vocations blossom in the
good soil of faithful people.**

**INSTILL those in religious life, parish
ministries, and families with the confidence
and grace to invite others to embrace
the bold and noble path of a life
consecrated to you.**

**UNITE us to Jesus through prayer and sacrament,
so that we may cooperate
with you in building your reign of mercy
and truth, of justice and peace. Amen.**

*Pope Francis
Adapted from the Message on the 51st
World Day of Prayer for Vocation*

