



NINE DAYS FOR OUR PRIESTS

A Novena to St John Vianney

“The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.”

— St John Vianney, Curé of Ars

Nine days of prayer for the renewal of priests:
prayed together by priests, by those who lead alongside them
and by those who love them.

Feast of St John Vianney, 4 August

Why we are praying

In 1818, a young priest was sent to a small farming village. He was thought unpromising. He had struggled through his studies, his Latin was poor, and Ars was not a place anyone expected him to flourish. He arrived to find a parish in which faith had grown weak and many had largely ceased practising. He remained there for forty-one years. By the end of his life, people were travelling from across France and waiting days to make their confession to him.

He was not physically strong. Several times, overwhelmed by the responsibility of his ministry, he tried to leave Ars for a life of prayer and solitude. He spent up to sixteen hours a day in the confessional and suffered periods of severe illness and exhaustion. His strength did not come from natural ability alone, but from prayer, his complete dependence upon God, and his refusal to give up on the people entrusted to him.

Saint John Vianney is the patron saint of parish priests. His feast is celebrated on 4 August.

Over these nine days we are asking priests, leaders and parishioners to pray together for the renewal of priests.

There is something we are praying for. In January 2027 there is a five-day Priestly Renewal Convocation at Massey University, Palmerston North — five days set apart for prayer and fraternity, on the interior life, the art of accompanying souls, and the grace of the confessional. Priests from across New Zealand and beyond are invited. We would love the right men to be there.

So, this novena has an ask inside it.

FOR PRIESTS: *Lord, is this for me — and who would I want beside me?*

FOR LEADERS: *Lord, how do we make it possible for him to go?*

FOR PARISHIONERS: *Lord, which priest am I holding before you?*

When to pray it

A novena is nine days of prayer, and these nine days can be prayed at any time of the year.

Before the feast. Many will pray it in the nine days leading to the feast of St John Vianney: beginning on 26 July, with the ninth day falling on 3 August and the feast itself on 4 August.

At another time. Others will pray it whenever the need arises. A novena is often prayed before something that matters: a priest arriving in a new parish, the anniversary of an ordination, a difficult season, the start of a school or parish year, or simply a week when a priest has been on your heart.

Whenever you pray it, you are praying with everyone else who has prayed it, and with those praying it still.

Before you begin

These nine days are prayer with a clear intention.

On Day Eight you will be asked to write down names.

On Day Nine you will be asked to do something about them — a conversation, a phone call, an invitation.

Small things, though they may take some courage. Nothing you have to decide now.

Pray it alone, in a family, or as a group. If you miss a day, simply carry on.

EACH DAY TAKES ABOUT FIVE MINUTES

1. Begin with the Opening Prayer — the same every day, prayed by everyone.
2. Read the short reflection for the day.
3. Pray the intention for where you stand — priest, leader, or parishioner. Read the others too, if you like, so you know what is being asked alongside you.
4. Sit with the day's question. Don't rush to answer it.
5. Close with the Closing Prayer — the same every day, prayed by everyone.

Pray the Opening Prayer to begin and the Closing Prayer to end,
the same each of the nine days, prayed by everyone.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest, You called ordinary men and made them yours.

You did not wait until they were strong.

*Through the intercession of St John Vianney, who loved his people to the point of exhaustion,
look with mercy on your priests and on all of us who have been given to them.*

Be near to the tired ones. Be near to the ones far from home.

Be near to the ones nobody has asked about in a long time.

Open our ears these nine days.

Show us who to pray for, who to encourage, and what you are asking of us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Closing Prayer

St John Vianney, You were not strong, and you did not think yourself equal to it.

You stayed anyway. Pray for the priests we have been given:

for the ones who are flourishing, the ones who are exhausted,

and the ones who have stopped saying how they are.

We pray as priests, as leaders, and as people who love them,

that we would hold one another up rather than wear one another down.

And pray for these five days in January:

that the right men would come, that cost would not be the thing that stops them

and that they would go home renewed.

Curé of Ars, pray for us. Amen.

DAY ONE

He was sent to a place he did not choose

Vianney did not ask for Ars. He was sent there, to a village of only two hundred and thirty people, where religious practice had grown weak and few were coming to Sunday Mass. He is said to have become lost in the fog on the way and to have asked a young shepherd boy for directions.

Almost no priest is standing exactly where he once imagined he would be. Many find themselves in places they did not choose, serving people they did not expect.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, you know the road that brought me here. I do not always understand it. Give me the grace to be present to the people you have given me, rather than the ones I imagined.

FOR LEADERS

*Lord, we see parts of what our priest carries that others don't.
Help us to see it clearly and honestly today, without judgement.*

FOR PARISHIONERS

*Lord, my priest did not choose me, and I did not choose him. You put us together.
Thank you for him. Show me his face as you see it.*

TODAY'S QUESTION

Priests: What did I not expect about this ministry?

Everyone else: When did I last ask my priest how he is?



DAY TWO

He tried to leave

Several times, Vianney tried to leave Ars. On one occasion, he set out from the village, only to be persuaded to return. The patron saint of parish priests was a man who repeatedly felt the desire to escape the responsibility entrusted to him.

This is not a failure in the story. It is part of the story. Perseverance is not the absence of the desire to leave. It is the grace to remain faithful when leaving feels easier.

FOR PRIESTS

*Lord, you know the days I have wanted to put it down. I don't need to pretend with you.
Give me what Vianney had — not the feeling of strength, but the grace to stay one more day.*

FOR LEADERS

Lord, help us not to assume he is fine because he looks fine. Give us the courage to ask a real question and the patience to wait for a real answer.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, for every priest today who is in doubt - hold him. Let him hear one word of encouragement before the day is out and let it come from someone who means it.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Who do I know who is quietly close to the end of what they can carry?

DAY THREE

He gave his time to the confessional

For years Vianney heard confessions for eleven, thirteen, sixteen hours a day. People came from all over France and waited days for their turn. He was not a polished speaker. He was not a learned scholar. But he remained there, hour after hour, and through him people encountered the mercy of God.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, you have given me the power to forgive sins in your name. Let me never grow casual about it. Renew in me the wonder of what happens in that room.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, teach us to lead people towards reconciliation, not only by organising opportunities, but by speaking of your mercy with conviction and hope.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, thank you for every hour my priest has spent hearing confessions. Give me the courage to go myself and to bring someone with me.

TODAY'S QUESTION

When did I last go to Confession?



DAY FOUR

He prayed before he preached

Vianney once noticed a parishioner spending long hours before the tabernacle and asked him what he did there. The man's answer, in substance, was simple: "I look at him, and he looks at me."

Vianney did not possess the natural gifts of a great orator. What people encountered in him was a man who had been with God and had not hurried away.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, protect my prayer. Protect it from my diary, my phone, and my own good intentions. Let the people I serve encounter someone who has been with you.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, help us to guard his prayer rather than eat into it. Show us the meeting we could cancel, the task we could take on, the space we could give back.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, give my priest the time and freedom to pray. Show me where I may be adding to what keeps him from you.

TODAY'S QUESTION

What is quietly eating a priest's prayer where I am?

He was poor

Vianney lived on very little and gave almost everything away. He founded *La Providence*, a home and free school for poor and orphaned girls and worked tirelessly to provide for them. He was not trying to make a point about money. He simply did not hold tightly to what passed through his hands.

Cost is a real barrier. For some priests, it is the reason they will not come to something good, though they may never say so.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, keep me free. Free from anxiety about what I don't have, and free to receive what is offered to me without embarrassment.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, if cost is what stands between him and five days of renewal, show us — and show us whether I am meant to do something about it.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, for every priest who wants to come to something good and cannot afford it, please provide. And if I am part of how you provide, make me generous.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Is there a practical barrier I could quietly remove for someone?



He needed his brothers

Vianney did not become a saint alone. Other priests formed him, encouraged him and helped him discern his way. He sought counsel and, though he spent much of his life carrying the burdens of others, he too needed the grace and support of the Church.

A priest can go a long time without a real conversation with another priest. Not a meeting. A conversation.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, give me my brothers. Break down whatever in me keeps them at arm's length — pride, busyness, or the habit of coping.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, help us to see the isolation we might be adding to without knowing it. Show us how to make space for him to be with his brothers.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, for every priest who will eat alone tonight — be with him. Send him a brother.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Priests: Which brother priest have I been meaning to ring?

Everyone else: Who is alone tonight who shouldn't be?

He was renewed so that others could be

The renewal of Ars began in its priest. Vianney could not lead his people where he was unwilling to go himself. He gave himself first to prayer, conversion and surrender, and the village slowly began to change around him.

The order matters, and it is easy to get it backwards. We ask priests to renew everyone else while they themselves are running on empty.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, I cannot give what I have not received. Show me honestly whether I need to be renewed before I can renew anyone else.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, forgive us where we have asked our priests for output and not asked after their souls. Change how we lead.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, I want my parish to be alive. Let me start by praying for the man who stands at its altar, rather than for the programmes.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Am I asking my priest to give what he has not been given?



DAY EIGHT

Who am I praying for?

Eight days in, this is the day to be specific. Not “our priests” in general, but a name.

Vianney carried particular souls before God. His ministry was never directed towards an anonymous crowd, but towards the person in front of him. General prayer is good, but named prayer changes things, because it changes the one praying.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, name the brothers. Not the ones I think I ought to choose, but the ones you are placing before me. Show me whom I would want beside me for those five days.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, name the priests. Show us the one concrete thing that could make it possible for them to go.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, name the priest. My parish priest, an assistant priest, a chaplain, a friend, or one I have not seen in years. Show me his face and show me whether you are asking me to say something to him.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Write the names down. Hold each one before the Lord.

One is enough. Three is better. This is prayer, not a target.

Who else is meant to be praying?

Vianney did not renew Ars alone. He gathered and formed people. What began with one priest praying became a parish learning to pray and eventually reached far beyond that small village.

Nine days end today. What has begun in them does not have to.

If you have prayed these days to the feast, tomorrow is 4 August — the feast of St John Vianney.

FOR PRIESTS

Lord, give me the courage to make the call I have been sitting on. Show me whether these five days in January are for me — and who I am meant to ask to come with me.

FOR LEADERS

Lord, show us who else should be praying this. Let it not stop with us.

FOR PARISHIONERS

Lord, show me who to invite into this prayer. And give me the words to say to my priest.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Who am I inviting into this prayer?

What is the one conversation I need to have — and on what day am I going to have it?

Name the day. Not “soon.” A day.

IF YOU ARE PRAYING THIS TO THE FEAST

4 August — the Feast of St John Vianney. Wherever you are, ask that Mass on this day be offered for the renewal of priests.

And then do the thing you discerned.

Finding the words

You do not have to invent these. Copy them, change them, or use your own.

Inviting someone into the novena

We're praying a novena to St John Vianney for the renewal of priests: nine days, five minutes a day. I'd love you to pray it with me.

A leader, to other leaders

We're praying a novena for our priests. There is a convocation in January, and I would love our priests to be there, but I would also love us to pray about it first. It is only five minutes a day. Will you pray it with me and pass it on to your team?

A priest, to a brother priest

I've been praying about January. I'm going. Come with me.

Or, if you are still deciding:

There is a convocation in January: five days of prayer and fraternity. I've been praying about whether to go. Would you consider it with me?

A leader, to your priest

Father, there is a five-day convocation for priests in January, and I would love you to go. I've thought about that week, and we can cover things here. I don't want the demands of this place to be the reason you cannot go.

A parishioner, to your priest

Father, I've been praying for you every day for the past nine days. I don't know whether you have heard about the priests' convocation in January, but I would love you to go. If cost is a barrier, I would like to help with that. Please do not feel that you need to answer me now.

That last line matters. It gives him the freedom not to respond immediately, which may make it easier for him to respond honestly when he is ready.

On offering to help with the cost

Some people will prefer to make the offer directly, as above. Others may prefer not to place that conversation between themselves and their priest. In that case, they might simply say:

I've made a contribution to the bursary, in the hope that it helps a priest to attend.

Both are good. Use whichever you can say naturally and without strain.

What I am going to do

Keep this. It is between you and God.

THE PRIEST, OR PRIESTS, I HAVE BEEN PRAYING FOR

WHAT I AM GOING TO DO

A conversation. A phone call. A message. An offer to help with the cost. An invitation to someone else to pray.

ON WHAT DAY

Everything about the convocation is on the website: the programme, the speakers, the costs, and how to enquire about a bursary in confidence.

Do have a look and share it with anyone you have been praying for.

priestlyrenewal2027.netlify.app

*Prepared for the Priestly Renewal Convocation, January 2027
Diocese of Palmerston North, in partnership with the Initiative for Priestly Renewal*



Diocese of Palmerston North

A Priestly Renewal CONVOCATION

*Five days set apart for prayer and fraternity —
on the interior life, the art of accompanying souls, and the grace of the confessional.*



AN INVITATION

"Dear brother priests — I warmly invite you to join me for these five days of prayer and fraternity. Let us together fan into flame the gift God has given us, and renew the joy of our priesthood at the feet of Christ."

✠ John, Bishop of the Diocese of Palmerston North



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1. Tale of Four Priests
2. Into the Castle
3. Sustaining Prayer in Busy Priestly Life

II.

Jesus as Spiritual Director

1. The Galilean & Nicodemus
2. The Healer & the Demoniac
3. Mary's Son & the Disciple

III.

Renewing Confession

1. The Sacrament of Mercy
2. Confession as Pastoral Encounter
3. Strengthening Priestly Ministry

Speakers from the Avila Institute and the Initiative for Priestly Renewal:



Dan Burke

*Founder of the Avila Institute; teacher
on prayer and the interior life.*



Dr. Anthony Lilles

*Theologian of the spiritual life; Dean
Emeritus, St. Patrick's Seminary.*



Fr. Francis M. Roaldi, CFR

*Franciscan Friar of the Renewal;
preacher and retreat master.*



Dr. Joseph Hollcraft

*Catholic theologian and educator;
host of 'The Sacred Heart Institute.'*

For more information and to register: priestlyrenewal2027.netlify.app