



“My name is Stephen Ward, I am 37 years of age, and I am from Cappagh Parish (Killyclogher) in Omagh. I am the oldest of two, I have a younger sister who is married and my mum at home whom I regularly visit.

I can't help but believe that there is something very appropriate and fitting in that I will, God willing, be ordained a deacon on the Feast of the Epiphany. If you consider for a moment what is significant about the Epiphany. It is a celebration of the Divine Child being revealed to all the nations represented by the arrival of the Magi from the East.

The Magi have come from a long distance away to see the King of Kings by following a glimmer of light from a star which guided their prolonged journey there.

The same can be said of my vocation story, I too travelled a prolonged journey. In fact, when the thoughts of priesthood first manifested itself, I chose to resist them. However, as I worked and lived the normal bits and pieces of each and every day and as I took time to pray and to reflect, I realise that the signposts were all pointing in one direction. This can be said of both the positive and negative experiences, the joys and the sorrows, the times of consolation and of desolation. All the while, God was inviting to consider a priestly vocation. After all, it was he who created me, and as St John Henry Newman reminds us, “he knows what he is about”!

With the help of regular reception of the sacraments, prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Lectio Divina (praying with Sacred Scripture), spiritual reading, local priests, family, and friends I decided to tease the issue of discernment out and after some time I realised that seminary was the only place where this could be tested. From 2016 to 2018 I was in St Malachy's Seminary in Belfast where I completed my philosophical studies and from 2018-2022 in St Patrick's College in Maynooth completing my theological studies.

It was during this time in seminary that the discernment process led me to the point where I am at today. That is, preparing for Ordination to the Diaconate in the Diocese of Derry. I just hope and pray that the Lord may use me in whatever way he sees fit, and that I may be a signpost as opposed to a roadblock for the people of God encountering the Divine Child. I also pray that it might be the star or spark that enlightens the minds and hearts of men young and old in this parish and diocese to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life.”