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THE LAITY will have to become more involved in running parishes due to the declining numbers of priests, the Pope's ambassador to Britain has said, writes Christopher Lamb. "In the face of this crisis, which nobody can deny, the churches should be pushed to give to the lay people more tasks surrounding the spiritual life of the parishes," Archbishop Antonio Mennini, apostolic nuncio to Great Britain, said in remarks reported by the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle's newspaper, The Northern Cross.

"In Brazil, many parishes see a priest only once a month or once every two months but every Sunday the eucharistic ministers preach, they read the Gospel and say the sermon. Of course, it's not the same as having Mass."

The nuncio, who made his comments during a meeting with the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle's Council of Laity, also dismissed a suggestion that married men should be ordained priests. He said that he did not

think this would increase the number of vocations.

"For young people in our times, compared to 20 years ago, it is more difficult to make a choice to get married or not to get married but this choice depends on the strength of the encounter young men have with Christ," he said. "We have no inner reason to lead a chaste life than to follow the example of Jesus. We are taught to give more than we receive

because Jesus acted in this way and I think that this is the case with celibacy." He said that the Church should evaluate where there is

disparity with the number of priests from diocese to diocese "and for example, a priest from the Milan

Diocese could come to Newcastle". The nuncio also suggested that missionaries may have to be sent to England and other parts of Europe.

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