

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Closer To Home

The coloured, syndicated sheet on which we've been printing our Bulletin saved a job, but it's expensive, and it isn't ours. In the time of change which has begun with the new Bishop and with the Diocesan Assembly, I think we could use this space to share thoughts and ideas as they arise. We don't know what the future will hold for us, and as it unfolds, communication will be vital.

The Parish Council

met last week for its AGM. We thank those who accept the task of working for it and hope that the Council will be the forum for a whole host of networks and communities within our parish. We need to think radically about the needs of the parish, the burdens it bears, and the opportunities before us. We have a large and dignified church: but it needs refurbishment, and it may also need structural repair. Although a survey has been commissioned, it is proving extraordinarily difficult to get the surveyors to report - they are nearly nine months overdue. We have our well-placed hall; it too is in need of repair and re-ordering. We've already put in motion the planning of a good kitchen and proper catering equipment. The hall could be a focus for hospitality and warmth on a grand scale; the city centre needs these things very much, and we should be in the forefront of filling that need. The awful presbytery is ridiculously huge for one man to live in, and hopelessly lonely as well. We need to rethink the provision of the priest's house; and for that we need to know what provision of priests the Bishop envisages, as the moment approaches when the numbers of priests in the Diocese is due to dive very steeply.

Clergy and Laity

We're still dominated by the thought that all pastoral care and all decision-making and leadership emanate from the clergy. We need to rethink that assumption very soon: most importantly because it just isn't true, and secondly because the Lord will show us it isn't true - by gentle removal of the clergy. It means that we must ginger up our community spirit, and rethink our rôles in the delivery of the Gospel to our bit of the Lord's vineyard. No-one is called to be a spectator or a sleeping partner in this

enterprise. The fact that we call this sort of religion by the worthy name of "humility" (*I'm not a leader, I haven't got any skills, I'm just a loyal customer...*) doesn't make it a good thing. The scripture is always taking that refuge away from us. When God called Jeremiah, the poor man said, *Ah, ah, ah, Lord: you see, I don't know how to speak; I am only a child.* But the Lord replied: *Do not say "I am only a child." For you must go to all to whom I send you, and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of facing them, for I am with you to rescue you.*

The Summit and Fount

of all we do is the Liturgy, the Mass. Here too the domination of the clergy has to yield to a much fuller expression of the whole community. To *tell* people they are sharing in the action of the liturgy is one thing. To leave them penned up in their benches, silent and motionless, tells them the opposite. As a parish, we need more help in the liturgy, we need more people to be up and doing. We need everyone in the community to have an active ministry, so that coming to Church really means doing something for God, and for each other. If St Hugh's awoke and flexed its liturgical muscles, it would be immensely uplifting! If one day we all stood up, with one full heart, and sang at the tops of our voices, we would amaze ourselves. We wouldn't have to argue our young people into coming to Church if they had a real sense of contributing, an awareness of their real importance to others. I've never known a decent server or a good musician who had to be *persuaded* to come to Church. They're first in, and keen to do things well. I hope I'll get to know the names of all our parishioners one day - it will take me years. Until this happens, I'm a "virtual" parish priest. But we must *all* learn who our fellow-parishioners are, and be there when they are in need, and share with them the joy and burdens of their lives. The happiness and fruit of being God's people will then become clear - not only to us, but to those outside the Church, who do not have such a cause for happiness. We mustn't be satisfied with the Church as it now is. We need it to be an abundant source of divine life; if we have faith and hope, God will make it so!

Fr Philip