

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Glance Towards The Future

We are coming to a moment of thresholds in the life of the Church. The Pope celebrated his 80th birthday last week, and in October the Bishop reaches his 75th - when he offers, obedient to Canon Law and other laws, his resignation. Meanwhile, in the Diocese, there are other difficult moments of change looming up. The average age of the priests is very high, and it is natural that within ten years there will be far fewer left to do the work. We have begged, borrowed, and stolen priests, importing them for years from Eire and Eastern Europe and recently even from Africa. The truth is, however, that each Church should broadly speaking support itself in ministers, if it is a mature Church as opposed to a juvenile one.

Coat And Cloth

We must therefore take steps as a Diocese to provide for the services of the Church in a way that will reflect our resources. Soon the decision will be made to withdraw priests from some presbyteries. This means what it says and nothing more. There is, we are assured, no plan to close or amalgamate parishes. It simply means that what happened to Wollaton will happen to other parishes: they will find their parish priest living at the presbytery of the next parish rather than their own. In our parish, I decided for many reasons to come to live at Wollaton, rather than in the Beeston chaplaincy where Fr Bernard lived. (There's no guarantee my successor will feel the same!) We have no idea where the changes will be made. But simply guessing, we could see (for instance) the priest of St Patrick's or St Augustine's living at the Cathedral, or the priest for St Mary's living at Bulwell or St Paul's. The parishes will have to share their priests as best they can, and accept the changes gracefully; it will mean that your favourite time for Sunday Mass has changed places (as I am sure it did in Wollaton). This has implications for priests, but for the people they serve as well.

Houses, Phones, and Faces

All sorts of questions will arise about the use and security of the church's buildings: new

opportunities, and worries too. There will be difficulties about finding, contacting, arranging to meet, the priest. Surely we'll need new structures in every parish, involving lay people in more administration and responsibility for our Church. This is very desirable in its own right, but it isn't easy. Perhaps the needs of these times will alert congregations to the urgent need for priests to lead the Church. I hope so! The rise of the deacons is going to make a difference; but it will not end the need for priests. Diocesan policy about deacons will need much attention from the new Bishop.

What About Wollaton?

The smallest parishes in Nottingham are Bilborough and Wollaton. Bilborough is the *pied-a-terre* of the Vicar Judicial - the place that keeps him sane and fed while he does the aching work of the Marriage Tribunal. Wollaton may be said to have been "already pruned" by its amalgamation with the Chaplaincy to the University. Still, we cannot consider ourselves separated from what is happening in the Church around us, and we should have exactly the same response, so that if we are asked to accept change, we will be ready for it. You won't be surprised to hear that I don't welcome the creation of plethoras of committees, and have always hoped to survive without them. But I have to acknowledge that we are now obliged to set up the structures that can represent the whole parish, and share the work of administration - so that the shared life and work of the parish can be seen as more and more vigorous, and less and less vitally dependent on the (possibly transient) presence of people like

Fr Philip