

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

When Did You Last See Your Father?

It occurred to me the other day that hardly anyone knows what I do with my time. I thought it was only right for me to tell you. Where do I go in the morning?

The University of Nottingham

A large community of 24,250 students, 3,702 of them postgraduates, and 3,500 staff. They are passing through very fast: the students - of whatever kind - are seldom longer here than three years, thirty weeks each year; in which time they have to leave home, grow up, decide how they want to live, and do the huge load of study that is demanded of them. Nottingham is in the top ten of British Universities, and its workloads are known to be prodigious. I'm there to help when times are hard, or relationships suffer, or great questions arise, or everything suddenly breaks down; students arrive apprehensive, and keep their problems to themselves, until it all boils over - often at the first exams! People have difficulty settling, or making friends, or looking after their money, or getting down to work. In all of this the Chaplain has to help people to trust God, how to hope, and how to believe, especially if their studies demand a sudden revolution in their way of believing. The most important task is to celebrate the Eucharist in the heart of the University, and help to create a thoughtful and prayerful atmosphere in which faith can be fed. Some of this work is routine, like instructing converts, and preparing the liturgy. Most of it, however, is sudden, and sometimes emergency.

He's In His Office

So I'm in my campus office, from 8 am (Mon/Wed/Fri) or 10 am (Thu) until 5 pm. People know I'm there and come to find me. It is no use being somewhere else when someone comes looking for you. It is vital to be there. Often they will chat for a long time before getting round to their real reason for coming; pastoral work is not to be done in haste! If I have a lull, I spend some of the office time on working for those whose lives are devastated by marital breakdown.

The Marriage Tribunal

uses me as a Judge, to study the record of a relationship that has failed, and decide about the validity of the marriage. This is painstaking work; I do three or four cases every six weeks; the Tribunal has its sessions at the curial offices eight times a year. A straightforward case costs me between eight and ten hours' work. If I can't find that on weekdays, I go in on Saturday too.

The Deacons

Eleven men in this diocese are preparing for the Diaconate. They have a three-year course, with a lecture-day once a month, at the Convent of Rearsby, and a one-to-one tutorial once a fortnight. I do the Scripture lectures, and I tutor three of the candidates; so there go the odd Saturday, six evenings per month (they stay till midnight!) and the time it takes me to prepare the lectures and mark the essays I set them each time. The candidates work very hard...and so do we!

What About Us?

Last but not least, there is Wollaton. You can see that I don't sit on my hands very much; I manage to celebrate the Mass for you every day, and I try to instruct new Catholics and help people prepare for the Sacraments. I prepare the Scripture group each month, and visit those who ask me to come. But I feel sorry that I can't do more for you. May I ask you to *make sure I know what you want of me, and when?* I don't have a crystal ball; tell me when you are ill, call me when I can help. You are my parishioners; you are vital to me, and I want to be your pastor! *Fr Philip*