SOME THOUGHTS ON RETIREMENT.....

“Thank you, thank you...” - for your wonderful, so very affirming, response two weeks ago to my announcements of plans to retire at the end of June, completing two, six year terms as your Pastor. Your prayers for me are so welcome and so very appreciated, as are your prayers for our Parish during these months of transition.

My priesthood is one for which I am ever grateful, thanks to so many priests, deacons and religious, and the “legions” of parishioners I have come to know these almost forty-six years. Even two summer assignments after ordination [not my idea, I assure you!], both of them forgiven if not forgotten, reminders that ours is a God of surprises. The next six years at Holy Name of Mary, Valley Stream is really, I often think, my first assignment. My “first” Pastor, the late Henry Phillips, was “mentor extraordinaire” to this “new kid on the block”.

Then, a year on the staff of our Cathedral Parish, followed seven years as Secretary to Bishop John McGann – a joy, a blessing for which I am ever grateful. I learned so much from him, especially his concern for priests in whatever situation – and especially, the importance of bringing a pastoral dimension to a plethora of administrative tasks. I even got stopped for speeding on the LIE, with the Apostolic Delegate [Nuncio] in the car! [The Bishop was “angry” with me just once, as I recall; anticipating his own retreat, he asked me about my plans for retreat, and I told him that I was too busy! He was especially concerned that he was in some way “responsible” for my “neglecting” an essential part of my spiritual life]. Serving for the next four years as Director of what was then called the Office of Catechesis and Worship [1985-1989], I came to know and so highly respect the dedicated religious educators and catechetical leaders throughout Long Island. In 1989, I became Pastor at Saint Christopher's, Baldwin; our parish motto, “Bearing Christ to One Another” might well be the motto for any parish, every parish. “9/11” found me there, where we lost five parishioners, far fewer than was your horrific experience here. Come 2005, I accepted the Bishop's invitation to come here, and as they say, I “... lived happily ever after”. But, thirty-nine years in various Diocesan and parochial administrative ministries is, I am thinking, enough.

I sometimes think that terms like “Emeritus” or “Senior Priest” describe people more on in years than me-self; however, a “three score and twelve “ Birthday this year [our Diocesan priests’ retirement age], and the completion of two terms here, makes it time, and my decision to retire one born of much thought, prayer, and good advice from lots of wonderful people, good friends one and all.

Especially anxious that this be an easy transition, I am already “making a list, and checking it twice” of things which I am anxious to share with a new Pastor - not at all to convey a “we’ve always done it this way” attitude, but to help him “... getting to know you... “ in whatever ways are possible, whatever ways may be helpful to him. Priests don’t “retire” from being priests, although being “out from under the desk” after thirty-nine years seems a prospect more and more appealing. Celebrating Mass and the other Sacraments on a regular basis is always a blessing — one which I plan on continuing to do.

Where to live? When we sold our family home in Westbury almost fifteen years ago, I bought a condo in the Riverhead area; it's been a great “day off ‘ oasis ever since. I plan to live there, offering whatever Mass and Sacramental assistance is needed in one or more East End parishes, where the Pastor is alone. I'm sure that I'll “find work” quite easily - and very happily!

“Lame duck? “ I don’t think that, and I certainly hope not! I'm here until the end of June, We'll have a Lenten Mission, Holy Week and Easter, First Communion and Confirmation, School Graduation — to say nothing of all of the daily activities which enable, encourage, and challenge all of us to become more fully the Body of Christ which is this wonderful parish.

Your new Pastor? As I mentioned when I announced retirement two weeks ago, he is in for a real treat — he is going to meet, come to know, pray with, be with, lead, and serve — all of you!

Like the man said, “Thank you, thank you ...”

Blessings galore - very gratefully!

Msgr. John Bennett

WEEKLY ENVELOPES

If you will be away for a month or more, would you kindly contact the Rectory Office 385-3311 x 214 and let us know. We will put a temporary hold on your envelopes. This is NOT first class mail and they do get returned to us for postage due.

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