

**PRIESTHOOD**

Change is never easy. Hardly ever is it viewed as progress, - unless one likes the outcome. Yet, change is a normal part of our lives. It has been, and continues to be, a part of the Church's life, as well. Many of the Faithful do not readily accept that fact. Yet, it is true, even for our own Diocesan Church. It is a part of our journey into the Lord's Reign.

Our diocesan priests (as well as our deacons) have just completed their annual retreat. They have returned with renewed spiritual and pastoral energy to serve the Lord's flock entrusted to them.

I continue to be impressed by the dedication and generosity of our priests in that service. More and more, I find our priests willing to accept transition in their lives by embracing a call to serve wherever our Diocesan Church needs them. Ultimately, in some way, it is a call from the Lord himself. It is through the unexpected turns in our journey that He leads us. The priests of this Diocese appear to understand that.

On July 2, our summer transfers will be announced. They affect 25 of our priests. I do not recall any one of them objecting for purely personal reasons. There even were volunteers. While some expressed a preference, it was always followed by, "Whatever you and the Diocese need, Bishop." That is generosity.

These moves will necessitate the closing of three churches. This is not an easy or a pleasant thing to do. Certainly, that is true with the parishioners, as well as our priests and me. What helps is the understanding of the faithful that are affected. "We understand. We just wish it were not us. But, we understand," is the reaction that I get most often. I, too, understand their sorrow over such a transition. That, too, is generosity. That, too, is a reflection of the common priesthood that the Faithful have been called to live.

Fortunately, no one in our Diocesan Church has to go without Mass on a weekend, unless they are homebound. That, again, is due to the generous spirit of our ordained priests. Many of them serve in double capacities, - sometimes even triple.

In a couple of weeks, I will observe my fiftieth anniversary of being a priest. Almost half of that time has been as Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown. As with any priest, there have been difficult days as well as joyous ones. Or, as I like to say, "It's like our Allegheny Mountains; there are the peaks and then there are the valleys." You cannot have one without the other. Looking back, I cannot help but see that the Lord has been working on me through all of that. I am grateful.

As I move on, and as our priests and deacons move on, we know that the Lord provides appropriate spiritual leaders for his people. We need to remember, however, that those ordained leaders come from our own families. This Diocesan Church will have enough priests only if parents and grandparents encourage their sons and grandsons to be open to God's call. It is in the family that the generous spirit of a priest begins.