

THE FOLLOW-UP OF A PAROCHIAL MISSION.

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VERY few things are so difficult, and the more successful the Mission has been the more difficult the Parish priest will find the following up.

There are, of course, a number of reasons for this. In the first place there is no recognized technique for it. In preparing a Parochial Mission there is such a thing as a recognized technique and all the books agree on it. The difficulty of preparing a Mission is not in wondering what had better be done next, but in summoning the great energy that is required and of inoculating the people with it. The actual sequence of things to be done is perfectly plain and straightforward if only people will stick to the text books, introducing only local variations. For the following up there is no such technique and very little has been written about it. The Parish priest must make up his own as he goes along.

Besides this, if the Mission has been at all successful opportunities open out in bewildering numbers and variety. The vicar will have in his hands the names of perhaps about two hundred people who took Resolution Cards. All of those who are not regular members of his congregation ought, of course, to be followed up at once. In addition, there is the far larger number of people who came several times to the Mission or who came every night but who did not take a Resolution Card or leave any record of their names. A good number of them will be known to the Parish priest and probably all those whom he does not know himself will be known to one or other of his visitors. These present a formidable problem. If they are not followed up at once the effect of the Mission will quickly fade from their minds and it will soon be with them as if there had been no Mission at all.

Then there are those who give in their names to be confirmed. These are quite simple to deal with. One simply drafts them into adult confirmation classes in the ordinary way.

It is the two first classes that cause all the difficulty. It means that after a successful Mission there are probably some four hundred people who need to be followed up without any delay at all. This number is obviously far too large for the Parish priest and his curate, but, and here is the hub of the difficulty, all his workers are tired out and are not at all in the mood to renew their efforts without any delay. They have been working day after day and night after night for probably two to three months on end. Between them they have brought about a glorious climax, they have shared to the full in the initial excitement, and

now both in body and in spirit they are exhausted. It is not reasonable to deny them the rest they need, and in any case most of them would flatly insist on that rest.

Then there is the difficult psychological atmosphere. It is so much easier to work up towards a definite climax than it is to go on working in the same way once that climax is past. Nothing is harder than to generate enthusiasm for an anti-climax. In many parts of England, especially in the North, there is another difficulty. Most people object to being organized, especially if the organization looks like being permanent. They will allow themselves to be organized for a particular task but once that task is over they expect the organization to disband.

Is there any way over or round this difficulty? If it is not met and faced it means that more than half of the possible fruits of a good Parochial Mission are dissipated and wasted. Really, the difficulty ought to have been faced before the preparation for the Mission began and provided for as a normal part of that preparation. The enormous majority of Parishes which are having a Mission work out their plans so as to cover the year of the preparation and the period of the Mission itself, but enter upon the Mission without any real plan as to what is to happen afterwards.

The counsel of perfection would be to divide one's workers and visitors into two sections. The first would do the preparation, the second would not be expected to do their work until the Mission was over, when for a period of three months or more they would visit as devotedly as their co-workers in the other section had done before the Mission had begun. But in all but a tiny fraction of Parishes this is a counsel of perfection because it is not possible to get enough workers to do all that.

What, then, of the others? Is it altogether inconceivable that two neighbouring Parishes should combine for this purpose, that Parish A should have its Mission, keeping in touch throughout with Parish B, and that when the Mission is over, Parish B should provide the resources to do the necessary visiting and following up work. Presumably there would be some kind of agreement that in another year, when the roles were reversed and Parish B had its Mission, the workers of Parish A should descend on it afterwards to help to reap the fruits.

It seems a difficult thing to ask, yet if parochialism could be sufficiently broken down to allow it, it would unquestionably mean that far more of the real fruits of most parochial Missions could be reaped than are being reaped now. Moreover, the workers of Parish B, if only they would begin their visiting at once, the very day after the Mission ends for preference, would find that their task is not half so difficult as the task of those who did the visiting before the Mission, for their ground will be broken up and they will find it receptive and not hostile. Moreover, they will not be visiting from house to house but dealing only with those who are known to have been touched in some way or another by the Missioner's message.