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PERSONAL

12th August 1975

Dear Father Baker,

Thank you for your letter received this morning and for the spirit in which it was written. However, it is only just to you to hear from me the extent of the reasons why this change in the status of Downham Market has been judged imperative by both the Bishop and myself.

I proceeded, as you will have noted, to intimate this change to you at the level of re-organisation. For a long time now I have had in mind to erect East Dereham as a parish. This has now become possible, but it has necessarily entailed the re-alignment of Swaffham with Downham Market.

However, there is a more personal angle as well. I cannot think you are unaware of this. It grieves me to inflict pain on you as your pastoral devotion to your parishioners is well known, and the letters and petitions I am now receiving support this in no small measure. Nevertheless, the greater good of the Church is at issue.

I cannot doubt your good intentions and the conscientious motives that inspired you to offer to serve Downham Market as a curate to the parish priest of Swaffham. But this cannot be. It would be an impossible situation, in any case, with the Mass celebrated at Swaffham in accordance with the command of the highest authorities in the Church, and the Mass at Downham Market pursuing the shape and form of the Tridentine Rite.

Yes, with the exception of retired priests who may celebrate the Mass according to the older rite in private (not coram publico) if they feel duty bound to in conscience, the Missa Normativa has been promulgated as the one and only rite of the Mass for public use. You may have reasons to disagree with this directive (which commands obedience), but the Bishop has the unique responsibility for the Mass and Sacraments within his own area of authority. From my own conversation with you (my letter to you dated 27th July 1970 echoes our conversation) and from many other

sources, I am justified (you must correct me if I am mistaken) in thinking that you are unwilling to accept the responsibility of offering Mass according to the manner prescribed by the Pope and the Sacred Congregation and promulgated by our own Hierarchy.

One tries hard to proceed in such matters with truth, justice and love. All three aspects of the life of the Church must be maintained. This will, I hope, explain the apparently long delay in reaching an explicit decision. Any confusion here will breed evil. It is therefore in a real desire to find a right solution to a wrong situation that I broached the matter of your future. The Diocese will make proper financial provision for you so that you will not have to be worried about the normal necessities of life. You say that you appreciate "the offer of the Diocese to make provision were I to insist on departing". It is, as you see, the Diocese, through the Bishop, which is requiring you to resign from your parish and, because of your convictions, offering you what I hope will be honourable retirement.

Quite a number of people are going to be hurt. This cannot be avoided. But I ask you in the name of Christ to do all in your power to mitigate the effects of the proximate change. "Vehement resentment" is not a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit: what we are both seeking is the will of Christ and we both know where it is to be found, however inadequately implemented by the sorry instruments to whom He has entrusted the government of His Church.

Wishing you every blessing,

Yours devotedly,