

CHAPTER XV: The Winds of Change

Following Msgr. Marcoux's departure, there was a period of about three months during which Fr. Joseph Sullivan was full administrator. He was appointed April 23, 1970. He stated that no major projects were undertaken during this time and that he simply kept the parish functioning until June 6, 1970, when Rev. Paul E. Bouffard was appointed pastor, with curates Revs. Paul St. James and George A. Paulin.

Fr. Joseph Paul Edmond Bouffard was born in Websterville, Vermont, on September 3, 1923, to Antoine E. Bouffard and Anna A. Gingras. He was educated at Spaulding High School, Barre; St. Thomas Seminary, Bloomfield, Connecticut; St. Michael's College, Winooski; and St. Paul Seminary, Ottawa. He was ordained at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Burlington by Bishop Ryan on June 11, 1949.

Before his arrival as pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Fr. Bouffard was assigned as curate to St. Mary Parish, Middlebury, St. Paul, Barton, St. Monica, Barre, and as Administrator for a short period at St. Edward, Williamstown. He was pastor at St. Theresa, Gilman, and St. Theresa, Orleans.

Fr. Bouffard began his service at St. Joseph Parish in 1970 and that summer he started making changes that in-

cluded the removal of the porches from the old rectory. In the fall he took over as chaplain of the Confraternity of St. Joseph and in the spring of 1971 he became chaplain of the deGoesbriand Council of the Knights of Columbus in Burlington.

Since there had been such extensive renovation of the interior of the church in 1968-69, there was little need for much work during Fr. Bouffard's tenure but in 1973 he began the process of repairing the deteriorating church steps.

In February of the same year, he thought it advisable for the parish to acquire available land adjacent to the school with 110 feet of frontage on North Street and he requested permission for this purchase. The Diocesan Administrative Board denied permission on March 13. On April 7, 1974, the Team Ministry repeated the request and were denied permission on April 25; they requested reconsideration and in October 1974, the property was eventually purchased through the efforts of Fr. Bernard Messier and the Stewardship Commission.

This was only one of the frustrating factors that made matters difficult for Fr. Bouffard during his three years at St. Joseph Parish. Another problem arose when Bishop Joyce directed that the parish's subsidy to St. Joseph School be reduced from \$50,000 to \$25,000. As a result the school enrollment was cut in half, eliminating one of the two divisions. On May 2, 1972, sixteen classes were reduced to nine and the enrollment dropped to less than 200 pupils.

An important outside influence during these years came as the aftermath of the loss of the two Burlington Cathedrals. The Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul burned on February 15, 1971, and thirteen months later, on March 13, 1972, the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was destroyed by arson. This last disaster occurred two months after the arrival of Bishop John A. Marshall, who succeeded to the Diocese of Burlington on January 25, 1972, following the retirement of Bishop Joyce.

Naturally, fear that St. Joseph Church would be next to go up in flames swelled in the hearts of pastor and parishioners, a fear fed and kept alive by the discovery of small fires seemingly set deliberately on church property. The efforts made to safeguard the church from fire added to the tensions and frustrations in the parish.

The church and chapel were locked at five o'clock in the afternoon and opened just before the first Mass in the morning. A guard dog, Micah, was obtained to patrol the church but he caused additional problems for the personnel; it became necessary to remove him.

Electrical alarm systems were then tried; one was sensitive enough to detect the slightest movement in the church.



Rev. J. Paul Edmond Bouffard, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, June 6, 1970- March 21, 1973

This also proved to be impractical because an occasional flight of bats set off the alarm.

Fr. Bouffard had other resources. He was a priest with a great devotion to the Holy Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin. He appealed to resources which he knew would be helpful. He began the practice of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament twice a week in the chapel and of daily recitation of the Rosary with a special invocation of the Blessed Virgin for protection against fire. These devotions continued until 1985; the Rosary is still recited daily, Monday through Friday.

Another personal custom of Fr. Bouffard related to the Holy Eucharist. At a period when parishioners everywhere were still a bit startled and pleased to hear their names as they received Communion, Fr. Bouffard knew and named each one of his parishioners. When a stranger appeared at daily Mass, he promptly informed himself of the name. It was a warm touch.

Unfortunately, the unrest in the parish continued to increase. As a result of the fires, there were certain legal involvements. Furthermore, preaching from the pulpit on

social issues caused much distress among certain parishioners. It became obvious that complete changes had to be made in personnel at St. Joseph Parish.

On March 21, 1973, Fr. Bouffard and the two curates were reassigned by Bishop Marshall. Fr. Bouffard accepted a transfer to St. Francis Xavier Parish, Winooski, as pastor. Fr. St. James became chaplain at the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont and Fr. Paulin went to St. Mary Star of the Sea in Newport as Associate Pastor. These reassignments were a part of the remarkable number of changes during that period when, in the space of two and one-half years, seventy-five percent of the priests in the diocese moved to other parishes or appointments.

In 1975, during his pastorate at St. Francis Xavier Parish, Fr. Bouffard was accepted for a course of three months at the Institute for Continuing Theological Education in Rome. He remained at St. Francis Xavier until 1981 when he became pastor of St. Louis Parish in Highgate. For St. Joseph Parish, the departure of Fr. Bouffard signalled the end of an era.