

Requiem for Sir Bobby

WHILE THE football world is in mourning after the death of Sir Bobby Robson, a Catholic charity is also feeling the loss.

The former England and Newcastle football manager, who died at the end of last month, was a devoted patron of the charity St Cuthberts Care.

"We are very sorry indeed. He had an ubiquitous warmth for everyone," Moira Ashman, the charity's deputy director told us. "He helped us with our fundraising dinners and made sure the right people attended. Through those evenings, we raised hundreds of thousands of pounds. He loved to join in the dancing at the end of the evening, too, and we often wondered where he got his energy from."

Although Sir Bobby was not a Catholic he was given a requiem funeral Mass at St Michael and All Angels Church, Esh Laude, County Durham last Wednesday. Sir Bobby's wife, Lady (Elsie) Robson, is a devout Catholic and it was planned he would have a Catholic funeral with a larger memorial service taking place later.

"He has always very supportive of Elsie in her faith and had a number of priests who were friends," Canon Bob Spence, who presided at the funeral and was a friend of the family, told us. Sir Bobby, who died from lung cancer aged 76, had been patron of St Cuthberts (his wife is also a director) since 2003. The charity primarily cares for disabled children and adults and is believed to be the largest of its kind in the north-east of England.

It was founded in 1946 by the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle for children orphaned in the Second World War. Over the years it has shifted its focus to people with disabilities although still places children in foster homes.

Look, no hands ...

PRIESTS AND eucharistic ministers are rubbing their hands with anti-bacterial gel before distributing Communion to minimise the risk of transmitting the swine-flu virus. But with an eye to the main chance a company in America is suggesting churches go a step further. It's come up with a Communion host dispenser that ensures the host is untouched by human hand from the time it is baked to the point where the machine pops it into the recipient's hand.

The dispenser is a gold- or chrome-coloured cylinder with a cross on the front and allows the celebrant to dispense Communion at the click of a button. Hosts come in "classic" or "wine infused" varieties. Its maker, Purity Solutions, claims its invention takes "the worry out of contracting germs while receiving Communion and instead keeps the focus on what is a very personal, sacred and holy event". Although clergy may balk at introducing it into the parish they may be



attracted by its efficiency: using the dispenser apparently reduces "the cost, time and personnel needed to provide Communion by as much as 50 per cent", boasts the seller. Eucharistic ministers, however, could be out of a job as the dispenser means that clergy can "provide Communion to the entire congregation".

Strictly Ann Widdecombe

AFTER YEARS in the political limelight the Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe is planning a solitary existence when she retires from the Commons at the next general election.

She has bought an isolated house on Dartmoor and when there plans to "ruminate gently" and write her memoirs. But in an interview in the September issue of *Total Politics* magazine she revealed that her life may not be so quiet after all. She said she would, for instance, take a seat in the House of Lords if offered one by David Cameron and "would be a moderately active but not obsessively active peer".

Nor after her numerous television appearances of the last few years did she rule out making more. She said she was approached to take part in the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* and while she turned it down this year would consider doing it in future, having been heartened by the success achieved by ITN's former political editor John Sergeant.

"I've always thought that cavorting around with those frightfully elegant mortals, I'd look a complete idiot. But what I've realised from John's performance is they do let you go at your own pace. If I'm allowed to go at my own pace, it's not such a horrible thought," she said.

Asked whether she has become disillusioned with politics, she deplored the rise of the "professional politician" with little experience of the world outside Westminster. This trend, she claimed, will lead to "a thoroughly third-rate Parliament".

Designer logo

WHEN the Bishop of Plymouth decided he needed a new logo for the diocese he looked no further for help than Fr Jonathan Stewart, one of his priests.

Fr Stewart, 49, had spent 10 years as a graphic designer before training for the priesthood and had worked for Sir Terence Conran, among others.

"I took it on as a proper design project," he told us. "I studied a number of early Christian symbols in the catacombs and presented three different ideas. We didn't want it to be too contemporary but wanted it to look forward."

The image that has been chosen is a cross curved to the right with a 'p' incorporated into it. Fr Stewart explained that as the diocese is quite far-flung, "from Bournemouth to the Scilly Isles", the image would help bring the community together. He said that the diocesan symbol would be separate from that of the bishop's own coat of arms. Other dioceses use the bishop's crest, although Clifton has created its own diocesan logo.

Fr Stewart, who trained at the Royal College of Art, said there were no plans for more images. "Running three parishes is hard enough work," he said.

Heartfelt celebration

IN 1541, a year after the foundation of the Society of Jesus, two Jesuits, Alfonso Salmeron and Paschase Broet, arrived in Edinburgh and were favourably received in audience by James V and his queen, Marie de Guise. But successive years brought the Reformation, and further missions to Calvinist Scotland came to nothing for more than 300 years.

The Jesuits returned in 1859 with a modest temporary chapel in the Grassmarket under the shadow of the castle, then in 1860 moved into their present church of the Sacred Heart in Lauriston Street. It's here that they launched their 150th-anniversary commemorations last week on the Feast of St Ignatius with a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Keith O'Brien.

An exhibition charting the history of the order in Scotland is on display in the vestibule of the church until 30 September, and other events are planned. A visit to Sacred Heart is also an opportunity to see its magnificent Stations of the Cross produced by Bavarian artist Peter Rauth and his school of apprentices in the 1870s. The Stations are oil paintings and at 14ft by 8ft are probably the biggest in Scotland. They were restored to their original splendour in recent years thanks to a grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and a major fund-raising drive by the parish.

For more information about Sacred Heart visit www.rc.net/standed/sacredheart