

CHANGE OF PLAN FOR STROUD PARISH CHURCH

Restoration May Go Ahead, Says Bishop

THERE APPEARS to have been a complete reversal of plans for the future of Stroud's Parish Church, which was threatened with demolition earlier this year.

It was in July that a Commission, under the chairmanship of the Archdeacon of Gloucester, recommended that the St. Lawrence Church and Vicarage be declared pastorally redundant and that, if a thorough structural and architectural survey of both buildings justified it, they should be demolished and the site sold.

Now, after a visit to the Church last week, the Bishop of Gloucester (the Rt. Rev. Basil Guy) has stated "quite categorically" that the Diocesan Pastoral Committee had no power to order the closure or demolition of Stroud Parish Church, without the consent of the Parochial Church Council, which is, therefore, in a very strong position.

Any plans for the future pastoral re-organisation of Stroud must go forward on the basis of agreement among the interested parties. The Bishop also approved the re-opening of the restoration appeal.

The new position is set out in a statement to the "News and Journal" by Mr. J. I. Harbidge (churchwarden) after it had been approved by the Bishop. It is in the following terms:

"At a celebration of the Holy Eucharist on All Saints Day (Oct. 31) the sermon was preached by the Lord Bishop of Gloucester.

"Afterwards, in the Church Institute, the Bishop addressed a representative gathering of the whole church, with reference to the recent Press statements regarding the future of St. Laurence's.

WITH MUCH REGRET

"He very much regretted that anything had been made public at this stage, since the proposals put forward by his Commission were tentative only, and for his personal consideration. Inevitably, they had been greatly exaggerated and he assured the meeting that nothing would be done until many further discussions had taken place with the P.C.C. and whole congregation, and other interested bodies in Stroud. He also said that at the recent Festival he had realised just what the Parish Church means to the centre of Stroud and how fitting it is in that position.

ALL MUST AGREE

no reason whatsoever why the restoration work should not be completed as planned, and he also stated in reply to a question that it would be quite in order for the appeal for the necessary funds to be re-opened.

"The Bishop also said that he felt that it was most important that this statement about the position at Stroud Parish Church should be given as much prominence in the local Press as was accorded to the statements in July about the recommendations of his Pastoral Commission."

SAVING A NAME

When the Archdeacon's Commission reported in July, they suggested that the benefices and parishes of St. Laurence and Holy Trinity Church, Stroud, should be united, but the name of St. Laurence should in some way be perpetuated.

They made their decision after coming to the conclusion that there were too many churches serving the central area of Stroud, and that one of these should be discontinued. There are five churches, St. Laurence, Holy Trinity, St. Albans, Thrupp and Uplands, serving a population of about 10,000.

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Of these five, St. Laurence had been losing its residential population in recent years with the gradual redevelopment of the town centre, and its congregation was drawn largely from neighbouring parishes. The Stroud central redevelopment scheme would mean limiting car parking and the movement of the traffic in the town centre, and this would tend to restrict members of the congregation who came by car from other parishes.

The Commission considered that Stroud Parish Church was not of special architectural or historic merit, and was in need of major restoration estimated to cost up to £30,000.

SUB-STANDARD

VICARAGE

The Vicarage, despite a £2,000 improvement scheme in 1960, was still sub-standard, and underground water courses had given trouble for a long time.

This had been accentuated in recent years and both buildings were deteriorating rapidly owing to the excessive dampness. If St. Laurence were demolished, St. Albans—some 400 yards away and built in 1916 as a family memorial to Father Stanton—could be used instead.

When the Parochial Church Council met in July, the Commission's proposals obviously came as a shock and a resolution was passed after the Council had considered the parts of the Commission's report relating to the parish of St. Laurence.

It did not accept that a case had been made for the pastoral redundancy of the Church, and considered the state of the building to be a secondary consideration—not connected with the first—and irrelevant to the question of pastoral redundancy.

VICAR'S SCHEME

About six weeks after the Commission's report, the 53-year-old vicar of St. Laurence, the Rev. John Tillett, announced a revolutionary plan for the Parish Church, which, he said, would bring it "slap into the twentieth century".

He planned to turn the building into a "Christian Community Centre" with a hall, incorporating ultra-modern techniques, to replace the nave and body of the Church.

The latest pronouncement by the Bishop poses as many questions as it answers and an early statement on future plans will be awaited with great interest.