

## SALESIANS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

THORNLEIGH SALESIAN HOUSE,  
SHARPLES PARK,  
BOLTON, BL1 6PQ.

May 1987

Dear Confrères,

On Tuesday, December 9th, 1986, the Lord called to Himself

### FATHER WILLIAM NICHOLSON SDB

His health had given concern for some time, but it was suddenly and, in some ways, unexpectedly that the end came here at Thornleigh, peacefully as he slept. It was not unprepared, however, for his last Holy Mass had been said on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception - that very Salesian feast, and on the previous day he had assisted at a Day of Recollection with the Salesian Family, and characteristically had been busy hearing Confessions.

Fr. William was born in Bolton on March 2nd 1912, the son of hard working Catholic parents, John and Annie (nec Riley) Nicholson. He was baptized in the Church of St. Mary's and attended the Elementary School of the parish before taking a Commercial Course. He began work as an Order Clerk, but Divine Providence was leading him towards the priesthood and the religious life.

At 19 years of age, he became an aspirant for the Salesian College at Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick in Ireland.

In his reference, his parish priest at St. Mary's wrote in glowing terms of this young man who was still his chief altar server, and whose "bearing, reverence and excellent life seem to indicate that God has called him . . ."

After some time in Ireland, William went to the Salesian Novitiate at Cowley, Oxford in 1935, and twelve months later was professed there. After studying philosophy for two years, he gained some experience as a teacher at the Salesian College, Chertsey, and again for one year at Cowley.

In 1941 he joined the students of theology at Blaisdon Hall, Gloucestershire, and with his companions was ordained to the priesthood there on 15th July 1945.

For the next 25 years, with one exception, he taught at Battersea, Farnborough and Cowley, before coming here to Bolton in 1970.

The period 1954-1958 was an unusual but a very happy and successful one. Fr. William was once again in Ireland, but this time he attended University College, Dublin while living at the Salesian University Hostel at St. Teresa's, Crumlin. He obtained not only a B.A., but an M.A. in English Literature, and the Higher Diploma in Education. For someone already over 40 years of age, this was no mean achievement, and underlined his considerable intelligence and application. He also had a great love for music, and talent as an artist.

In 1970 he came to Thornleigh to join the teaching staff, but already his health was not good, and he was forced to retire from the College in 1974. For a short time, when he recovered sufficiently, he was Chaplain to the Salesian Sisters at Colne, but while there he suffered a heart attack, and finally returned to Thornleigh, where he was to spend the rest of his days.

He undertook a number of supplies, filling in for some of the local clergy, and also became much sought after as a confessor, both in the parish of St. Patrick's and elsewhere, and at the Convent of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion at Mount St. Joseph's. He remained faithful to this ministry of the confessional until the last week of his life, in spite of recurring heart trouble. The young and the elderly especially found in him a patient and sympathetic friendly ear and heart, and a great support in time of need. Through his own experience of pain and suffering, he was able to respond with a word of practical advice and encouragement.

For a number of years he undertook, with great success, the task of looking after the Salesian Cooperators, and his personal correspondence and monthly letters conveyed much of his cheerfulness and wry sense of humour, coupled with his practical Salesian spirituality. But eventually, he had to give up this side of his ministry.

On his return to Bolton, he had been able to renew old acquaintances, and to see more of his numerous relatives. The death of his last surviving brother Jim, some six months ago had clearly been a blow to him, and also perhaps a warning. When Fr. William died, on the table beside his chair were found two quotations which he had recently written down - from those other masters of English, John Donne and Dylan Thomas. The first of these was on a page of a note-book which had also the following lines from the psalms: "Like a tapering shadow my days dwindle . . . Lord, thou endurest for ever . . ." Father had written: "Say not for whom the bell tolls - It tolls for thee!" and: "Do not go gentle into that good night . . . Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

May the eternal light of the Lord shine on him now and always.

The body was received into the College Chapel here at Thornleigh on Sunday evening, 14th December, when there was a well attended concelebrated Mass. The funeral Mass took place next day, and was presided over by Father Provincial, assisted by a large number of Salesians and Diocesan clergy, and with many of Father William's relatives and friends. The burial took place at Tonge Cemetery, Bolton.

Please remember in your charitable prayers our brother William, his family, the members of this Community, and

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,

Bernard F. Grogan SDB - Rector.

**DATA for the NECROLOGY:**

FR. WILLIAM NICHOLSON, born in Bolton, Lancashire, on 2nd March 1912, died in Bolton, on 9th December 1986, at the age of 74, after 50 years of religious profession, and in the 42nd year of priesthood.