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LA SALLE-CIENFUEGOS: SOLIDARITY PROJECT

De La Salle College, Santiago (Dominican Republic), has 1350 students, sons of upper and lower middle class families. Cienfuegos is a township of 20,000 inhabitants, for the most part poor and emarginated.

We shall describe here the methods of organization and animation of the project, an account of which appeared in the first number of "Life of the Institute Today", page 58.

I) AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- 1) Direct contact with the poor and their cultural background in order to find out their values, their problems and their expectations so as to share with them our spiritual and cultural heritage.
- 2) Dialogue between our educative community and the people in the slum area in order to analyse the causes and consequences of their poverty and to help to remedy them by initiatives in popular education.
- 3) Evangelization of our educative community through contact with the poor and sensitivity to the demands of justice which must result from such contact.
- 4) Education in social responsibility and Christian commitment to the struggle for justice and the advancement of those on the fringes of society.

II) PREREQUISITES FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE POOR

- 1) Christian motivation: evangelical attitude of openness and availability.
- 2) Basic information on the concrete problems of the township and on the general psychology of the inhabitants.
- 3) Direct contact with the people and cultivation of lasting friendships which will be mutually beneficial on the human and spiritual planes.
- 4) Attention to external factors which could create barriers such as dress, means of transport, language, topics of conversation etc. (There must be no condescension)

III) MAIN LINES OF PASTORAL ACTION

- 1) Awakening of self-awareness among the poor. General uplift through education.
- 2) Organization of the community through the training of leaders particularly among the young.
- 3) Coordination and integration of the activities of the educational, social and religious elements in Cienfuegos.

IV) PASTORAL WORK FOR AND WITH THE PEOPLE OF CIENFUEGOS

1) Facilities already provided:

- ★ A dressmaking shop (1979) with 15 sewing machines, run by a lady volunteer and one instructress.
- ★ A school for typists (1981) with 15 typewriters and an instructress paid by the project organisers.

2) Occasional Activities

- ★ Literacy campaign, provision of books, and medicine for the dispensary.
- ★ Cultural activities by groups of students from the College, such as plays, concerts etc.

3) Help provided for the people's own efforts

- ★ Advisors to help the youth groups.
- ★ Trainers for sports teams and teachers for help with basic education.

V) ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

1) The Pastoral Team

Animation of the project for justice to the poor of Cienfuegos is the work of the Lasallian educative community. To animate means to maintain motivation in the pastoral work, to organise, coordinate and evaluate it on a permanent basis. This is done by a team of three lay people and one Brother who meet weekly and who are financed by the College.

Methods of animation employed in the College include:

- systematic catechesis on justice and commitment to the poor;
- diffusion of information among the educative community by means of college news sheets, circulars, posters and talks;
- organization of class groups such as Justice and Peace etc.

2) Cor Unum

This is a movement organized by the students of the College to arouse interest in and provide funds for the project. There are at present about 500 members among students from 5th year primary to 4th year secondary level. They donate 25 cents each on 25th of every month.

3) Justice and Peace

This is a movement of recent date. It is comprised of young Christians who commit themselves to the promotion of justice in their own lives and in the society in which they live. The movement is not confined to Lasallian circles but the student members provide a guarantee that the project will be maintained when they leave college. They form teams or "communities" in each class. Each member tries to make a concrete contribution to a project for justice. They meet periodically for prayer and reflection under the guidance of a member of the Lasallian educative community (Brother or layman).

Their pastoral activities are aimed at the practice of justice:

- in their personal relations with God and with others;
- in family relations with parents, members of the family and employees and neighbours;
- in school in their relations with teachers, companions, ancillary staff etc.

4) Youth and Cultural Centre - May, 1973

This is a concrete realization of the ideals of the project which began on 22nd December, 1978. It is an external sign of the Lasallian determination to be present among the poor. It is a meeting place for several youth organizations and for adults who find there people anxious and willing to encourage and advise them. There they can form lasting relationships and find means of self-improvement.

The embryonic library has already got all the books required for the Baccalaureat (School Certificate). These were donated by 4th year students of the College.

By means of loud speakers, "Radio Youth" keeps the people of the township informed. Two projects have their headquarters in the centre:

a) "Women in Action" – a programme for education in health, hygiene, domestic economy etc. conducted by a lady teacher.

b) "Youth Encounter" – an organization for literacy programmes, help with school work, children's choirs, theatricals etc.

V) DIFFICULTIES

1) People move away from the township. Lack of communication (there is only one telephone). Poor means of transport. Roads are impassible in wet weather. 70% of the people have neither water nor electricity. 60% are illiterate. Promiscuity and its results are widespread.

2) On the part of the institutional Church there is mistrust, gossip... and SILENCE.

3) From outside the township there is pressure from political parties who want to make capital out of the inhuman condition of the people and to manipulate them. There is absolute indifference on the part of the Government to the social problems of Cienfuegos.

VI) RESULTS

We are still sowing... When we discuss the situation among ourselves we feel we are moving in the right direction but...

Bro. Alfredo A. MORALES
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