

THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LASALLIAN BOARDING SCHOOL

One week before school recommences, the request comes: "Could we please accept Adrian as a boarder?" Adrian had been adopted as a baby. His adoptive mother died when he was seven. By age twelve, the adoptive father, now re-married, said to the dead mother's brother, Alan "Either you take him or he becomes a ward of the State. I have had enough". Alan, although not knowing Adrian since Adrian had lived 2000 kms. to the north in Australia, accepts responsibility and Adrian enters boarding school. There is no place available, but somehow an extra bed is found by the Brothers.

An isolated case? Not really. Just the true story of one boy who commenced at St. Bede's College in Melbourne, Australia this year, one boy whom the Superior General met when he stayed at St. Bede's in February, sharing mass and a meal with the boarders. There are many such boys in the Brothers' boarding schools.

It is a long tradition of the Brothers, dating back to the time of De La Salle, to conduct boarding schools.

Brothers who want to give their time, their efforts, their love to the underprivileged — boys with real needs — can find fulfilment in the most responsible and Christian task of educating resident students.

Since Brothers do not have the same family commitments as lay staff, the Brothers have a unique availability for work with Boarders and bring to it a wholehearted commitment that is recognized by both parents and boys. Parents have an especial confidence in the ability of committed religious to act "in loco parentis" in a boarding school.

The Brother is called upon to exercise a selfless love and care for the boys in his charge twenty-four hours per day. The Brother in a boarding school has a unique opportunity to exercise a Christ-like influence in the lives of the boys. Caring for boys in their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, the Brother has a capacity to touch them more deeply than day boys.

In normal circumstances the best environment for a boy is a good home situation, with father, mother, brothers and sisters. A boy's emotional needs are best catered for in a good home.

However, there are many circumstances which necessitate the alternative environment which a good boarding school provides.

Among the reasons for boarding are:

1. inaccessibility of a Catholic school which the boy can attend as a day pupil.
2. unsatisfactory situation at home, if there is a home.
3. qualities in the boy that make it desirable for him to spend a period away from home.

It is essential, of course, that a boarding department be well controlled with appropriate discipline and order. There is always the danger that a boarding section can become a harsh emotional environment caused by the closeness of boys living together, insensitive treatment of boys by teachers or by neglect on the part of the family that has placed the boy in boarding school.

Further, a poorly conducted boarding house could become a coarse social environment

marked by bad language, untidiness, uncleanness and, in general, a spirit of selfishness. Above all, it is imperative that a boarding school not become an erroneous moral environment wherein wrong attitudes to stealing, sexuality, truth, trust and other such matters develop. Anyone who has worked in a boarding school is very aware of the need to set high levels of expectations and demands in terms of the Gospel ideals.

Too often critics of boarding schools focus on a particular difficulty or shortcoming and make faulty generalizations. Without doubt, it is possible to run a very good boarding school in which excellent attitudes and values are developed.

Some of the values of a boarding school education for boys may be stated as follows:

1. Boarding schools develop in the students a **manly independence**. The boarder must learn to become self-reliant, to a certain degree, not only in managing his material affairs — money, clothing, travel and the like — but also in his emotional development. Mum and Dad are not around to shield, to protect, to assist. For this reason, boarding schools can be hard; but they do serve to toughen and strengthen the individual's character.

2. Boarding schools act as a great **socializing agency**: boarders must learn to get along with other boys. "Sharp edges" are rubbed off. Brash characters are frequently pulled into line by the other students. Boys from varying national and socio-economic backgrounds learn mutual understanding and respect.

3. In a boarding school a boy must learn to accept the demands of a strong system of **discipline**. To a certain degree life is regimented to a set pattern of schooling, study, recreation, meals and so on. Clear rules exist that govern behaviour. The development of a disciplined attitude to life is especially important in an age when informality is regarded as virtue.

4. The Catholic boarding school is a **controlled religious environment**. Traditional Catholic values are stressed such as participation in the celebration of the Eucharist and reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation. There is reassuring religious solidarity in the boarding school environment.

5. In most cases, attendance as a resident student result in **improved study conditions**. There are set hours for study. Study is supervised. Extra resources are available both by way way of textbooks and tutorial assistance. Boarders do far more study than most of their day counterparts.

6. A boarder is provided with the opportunity for many **extracurricular activities**. The full range of school facilities are available to resident students. Whilst day boys are travelling home, resident students are normally involved in sporting activities, photographs, manual arts or some other interest group.

7. Lastly, and perhaps ironically, boarding school teaches a boy to **appreciate home**. The emotional warmth of the home environment and the uninstitutionalized, less structured routine are seen more clearly as something to be appreciated. Family love and the freedom of the private home are recognized for what they are.

For those boys who have never experienced a stable, secure home environment, boarding school provides a place of belonging where people care about the boy, his attitudes, his development, his growth, his well-being. Boarding school can stabilize emotional insecurity. Diligent pastoral care can bring about great changes for the better in boarders.

The boarding school remains the preferred field of apostolic endeavour for many Brothers. It has been my special privilege to have been the Headmaster of a boarding school for the past eleven years. There have been changes. Conditions are less austere. There is more personal space and privacy for each boy. Costs have risen. Yet so has the demand. Catholic parents value highly the Lasallian Boarding School. It is a work of special commitment for us.

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