

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL ANIMATION AT THE SAINT CHRISTOPHER AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE (1)**

The innovative school schedule at St. Christopher's, based on eleven class days and three holidays, requires close attention to the organization of the daily routine of the boarding students especially after school hours.

In fact, having 640 young boarding students living together requires strict cooperation between grown-ups and youngsters. Sports and leisure activities play an important role in school life and are the source of equilibrium in the lives of the youth. From the teachers who work within such a framework, this requires a great deal of availability.

### **ORGANIZATION**

The adults play a prime role in initiating, maintaining and coordinating activities. To the best of their ability, and for the sake of the students, they try to find within this framework a certain rhythm of activities which are smooth flowing and precise. This is most remarkable in the field of sports. There are twenty-nine sports teams at Saint Christopher's with eight additional teams only for adults. This calls for effective participation and help among the young people in the scheduling as well as in the training and refereeing.

All the teachers, both lay people and Brothers, meet together once a week to coordinate the activities for the following fortnight and to mutually share problems which might be encountered. The group in charge is made up of 5 gymnastics and sports teachers, the chairman and seven members of the socio-cultural department who help in the animation and effective participation, those in charge of the various scholastic cycles, the Brothers, the Chaplain, and the General Supervisor. All these, plus the Director, add up to some twenty adults.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

These activities are as diverse as possible so that they can involve the greatest number of youths. Their essential purpose is mutual cooperation, but also openness to others by taking on meaningful re-

sponsibilities, and exposure to the world outside (trips, conferences, various excursions), the creation of a family spirit, where each one contributes whatever he can by participating in the preparation and the celebration of Christmas Eve, and the School's Foundation Day, for example.

For the first and second scholastic cycles, some fifteen conferences are programmed each year with big and well-known associations in the country, such as "Knowledge of the World", "People and Images", "Great Report", or with conferences on current and relevant subjects.

The Cinema: among the scope of activities for Sundays, six full-length films are shown each year in the school auditorium for those who are interested. These films have an essentially recreational value and are shown near the end of the afternoon. The recreational facilities of the school remain open for those who are not interested in the films. The average attendance at these films is about 350 pupils per film.

The Cine-club: During the week, on Thursday evenings, film showings for the older students of the second cycle have been organized. The seven films which have been scheduled are of a more serious nature than those shown on Sundays. They possess an educative value and are artistically superior. They form the basis of thought and discussion between the teachers and the students in class after the film has been viewed.

Presentations, Dramas, various Socials: In general we provide two performances each year either of the classical theatre or modern theatre, performed by one of the theatrical groups of the region. We also have social gatherings in the boarding students' recreation hall where there are audio-visual presentations, a raffle, video cassette presentations and dances. All these depend upon the initiative of the individual classes. There are also informational presentations such as "The Church in Distress", "Amnesty International", or talks on various careers and professions.

Trips and excursions: For the past few years, the students of the terminal year have organized trips abroad, with the help of the teachers and more particularly those in charge of the cycle. Thus, three trips were organized to Tunisia, three others to Italy and Greece, one to Yugoslavia, two to Morocco, and one to Spain. These journeys take about twelve days and take place during the Easter holidays. Other shorter trips, of three or four days, are likewise organized each year to England and Spain for the younger pupils, who are accompanied by the language professors.

During the vacation in February, two teachers organize skiing trips to the Pyrenees, and during the summer, to the Basque territory along the ocean, for other volunteer groups.

Those in their final year of the short cycle vocational course make a six to eight day trip to Paris and the region around Paris during the International Agricultural Exhibition.

Finally, during the Sundays of Winter, a ski club,

organized and run entirely by the students themselves, arrange regular trips to the mountains.

### **CHRISTMAS EVE AND THE SCHOOL'S FEAST DAY**

The pre-Christmas holidays constitute a very special time of vivacity for the first scholastic trimestre and in a spirit of joy they finish off the first three months of the school year. Three performances are organized by the students with the help of the Socio-Cultural services, as well as of the administrators and teachers. Each of the three performances are prepared by a group of the same grade level.

Parents, former students, and friends are invited to these festivities, and the 630 seat auditorium is too small to accommodate all of those who are interested in coming. This is especially true for the festivities of the older students. These performances are free; however, collections are taken to finance particular projects: Truckloads of goods for Poland, sending grain to Sahel, constructions for teaching literacy in Rwanda, etc.

The programs for these evening festivities include modern dances, folkdances, and classical dances, depending upon the year level; there are dramas, modern songs and folksongs, orchestral music, gymnastic performances, and poetic montages. Many of these numbers are created within the school itself, either by the students or by the teachers. These performances thus allow a significant number of students to express themselves, to create, and even to discover talents which they never knew they possessed. The atmosphere which is created progressively with the repeated performances are often excellent and greatly promote personal rapport between the youth and the adults.

The School's Festival, which takes place on Ascension Thursday, brings together within the premises of St. Christopher's between 2,000 and 4,000 persons on one day. The students participate in the creation, decoration, and animation of numerous stands for games or performances given in the open air or in the auditorium: dances, gymnastics, synchronized field demonstrations, etc. The more spectacular performances are open to the public: The cow-chasing contest, maiden helicopter flights, parachute jumping exhibition by the army, etc., according to the theme chosen for the festival.

### **FACILITIES**

For all of these activities, St. Christopher's makes use of rooms and equipment adapted to the purpose:

- ★ three important rooms as the students' recreation centres: one for the girls, the other for the short cycle, and the third for the second cycle. The equipment in these centres have been improved over the years: intellectual games, table tennis, electronic games, television sets, tape recorders, etc.;

- ★ an auditorium fully equipped for films, music, theatre and a sound and lighting system largely set up and operated by the students and teachers;

- ★ audio-visual rooms for courses or for use by small groups and for class meetings;

- ★ outstanding audio-visual equipment such as over-head projectors, slide projectors, video cassettes, films, etc.

All of this equipment is used for the above-named activities, but also for the enlivening of the Wednesday and Sunday activities, for it is important that the 600 young people who live there can participate to the fullest and thus avoid becoming bored. Efforts are made to develop in the students the ability to use leisure time well, which is an important part of their human and social development.

Other young people prefer to express themselves through shortlived clubs. They appear and disappear each year according to the tastes and whims of the group: cycling club, electronic club, manual activities, music club, judo, horses, tennis, model airplanes, and other miniature model making, etc.

The Socio-Cultural Service coordinates these various activities and participates directly or indirectly in their animation. They are financed by the annual dues of each student and to this are added the receipts from the school festival and from the snack bar. The cultural activities are usually free. The socio-cultural service is closely related with the sports services which is the other important factor in the animation of the lives of the young people at St. Christopher's.

Of course, we must also speak about the Christian animation of the institution.

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