

ACTION FOR CATECHETICS

Two items contributed by Brother Damian Lundy FSC, a leading figure in English catechetics. They were originally written for the District of England "Newsletter" and are presented here in slightly adapted form.

A. Catechetical weekends in Kintbury:

For several years now, the District Catechetical Commission has been organising a series of weekends at St Cassian's Centre, Kintbury.

These sessions are for teachers, catechists, adults of different ages. They draw together forty or fifty people from different parts of the country. Not all the participants belong to De La Salle establishments, but some of our regular participants come from schools like West Park, St. Helens, De La Salle, Salford, and St Peter's Schools, Bournemouth, where lay colleagues as well as Brothers are regular participants.

Topics treated during recent sessions have included Prayer and Religious Experience in the Secondary School; the Psalms, St Paul and the early Church: new perspectives; Liberation Theology and Britain Today; and — most recently — A Journey into Easter: the new Rite of Christian Initiation. Sometimes, the content of the sessions is offered in traditional lecture form, but more generally teaching-methods which invite full and active participation are favoured. This was the case with the most recent session on Christian Initiation during the 10th-12th October 1986. This weekend was led by two first-class presenters — real adult educators who invited lively participation and received a full response: learning proved to be very enjoyable, because there were no passive spectators — we were truly learning together, sharing experiences and reaching significant conclusions. The two Sisters who led this session were Céline Murphy (from Middlesbrough) and Mary Bernard Potter (from Bradford). They really brought the best out of us all. Let me quote from their letters, reflecting on the week-end!

Mary Bernard wrote: "It was wonderful working with such a sensitive group at St Cassian's. Thanks for all your affirmation and good humour. I personally gained a lot from the experience".

And Céline commented: "So much to be grateful for and only a 'thank you' card to express my thanks for such a beautiful weekend. In every way, you and the Brothers were so right. Indeed the whole spirit of St Cassian's took us all over — and I know it was a Holy Spirit. An enriching few days like that won't easily be forgotten. I am so glad I was there and I can't get over my luck to have been invited!"

Two of the most interesting learning-experiences were an extensive role-play in which we became the early church in Joppa, receiving two new members into our community, and an excellent video of an international conference in Belgium which explored, from the point of view of different societies and cultures, "New Ways of Being Church". A reflection on the Joppa experience was written by Anthony McNamara, Head of English at St. Peter's Bournemouth, and it was read to us before we prayed together at the end of the weekend and received our commission to take the good news back to our local situations. This reflection is printed here:

On being the Church in Joppa:

It was a happy experience. We enjoyed seeing the living bricks being moulded and coming together to build a living church. We felt we had a part to play in the process rather than being spectators ("members of a congregation"). The church into which we welcomed the newcomers, Edmund and Margaret, was a reflection of what our faith meant to us and the joyful way in which it expressed itself. This was a persecuted church of signs, mysteries and revelations; yet everyone in it seemed to be laughing.

We felt a sense of wonder. Was this new world where people discovered and shared each other's gifts as "ministries" really "the Way we were"? Instead of a linear process along which we appeared to be discarding ancient traditions for novel forms of expressing our identity as Christians, we discovered that we were returning, almost as if it were along a full circle, to the very roots of the church — mustard seed from which the mighty tree had grown.

We felt we would be moving into a period of tension and confusion.

There was in the church a hierarchical structure that was, perhaps quite understandably, threatened by the proliferation of ministries and by the reaffirmation of the church as community rather than the Pope's divisions, complete with generals and poor bloody infantry. The laity had lost its sense of worth. It would need patience, inspiration and real skill, both imparted and assimilated, to bring those ministries out.

It ministries represented new roles for the laity, the emerging communities in which they were embedded represented new structures — a challenge to ours, the most rigid of christian traditions. Basic communities in places such as Brazil and the Philippines were flourishing against all the odds and were now being grudgingly accepted by the Church. Perhaps the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) would be the catalyst for new communities in Europe. They could not be imposed from on high, however. The growing-process would be uneven, and would ultimately depend on the amount of leaven locally available.

(Anthony McNamara)

B. Planning a workshop to examine your school as a christian community

1. *Concerns of education*

I. Aims and underlying principles and differing expectations: What are we trying to achieve? Any conflicts of interest? Sources of such conflicts?

II. Knowledge and skills:

What is to be learned and why? How?

III. Persons involved in the process:

Who are learning? Who are teaching? How do teachers and learners relate?

IV. Society:

In what kind of society does our educational process take place?

How do our culture and society affect the educational process (in obvious and less evident ways)?

2. *Vision statements:*

I. Do they exist? Could we name them? Do we read them? Do we understand them?

II. How do we use them? How do we modify them and apply them to our situation?

Cf. three Lasallian documents: *La Conduite des Ecoles; Meditations for Time of Retreat; the 1967 Declaration.*

Cf. three Roman documents: Vatican II's *Declaration on Christian Education*; the subsequent documents on *the Catholic School* and on *Lay Catholic Teachers.*

3. *Possible workshops*

I. In which we examine *our own school now* by listing and exploring problems we experience and by proposing solutions;

II. In which we draw up *our own vision statement* and work out how it could be applied in the day-to-day running of the school: What Kind of school do we want? What makes a Christian school "different"?

III. In which we examine changes in society, school, church, and investigate new needs which have arisen and work out how the school can help;

for instance, in Herman Lombaerts' *ecological model*, the "ecology" of the Christian school in our society is examined: what supports life? What threatens life? What are our priorities for the future?

IV. In which we investigate the values of the Christian school (or the Lasallian school) and then use these as a checklist to evaluate our school; this involves going back to (or even discovering) our origins and sources *and* considering the present situation here;

V. In which we select one or two of the possibilities already indicated but limit our enquiry by concentrating on a specific group of persons within the process of education: eg. teachers, pupils, parents, administration...

4. *Running a workshop*

Who will choose one of the above workshops for our school?

Who will participate in the workshop?

Who will direct the process?

What do we see as the stages of the process? How long will it last: one day; residential weekend; series of meetings?

Will participation be optional? If so, how do we attract participants?

5. *An outline of Groome's praxis method*

a. We state what we intend to do or explore in the process — we name the course of action we want to adopt;

b. we reflect on some of our recent experiences as a way into the course of action;

c. we study some aspect of our history, tradition, vision, with the help of suitable input;

d. we ask how our present experiences *and* the tradition/vision relate to each other;

e. we look to our future action, indicating concrete steps or plans to be adopted in the light of our workshop.

Damian LUNDY
De La Salle House
Weaste Lane
SALFORD M6 8QS