

SOME OTHER INDIVIDUAL LASALLIAN APOSTOLATES

Brother Augustine Loes

Two Brothers in the New York District have been pursuing "other possibilities [than schools] for teaching and educating more adapted to the needs of time and place" (Rule 3), similar to the examples already given in LASALLIANUM 22. Each is doing creative work in one of the two preferred fields of education specified in the Rule: religious education and service of the poor.

One of these is Brother Charles Reutemann, who has been active as a Christian Brother educator for fifty years. He began as a teacher in a parish elementary school for four years, then taught in a diocesan high school for two years, then worked on the college level for another 16 years, not only as a teacher, but also in administration, both at Manhattan College and in the scholasticate.

He then served in an entirely different apostolate for another 16 years, at the American Second Novitiate, Sangre de Cristo Center, both in spiritual direction and as the executive director.

Today he is in his eleventh year at yet another kind of ministry: as a trainer of spiritual directors. With two Sisters, Margaret Ellen Burke, SC, and Miriam Cleary, OSU, Brother Charles staffs the Center for Spirituality and Justice. Its purpose is to train others in the work of spiritual direction, lay persons, religious, and priests. The Center provides weekly three-hour seminars for a total of 30 sessions from mid-September to mid-May. In addition, weekly one-hour supervision is given to each participant. Graduate credit may be gained for this training at some colleges and universities.

As noted in the title of the Center, while participants become familiar with the masters of the spiritual life, such as Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and

Ignatius Loyola, they also become deeply aware of structural justice and its integration into contemporary spirituality. In doing this the Center is continuing in a special way the traditional commitment of the Institute, as well as most religious orders, to the service of the poor.

In addition to the fundamental course, an advanced course of another 30 sessions is provided by the Center for its graduates. The staff of the Center is also available for giving days of recollection, directed retreats, prayer weekends, workshop assistance, and other similar programs.

For several years now Brother Charles himself has been giving retreats and conferences, not only to every Englishspeaking group of our Brothers around the world, but also to other religious orders of men and women, to groups of diocesan priests, even to bishops.

Brother Charles, who lives in the San Miguel Community, which is attached to Manhattan College, has been well prepared for this new special educational apostolate of training spiritual directors. Before his extensive experience at the Sangre de Cristo Center, he earned a Master's degree in English Literature at Manhattan College, a Doctor's degree in philosophy at Catholic University of America, and a Master's degree in Spiritual Direction at the Jesuit's Weston School of Theology. He has also taken courses in contemporary theology at the University of San Francisco, and communication studies at New York University, and in 1955-1956 made the Second Novitiate in Rome.

Brother Charles has written several articles for leading periodicals in the United States and has published two volumes of community prayers, Let's Pray, which are used by many groups besides our own communities; several hundred thousand copies have been sold, and he is now beginning work on a third volume.

One of the encouraging facts about the renewal of the Church in the world today is the widespread, grassroots deepening of the prayer life of the laity as well as priests and religious. To be involved in a creative training program of spiritual directors, as Brother Charles has done for many years, is a fine example of the adaptation of the Institute's apostolate of Christian education to the needs of the world today. Fortunately Brother Charles Reutemann has the vitality of someone half his age to continue to meet these needs in his third career as a De La Salle Brother.

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Brother Edward Phelan is another Brother of the New York District who has been an innovator in educational projects. At the age of 51 he has now been creating educational programs in the service of the poor for 25 years. He began this apostolate while assigned to a parish elementary school in the South

Bronx borough of New York City, the poorest congressional district in the United States. He did this by gradually converting a traditional program for children into a learning center for the parents and other adults of the neighborhood as well as the children. He enlisted the help of the parents as teacher-aides, and provided a program to train them to become effective teachers. He also became involved in the social problems of the neighborhood, helping the poor obtain access to private and public assistance for the improvement of their lives and of the community in which they were living.

In 1973, as an outgrowth of his work with parents, he developed an adult education program to help the poor secure federal scholarship grants and earn a college degree from Manhattan College, conducted by our Brothers, and the College of New Rochelle, conducted by the Ursuline Sisters in New York. Eventually this program expanded to include 120 teachers and 1380 adult students. Meanwhile Brother Edward was earning a Doctor's degree in Educational Administration from Fordham University. In 1976 he was voted "Humanitarian of the Year" by the Morrisania Educational Council in New York City.

In 1983 Brother Edward joined the Highbridge Community Life Center in the Bronx section of New York City. This Center is the project of the local citizens in the same poor congressional district. The people of the district are a mixture of many racial and ethnic groups, mostly black and hispanic. The chairman of the Center's Board of Directors is a local Jewish businessman. At first Brother Edward taught adult literacy classes, but when the Center realized how competent an administrator he was, they chose him to be the executive director of the Center. Among his other welldeveloped talents is a remarkable skill in obtaining financial grants from private and government sources.

Under his leadership the Highbridge Community Life Center expanded its services of education to include many programs:

- * a program for 300 adult students to learn basic skills, earn a high school diploma, or learn English as a second language;
- * programs for 200 children in reading, math, and for organized recreational activities;
- * counseling for 70 families coping with survival problems, including a program for 300 troubled youth;
- * an outreach program for the 5000 women and children of the neighborhood who are at high risk of contracting AIDS, including a residential center for families with AIDS;

* a Respite Center in the country about 50 miles from New York City to which the staff brings various groups of their clients for a day, a weekend, or a week, of physical and spiritual renewal.

The staff of the Center includes 30 full-time members, 19 part-time, and 18 volunteers, practically all of whom are residents of the community they are serving. Staff have been trained in such a way that the Center is able to carry on its work if for any reason Brother Edward is not able to continue as the executive director.

Three Brothers live with Brother Edward in the Melrose Community, which is located in the same poor area as the Highbridge Community Life Center. Brother William Fecteau of the Long Island-New England District, has been working with Brother Edward in all his projects for the past twenty years. Brother Michael Thomas serves senior citizens in a food program. Brother Brian Carty is Principal of De La Salle Academy, an innovative elementary school he created for gifted poor children of New York's inner city.

Their community tries to practice the hospitality and the simple lifestyle of the poor with whom they work. They welcome volunteers who wish to live and work with them. They do all their own cooking and housework. For eleven years they have been distributing sandwiches to the poor, who come for them each evening. They try to live as economically as possible in order to be able to donate as much as they can to the poor.

In 1990 Christian Brothers university in Memphis, Tennessee, awarded Brother Edward "The Bishop Dozier Peace and Justice Medal," which had been given the previous year to Mother Theresa. The New York District is also proud of this special community and its work; visitors, such as the Superior General and candidates for the Institute, are often directed to see what they are doing and how they are living.

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A postscript on Brother Jeffrey Gros, whose work was described in **Lasallianum 22**: he completed three terms with the **National Council of Churches of Christ/USA**, and he is now working with the **United States Bishops Catholic Conference** as Associate Director in the office of **Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs**. As such he is continuing the work of his preference for which he is admirably gifted, a very timely apostolate of Christian education today.