

## MORE INDIVIDUAL APOSTOLATES

### Brother Augustine Loes

Two Brothers of the New York District are further examples in the series (Lasalliana Nos. 22-20-E-52 and 28-20-E-64) of individuals who have been "*called upon to work outside the establishments conducted by the Institute*" (Rule 16b) as they became "*increasingly conscious of the reasons for the poverty that surrounds them, and so earnestly involved in the promotion of justice and human dignity through the educational service they provide*" (Rule 14). They are Brothers Francis Crotty and Louis Ruch, presently serving the victims of addiction, helping them overcome their addiction, or accept the unavoidable consequences in a Christian manner.

Brother Francis, who recently celebrated his 60th anniversary as a De La Salle Brother, works in the 12-step program, especially for persons addicted to alcohol; Brother Louis, who celebrated his 40th anniversary in 1993, works with people who have AIDS, or are HIV positive. Both these Brothers are both educating and serving two types of marginalized people that are typical of the poor in today's world. They do their work with a special generosity and with the message of the Gospel, i.e., with great zeal and faith.

Brother Francis has been working with the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism (NCCA) for the past 24 years. In the course of those years he has served on the Board of Directors and as Associate Director, with headquarters first in Washington, D.C., now in New York City. He works as a volunteer, supporting himself by the stipends he receives from the retreats he gives, which have averaged over 40 a year. He is a member of the Queen of Peace community (New York District) in North Arlington, New Jersey.

Brother Francis first became involved in the 12-step program as a way of coping with his own problem of alcoholism in 1964. At the time he had been a very successful teacher in several of the District's high

schools, known for his thoroughness and discipline. In accord with the principles of the 12 steps, he began giving his time to helping other people coping with the addiction. By 1970, with the help of his spiritual director, he realized that he could not continue as a high school teacher and devote as much time as he was giving to the work of the NCCA. His director challenged his motives: was he running away from teaching, or was he afraid of taking on another full-time apostolate of Christian education?

Eventually Brother Francis decided to ask the Brother Visitor to work full-time in the NCCA. He made his request to a meeting of the District Council, explaining the work he planned to do, and the reasons for his proposal. He said afterwards, "I felt I went over like a lead balloon." But on advice of the Council the Visitor approved the request.

Since then, Brother Francis has been giving retreats and talks to priests, brothers, sisters, lay people, students in our high schools; has been counseling individuals, preparing them for residential treatment, supporting them after they have completed their residence; has written many articles to explain the program, and given talks at the annual conferences of the NCCA. He is "on the road" more than he is at home, much in demand in several parts of the United States, despite several serious operations a few years ago. He seems to be supported miraculously in constant, yet calm and quiet dedication to his work.

The 12-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous was originally designed by a medical doctor and a business man from New York City. They were Protestants, and originally Catholics were forbidden to participate in the program, but in 1943 a priest from Indianapolis, Father Ralph Pfau, became the first priest-member of A.A., and started giving retreats for alcoholics. He was later joined by another priest and in 1949 they organized the first Clergy Conference with the approval of the bishop of Indianapolis. This began the National Clergy Council on Alcoholism. In the 1970's the Council included members who were not priests, and Brother Francis was one of the first of these. Later the name was changed to the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism, and has become greatly appreciated by all the bishops. In fact, the 12-step program has become almost universally recognized as the most successful treatment of addiction of all kinds. Many people also see in it a basic spirituality for the cure of the basic human addiction, sin.

Brother Francis appreciates the fact that the 12-step program is a deep and comprehensive way of life, and that there are many elements in it that coincide with the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He often points this out when he gives his talks and counseling on retreats.

The first of the twelve steps is to admit that we are powerless over our own lives, that of ourselves we are in need of God's help. The second step is belief that

God can give us the power we need, and the third is to turn our will and our whole lives over to the care of God in total trust.

Such a line of thought and action resembles very much our Lasallian total abandonment to the Providence of God in all things, trusting in God to provide all our needs.

The next seven steps (four through ten) ask us to make a searching and fearless examination of ourselves, admitting before God and another human person the exact nature of our wrongs, counting on God to help us correct our defects, asking his help, making amends to anyone we have injured, and continuing daily –one day at a time– to maintain this process of examination, resolution, dependence on God, and making amends.

All of this is in perfect harmony with Lasallian examination of conscience, use of the sacrament of reconciliation, and daily renewal of our efforts to live honestly, humbly, and in good relations with others.

The eleventh step asks us to strive to live in the presence of God in trust and love. The twelfth step is a call to bring to other people this message of our relationship with God. Both these steps are also integral parts of Lasallian spirituality.

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Brother Louis Ruch has spent most of his life as a Brother in the service of the poor, notably for 16 years in Africa, often under extremely difficult circumstance, and for the past eight years in different programs for the disadvantaged here in United States, notably at La Salle School in Albany, New York.

In 1988 he began work with people suffering with AIDS as part of the Highbridge Community Life Center in New York City and a member of the Brothers' community attached to this Center. (This program has been described in Lasalliana No. 28-20-E-64.) At that time he saw AIDS as one of the "signs of the times" pointing to a desperate need for Christian service and education.

Supported by a grant from Vista, a government program for volunteers that was helping the Highbridge Community Life Center, Brother Louis devoted himself to the care of adult victims of AIDS in the South Bronx section of New York City. He quickly became expert in the knowledge and treatment of this epidemic in New York. Currently there are over 350,000 afflicted with this disease in the United States, many of whom are without any help or human kindness. The South Bronx has the highest number of persons with AIDS in the United States,

one male in four is estimated to be HIV positive. As he became known for his skill, he was called upon to give talks to many groups, including the students in our own schools.

In 1991 the Vista grant for Brother Louis' position at Highbridge expired, and he was hired by the Saint Barnabas Hospital to be the Coordinator of the Immune Deficiency Services of the hospital. He devoted part of his time to the organization and training of the staff in the care of the AIDS patients and their families, or friends, and another part to setting up Outreach Programs. But his preference was for direct service to these people himself. Though adept at administration, his heart is really in personally counseling those who are suffering from the illness, and also their families and loved ones. He sees that his primary mission is to communicate love and trust in God to all these persons as they face inevitable and often imminent death.

In 1993 Brother Louis responded to an opportunity to provide leadership in a new residential treatment program for men and women with AIDS, which was initiated by the Archdiocese of New York and financed by the Human Resources Administration of the city. His friends at Saint Barnabas were surprised when they learned that he was not changing jobs in order to make more money; actually his new salary is only 75% of his previous one, but he was moving because he had felt his work at the hospital had been taken as far as it could be, and his new assignment would be a challenge to meet the more desperate needs of housing the homeless with AIDS. He is the Director of Clinical Services, and will have other religious of the Archdiocese on his staff at the Ryer Avenue Residence. He will continue to live at the Manhattan College Community, which is also located in the Bronx.

Brother Louis has a Doctorate in Spiritual Direction from the Graduate Theology Foundation in the State of Indiana. His degree indicates the primary focus of his work with both his staff and the people for whom his clinicians will be working. This interest in the persons whom he serves is illustrated in the paintings which one of them gave to him; they are symbolic of the conversion that took place in the patient's life. The first painting is abstract, filled with sombre colors and lines of conflict, a painting done at the beginning of treatment and of Brother's counseling. The second, completed while the person was in the hospital under treatment, shows angelic figures with smiling faces floating with the clouds over the hospital, images of the other patients who had died. The third, a self-portrait, recently completed, shows himself with a calm, peaceful expression and relaxed posture in a cheerful landscape reflecting repose and inner peace. Brother Louis says the young man has acquired a great trust in God, and is wonderfully ready to die. ●