

## Christian Seminars: New Approach to God's Love

A Christian Family Seminar is easier done than said.

At least that's the conclusion of many young people and adults who have taken part in a seminar as they unfold at Notre Dame.

It's not easy to describe a rich new experience in Christian living, and that's what the seminars are. Words can provide an outline but the best advertisements for a seminar are the people who have made one.

"We use the word 'seminar' to distinguish this program from the usual retreat," explains Father Richard Moran. And the "Christian Family" phrase explains the framework of the seminar, he continues.

Basically, those who make a seminar aim to live together for three days as a large "family," but one conscious of its unity in Christ.

The program is geared to help the individual understand himself better, awaken him to the reality of other people and see that love — of God and of neighbor — is the clue to many human problems.

The three day spiritual adventure, (and for most people, that is what it is), involves many aspects of family life — work, play and prayer. Each group is made up of people of similar age and background — high school students or college students or young adults. There are approximately the same number of boys as girls, and the group usually numbers between 20 and 40.

**Making It Real**  
Using a theme of "The love



Seminar participants end Mass in song.

Christ urges on us," the seminar aims to help the participants discover for themselves the full meaning of Christianity, and make a personal decision to become committed Christians.

Between some work (on the grounds or doing dishes, etc.), some prayer and some play (group songests, a picnic or a coke party) there are the key discussion sessions. In a relaxed and permissive setting, the participants face up to some big questions.

What is love all about? What does it mean to be a Christian? Is our faith relevant to today's challenges — courtship, marriage, war, race prejudice, etc.?

In discussion, each person tries to be very candid about his reactions and views. This is sometimes difficult. As one high school girl wrote to Father Moran after a seminar:

"Everybody was open and honest . . . well, I wasn't. I started to be and inevitably, I retreated to the mask we spoke of and withdrew."

Facing "Self" in a direct way can be a little frightening. The same letter voiced a thought which strikes more than person on seminar:

what I really looked inside of me . . . and found nothing worthwhile there . . . what would I do then?"

**Awareness of Others**  
The participants soon realize that one of the basic concepts of love of neighbor is really being "aware" of others and

trying to respond to their needs. The openness of people on a seminar makes it possible to reach rapport in a striking way.

"I could not believe I could get to know people so well, in such a short time," another high schooler wrote later to Father Moran. "I have never felt so close to anybody as I did to everybody on the seminar except my family and that has taken years."

The daily celebration of Mass, with the "family" gathered close around the altar, is a moving experience cited by many who write back. Living, working and dialoging together develops the roots of a group unity. Now that unity is symbolized and deepened by the Mass and Holy Communion, the sign of Christian unity par excellence.

One boy commented later, "I didn't realize that all Christians were REALLY brothers and sisters. I'd heard it but I didn't understand it. Now I know it's true, and that we need each other to really pray and live our best."

The latest techniques are used when helpful. This can be a thought-provoking movie, or a popular record with a message worth discussing.

**Perennially Popular Topic**  
The various aspects of "love," that which there is no more popular topic with today's youth, get a thorough airing.

"What does 'love' mean to us? When is it benevolent (directed to others' good)? When is it utilitarian (self seeking and possessive)? What about love in the family? How do we

(Continued on Page 15A)

## What the Men Say About a Retreat

You can write a good brochure for weekend retreats just by quoting the men who have made one and found it valuable.

To keep their pulse on the way retreatants react to a retreat, the Redemptorist Fathers ask the men to hand in a brief evaluation after their weekend at Notre Dame.

Reading over a selection of these appraisals, it is evident that a retreat "has a variety of meanings for different individuals."

"I have found peace of mind and spiritual rebirth at every retreat," reads a typical comment. The same man noted the deeper insights he has gained: "It has helped me to understand myself, my family, my work, my community and my responsibility to each."

Another retreatant, with a business-like approach, noted: "I compare the retreat to a visit to the doctor for a physical checkup . . . the difference is that a retreat is a checkup of your soul."

**An industrial relations manager, who deals with others' problems every day, stressed:** "I'm a human being too, and have my own problems. (The retreat) gives me an opportunity . . . to evaluate my own problems — spiritual and material, without interruption."

An ambulance operator with a sense of humor made a retreat sound like a new diet formula:

"At the end of a retreat you feel 900 pounds lighter, not (he added quickly) because they didn't feed you, but because you have lightened your mind

with thought and your tired old body with wonderful rest!"

Many comments emphasize the restorative peace of a weekend retreat, "where you can get away from the turmoil" of everyday life.

The new approach which uses some dialogue sessions has been very helpful to many men. One factory worker wrote, that as a result of the discussions, he has come to know the truths of his faith better, and "appreciate the gift of faith even more."

Can you guess the occupation of the retreatant who wrote that giving up one weekend a year is "a small premium to pay for all the benefits I have received" (That's right, he's an insurance man.)

The Christian community aspect of a retreat appealed to another man who said:

**Genacle Retreat For Women**  
The Genacle Retreat House in Rochester provides retreats and days of recollection for women only. The Genacle nuns who conduct the house at 693 East Avenue also offer doctrinal instruction for adults and children. They have accommodations for as many as 55 women on a weekend retreat.

For information on retreats, phone the Genacle Retreat House, Area Code 716, 271-8755, or write:  
Genacle Retreat House, 693 East Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

"Living with a group of men from all walks of life — doctors, lawyers, policemen, plant workers — and under the roof with Christ Our Lord . . . singing, praying and discussing our daily problems together . . . (these) are the reasons I have made retreats for the past 12 years."

Men sometimes mention the good after-effects of a retreat, such as "I've been going to daily Mass and Communion," or "I've learned to know God as a result of the retreats."

One of the best summaries of the value of a retreat came from a man in words that might well be engraved on a wall plaque:

**Canal Weekends, Regular Feature**  
Canal weekends, retreats for married couples, will continue to be a regular feature in the new Notre Dame Retreat House.

There were two such retreats in both 1965 and 1966, and the '67 schedule has added a third, which will take place Labor Day weekend, Sept. 1-3.

Father Richard Moran, director of retreats at Notre Dame, feels that couples' retreats are growing in popularity.

"Last year, more than 10,000 married couples enjoyed a retreat houses throughout the country," he noted.

Couples' retreats were considered in the planning for the new Canandaigua Lake site for Notre Dame. 25 double rooms were included in the new structure.

in the new Notre Dame house. He wrote thoughtfully:

"Here, more than any other place and time, one finds the

answer to past failures and the courage to endure future ones, so that what is best in him may grow — for God, for family and for all men."

## 'A Chance to Live Life The Way It Should Be'

(Continued from Page 14A)

relate love to sex and Christianity? How do love and commitment go together?

For some participants, their new awareness of others and the effect it has on both parties, is a awakening. Reflected one collegian in a letter to Notre Dame priests:

"I have changed my attitude by realizing what can be accomplished by caring for others."

For a few, the seminar opens up a world of human warmth that they didn't think possible. One high school lad, whose background was rugged, wrote to Father Moran after a seminar:

"I was brought up in a place where love is the least practiced of all the virtues. The seminar gave me a chance to live life the way it should be. . . Now that I'm back in my own world, I'm trying to live my life the way I lived it those three days, giving myself to others."

**And Afterwards?**  
While many finish the seminar in a happy euphoria, their later letters show that it was

no make-believe session, that they are now trying to live out their new attitudes.

"When I went out to try to practice what we had talked about, it was hard, really hard," wrote one young man soberly.

Cautious optimism tinged another letter. "It's been two full weeks now and I think it's working."

Surprised families sometimes get the pleasant impact of a son or daughter who is taking a fresh look at mother and dad. A high school girl reported:

"My family, especially, has seemed to benefit from my experience — I can look at them as PEOPLE now, and it's wonderful!"

Summing up, it's difficult to convey an experience in a written account. First hand accounts, full of enthusiastic phrases like "best thing that ever happened to me," are more effective.

But the best way to find out about the seminars is to make one yourself. Notre Dame will provide further information if you write or phone the retreat house.

—Father Robert Kanke

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