

Next Big Push for CCD is Adult Education

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Not since the awakening of the math and science teachers after the first Sputnik have we seen anything like the present-day crusade for adult education on all levels and for all kinds of people. A recent survey indicates that one out of five Americans are involved in some form of adult education.

Interest in religious education for grown-ups is not so promising. Only two per cent of the Catholic adult population take part in programs to brush up on theology or its allied areas of ethics, scripture, philosophy or comparative religion.

The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine is not a newcomer in the field of adult education. There were some 400 centers of religious training for old and young in Milan, Italy, in the 1500's when the CCD was only a generation old. Since its of-

ficial establishment in this country in 1934, the CCD has insisted that Christian formation for our Catholic children and youths attending public schools is only part of its work.

It is true that the CCD has been too "child-centered" during the past decades owing to the overwhelming need to take care of the millions of youngsters not in the Catholic schools. The CCD-structure, nevertheless, has always provided for a continuing religious education of adults, chiefly through its discussion-action clubs. Only here and there, however, was the program fully implemented.

A few years ago a survey found less than a half-million persons in the CCD discussion clubs. This figure should be compared with more than five million pupils in CCD schools and an equal number still un-reached.

The picture for adult education has radically changed since the close of Vatican II. Perhaps the prophetic words of Pope John at the Council's opening

may have had something to do with the change. "The Church," he declared, "must look to the new conditions, and forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new advances to the Catholic apostolate." The Council subsequently, in practically all its documents, strongly urged new measures for the religious formation of adults-in-all-conditions-of-life using all forms of the modern communications media.

New voices calling for equal educational facilities for adults as well as for children and youths are being heard. "First of all," warned a CCD parish director in the mid-west, "a parish has a responsibility to educate all the people, including adults. Any program that permanently excludes them should be revised."

Diocesan and parish directors, profiting by the insights of their lay boards are taking a long, hard look at adult religious formation. There is a sense of urgency to bring to the People of God the fruits of the Council. The old structures of the CCD are being revised or done away with; new experiments are being tried. In many cases the old workable structures bear new names. The following are a few cases in point.

Within less than four years, the CCD in the Boston archdiocese has built up an impressive adult Christian education program in 152 parishes with more than 6000 participants. Msgr. Russell R. Novello, CCD director, writes in a forthcoming issue of "The Living Light" of the excitement, enjoyment, and enthusiasm which adults find in this apostolate of learning. He provides, also, a diocese-wide course in Sex Education which at the present time has an enrollment of over 17,000. "In evaluating the importance of adult education," he notes "its effect on young people must be kept in mind. Youngsters identify with their elders."

Urban success is duplicated in rural areas. In the Lincoln, Neb., diocese, Father James Dawson reports on the work of two priests and three Sisters in directing programs for 2254 adults in 86 country parishes and missions. "The program," explains the CCD director, "is designed to help adults, young and old, toward better understanding of their faith and to impress upon parents their role as primary teachers of their religion."

A new experiment in inter-parochial planning is under way in Chicago. Here, a catechumenate center is provided by the joint initiative of five parishes. The program includes training for catechists, a pre-catechumenate course for persons interested in religion, and for prospective converts; also, preparation of adults for baptism during Lent through the formal catechumenate.

In other places, particularly in the far west, religious programs for young people are emphasized. They include youth seminars, Christian Youth Days, Christian Formation Weekends and other curricula-like programs. In fact, the CCD is becoming increasingly aware of the educative effect of community experience. The Workshop on the CCD and Parish Community held in June at the Catholic University of America stressed the need of making the parish itself fully community conscious. From the parish adult education programs a sense of oneness in Christian love should develop along with co-responsibility, dialogue, freedom and the spirit of community itself.

An extension of the spirit of community which the CCD seeks to implement is found in

ecumenism and efforts toward Christian unity. Ecumenism is an exercise in human understanding. For example, a dozen or so neighbors sit around a living room table. Their topics: What's the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant Bible? Or they may be discussing whether a Christian may discriminate because of race or religion.

These people are frequently using the new "Living Room Dialogues" published by the CCD and the National Council of Churches. They meet once a week. The scene could be multiplied in hundreds of homes across the country. It is a new dimension of education in the framework of Christian love and good will.

The CCD is not overly interested in expensive and elaborate diocesan-wide programs which involve only a fraction of the total Catholic community. Their attractiveness lies only in the extent to which "graduates" of these programs engage in pilot training activities on the parish level. For this reason, a nationwide program of study, discussion, and implementation of the decrees of Vatican II has already been approved by the American bishops. It will operate solely on the grassroots level. This program will be jointly sponsored by the educational agencies of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

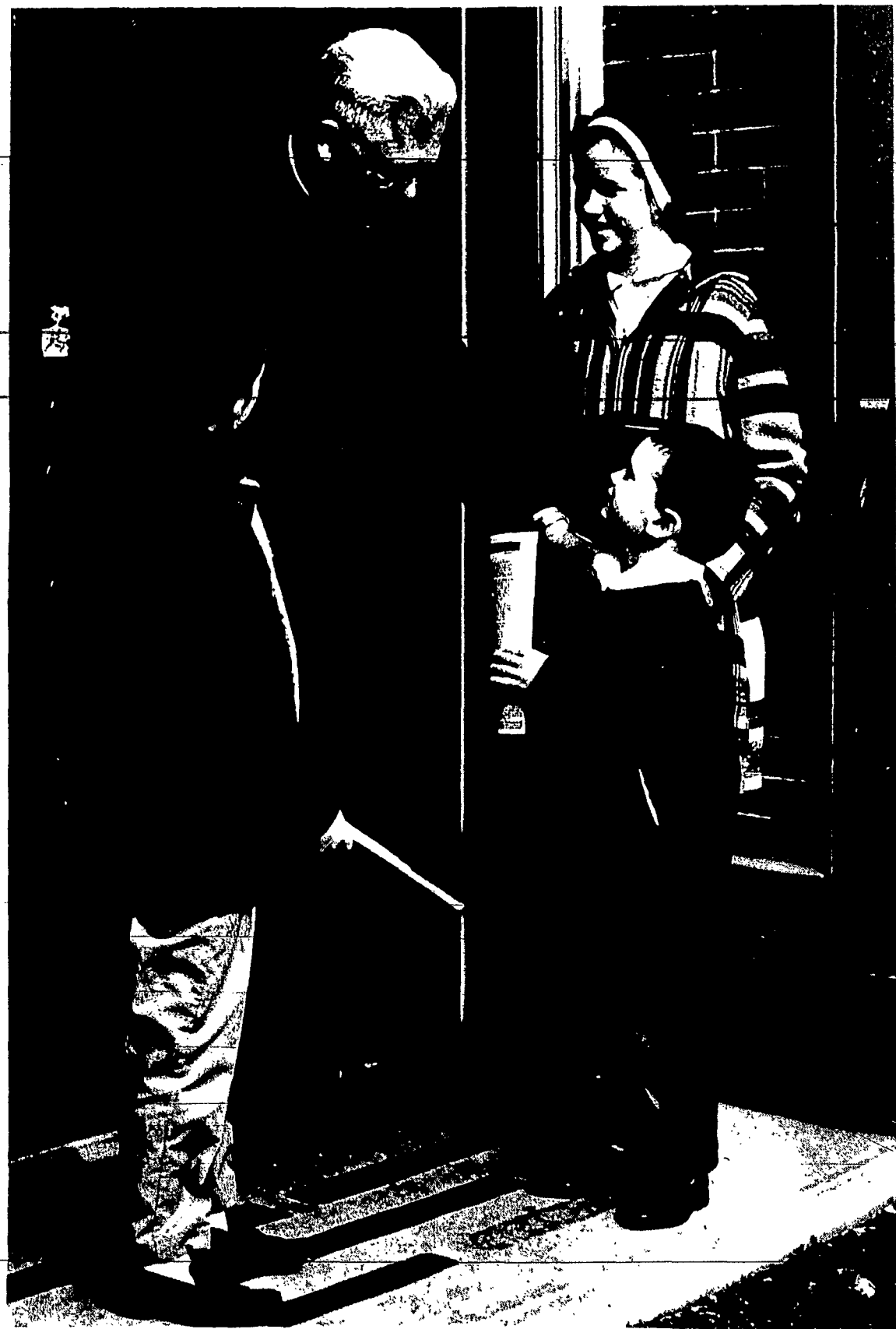
A primary objective is the production of texts and other visual material containing commentaries on the teaching of the Council and of the magisterium of the Church that are specifically adapted for the rank and file of our people in the parishes.

These texts will be used by priests, lay leaders, and members of small groups engaged in the study. Group discussion, forums, panels, lecture series, and film study will be employed. The main purpose of the program is to clear up much of the tension and confusion that prevails in the wake of the great changes occurring in all segments of Christian living.

Spiritual formation for personal and community living should be provided in a modern adult education program along with, and not inferior to, doctrinal and moral information, and including formation in social justice and charity. One such experimental program is operating in Detroit. Its CCD office, after research and development activities, has come up with "Long Term Spiritual Development Groups." Small groups of similar intellectual level and maturity meet regularly, not for action, but for prayer and reflection.

The problems of Christian life are talked out openly in a community setting, and a realistic and flexible spirituality for contemporary man is considered, accepted and nourished.

The field of adult education must be as broad and as deep as the religious, social and cultural endowment of each Christian. It must be tailored to meet individual and community needs. As envisioned by the CCD, adult education is not merely a "continuation" of the formation received in home and school but a re-education and readjustment of personal values commensurate with Christian living in the modern world. It is a wholesome experience of giving which, through interpersonal communication, openness and listening, leads to communion and sharing and serving of the Lord.



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