

# Parish Adult Education Guidelines Available

In a Courier-Journal column two weeks ago, Paul Brayer of the Christian Education Commission of the Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen, presented a convincing case for increased attention to be given to adult education, particularly at the parish level.

One can only regard the rate at which religious discussion clubs are sprouting as a grass-roots demand for more formal parish efforts in this important area, despite the later suggestion from Father Paul Cuddy that the masses of laymen are really interested only in ball games, bowling and bars.

Bishop Joseph Bernardin, executive secretary of the Conference of American Bishops, in defining the "total teaching mission" of the parish to include programs for adult education, seems to side squarely with Mr. Brayer and the "starry-eyed idealists."

The problem seems to be the challenge of providing programs which have both value and interest, since a group which organizes an adult education program must generate attendance and participation without the aid of a truant officer. All too often, also, organizing committees have been made to feel, perhaps by priests such as Father Cuddy, that a busy box office is the only measure of success for such a program.

Just as lay participation in the liturgy was very tentative when the vernacular made its first appearance in the Mass a few years ago, it must also be expected that acceptance of offerings in the field of adult education will be limited in the early stages when the idea is unfamiliar and methods are uncertain.

There is no single answer to the question "How should an adult education program operate?" but a two-year-old program at St. Ambrose Parish in Rochester can at least serve as a useful example. During this time, sessions have been held weekly or bi-weekly from autumn until early spring with an average attendance of 75 parishioners.

Emphasis has been divided between more or less "pure theology" and programs stressing the Christian aspects of social action. Methods of instruction have included lectures, panel discussions, films and any other media occurring to the 15 members of the steering committee which plans and conducts the program. An assistant pastor serves on the committee and parish funds have been made available by the pastor to meet the modest financial requirements of the program. According to a committee spokesman, the program for next year will be organized during the next few months.

Members of the laity and clergy who become interested in conducting parish programs will be surprised to discover how much assistance is available: The Capuchin Fathers of Geneva who conduct a diocesan program of adult education are also interested in working with parish groups. Experts in many fields of interest are to be found on the faculties of the seminaries, colleges and high schools of the diocese. For example, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Humboldt Street, engaged a lay member of the theology faculty of Nazareth College to conduct a series of discussions during the past winter. Most thought-provoking evenings have been provided by Protestant clergymen, by social workers and by other involved individuals.

In addition, a number of prepared programs are available. Arrangements can be made for a series of four pre-Cana conferences through the diocesan Family Life Bureau, and this agency is now experimenting with Cana programs for married couples. Another currently successful program series has been organized by the Catholic Interracial Council. Titled "Confrontation: Black and White," it is being presented in six weekly meetings of an ecumenical group in Pittsford after having been conducted first at St. John the Evangelist Parish.

Finally, possibilities for cooperation with neighboring parishes or church groups should be explored. Recently, parishes in the Corning area collaborated in a highly successful two-day Scriptural Workshop with the assistance of Fr. Sebastian Falcone of St. Bernard's Seminary, and for several years the parishes of Webster have participated in a "University of Light" with other Christian congregations of the town.

I recently heard of a young Catholic mother who dismissed the idea of a parish adult education program with the statement, "We don't have time for anything like that." If attitudes such as this prevail among adults while the quality of religious education for their children is improving rapidly, the so-called "generation gap" will soon become a chasm of hopeless breadth.

Interested and concerned pastors and laymen face no greater challenge at present than that of providing adults with an opportunity to keep up with the younger generation in the all-important matter of Christian education. Father Cuddy to the contrary notwithstanding, parish bowling leagues and style shows are not enough.

- J. E. Koller

# NOW HEAR THIS . . . Papal Worries Depress the Church

By Father Richard Torney

Dan Herr, an often impertinent but provocative thinker, says in the current Critic magazine that despite a pitiful credibility gap between the people and the hierarchy "the institutions of the papacy and the episcopacy are still of sufficient strength that the Church's present tragic situation could be changed overnight."

Claiming that positive, hopeful leadership "could halt the dangerous slippage of the Church," Mr. Herr submits that one Bishop, with courage and charisma, "who is willing to inspire rather than denounce, who is willing to face the future rather than try to hide in the past, could with the help of our modern communications media, inspire the whole country."

This publisher-critic's hopefulness stands in sad contrast to the pessimism which presently seems to overwhelm the Holy Father.

Pope Paul in two recent addresses uttered the most gloomy and anguished critiques the modern Church has ever heard from its Shepherd. They revealed that he is personally suffering all the turmoil troubling the Family of God.

Addressing large crowds gathered for the Holy Week liturgy in St. Peter's, the Pope spoke painfully about the clergy and laymen who "crucify" the Church through "defection and scandal." He lamented, as though in hopeless failure, the "destructive rebellion" of those within the Church who are "restless, critical and unruly."

Then in a frightening statement about the future he warned that the Church is being "so often and so gravely corroded by dissent" that a "practically schismatic ferment is breaking it up."

The Pope's worry has to be disturbing to every Catholic. Whether fit to be labeled a traditionalist or a liberal, a conservative or a renewalist we know that doctrines and traditions are being criticized, altered, and in some cases, simply ignored. We notice that papal and episcopal authority is questioned and occasionally denied, that its leadership is hesitant and its voice more often depressing than constructive.

But complaints about resignations of priests and even Bishops and regretful gloom over upstart theologians or innovating liturgists, will not shock these dissidents. Their dissatisfaction is usually as much within themselves as against the institution.

They will not voluntarily sweeten their distemper nor keep their gripes to themselves, simply because the Holy Father weeps about them.

What does he think is accomplished by sharing with the world (for the press spreads every word that re-

flects a tragedy) our sickness reports?

A respected Boston pastor, Msgr. George W. Casey, in a syndicated column of compassion for the Pope's malaise, says there is "an urgent precedent for pushing the panic button." He writes: "It was none other than the first Peter who panicked in the Lake of Genesareth and woke the Lord up."

It is nostalgic and romantic, but not very practical, Msgr. Casey believes, to hope that in this epoch of challenge and change, where every institution is bubbling explosively, the Church can operate as it has "with structures and postures deriving from medieval Rome."

The laments of the Holy Father are understandable, but regretfully they offer no plan of action for riding out the storm. Of course he believes that the Bark of Peter will not sink. But do we sit shivering in the wind until the Lord who is testing us with this tempest helps contesting forces to find peace?

A few weeks ago, speaking to the International Council of the Laity meeting in Rome, Pope Paul said: "The great concern of the Pope is that all Christians be faithful to Christ . . . that they be living, ardent, generous, joyous witnesses of the love of the Lord."

"It is up to everyone in this trouble," he went on, "to regain posses-

sion of themselves, to listen, too, and to understand the questions which concern us all and which spur us to a healthy examination of conscience: are we good servants of the Church, good messengers of Christ?"

Our Lord in His darkest hour of human fear tried to beg off: "Father, if it be possible . . ." But no heavenly escape was permitted.

He put aside His alarm and terror, let His defectors run off into the night, gently forgave those who mocked His authority and spat in His face. But He did not stop professing His mission: "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth, hears my voice." And those who refuse to listen will fade away.

# COMMENTARY

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## ON THE RIGHT SIDE

### 'The Children's Bible' Worth Buying

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

It remains an unchanging mystery to me, that men will charge into a liquor store and spend cold cash for a bottle of Scotch or bourbon, and men and women will spend an evening at a bowling alley or a restaurant, spending \$5 to \$15 on three or four hours' entertainment. I have no objection either to the booze, the bowling or the food, or to spending valuable cash. What does mystify me is the caution and reluctance to spend cash on good books that help to shape the minds and souls of children.

For example, before Vatican II there was a great movement to encourage Catholics to read the Bible. Leo XIII even granted a 300 days indulgence, Dec. 13, 1898, to any Catholic who would read the Bible 15 minutes a day. I don't think he had many takers.

The Bible is long in volume, semitic in expression, non-chronological in order which is a distress to the organized Western mind. Furthermore, some of the Bible is spiritually vapid, e.g. the long Old Testament genealogies and many of the Levitical regulations. Some of it is hair-raising, as we find in the mysterious "cursing psalms." Unfortunately, because of these reasons, many do not read the Bible, and remain unfamiliar with the

noble, majestic, God-inspired thrilling sections.

Yet the Bible is the Book of Books. Happy the child whose childhood is formed by familiar but select sections of the Bible.

There is one book I recommend highly. It is called "The Children's Bible." Do not be misled by the title. The text is literature. The narrative is Salvation History from Adam to John's Apocalyptic Vision. The pictures are in color and artistically done. The print is large and dark black; the binding is firm and durable. "The Children's Bible" is ecumenical in composition. It was put together by Father Joseph Grispio, S.M., S.S.L., professor of Sacred Scripture at the Marist College, Washington, by Dr. Samuel Terrien, Th.D. of Union Theological Seminary, New York, and by Rabbi David H. Wice, Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Philadelphia.

Catholics should be steeped in Scripture especially because of the Scriptural passages and messages threaded through every Mass. But if they recite the glories of the Cedars of Lebanon, or the raising of the horn (which means "strength," not a stem), if they recount the deeds of David and Jacob, of Ruth and of Naboth, of Josiah and Judith and do not know

their religious significance, then the children are the losers because of the neglect of their elders. And the elders are the losers because they seem to value mammon more than the Word of God.

Where can you get "The Children's Bible?" It is a Golden Press publication. It is obtainable in most large book stores. Some of the supermarkets also carry it. It sells for \$4.95.

I just phoned a liquor store to inquire the prices of booze. The answer is: The quart of good Scotch, \$9, better Scotch, \$11. One quart of good bourbon, \$7.30. Higher alcoholic content to heighten the exhilaration, \$9. I should say that any man or woman who shells out \$7 to \$11 for booze and hangs on to \$4.95 rather than buy "The Children's Bible" better have some second thoughts. Children are our priceless possession. Their spiritual development should be our first concern.

An interesting event, Rexville is the Galliee of the diocese. It is 20 miles from Hornell and I alternate each Sunday with the pastor, Father Otto Vogt, to celebrate Mass. Rexville is so small it has only 24 houses. Yet for Easter the people of Rexville bought 14 copies of "The Children's Bible," and have ordered more copies. Can your parish compare with this?



# CHURCH AND THE CITY

## Parish Must Serve Community

By Father P. David Finks

Kudos to John Porter, Bill Haley and Company at Channel XXI for the recent program, Four Churches. The interesting production told a story of four downtown Rochester churches, three Presbyterian, one Episcopal, working together to discover their joint mission to the surrounding community.

All four churches are situated within a half-dozen blocks of one another. Formerly "in-certain" in membership, they are no longer drawing the younger families from the suburbs. Mainly white and upper class in makeup, these congregations have agonized over their mission to the people living in the poorer residential areas surrounding their church buildings.

The four churches, Central, Brick, First Presbyterian and St. Luke's Episcopal, have pooled resources to hire a professional church planning organization, Leonard Styche Associates of New York. To initiate the planning process this organization brings in experts in mission for city churches from all over the country to consult with pastors and lay representatives of the churches involved.

The long process is aimed at marking out new priorities for their churches and pooling people, property and finances to serve the community better.

We Catholics have many city parishes, often in close proximity, who are feeling anxieties about their role at present. Afoot from everyday neighborhood problems, they fret

over diminishing collections and disappearing congregations.

Burdened with gigantic "plants" built for service in an era which will never come again, pastors and parishioners seem more intent on preserving buildings rather than serving people. The anxiety that drove the "four churches" to radical planning ought to disturb our city congregations too.

Contemporary theology reminds us at every turn that the church has a dual role. A parish exists to minister to the spiritual development of its members. This is done through a program of worship, Christian education, counseling, pastoral visiting of the sick, elderly and others.

But a parish congregation also has a mission to be a positive force serving the community that surrounds it.

France after World War II awoke to find itself a pagan nation with empty churches on every street corner. The great Cardinal Suhard and others showed how the church had gradually become irrelevant by failing to be a positive force in the every day lives of people. French churches, too inner-directed, became the sole preserve of little children preparing for First Communion and elderly people preparing for death.

It will do us little good to develop ulcers or cry salt tears over the vanishing parish life of yesterday. Rather than spending valuable time playing elaborate war games with "good

guys against bad guys," ultra-progressives versus bed-rock conservatives, can we not do a little cooperative planning?

A "cluster" of churches in a contiguous area (therefore a community sharing common concerns and environmental factors) could join together to develop a common mission to its community. One pastor or assistant pastor could be designated by all the churches to provide leadership in the area of community relations and outreach strategies.

Outside people including professionals can be brought in to consult with the cluster of churches to set up a shared action-mission for its particular community. In some areas neighboring Protestant and Catholic churches have pooled resources to undertake a common service to the neighborhood. This is practical ecumenism.

It is the experience of parishes who have experimented with cooperative outreach ministries that far from diminishing its pastoral role, the parish has grown, if not "a hundred fold," at least the congregation has developed in "wisdom and grace" as well as age.

The "cluster of churches" concept for external mission seems an exciting possibility for churches looking to find "what can be done" in these days of urban crises. Perhaps the experience of parishes working together in this limited way may lead to further coordination of churches sharing other areas of pastoral life.



# THE HOLY FATHER

## Christians Can Be Non-Believers

(NC News Service)

Vatican City — Pope Paul VI declared (March 27) that Christians, too, are non-believers.

"For example, we do not believe that the development of modern thought . . . leads of necessity to a denial of God," he told participants in an international symposium on "The Culture of Unbelief," held under the Holy See's auspices.

Listing other ways in which Christians are non-believers, he said: "We do not believe that the certitude of God's existence is inaccessible to the human mind . . . We do not believe that science and belief in God are antithetical terms, mutually exclusive of each other."

"We do not believe that the theoretical and practical forms of the modern denial of God are beneficial to the progress of culture and of human happiness."

"We do not believe that the economic, social and civil liberation of man requires the necessity of banish-

ing religion as being a deviation from the struggle to establish truly human dimensions and to build up an earthly city.

"And finally we do not believe that the ineffable, mysterious, transcendental and unknown God is inaccessible and distant."

The Pope's declarations seemed to be taking up the challenge laid down at the opening of the symposium by American Protestant theologian Harvey Cox, author of "The Secular City," who asked "whether we have really forced our fellow human beings into an artificial category when we created a category called 'non-believers.'"

Another question Cox put was: "How can we really use the label 'unbeliever,' or 'non-believer,' for people who search for the transcendent is somehow more serious and many times more ardent than the search of people who can be called 'traditionally religious?'"

Scholars in the audience included

Protestants, secularists and a few Marxists as well as Catholics.

In a private exchange, the Pope told Professor Cox, "We are fighting against you, but we read you with great interest." Then he blessed a medal hanging around the theologian's neck. Dr. Cox explained later that the medal belonged to one of his Catholic students at Harvard.

The Pope, in his speech, referred to his meeting with the hundred or so participants as "dramatic and symbolic."

He noted that "it is always our desire to listen to those voices which express the thinking of our times, as it is ever our desire that our own voice should be heard."

The Pope claimed he was "fair, and in part, assenting in regard to non-believers," because he acknowledged that secularization "is not in itself anti-religious." He said secularization rather claims that autonomous reason should know and exploit "the world as proposed to man's direct experience."



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