

Religious Formation Programs Gain New Status

By WILLIAM RYAN
(NC News Service)

Washington—The rapid decrease in the number of parochial schools has coincided with a renewed emphasis on confraternity of Christian Doctrine and other religious formation programs in many U.S. dioceses.

Most dioceses are increasing the budgets and manpower given to their CCD centers and sponsoring adult education programs to an unparalleled degree.

A fast-growing number of dioceses are opting for "parish coordinators," trained religious and lay experts who serve as guiding spirits for a variety of parish religion programs ranging from pre-school to the adult level.

These findings emerged from an NC News Service survey made to learn what was being done to provide religious education for Catholic youngsters affected by the recent rash of parochial school closings.

While the survey found near unanimous accord that religious formation programs are enjoying new dignity and status in U.S. Catholicism, it also uncovered a distinct difference of opinion among the experts as to whether this is a direct result of the parochial school closings.

"I like to think that what it reflects is an increasing awareness on the part of more and more people that there is a need for total involvement in religious education programs," said Father William Fitzgerald, director of religious education for the Lansing, Mich., diocese.

In Baltimore, Joseph Nason, CCD administrative assistant, said: "We have recently put a lot of emphasis on adult education because we felt that we had been neglecting it." Nason's office has doubled its size and considerably increased its budget during the past year.

That general view is shared by Father Raymond A. Lucker, director of the Department of Christian Formation, which coordinates all of the education offices of the United States Catholic Conference in Washington. Father Lucker attributed the rejuvenation of CCD to a "growing consciousness all across the country that Catholic parishes and dioceses are concerned with the total religious education of all their people."

"All over the country there

Suburban Child Doctor's Topic
Dr. Edwin M. Sumpter, who practices pediatrics in the Bush-Henrietta area, will discuss specific "Problems of the Suburban Child" Monday night at the Good Shepherd school hall.

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is a growing concern for adult education, for family education, for different ways of bringing the faith to youth and to young people in universities," he said.

Whether "panacea" or not, the parish coordinator of religious education seems definitely to be the key person on whom any massive shift to extra-parochial school religious formation will depend.

Msgr. Neighbor, who has begun a national research project

on the subject of parish coordinators, said there are about 500 of them working in 45 to 50 dioceses in every region of the country.

In general, however, the trend in most dioceses seems to be toward having a parish coordinator oversee the total religious education program in a parish (or area) working in concert with the principal of the school of religion, the directors of parish adult education and even (where they exist) the parochial school.

"The important thing is to find people who will work to-

gether, and that they have the vision and the ability to plan as well as teach and lead the program," said Therese Motherway of the CCD office of the St. Paul and Minneapolis archdiocese.

"One of their main roles the first year is to lead the entire parish board to a deeper sense of parish," Miss Motherway said. "They do not replace the present workers in the parish. They help them and provide them with theological insights into their present programs, and plan future programs with them."

Most parish coordinators and other religious educators are graduates of some 10 North American catechetical centers operating year-round programs. These include the graduate school of theology at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.; Manhattan College and the Fordham University graduate school for religious education in New York; the department of religious education at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; the Institute of Lay Theology in San Francisco; Marquette University, Milwaukee; Plus XII Center in Detroit; the University of Notre

Dame graduate school of theology and religion; and the Divine Word Center, London, Ont. A number of summer programs such as the Loyola Pastoral Institute in Chicago also furnish workers for the field.

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Shifting of Sister schools to diocesan high school facilities will be in the pipeline next fall.

Figures released by the Sisters of St. Ann's in Rochester reveal that the decline of the parish schools is the result of the closing of 100 parishes in the diocese.

From the 100 parishes, 80 schools are being closed, and 20 schools are being converted to diocesan schools. The 20 schools to be converted are the 10 parishes in the diocese which are being closed because of the decline of the parish.

About 6 will be sent away for temporary assignments, the report said.

About 8 Sisters receive teaching and 2 temporary assignments, the report said.

The two communities teaching Sisters elementary school formed diocesan schools 30 months ago and 30 Sisters not be available facilities next fall.

Pastors were 100, School of St. Ann's would have to replace the nun.

Attrition among the 100 parishes is worrisome to the Sisters had to 100.

Pope Surp

By MSGR (NC N)

Rome — Pope Paul VI's message to the 50th of the International Eucharistic Congress in Rome — include theologians in the pipeline by the Pope.

Some people first rather than the Pope's unexpected heard several examples, that by the ELO confer will be getting too deeply in their view, he is political arena lead his present organizations will

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