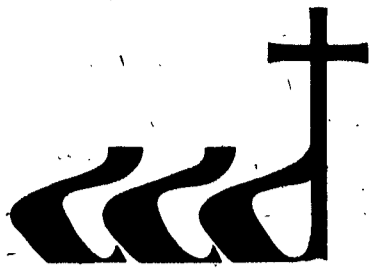


What Is this Church?



By THOMAS MCGARRY
The following is a sermon delivered by Thomas McGarry, chairman of the diocesan CCD Lay Board, last Sunday, at St. Leo's Church, Hilton.

The CCD had its beginning in Milan in 1536. It was formed to help the spread of the faith in the young children and to relieve the priests for their work in the counter-reformation. The CCD in this country started in the early thirties, and has come of age in the sixties.

It is the only lay organization that is written into the church constitution. Really, what does the CCD mean? It means the lay people in the church taking a stand, and doing something for their children and their faith.

What is this church? Is it a building, the priests, the lay people? It's all three. Without one, the church cannot stand. Without priests, its religious, its lay people, it cannot exist.

If we say the teaching of religion has to be left to the church, we say that it has to be done by ourselves with the guidance of the priests and religious. How can we do this? We are not trained in years of theology as the priest, but we are trained in years of love of our children, and the knowledge of growing up in the love of God.

I taught CCD for two years in my parish before becoming involved on a Diocesan level, and I found it to be one of the most rewarding experiences in my life.

I was not trained as a teacher when I first went in, but took the course as I went along teaching the children. At first I thought, "Well, it's a 30-week course, and that's a long time, and I'll only do half of it, when I really think it will do the most good." But after getting some of the theology and some of the methods, I came home to my wife, and said, "For the first time in my life I feel that I am a Catholic."

This is a real experience. To know this thing is to be happy within yourself and your family.

My class was held on a Saturday morning. It was a

group of about 40 children, and as I assembled them to say the Our Father at the beginning of the class, I started out with, "Bless us, O Lord, for these Thy gifts..." The children laughed, and so did I. I thought, through that first year, as the class and I grew together, that we were both experiencing a change—a change in knowing God and knowing ourselves.

The children appreciate a person who talks to them, and has a feeling for them, somebody that they can confide in, and trust in. This is what, basically, our religion is. It teaches a child that to know God is a thing of beauty; to be with Him is happiness; to love Him is life. Without knowing this thing, our children can't grow. It would be the same thing if we had the experience in parishes today, if all the public schools were taken out, and all of a sudden, we, as parents, had to teach our own children, or we had to rely upon untrained personnel to teach our children. The children would learn, first, from life experiences; and this is what we give them in the CCD, along with the learning of our Catholic Church.

At the end of that first year of teaching, my son, Daniel, who was in the 1st grade at the time, was asked by his teacher, "What does your father do for a living?" He just got up and said, "Well, my father teaches religion in the CCD."

From this, my whole family has become involved. My wife teaches a high school course, one of my daughters helps with the visual aids job, on Saturday morning—and it takes time. I'm not going to tell you that it doesn't. It takes time away from bowling, from fixing the house, from being with your family and your own children, but the way I see it, our responsibility is ALL our children.

How do you get involved in this work? First, by saying to ourselves, "God has given me talents—talents that I have to use—talents that I am accountable to God for." These gifts that He has given me can take many shapes and many forms. I may not be a teacher, but maybe I can help in assisting

the teacher. Maybe I can help some of the clerical work on a Saturday morning doing what has to be done. Maybe I can help on a Board, become part of the organization in the parish.

The basic organization of lay people is a very important thing in parish life. It helps hold the program together if a priest or sister is transferred from the organization. But if you have a substantial group behind you if this happens—if somebody gets transferred—the organization takes over and carries on, and helps the next priest that comes in. This is where our ability as lay people will do the most good.

At a dinner a few years ago, I heard a coach from the Alabama football team asked a question: How come you have a winning team most of the time? He explained it very simply. He said, "First, I surround myself with a good organization, and then I surround myself with winners."

We, working with Christ, certainly have surrounded ourselves with a winner.

People talk about the changes in the Catholic Church—they don't understand them. Well, without changes in the Church, really, Christ couldn't be the head of the Church. The Church has always been changing, but we haven't noticed it, as lay people, because we haven't been asked to do things. Now is our opportunity. Now is the chance to say, "I am here; what can I do for you?"

We in the CCD office plan to have workshops to help you become better trained in your work, and we will answer any call to help you organize a Lay Board in your parish.

In the gospel a couple weeks ago, we heard Christ tell the story of the man who was hurt and of the three people that passed him. I think of the CCD as that man.

Will you be one of the first two people that pass, or will you take care of him and join his work?

Join the CCD.

Boon to your budget and fund-raising group.



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