

Teacher Training and Teacher Quality

The success of any education program is affected by the quality of the teachers. Parochial CCD teachers have access to several training-helpers described in this fourth of a series on the goals of the new Religious Education-CCD Department.

By **CECELIA VIGGO**

If you strongly like or dislike a particular subject, chances are a teacher figures along with your fondness for English or hatred of math.

Along with the influence of the parent, a teacher's influence seems to be both lasting and far-reaching.

If the teacher's role is crucial in the purely academic realm, it is doubly important in religious education. For while a man might easily survive with a distaste for calculus or an aversion to Milton, it's doubtful whether his life could be complete if he were hostile or even apathetic to religion.

Religious education programs for public school children of the Rochester Diocese depend on the services of volunteer teachers. Given the importance of the teacher in the CCD religion program, teacher training is essential.

The Diocesan Department of Religious Education-CCD conducts teacher training programs for volunteers in six churches in Monroe County: Corpus Christi, St. Theodore, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Monica, Holy Spirit of Penfield, St. Jerome of East Rochester and at the CCD office on Chestnut Street.

CCD volunteers are generally parents who have not studied religion since their high school or college days, and who have little teaching experience.

For this reason, the twenty week course has two sections: ten weeks on Christian doctrine, and ten on teaching methods. Classes meet once a week for one two hour session.

The CCD course on Christian Doctrine, the first section of the teacher training program, is open to any interested Catholic. It attempts to give students a view of the new directions in the Church since Vatican II, and to delineate as well the unchanging aspects of the faith.

The course uses as texts the

Bible (Confraternity Edition) and the revised Dutch Catechism, which includes a large appendix added to answer the questions and objections to its first edition.

The course tries to cover one topic each week, and touches on the "basic core" of Christian doctrine: Old Testament accounts of Genesis and Exodus, Gospel accounts of Christ, work of the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments, work of the Church today and Christian morality.

The second section of the teacher training program, dealing in methodology, groups volunteers according to the grade levels they teach. Separate classes are held for those teaching junior high and high school students, and those involved with primary school children.

This section is especially geared to helping those with no teaching experience, and discusses child psychology and specific education techniques.

Aside from the teacher training course itself, Religious Education-CCD also sponsors various "educational happenings" throughout the year.

Last month distinguished educator Sidney Simon, conducted a series of seminars for several groups of diocesan teachers.

The first of a series of art and music workshops to demonstrate the use of such media in the classroom, will be held November 22 at St. Thomas More Church. Ken Sarkis, a teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes school, will advise junior high school religion teachers on the outlook of the adolescent, and the role of film, music and dance in the classroom.

Many parishes also sponsor monthly or weekly sessions especially for CCD teachers, in which they can discuss their problems and receive guidance from more experienced teachers. A few parishes have adult education classes in theology which teachers find very helpful for their work with young people.

Various textbook publishers also provide materials and personnel for workshops for parish teachers.

Sister Sheila Kennerson, religious education coordinator at St. Patrick's parish in Victor,

who assists the Paulist Press in the presentation of workshops for their "Come to the Father" series, explained the goal: "They give teachers a new approach in teaching religion, and an understanding of how to use the books."

But teacher training programs cannot simply be described by reference to workshops and classes.

For religion is not just a subject to be known; that "knowledge" must affect our lives, our conduct. Thus, the role of the religion teacher extends beyond just "teaching" the child, and includes exemplifying Christian love and faith.

Aware of the religion teacher's special role, religious educators are concerned not only with the intellectual development of those volunteers whom they train, but their spiritual growth, as well.

One factor important to fostering the spiritual growth of each teacher, is the creation of a sense of Christian community among members of a class. How to provide members in a teacher training program with this sense of community?

Sister Alice Cooney, of the Sisters of St. Joseph, staffer in

the Department of Religious Education-CCD, suggests that it's a process involving both teacher and students, and entails the "sharing of life and faith experiences" among members of the group.

In order to encourage this sharing of ideas and experiences, CCD teacher-training courses do not use the straight lecture method but welcome group discussion and employ films to stimulate group reaction.

Several obstacles hinder this feeling of community. Students come from different areas and backgrounds, and see each other only once a week for a twenty week period. Limitations on their life as a group is naturally prohibitive of any enduring sense of community.

For this reason, when one questions the directors of teacher-training programs, their response is likely to be similar to the response of Father Miller, director of CCD Course in Christian Doctrine at Corpus Christi Church.

Father Miller hopes that some day teacher training programs will transcend the limited definitions of a ten week course in doctrine, or a two day workshop

in catechetics, and will take its place as a stage in an ongoing process of "Christian formation," a process which would involve Catholics of all ages. He believes that clusters of parishes should offer weekly classes in theology on a long-term, continuous basis.

The creation of a real and permanent sense of Christian community can be generated by small classes, time for more group discussion, use of liturgy and group participation in apostolic work, leaders agree.

But until utopia comes, present teacher-training programs are providing intellectually competent volunteers for CCD programs. And if you were to sit in on a teacher training session, the enthusiastic expression on the faces of those present, the eagerness of their participation in discussions, and the friendliness animating their coffee breaks, all would give you the feeling that that "sense of Christian community, however cramped and thwarted by difficulties and limitations, is not absent here.

(Next week a survey of three parish programs of religious instruction for public schoolers.)

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