



A Comforting Evening

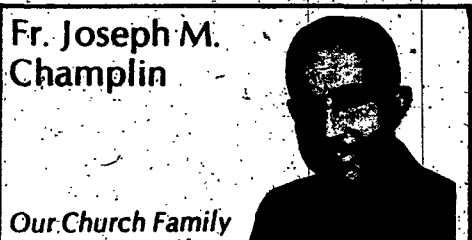
Pamela Santos is a registered nurse, but for the present, works full-time in her own home as a wife and mother of three young girls. Yet both in volunteer tasks and in support of her physician husband's labors, she often employs those skills and sensitivities developed through nursing school and hospital practice.

Pam welcomed eight guests to her house on a Tuesday night some weeks ago: three other nurses, a physician, a woman funeral director and two "ordinary" mothers. She invited them to experience a program called "Together by Your Side: a Program on How to Comfort the Sick, the Dying and the Bereaved."

The program consists of listening to a cassette taping of a three-hour presentation on the subject, reflecting on the message given, sharing personal reflections with one another and learning how to use two books for the sick, dying and bereaved.

As both hostess and guide for the evening, Mrs. Santos had prepared by previewing the tape and studying a companion Program Leader's Guidebook. This booklet offers detailed directions on how to conduct such a session with many lead questions and techniques for facilitating group discussion.

For example, at the initial meeting, Pam asked her visitors to write down in a notebook, "At a time when I was in need and ministered to by another,



Fr. Joseph M. Champlin

Our Church Family

how did I feel?" After a few minutes of writing, she invited those who wished to share their observations with others.

Another illustration. During the second gathering and after hearing a lengthy presentation on the "Stages in Dying," the hostess asked participants to list in their journals the seven stages (denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, acceptance, isolation, desolation). They then jotted down how they would respond during each stage with someone seriously ill. Finally, the members who so desired shared with the other guests.

The program guidebook charts a minute-by-minute format for each session. However, Pam and her visitors quickly departed from the prepared outline and, after listening to a section, swiftly began to discuss their own reactions. It was, in her words, "a very moving time and there were many tears."

While the program has been designed as a training

kit for future visitors to the sick and bereaved, it in fact seems to touch people on a highly personal level.

This was the case in the Santos home on that Tuesday night. One guest had lost a 13-year-old daughter through leukemia two years earlier and a mother less than a year. As she listened to the tape and heard the speaker describe a hospital scene, in which wife and ten children surrounded the dying father's bed and held him as he left the world, she began quietly to weep. Pam walked over, put her arm around the lady and reassured her. The other participants, all of whom had been through the death of at least one close relative or friend, likewise provided their support. What started as a training session became a healing event.

The kit (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556) suggests four two-hour meetings to cover the material. Those at Pam Santos' house decided otherwise. Tuesday's program commenced at 7:30 and went on past midnight. All then returned the next evening at 7:30 and finished at 11:30 p.m.

How well did the program succeed? Pam commented, "Everyone said that was the best way that they had spent an evening in a long time." But only the future will tell how much those lessons influenced the participants' attitudes and approaches toward comforting the sick, the dying and the bereaved.

Organized Sports as They Ought to Be

By now, many of you are watching your tenth baseball game of the new Little League season. As one who has written on the negative side of organized leagues for children in the past, I need to do an about-face and tell about a really good experience of one of our sons. I don't know if it was the program, the particular coach, or both, but Steve's first season with the YMCA's basketball league (YBA) last winter, was what young organized sports should be.

It began with a meeting for parents in which we were told this was an activity designed for kids not parents: "You're welcome to come to the games," we were told, "but our emphasis is not on individual stardom or winning."

S-U-R-E, we thought. We'd heard that before and then attended the first game to find organized parent cheering sections, rosters of individual stats, and factions ready to "get" the coach or umpires, whichever first met their displeasure.

Next, the director showed a film explaining the underlying philosophy of YBA and elaborated on its message that enjoyment and learning to play together were such an integral part of the YBA league that after each game there would be short team meetings in which feelings, behavior, and attitudes would be shared. Again we were skeptical. Most post-game post-mortems that we'd experienced in our 100-odd years of Little League spectatorship



Dolores Curran

Talks With Parents

were either rub-it-in demonstrations of victory, bitter denunciations of unfair officiating, or inter-team accusations of one another for losing the game.

None of this was true in Steve's YBA experience. Although scores were kept by the coach's wife, no scores were posted or announced. In fact, players sometimes had to ask who won at the end of the game.

Always they had to make a personal effort to find out how many points they scored and were not told anyone else's scoring record, which remained private unless that person chose to share it. There were no league leaders, championships or endless playoffs.

The season ended as promised. It didn't bump into the next season because winning coaches were loathe to cease playing.

What we enjoyed most, though, was the in-

teraction of the kids and the youthful referees. At the parents' meeting, the director told us that high school basketball players would referee. She explained that parents who criticized or interfered with the refereeing would not be tolerated. "You may see some pretty strange refereeing," she said, "but there's some pretty strange playing too."

She was right on both counts. The referees let a lot of 11-year-old steps and double-dribbles go by — thank heavens, or we'd still be there — but they were so affirming when they did call foul I almost think a player would foul for that reason.

"Good hustle," a sophomore referee would say, "but you bumped into him pretty hard." And he'd pat the player on his badges. Or, "You missed that one but the next time it will be easier," when a free throw didn't make it. Never did they chuckle at a player, even when his attempt at the basket went behind the board.

All in all, it was basketball for the fun of it, playing without pressure but with coaching, and enjoyment on the part of parents in seeing their kids have a good time rather than seeing them win or consoling them when they lost.

This isn't meant to be an endorsement of the YBA league over other leagues, but rather one parent's pleasant experience with one community's Y basketball effort. It's proof that organized sports can be fun without pressure.

Love Is Action

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 10:25-37. (R1) Dt. 30:10-14. (R2) Col. 1:15-20.

I wonder why evil is so pervasive today? One reason, I suppose, can be found in the old cliché: "Familiarity breeds contempt." Can it be that Christianity's two thousand years with us has bred contempt in many? Consider the Good Samaritan story. It is one of the greatest short stories in all literature. Yet is it not really unknown to us, because so well known?

Ponder two questions in the story. The first: "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?" The lawyer was right on with that question — "What must I do?" Religion is more than words; it is action, doing.

Long ago, Aristotle said a teacher is like a midwife: he enables, facilitates the birth of knowledge. Jesus was a master teacher, a true educator. He educated knowledge from His students, not by getting answers directly, but by asking questions. His



Fr. Albert Shamon

Word for Sunday

question drew from the lawyer the answer: "You shall love God and your neighbor as yourself to get eternal life."

Jesus said: "You've answered correctly. Do this and you shall live." Do this continually, everyday. Do we look for instant salvation — a quickie, a gimmick, a one-shot deal? If we do, we err — religion is a lifelong process, a continual striving to love God and neighbor.

However, it seems the lawyer wasn't looking for answers. His greeting to Jesus betrayed his sincerity. Only Jesus' enemies greeted Him as "teacher." Thus the lawyer posed a second question: "Who is my neighbor?"

Now this was the wrong question to ask. Doesn't such a question imply limits to love? That there are some people we shouldn't love?

"Who is my neighbor?" was the wrong question. What was the right question? It was this: "How can I be neighborly?"

The Latin word for neighbor is "proximus" — which means "the one next to or closest to me." Perhaps proximity constituted the standard for neighborliness for the pagan Roman. Perhaps also for the Jews of our Lord's time.

The man on the roadside between Jerusalem and Jericho was a Jew. Those nearest to him, geographically and racially were the priest and the Levite; and yet they were not neighborly to him. Of all people, it was a despised, hated, heretical, God-forsaken, untouchable Samaritan — the one most removed from the Jew geographically and racially. This was shocking! In fact when Jesus finally asked, "Who was neighbor to the man?" the lawyer couldn't bring himself to say "the Samaritan;" instead he said, "The one who treated him with compassion."