

VILLA FLAMINIA: THE ST. MIGUEL GROUP

The St. Miguel Group at the Villa Flaminia has been in existence now for about 4 years. About 60 boys and girls belong to it, all aged between 14 and 18, and all studying in the secondary classical or secondary science department of the school. Like most pupils belonging to the school, these boys and girls are upper middle-class. One could say the basic aim of the group is to develop a Christian outlook on society. The members of the group try to mature as persons by being part of a small community. There are various ways in which they try to do this: their activities take place either within the group or outside it. With regard to what takes place within the group, there are monthly meetings at which religious topics are raised, and this leads to prayer and personal meditation. One thing about this personal meditation is that there comes a point when the various members of the group share with one another what they have experienced during their time of meditation. This sharing is a very important element in their development as it forces them to break down the barriers that isolate them and to show more trust in others. There are other very important activities like retreats and camps during which the group's activities are assessed and new plans for the future are drawn up. Another activity which is not without its importance is the recitation of the psalms every morning so as to start the day off according to the spirit of the group.

The overall responsibility for all these activities lies with M. Scagliarini, a young lay teacher, and Brother Ugo. Their other activities, directed towards other people, are almost all organised by members of the group. One of these activities is to visit the old people in the St. Peter-in-Chains Retirement Home; while another is to help other youngsters with their studies. Another activity, while not spectacular but which helps to bind the group together, is the publication of a newsletter to which anyone can contribute his views or accounts of his experiences.

Both kinds of activities — those intended to help members to become more mature, and those meant to help other people — are part of the process mentioned already of personal development and greater social awareness. We wish to encourage thought and discussion about society around us because this is an essential aspect of the group's identity.

And so our group tries to offer some kind of wit-

ness to others, starting especially with those in our school, as well as an example of involvement in social work outside the school along the lines of Lascallian educational thinking. We have not allowed our small community to become a slave to any one set of plans: we are always ready to make changes, improvements so as to ensure the steady growth of its work.

(Simone Pollo, Classical 6th Form.)

The Districts of Rome and Turin use summer holiday camps a lot to run spiritual renewal and vocation courses. These are both gatherings and retreats which provide training for groups and promote more informal relationships with those running the meetings.



LASALLIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

Our Lasallian Youth Movement is the most recent in a long series of Catholic action groups: Scouts, Congregation of Mary, Vocation clubs, Legion of Mary, Voluntary Catechists, Catholic Action and so on.

However, in the 70's, many of these groups went through a very bad patch and their numbers dropped considerably.

At the beginning of the 80's new needs and new possibilities came to light. Something which had already been going on for a long time was injected with new life and gave rise to a new movement, that of the present day Lasallian Youth. In the District of North Mexico there are three Brothers who run and monitor this movement.

A) PASTORAL CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN GENERAL

Each local educational community takes responsibility for this with the help of District advisors.

As a general rule, there is a pastoral commission which organises, runs and assesses activities intended to encourage growth in the faith among young people, those who monitor them and their catechists.

Here are some of the pastoral activities we offer our young people in general:

1. *Training monitors:*

- Courses in Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy for teachers and catechists one week per year.

- Training courses and meetings for catechists, lasting a year or 6 months, with meetings either once a week or once a fortnight.

These sessions are a mixture of training in spirituality, extending religious knowledge and learning catechetical techniques.

- Retreats for adults.

2. *The spiritual life of pupils:*

- Morning prayer and reflection lasting 10 to 15 minutes.

- The reminder "Let us remember..." throughout the day.

- At the end of the day an examination of conscience and a prayer to Our Lady.

- Masses with a commentary by class or year groups.

- Reconciliation services and confessions.

- Preparing older pupils for confirmation or to relive the experience.

- At the beginning of the school year: A settling-in day.

- At the end of term or during Lent: small group retreats.

- An awareness of the liturgical year.

3. *Religious instruction:*

- Three (or two) hours per week.

- This is done normally in small groups (12 to 20) led by a catechist or a couple of catechists whose role it is to ensure that the group feels that it is a living faith community which thinks, prays and commits itself.

- There exists a District programme and a series of textbooks suited to the need of almost all age groups.

4. *Teaching awareness of the poor and the duty to help*

- Providing motivation through the study of social topics related to the promotion of justice.

- In October, a vigorous missionary campaign.



- In November, campaign to help the poor and then in Advent, taking part in charity sales, "posadas", other local celebrations and instruction in preparation for Christmas.

- Other charity activities: Red Cross, help for disaster areas, help for missions supported by school groups.

- Organised group visits to help centres.
- Invitation to join Lasallian groups.

5. *Lasallian spirit*

- At the beginning of the school year, an introduction to the world of the Brothers and to their ideals.
- Lasallian feasts: blackboard displays in class, talks, celebrations.

6. *Fostering vocations*

- Morning reflections on vocations.
- A study of the various vocations in the Church (Topics for lessons).
- A novena for vocations (from the 16th to the 25th of each month).
- A talk in each class by the District Vocation Recruiter.
- A questionnaire on vocations after a series of reflections or lessons on vocations.
- Personal interview with anyone showing signs of having a vocation.

B) PASTORAL CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE JOINING LASALLIAN GROUPS

All young people, boys and girls, know that they can join any one of the Lasallian groups whenever they wish.

The general aim for all these groups is the same, although topics treated, organisation and activities are geared to the needs of each age group.

General aims:

- Grow in faith, deepen it, pray.
- Grow in the Lasallian spirit by learning about and assimilating the life, work and spirituality of the Founder.
- Grow in Christian friendship and brotherhood.
- Grow in concern for the poor and for the promotion of justice.
- Grow in willingness to help others.
- Work out for oneself a personal plan, discern one's vocation in God's plan, and make a decision to follow it.

We run five Lasallian groups:

1. *The La Salle Club*

- Pupils (boys and girls) 11 to 13 years old.

- Weekly meeting for prayer, religious discussion and learning about St. La Salle and his work. (Text used: The "Voler" Plan, in 30 sections. Includes a book for the group leader and another for the pupils).

- Each week, a commitment to personal improvement and some form of apostolate at home and at school.

- Two retreats per year.

- An annual vocation camp during Holy Week.

2. *Preadolescent group*

- Pupils (boys and girls) 13 to 15 years old.

- General aims:

- learning about oneself and growing up as a person
- learning to live with others, to support them, to give of oneself
- becoming sensitive to the world round about (nature, culture, the poor)
- learning to pray
- learning about the Lasallian spirit and Lasallian spirituality
- thinking about vocations in general, and seeking to discover one's own vocation in the service of the Church.

- Main activities:

- meetings (Text used: "Lasallian Horizons" in 32 sections including activities, songs, readings and prayers. A text for the group leader and a book of documents for the pupils).
- Visits to city administration and aid centres.
- Helping in the parishes with the census, charity sales, campaigns.
- Excursions and camps.
- Apostolate among one's fellows and support for the apostolic work of youth groups.
- Specific forms of apostolate: organising sports, helping children in slum areas with their school work and teaching them religion.





- Taking part in District activities:
 - meetings with other preadolescent groups.
 - Aid camp during Holy Week
 - Retreats for preadolescents.

3. Youth groups

- Young people (15 to 18 years old).
- The group's motto reflects its nature: "Faith, Brotherhood and Service, especially of the poor".
- Weekly meeting to pray, think and organise apostolic work.
- Apostolic work among one's own fellows and in areas of need.

- Examples of apostolic work and service:
 - helping children with school work.
 - Organising sports.

Helping in retirement homes, in schools for maladjusted children and young people, and in centres for handicapped people.

- Teaching religion in poor districts.
- Visiting reception centres to preach the Word of God.
- Helping the children of school employees and teaching them religion.
- Cleanliness and hygiene campaigns in slum areas.
- Gardening advice and help.
- Helping to redecorate churches, schools and houses of poor people.
- Helping with charity sales and clinics for the sick.
- running sections of the preadolescent group.

- Taking part in District activities:
 - Youth meetings on topics related to actual needs, e.g.: the promotion of human dignity and justice; preaching the Gospel, teaching religion; training group leaders; promoting "civilised" love; Lasallian spirituality.
 - Retreats for discerning vocations, 3 days in January and a week in June. Retreats for boys and retreats for girls deal with similar topics but are held at different times.

- Holy week missions, putting into practice the kind of Christian community life as described in the Acts of the Apostles: everything in common, a simple life, joy, prayer, promotion of human and Gospel values among the people the youngsters come into contact with.

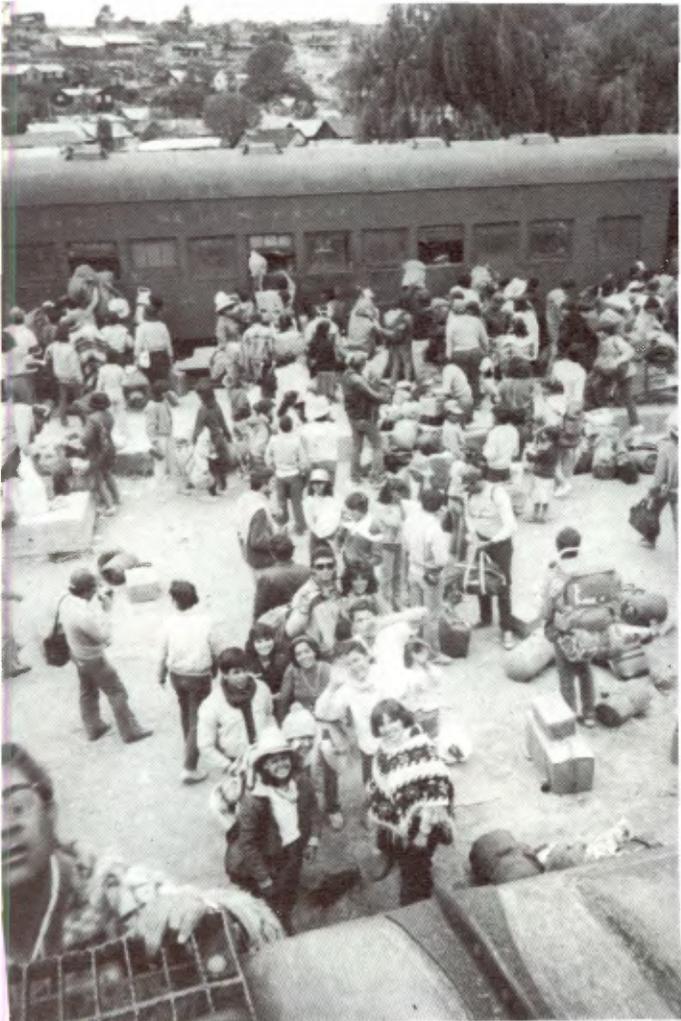
- Certain groups involve themselves for several days or weeks in missionary work over Christmas or during the summer holidays.
- Such work is based on the "Missionary Handbook" or other materials prepared for use in the catechesis of different sections of the population.

- Taking part in national and international events:
 - meetings of Christian youth or missionary youth at diocesan or national level.
 - National Lasallian meetings.
 - International Lasallian meetings: RELAL north region; Lasallian Federation and Congress; the Sasalma meetings in Colombia; and Quebec '87.



4. Lasallian old boys student groups

- Young people (18 to 23 years old) studying at university but still interested and involved in Lasallian spirituality.
- The structural organisation of Old Boys associations is very similar to that of the Youth Groups. In some places, Old Boys and pupils belong to the same group.
- Those Old Boys who belong to associations have their own meetings, give their support to meetings for youth group leaders, take part in meetings organised by the Church, and in both national and international Lasallian gatherings.
- Areas of missionary work entrusted to Old Boys are usually more challenging than those tackled by pupils, for example:
 - Suburban areas which are particularly dechristianised.
 - Isolated rural areas which can be reached only after a long trek on the back of a mule.
 - Sections of the population that have been won over by one sect or another, in particular, by the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- Old Boys associations are also a source of group leaders and assessors for Preadolescent and Youth groups.



- With the help of the Brothers, Old Boys associations organise their own retreats. Those Old Boys who wish to do so take part also in retreats for the discernment of vocations (to the consecrated life or to missionary work).

5. Other apostolic Groups

- At Tijuana, there is the "La Salle Integral Formation Centre" which trains a variety of youth groups to do social and evangelising work in the parishes.
- When young missionaries go out to work in the various areas of the Sierra, they encourage people to go on special courses for prayer leaders and ministers of the Word, which we hold in El Salto. In this way, little by little, there is formed a group of young people and adults, trained by the Brothers, who undertake the evangelisation of their fellow citizens.
- At Ciudad Obregon, young people doing their secondary schooling at evening classes, have managed to attract a large number of people to "development centres" and have encouraged them to undertake social and evangelising work among their fellows.

C) THE FUTURE AND ITS CHALLENGES

a) Up to now it has been the Brothers who, to all intents and purposes, have provided assessors for the various groups.

A certain number of lay people also have helped.

The challenge which we now face is to continue to provide the right conditions to encourage teachers and parents to be trained and to work as assessors of Lasallian groups.

b) The La Salle Clubs and the Preadolescent groups have available a certain amount of basic literature to help them with their meetings. Youth groups have the Missionary Handbook and supplementary ca-

technical material to help them prepare themselves for their missionary work.

The challenge we face here is to continue to provide the right conditions which will encourage young people to work with us and the assessors, and succeed in creating better material to help with the various stages of initiation, development and commitment at group meetings.

c) In our groups we have a prayer life, but we always feel that there is always so much more we could be doing. The challenge that we face is that we must continue to try and improve our prayer life at a personal as well as at a group level.

d) We have any number of apostolic works, but we are forever being asked to undertake something new: our challenge is to do more and to do it better.

We must make ourselves more aware of the issues, We must prepare ourselves better, assimilate more, involve ourselves more.

We must organise ourselves better, be more efficient, and if possible, be more successful so as to at-

tract more people to join us in our work from the district, from the town centre, from the area in which we work. "Together and by association" is our motto and what will bring about a real breakthrough.

e) And when all is said and done, what is there extra that we offer our young people?

Lasallian lay voluntary service?

Yes, a voluntary service, a life shared with committed lay people, a life dedicated to the work of St. La Salle, a life dedicated to the service of the Church.

This is what we can look forward to in the near future, which together with our young people, we can bring about.

Those are some of the challenges that face us, and it is "by the guidance of God, through the movement of his Spirit, and with the intention of pleasing him", that we wish to meet them decisively, with joy, and with the firm intention of making the young people of the Latin American Church our preferential option.

Brother Lorenzo GONZALEZ KIPPER

Pastoral Commission
North Mexico District

In the course of these last few years, a variety of international meetings has made possible some co-ordination of the activities of the various Lasallian national youth groups. The "Quebec '87" meeting in Canada and the 6th International Lasallian Youth Meeting in Toulouse in July 1987 were particularly interesting. The photo captures one moment during the celebrations during the "Quebec '87" meeting.



THE SEARCH-IN PROGRAM

The *Search-in* Program is a weekend encounter for young people to help them discover, evaluate, and appreciate their relationships with themselves, their families, their own selves, and God. The students are usually 16 and 17 years old and are at a very important stage in their lives where they are questioning their own identity, their direction in life, and the values that they hold. They are looking for answers, searching for truth, and at the same time implicitly knowing that the ultimate truth is God. During this experience of the *Search-in* they explore personally and with their peers the truth within them, sharing those things that are important to them, revealing in generosity and courage some of their thoughts, feelings, and hopes with one another, thereby building support, compassion, and enlightenment. The students go thru some group dynamic activities that help build openness and trust. Each activity then has moments for reflection and prayer. After listening to one another, they lift their experiences in faith in order to hear more clearly the voice of the Lord. There is a lot of healing and reconciliation that takes place among the students, and for some with difficulties at home, with their parents, brothers, and sisters. The experience is more than a psychological group encounter that we may be familiar with. It is very much grounded in a spirit of prayer and faith: that all of us are loved by God, are beautiful in His eyes, and that we are called to be brothers to one another in Jesus Christ. Through the *Search-in* many of them have experienced a deepening of their faith. They commit themselves to continue the Lord's work in the day-to-day circumstances that they encounter. All that are involved experience grace. Some of the pain and difficulties that some share may be very complex and deep-seated, but there is always the beginning of healing through the perceived concern that others and the Other show for them.

What makes the *Search-in* different from the other youth encounters and retreats is that the enthusiasm and zeal in running the program comes from the youth themselves. The *Search-in* Program started in 1975 in our school, La Salle Academy, in the island of Mindanao. The Brother who initiated it was transferred to La Salle Green Hills in Manila and he continued the program

there. Since the Brothers change their assignments and have to move to different areas, those who have finished the *Search-in* have realized that they need to take the initiative to continue the program in the school. Now, it is the young that have taken over the program, though they still ask help from the Brothers who are in their area to supervise them. Nevertheless, they have developed the capability of handling the program themselves. Since the *Search-in* was so important to them, they would like others to experience what they have experienced also, and thus they volunteer to facilitate and join in the search of others. Because of this ownership that these students have taken, the *Search-in* program has branched out to different La Salle schools, in Alabang (in the island of Luzon), Bacolod (in the Visayas), and back to Iligan. Two non-La Salle schools have asked for the program, and are now continuing it through their own students. There is a council made of the leaders of the *Search-in* and they help in the supervision of the different groups in the country. There are some Brothers who are in some of these schools, and they play an important role in giving guidance to the students and young alumni. Each group is called a Circle and there are about 100 Circles in all, having touched the lives of about 1,800 students.

It is also not a one-weekend experience, for we know that our search never really ends. Each *Search-in* group has an elected leader and his main responsibility is to gather his "brothers" and or "sisters" once in a while to help them evaluate their Christian commitment that they made during their *Search-in*. This is done because during their *Search-in* they are encouraged personally, and as a group, to actualize their commitment by doing "secret good deeds" to others. Then there are the twice a year recollections, where there is an open invitation for them to gather and renew themselves. Follow-up is very important here, and the Brothers, teachers, and student leaders are continually developing models for such follow-ups.

The *Search-inners*, who are mostly from the middle class and some from the upper middle class, also realize their responsibilities to their brothers and sisters outside their immediate surroundings, especially those in need.

Search-inners have organized newspaper drives, garage sales, and dances to generate funds for needy students, giving them scholarships to the Adult Night High School of La Salle Green Hills. They have taken active participation in the National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) which is a body that helps ensure free and honest elections in the country. There have been members who have shown interest in helping the Brothers in the apostolate in Tala Leprosarium. Some are planning to give the *Search-in* to youth in the public school. There is a group that is developing an adapted program for students in the elementary years of the public school.

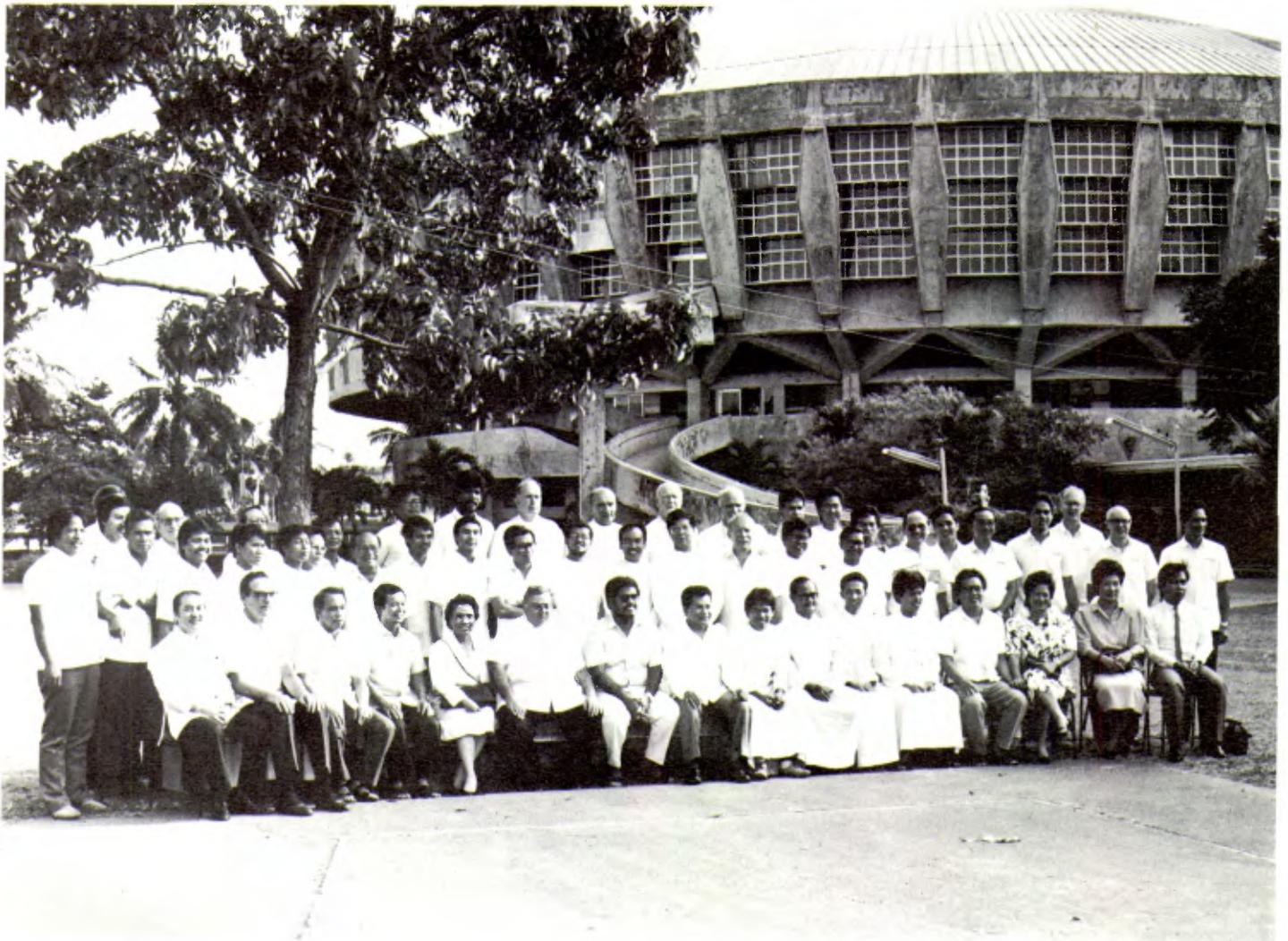
It seems that the *Search-in* makes the young people more open to the daily call of our Lord. Regarding vocations, there is one Brother, now in the Scholasticate who

was an active Search-inner. And there are a good number of the Aspirants who have come from the program. Their experience of brotherhood and the joy in helping others contribute to their openness in the vocation of the Brother.

Once a year, when the school year ends, the leaders of the *Search-in* organize a Sportsfest, inviting all the Search-inners to join. In the fun and games and the moments of joyful thanksgiving in prayer at the end of the day, singing songs coming from the heart like *Lead Me Lord* and *Tayong Lahat ay Magkakapatid (We are All Brothers)*, they celebrate the brotherhood that we have in Christ, and together witness to our continuous search and journey to his kingdom.

Brother Bernie Oca

Green Hills (Manilla): This is a photo of the assembly which preceded the Philippines District Chapter in 1987. Various members of the Lasallian Family took part in this assembly during which plans were made for future youth group activities.



ST. CASSIAN'S CENTRE

St. Cassian's Centre, Kintbury, is a Youth Retreat Centre. It was established in 1975 by the District of England, in a large old country house, which had been a juniorate. It now regularly receives about 3000 young people a year from schools, parishes and other youth groups from across England, Wales and Scotland.

It is recognised nationally as a leader in the field of Youth Retreat work.

STAFFING

Although it was established by the District of England, there have been members of the District of London involved in the ministry for much of its existence - foreshadowing the recently amalgamated District of Great Britain. Presently nine Brothers form the community, including two Brothers involved in the maintenance and administration of the house, and a retired Brother. Six Brothers are involved with the groups who visit the Centre. All have been involved in a variety of other schools before their present appointment.

It has been a District commitment to put experienced Brothers into St. Cassian's. The present Community includes 3 ex-Cilists, a former Director and Sub-Director of Novices, and a former Director of Vocations. Former staff members include Bro Joseph Hendron, General Councillor, and Bro Damian Lundy, present Auxiliary Visitor.

The District's commitment is also financial, and almost half the costs of running the house are paid for by the District. This is to ensure that it is as open as possible to young people. Many individual communities further subsidise youngsters from their areas in order that they may not be excluded from the experience offered.

For the last nine years the community has welcomed groups of young people who commit themselves to live and work with the Brothers for at least a year. For the last five years this group of young people has included young women. These young people wish to grow in faith, to work to build community — with each



Kintbury (England): Wallingtons, now St. Cassian's Centre, where, over the last few years, some remarkable work has been done in catechetics and spiritual renewal (meetings, congresses, retreats).

other and with the Brothers, and to work to encourage other young people to grow in faith. For this purpose they give a year to God, variously after secondary school (18+) or after tertiary education (21+), or even after having worked for some time. Presently there are three 19 year olds waiting to go for further study, a 22 year old building technology graduate, a 23-year old former secretary, and a 26-year old former nurse. The contribution these young people make is of a powerful faith-witness and challenge to the young visitors. In the last three years two of these young people have joined the Brothers.

VISITORS

Most groups who come to the Centre are students between 15 years and 20 years of age. Occasionally younger groups, preparing for Confirmation, come for a week-end. More rarely junior school children come for day sessions. Older groups come from Parishes — usually accompanied by lay-people who support them,

rather than priests. Some groups come from university or college. Some Catechetical Conferences for teachers — organised by Bro Damian Lundy (the original inspiration for the Centre) take place each year. Weekends for family groups occur about three times a year in response to requests from families after seeing the effects of the retreats on their youngsters. Age ranges on these sessions have been from 3 weeks to 80 years — a very interesting and enjoyable experience! Other groups from the local village and parishes, both catholic and ecumenical ensure that the Centre is used almost constantly.

It has been a delight over the years to welcome Brothers from other countries to share in the sessions in St. Cassian's.

In the last twelve months we welcomed Bro Eugene Bodel, General Councillor, who shared in our sessions whilst improving his English. We also had brothers from Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Ireland, Australia and Austria with us for other sessions. Besides contributing personally to the sessions, the presence of these Brothers spoke strongly of the internationality of the Church and the Brothers and was a powerful witness to real community to the young visitors.

Generally groups visiting St. Cassian's have about 15 youngsters with teachers or leaders, and it is usual for them to come from three different areas. An interesting mix of young people is created who are then invited to become a community together. This mixture of people, once the initial shyness of others fades, facilitates the young people sharing their life and faith-experiences at a much deeper level than is usually

Kintbury: A moment during a Yes Week in 1987. One of the young men (the one on the extreme right) is at present getting ready to go to the Brothers' novitiate.



possible when they are in a group of their own friends. They amaze and delight themselves and each other by the ability to listen with respect and to talk with trust about their deepest longings and their difficulties. Friendships grow very rapidly and the comments we often hear about the cost of long-distance phone calls, length of letters, and meetings and visits around the country, bear testimony to the survival of these friendships — some of which have resulted in marriage.

THE PROGRAMME

The programme in many ways is quite simple but not simplistic. There are four main invitations which are the pillars of most sessions. These are the four "Becomes": the invitations to become relaxed, become aware, become reconciled, and become Good News. These invitations are challenges for all who take part in the sessions, to grow both as human beings and in relationships with both God and others. The focus of the sessions is very much on personal development and faith development.

Before groups arrive at all, information is sent to leaders to try to help prepare the young people for the experience. They are informed that it is not a holiday but is an opportunity for growth within a Christian community which requires an openness and willingness to take part by each person. Despite such clear statements, occasionally groups arrive looking for "the pony-trekking and canoeing". This usually betrays a fear on the part of the leader to challenge people at the faith level. However, with a little encouragement, the youngsters join in wholeheartedly and are able to give much to others, too.

"BECOMING RELAXED"

The programme starts with arrivals and meals normally on Monday or Thursday evenings and less frequently on a Friday evening. Right from the start when groups are welcomed they are invited to mix and to form a community. Younger groups often find this difficult to begin with but grow visibly in confidence through their time with us. In the introductory session, the values and expectations of a Christian community are outlined simply and in a fairly light-hearted way. All are invited to speak and to participate in simple introductory ways. Music is a powerful ingredient in this process and throughout the session. Bro Damian Lundy's very popular and thoroughly scriptural hymnbooks

are much-used — and, in fact, many songs included in them originated in the Centre.

Much of the important ministry of the house takes place in small groups. Listening and sharing of personal faith stories, expression of needs and difficulties, hopes and expectations, various experiences of affirmation and prayer and cooperating together to create the liturgy, occur there. Consequently, on the first evening a meeting in small groups (normally of about 9 or 9 people, drawn from the various groups present and including adults as well as the youngsters) takes place in order that they may begin to get to know each other.

Some time to enjoy each other's company in a relaxed social setting is available before the evening draws to a close with a joint night prayer. Many youngsters know about saying prayers but often feel unable to pray. We try to give a variety of experiences of prayer during the sessions. A popular prayer is using the candle — as a symbol of the Risen Lord, and invite the youngsters to hold this candle and pray — thanks, petition, sorrow as they wish, and allow the community to join them in their prayer. Other prayer experiences using audio-visuals, slides, pictures, actions, meditation are offered during the session, and the young people are invited to reflect upon the different experiences, share their experiences of prayer, and to experiment and discover new ways of praying which are helpful for themselves. The young people who live with the community have an important witness to share as they frequently lead the visitors in prayer in idioms which they can identify with.

"BECOMING AWARE"

The second part of the programme is devoted to Becoming Aware. Many retreat centres take topics like peace or justice or love and examine them rather intellectually or abstractly at first and then come (hopefully) to the personal implications of these matters for participants. St. Cassian's does not follow this approach. Instead, focus is put on the individual's experiences of life, of relationships, of God and their own hopes and fears.

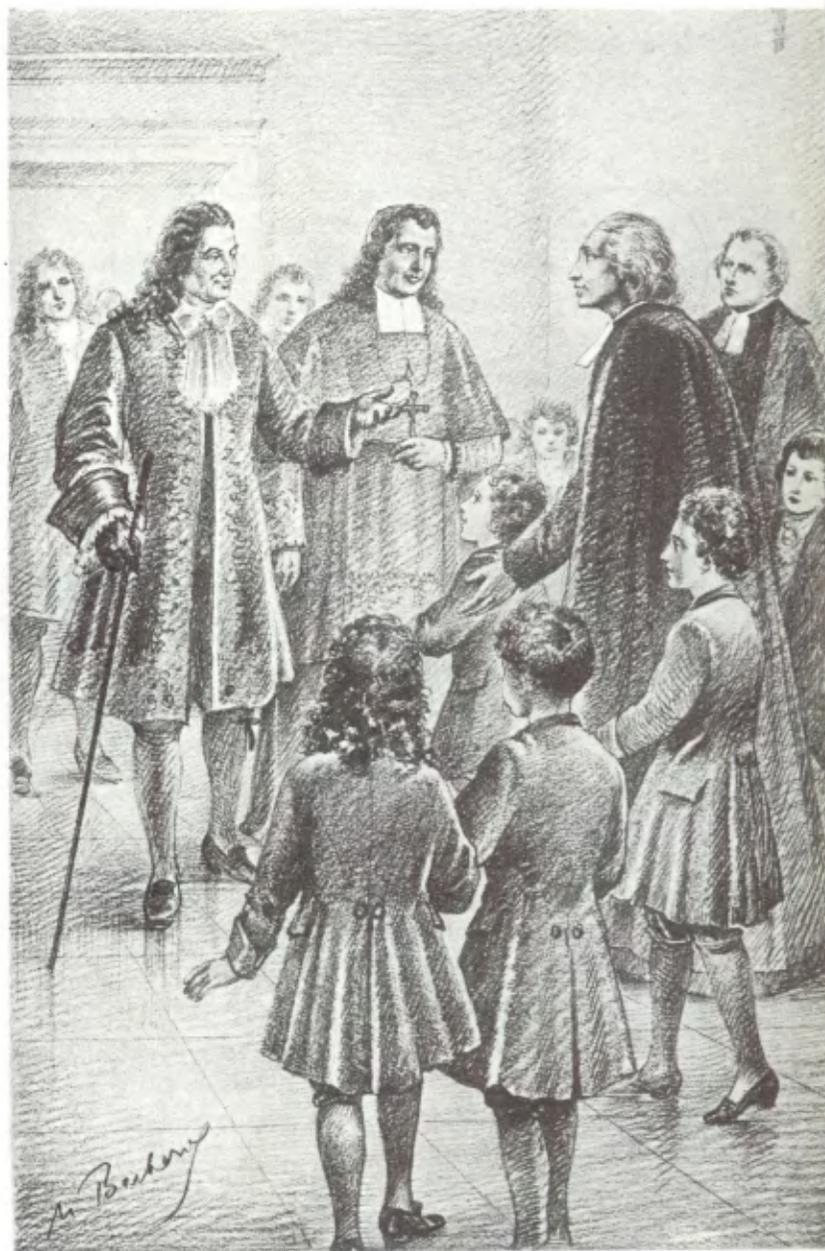
This is done using a variety of audio-visual experiences and scriptural images. Personal questions for reflection and writing are posed in order that the participants might value the mysteries of themselves, of others, of their life's journey with God. Such questions are a novel experience for most participants.

The input increasingly uses visual imagery to help the young people focus on their own life and faith-

experiences. Use of the Hunger Cloths, slides and video help convey the scriptures in a meaningful way. This is a response to their preferred modes of perception and differs increasingly from older groups who have been accustomed to learning mostly by listening. By writing their responses to the ideas put to them, the young people are facilitated in later sharing their reflections on themselves and in listening to others.

Frequently the "act of faith" which has developed in Kintbury over the years is proposed for their own acceptance. This is an amalgam of ideas in an apparently

With great generosity and ability to adapt to circumstances, John Baptist de La Salle was prepared to become involved in all aspects of education. Setting up a school for the young English noblemen who came to France with James II, King of England, marks the first contact between the Brothers and the English-speaking world.



“flippant” way but with the deeper significances clearly being explained”.

“I am... (name)
and I’m O.K.
because God doesn’t make junk
but he collects it
and gives presents instead”.

This “act of faith” invites a personal response for each line of either a tick (if the line is accepted), a cross (if it is not accepted), or a “?” (if there is uncertainty about it). “I’m ...” invites each person to insert their own name — all can accept that. “And I’m O.K.” does become questionable for many young — and older — people. “Because God doesn’t make junk” is a reiteration of the basic scriptural message of Genesis and much else of being created in God’s image. “But he collects it” is a statement about the redemption of our brokenness by Jesus as spoken of in the Gospels. “And gives presents instead” is an acceptance of the empowering of the Holy Spirit — with gifts which are for sharing with others — the Church. This act of faith is about the reality of living out of both our humanity and of our Christianity.

In these ways youngsters are invited to accept for themselves the reality of the faith which they often know about but have rarely accepted personally. Inviting them to think of their images of God and of their experiences of and need for God is an important challenge to the young people. Initially few think they have had any images or experiences but with witness and suggestions most come to see that God is present although they have rarely thought of that presence. Much of our work is in evangelising the catechised!

Within the small groups which follow the inputs, opportunity is given for much sharing of experiences. This is often a quite religiously schizophrenic experience. On one hand is the Mount Tabor experience when young people can be seen to grow and to reflect the glory of God in ways which transform others. On the other hand is the Gethsemane experience of hearing of deep suffering of others and the sense of being helpless. Description of the influence of the small groups is difficult to give, other than as an enriching and humbling experience.

During the session all the young people are invited to be involved in preparing and participating in the liturgy. More than anything else this experience binds the groups together in a community. Many ideas and experiences are used involving music, art, drama, silence in an extremely creative way. Of course the

norms suggested by the Directory on Children’s Masses give much scope in this regard.

“BECOMING RECONCILED”

The third major segment of the programme — following from a greater awareness of themselves — is to challenge the young people to become reconciled. Leading the youngsters to clarify their weakness and to admit their needs for healing and forgiveness is only a small part of this section. Much more strongly emphasised is the love and invitation of the Lord and the help given to seek and accept a change of heart. Various suggestions and means are proposed: most important is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It has been most gratifying to see the numbers of youngsters taking the opportunity, sometimes with a close friend or even with a member of the community to seek the Lord’s reconciliation in the Sacrament. For many it really can become a celebration. Some quiet time is often provided with practical suggestions about how to spend the time — suggestions like writing a letter to one they need to forgive or whose forgiveness they need has brought notable results on many occasions — even after the Retreat. Praying with youngsters for healing of memories, and reflective exercises, are very powerful experiences. Emmaus Walks — or walking with another, sharing deep hopes and fears, being just listened to and accepted by another and by God — is a good experience for many. The final group session is an important part in this. The group is invited to affirm each other in a purely positive way and then to pray with and for each other for their needs. This is a most moving experience and transforms even the most hurt, withdrawn and “hard-nut” people.

“BECOME GOOD NEWS”

The affirmation and prayer session is in fact the fulcrum between “Becoming Reconciled” and “Becoming Good News”. The youngsters receive the good news — and God’s love — through each other. They are built up and hence are encouraged to go and share this good news of being loved, with others. Before they leave they are invited individually and collectively to become aware of the Good News they have received and to consider how they might share this when they return home. This they are invited to share at the last Mass before they leave.

Many young people accept a commitment to pray



Kintbury: The Way of the Cross for youngsters. (Yes Week 1987).

daily, to become more considerate at home and in school. Regularly groups try to meet and invite others to share with them in celebrations or service in schools. This is the greatest challenge of St. Cassian's given to the young people to live out their lives in a more loving and Christian manner. Many do try conscientiously. It does recognisably affect their families and schools and parishes — as is evidenced by the many comments received, and requests for places by other groups. We do not advertise, yet we are almost always booked a year ahead.

YESWEEKS

During the summer holidays, sessions are run for eight days for those who have visited St Cassian's and who wish to deepen their experience. Young people come as individuals — not as groups — from all over England, Wales and Scotland. Naturally these sessions are very rich. Normally they are based on the Scriptures — e.g. the Beatitudes and Micah 6:8 in the last two years. There is greater time for prayer and for sharing and for working out in greater detail practicalities of living the Christian life in our own society.

DIFFICULTIES AND BLESSINGS

Within any situation there are difficulties. There are difficulties and ambiguities to be coped with in the young people who visit St Cassian's — usually caused more by thoughtlessness than by deliberate malcon-

tent. "Professed atheists" despite their protestations create no real problems and show interest. Even difficulties caused by lack of cooperation regarding sleep — which is probably the greatest difficulty, can usually be turned into a lived experience of seeking for and giving and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation. Amongst the community and young people the pressures of close-living and constant giving and meeting new people can be difficult to cope with. Hence regular breaks are essential for maintaining our own equilibrium.

Nevertheless those of us who live in St. Cassian's recognise the privileged position we have in sharing the lives and faith of so many young people. We are enabled by the District to facilitate and set free youngsters so that they may grow, we are enriched by the idealism, good will, openness, honesty, respect and trust of these young people who allow us to be brothers and sisters to them.

Brother Benedict Foy

Photo on back cover: John Baptist de La Salle gave his whole life to the Christian education of young people. (Stained glass window in the Mother House in Rome).

Kintbury: Aerial view of Kintbury.



