

Convention News

AT the moment of writing just two more sets of recommendations remain to be sent to the delegates of the Diocesan Convention for voting on. These are the recommendations on Education and on the Social Mission of the Church. These latter recommendations have just been received by the Steering Committee—all thirty pages of them! As the preparation of the stencils of the Chinese version will take quite some time, there will inevitably be a little delay before these recommendations can be circulated among the delegates. The proposals prepared by the Education Working Group will be sent out very shortly afterwards.

PRIESTLY LIFE

THREE hundred and ninety-one voting papers were sent to delegates. Of these one hundred and seventy-eight, or somewhat less than half, have been returned.

This was the shortest list of recommendations—twenty-four in all, dealing with various aspects of the priestly ministry. A few delegates, in general comments, complained that though the proposals purported to treat of the priestly life, they in fact dealt almost exclusively with the priest's ministry. Wrote one delegate: "These recommendations say nothing about the spiritual side of the life of a priest, his life of prayer, his striving to imitate the life of Christ: this omission is much to be regretted." Declared another: "The recommendations say a great deal about the priestly ministry but not much about priestly life. There is no mention of his spiritual life; no mention of his life in contact with society and the world around him." A priest-delegate thought that the proposals did not get to grips with essentials: "Let us produce," he pleaded, "not specialist, but good, zealous, simple and educated priests."

Among the more controverted recommendations was one which suggested celebrating Mass "in different apartment blocks and especially in the homes of the aged and the sick." A number of delegates (21) opposed this suggestion; some others preferred not to commit themselves. Of those who commented on the proposal one asked whether the people really wanted Mass in their homes. "I know people," this delegate claimed, "who refused because of all the trouble entailed." Another thought Mass in the home should be reserved for very special occasions, or for the sick and those confined to home only—though another delegate felt that such people should be left alone: "Why distract them?", he asked, "why can't they be left to pray in peace?" A few respondents considered the idea a good one but unpractical for Hong Kong because of the lack of space in the average home. Others warned against the danger of starting rivalries and provoking jealousies if some families are passed over and Mass said in neighbours' homes. Several expressed the hope that the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament would in no way be diminished on such occasions.

Two recommendations urged that the sacraments of baptism and confirmation should not be conferred on large groups of persons at one time; large crowds distract and "make the

ceremony less meaningful." The recommendation on confirmation in addition suggested that "the possibility of allowing priests to administer the sacrament might well be investigated." Quite a number of people were opposed to both proposals. It was impossible to deduce the reasons for their objections in the case of baptism. As regards confirmation, many felt that this sacrament should be reserved to the bishop and hence we should have to accept the fact that large numbers would be confirmed in the one ceremony. One or two gave as their reason for reserving confirmation to the bishop the fact that by this sacrament a baptised person is admitted into the community as an adult member, prepared now to share in all of the Christian's rights and obligations: it seems therefore more appropriate that this adult commitment should be made in the presence of the bishop of the diocese as head of the community.

"Confessions during Sunday Mass should be discouraged." There seemed fairly general agreement among delegates that the present system is something less than ideal. However, many were at a loss to know what to suggest to improve the situation. Some stressed that confessions during Mass should be discouraged but not absolutely forbidden. Others suggested before and after Mass as alternative times. A number of delegates pointed out that many would find it difficult, if not impossible, to come to church at other times, e.g. on Saturdays, for confession. One or two thought that the real problem about the sacrament of penance lay elsewhere, namely, in the meaning of the sacrament and of sin seen as a wrong done to the Church as well as an offence against Almighty God. A priest-delegate suggested that more thought should be given to the possibilities inherent in the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass.

"In the training of future priests care should be taken that celibacy be rightly understood, loyally observed with interior conviction and accepted with personal freedom." This statement was found generally acceptable. However three priests gave as their opinion that celibacy could not be accepted "with personal freedom" unless it were left completely optional to the individual.

In the section dealing with the intellectual life of priests one recommendation suggested the need for a Pastoral Institute in the diocese. Few disagreed, though one delegate thought this a subtle form of triumphalism: whatever exists elsewhere, Hong Kong must have too and immediately! Another delegate considered this one of the most important of the recommendations. "Little can be expected, e.g. in the field of religious instruction," he maintained, "unless the priests themselves are updated." The Pastoral Institute, he continued, is important and so it is regrettable that the idea was not spelled out a little more clearly in the recommendation. This same delegate went on to remark that it was a great pity there was no question at the end of these and other lists of recommendations asking delegates which of the proposals they considered more important than others. This would have given some indication of what delegates

thought should be the priorities of the diocese.

Another suggestion in this same section proposed the setting up of two libraries, one in Hong Kong and the other in Kowloon, specialising in religious subjects and language studies. A number of people, while agreeing with the idea behind the recommendation, felt that the first thing to do was to convince priests of the need to give a bit of their time to reading, else the libraries would by and large remain unused. Others suggested making a start by enlarging the existing facilities of Caritas House, Caine Road.

In a section dealing with priests and the development of the local Church, three recommendations were proposed: that there be permanent deacons, married or unmarried; that the bishop give serious consideration to ordaining mature married men to the priesthood; that consideration be given to assigning priests fulltime to the Christian formation of young workers and to releasing priests for work in factories as part-time or fulltime employees.

The first of these recommendations got 23 negative votes, while 19 delegates abstained. There were few comments: one or two questioned the utility of ordaining deacons as all their functions can be performed by lay people. A nun thought that in view of the number of priests in Hong Kong, permanent deacons would be a luxury.

The second recommendation was opposed by 48 delegates, with 20 abstentions. Some thought there were enough priests in Hong Kong and so voted against the recommendation; others on the contrary mentioned the shortage of priests as the reason for voting in favour of the proposal. A number of respondents who voted *yes* put down various reservations: "Provided they are no longer tied to family duties," "let the bishop consult the feelings of the people of God first," "it does not seem necessary now, but might be in the future," "this proposal needs very careful consideration."

Twenty-four delegates voted against the third recommendation, 18 abstained and 19 had reservations. A large proportion of those who voted *yes with reservations* were in favour of priests being assigned to the pastoral care of factory workers but opposed their working in the factories (except perhaps for a short time to gain experience). Some gave as their reason the fact that previous experiments of this kind had not turned out very happily; that while the idea might work in a post-Christian country, it seemed of very questionable value in Hong Kong; that it might deprive workers of a job in some areas, though in others where there was a shortage of labour it might be a good idea.

One delegate thought he saw a contradiction between the proposal to send priests to work fulltime in factories and the idea that seemed to lie behind an earlier recommendation which urged priests in schools to devote more time to the teaching of religion and to the pastoral and spiritual care of students. "If the teaching of profane subjects and administration," this delegate said, "are frowned on as less appropriate to the priestly vocation, why should a different view be taken of priests spending their whole day working at a machine?"