

Convention News

THE first of the Ground-Rules governing the conduct of the meetings of the Working Groups states: To form a quorum the number of Convention delegates present at a meeting must at least be equivalent to one third of the number of members of the Working Group. On Wednesday, September 2, only eleven Convention delegates turned up for the meeting of the Education Group. As this was well below the number required to form a quorum (there are 55 delegates attached to the Education Group) the meeting could not proceed. Admittedly it was the evening of the day on which many schools reopened after the summer holidays; moreover since, through an oversight, the *Sunday Examiner* had not been provided with the list of meetings for the week and an agenda had not been sent to the Group members, many may have felt doubtful whether the meeting would take place as scheduled. As so much remains to be discussed by this Group, it can ill afford to drop any meetings between this and Easter. Delegates are therefore requested to make a special effort to attend the next (September 16) and subsequent meetings of this Working Group.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

AT a meeting on September 1, Working Group 2 finished discussing the first chapter of the draft document. Four other chapters remain to be discussed and revised before Easter, though admittedly the first chapter is the longest, making up almost one third of the whole document.

The first point on the agenda was a recommendation (n. 9) urging the need for more suitable textbooks for parish use. The first part of the recommendation, dealing with the formation of Catholics, seemed to some delegates to equate Christian formation with preparation for the sacraments, which, though important, is not the whole of Christian Life. One

speaker felt the recommendation as worded in the draft might reinforce the common misapprehension that knowledge of the catechism is more important than knowledge of Christ. What we need, suggested another speaker, is not so much catechetical textbooks as booklets which introduce the Bible to children and young people.

The second part of the recommendation stresses the need for new textbooks suited to catechumens of various educational backgrounds: these texts should be up to date and distinguish between "the content of pre-catechesis and catechesis proper." To some the recommendation seemed to use a lot of words to say simply: we need textbooks. In the ensuing discussion it was agreed that the recommendation would gain from a greater economy of words but that it is necessary to bring out the need for two series of textbooks, since a textbook written to cater for the needs of Catholics would not be at all suitable for use in the preparation of catechumens for baptism.

The Group then moved on to a recommendation that had generated a certain amount of heat at the previous meeting: the question of Mass for small groups of people in the home and in other places. Three opinions had emerged from the debate: retain the recommendation as it stands, delete it entirely delete at least the words "in the homes." Now a fourth suggestion was added: to preface the recommendation with the words: if pastoral needs recommend it. A delegate pointed out that there was really no need to vote on the issue as it had been already decided by a large majority at a meeting over five months ago(!) when the body of chapter 1 was discussed. By a near-unanimous vote it was agreed to retain the recommendation as it stands with the proviso that the pastoral needs of the parish indicate the desirability of these small group Masses.

Before concluding the debate

on the recommendations of chapter 1, the chairman asked whether the Group wished to add any other practical suggestions. A delegate proposed recommending that those school chapels where Sunday Mass is said for a stable group of the faithful "should be given full missionary and pastoral work, although they are not fully parishes." It was urged that the priest who says Mass for these Catholics every Sunday has the duty to take full pastoral care of them; and not just to gather them together for worship on Sunday, and then feel absolved from further responsibility towards them. Parish priests would welcome this, it was maintained. In the debate that followed it was suggested that some of these chapels might not have sufficient priests to undertake these added pastoral responsibilities. In reply it was stated that there is not a shortage of priests in Hong Kong but a misuse of manpower, a disproportion between the number of priests engaged in education and those working full-time in the parishes. An amendment to widen the proposal to include all chapels "which can be used for Sunday Mass and for forming a community" was accepted. Another recommendation urges religious superiors to make more of their priests and nuns available for work in the parishes.

During the closing minutes of the meeting discussion began on chapter 2: Religious Instruction in the Family. This will be continued at the next meeting on September 29: a delegate hoped that many parents would attend this discussion in order to keep it realistic, bearing in mind the difficulties of parents today in Hong Kong. (Because of the Mid-Autumn Festival there will be no meeting on September 15).

PRIESTLY LIFE

THE last meeting of Group 5 began with the request of a delegate for clarification of a point made by a speaker at the previous meeting and recorded in the minutes: the notion (attributed to Father Nebreda) of non-baptized Christians and baptized non-Christians. After twenty minutes of debate little progress was made and the Group moved on to an exchange of views on section 16 of the draft document, entitled: Priests are leaders and educators of the people of God.

The chief criticism made of this section was its rather negative approach. To one speaker it seemed to define a priest too exclusively by his function; it was felt more stress should be put on what a priest is rather than what he does. Another speaker suggested that more should be said on what it means in today's context to be a leader and an educator of the People of God; and how this can be done while avoiding the danger of paternalism, which the draft warns against.

The text urges priests "to relinquish works that could and should be undertaken by laymen." A delegate pointed out that this would leave the priest with Mass and perhaps a few confessions each morning: how is he to spend the rest of the day? The document, therefore, should not be too specific about what a priest should do or should not do: so much depends on the circumstances a priest finds himself in, his own talents and preferences. Here again the question of priest-educators came up, and especially the de-

sirability of priests being school supervisors: "the role of priests as supervisors or principals should not be encouraged." This last phrase had been inserted into the draft as a result of numerous letters received from the faithful. But it was suggested by a speaker that the reasons behind these letters were not all theological: since the duties of a supervisor do not seem to be clearly marked out, some priest-supervisors might appear to overstep what their lay principals felt were the proper bounds of their responsibilities; other letters considered that the severity which some priest-supervisors feel it necessary to assume in carrying out their duties clashes with their idea of the kindness which should characterise the priest. A delegate regretted that the draft says nothing at this point of the leadership of service and added that perhaps many of the difficulties so obviously encountered by the authors of this section of the draft could be resolved simply by saying that any function that is truly a service to

the community would be well suited to the priesthood.

Section 15 deals with the prayer life of priests and stresses the urgency of this matter: "The Convention should discuss this need of prayer as one of the most serious shortcomings of the diocese." Speakers brought up the point frequently made by lay people that, with the exception of Mass, they never see priests at prayer in church or chapel. Some priest-delegates said in reply that it is not necessary to go to the chapel in order to pray: a priest can pray as he goes about his lawful occasions; that some priests prefer to visit the Blessed Sacrament at night time. It was agreed that the important thing is that priests, who should encourage the faithful to pray, should themselves have the spirit of prayer; of less importance is the question of where the priests pray, in church or in his room in secret.

Programme of Meetings of Working Groups During Coming Week

Liturgy and Sacraments	Monday, September 14
Religious Instruction	No Meeting
Education	Wednesday, September 16
Lay	Thursday, September 17
Priestly Life	Friday, September 18

Place: Catholic Centre, Connaught Road, Hong Kong.

Time: 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.