

RELIGIOUS

GROUP 6 held their final meeting on March 22. The matter discussed was the last section of the draft document, an Appendix entitled Projection into the Future.

The delegates were generally in agreement with the ideas contained in the paragraph on the need for specialists in the diocese, especially in the fields of religious sociology, mass media and catechetics. However they wanted the text to be rewritten to indicate how precisely religious can contribute to satisfying these needs.

The next paragraph of the Appendix suggests that "if there is an openness to the Holy Spirit we will have no difficulties in determining the important needs of the Hong Kong Church". It then goes on to propose that "a priorities-list be drawn up for the Church of Hong Kong and a separate list for the religious communities". Fourteen items are then mentioned for possible inclusion in these lists.

Opinion was divided over the way to deal with this paragraph. Some spoke in favour of listing our priorities; others felt this was asking too much of the delegates and should be left to the Conferences of Major Superiors. Others again thought that the Group should pick out a few areas in which religious could here and now do something, since it was not immediately obvious what they could realistically contribute to a number of the areas mentioned. As a result of a vote it was decided to hand the list over to the Major Superiors and leave them to determine priorities.

The draft document proposes that a personal file be kept on each religious in the diocese, with information about his talents and qualifications, in the

interests of making the best possible use of available manpower for the good of the Church. This proposal was not very enthusiastically received. It was agreed that there should be greater collaboration between the different congregations and the diocese, but the method proposed to achieve this seemed inappropriate. Fears were expressed that it would result in practice in an inflation of talents and that the records might bear little resemblance to reality. Moreover the good of the individual religious cannot be taken care of sufficiently if he is liable to be called on to do some work merely on the strength of annotations punched on to a card; nor indeed would the congregations be able to provide properly for their own legitimate needs since it would be very hard to refuse requests made as a result of the information made public in this way. A more satisfactory solution, it was suggested, would be to provide Superiors with a list of the needs of the diocese so they can see whether they have men available to do the work required and decide who would be most suitable for it.

Should a local Chinese congregation be founded in the diocese? "It is envisaged that the members should use Chinese dress and live in Chinese style according to the spirit of Hong Kong people". To this suggestion it was objected that normally a new religious congregation comes into being from below and not from on top. Moreover since almost all women in Hong Kong now wear European-style dress, there seems a slight contradiction in proposing that nuns wear Chinese dress and at the same time live according to the spirit of Hong Kong people.

Another suggestion was the establishment of a Lay Institute in the diocese. A number of speakers pointed out that there are members of at least one such Institute already in Hong Kong. Others objected to the comparison made in the text between lay institutes and religious congregations to the detriment of the latter. It was finally agreed to invite those interested and concerned to study the feasibility of the further development of the lay institute movement in Hong Kong.

A final recommendation urges the setting up of a research centre to subject to systematic analysis and evaluation the life and apostolate of the members of religious congregations working in Hong Kong. One speaker felt that such a centre is a rather ambitious project for one diocese to undertake on its own. He pointed out that such centres already exist in Taiwan and the Philippines. We should therefore, he suggested, make use of these facilities before thinking of setting up our own. This view was accepted by the delegates who agreed to recommend that a research institute be set up in Hong Kong when the diocese has the means of doing so: but that in the meantime the facilities available elsewhere should be used.

The last vote of the evening decided that the matter contained in the Appendix should not form a separate chapter of the revised document but should be inserted in the earlier chapters where appropriate.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

GROUP 2 have also held their final meeting. This took place on March 23 when the last

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recommendation of the last chapter of the draft (Higher Religious Instruction), together with the revised version of the chapter on The Family, Basis for all Christian Instruction, was discussed.

It was pointed out by the first speaker that the draft says little about the pastoral care and religious education of university students. This, he felt, is regrettable since during their time at the university students pass through a critical period with no one to help them. A nun thought that the proposed Pastoral Institute under discussion in the diocese should see to establishing chaplaincies where both students and professors could easily approach a priest. In reply this it was emphasised that the Pastoral Institute will not be directly concerned with university students but will aim at providing higher religious instruction; moreover most of the post-secondary colleges have a Catholic society and a chaplain; students whose colleges have not these facilities are cared for by the Federation of Students.

A lay delegate maintained that the Pastoral Institute could play a useful role by keeping in contact with the chaplains of university students, letting them know of lectures and seminars that might be of interest to them. A recommendation framed in these terms was later accepted by the delegates in place of the one found in the text.

The first recommendation of the revised draft on the Family urges Christian parents to take seriously their responsibility for communicating the faith to their children. A priest delegate felt it is not enough to stress the parents' duty of handing on without also saying something about what they should hand on. He asked therefore that the recommendation urge parents to acquaint themselves with the contents of the faith (the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption) and how these can be applied to daily living.

A nun made the point that the text is silent on the responsibility of parents to provide their children with the chance of proper amusement, to give them moral guidance and to send them to a Catholic school. This last item was the signal for the start of a lengthy discussion.

Some speakers were in favour of reminding parents of their duty to send their children to a Catholic school: how else can children get a proper grounding in their religion? A priest maintained that the supervisor of a Catholic school has the obligation to accept a Catholic applicant, at least when his qualifications equal those of other applicants. A Sister who that very morning had visited about a dozen families in her parish reported that four of them had complained of their inability to place their offspring in a Catholic school. Other speakers, however, felt it is unnecessary to remind parents of this duty. In addition, there are insufficient places in Catholic schools, as one delegate reminded the Group, adding that if we state too clearly the parents' duty in this matter they might well start demanding their corresponding right!

As a result of the debate it was agreed to recommend that parents should do their best "to help their children find a religious atmosphere either by sending them to a Catholic

school or by encouraging them to take part in parish activities or both".

To a recommendation urging parents to inculcate a concern for others on their children it was decided to add a phrase or two to remind children to foster love for their siblings and to become reconciled with them immediately after a row or a fight, as a way of forming in them attitudes of tolerance and forgiveness.

Two new recommendations were added to those already in the draft. One states that "parents should help their children in their choice of a state in life in accordance with Christian principles". The other that "parents should foster a regard for a religious vocation and encourage the seeds of a vocation when they perceive them to be present in their children".

The last recommendation to provoke discussion urges the immediate abolition of the present system of classification of wedding ceremonies. After an exchange of views it was pointed out that this proposal, whatever its merits, is hardly relevant to a statement on religious instruction in the family. It was therefore agreed to omit it.

With the unanimous acceptance of a final recommendation urging parishes to help parents fulfil their duty of seeing to the religious formation of their children, the labours of Working Group 2 came to an end.

EDUCATION

At a meeting on March 24, Group 3 continued their discussion of the recommendations contained in the draft document's chapter 13, Staff and Administration.

The draft recommends that "a school advisory council should be set up in each school for the purpose of wider consultation pertaining to curricular and extracurricular activities". The first speaker opposed the suggestion, saying that frequent staff meetings attended by all the teachers should be recommended instead. He was supported by another speaker who saw staff meetings as a way of giving all the teachers the chance of airing their views: afterwards they could not complain that they were not given the opportunity of having their say. In favour of the recommendation it was urged that staff meetings are unwieldy affairs at which no one—or very few—has anything to say; a smaller group which would channel the opinions of the rest of the staff would seem much more effective. A nun said that in her school staff meetings are held for one half of the teachers one week and for the other half the next.

Two headmasters present explained how successfully the school advisory council of their schools works. One said that up to now there is no student representative, but it is hoped to include one in the near future.

A Sister pointed out that what is needed is an effective way for the principal to keep in contact with the staff; the means used to achieve this are of secondary importance. It was agreed therefore to reword the recommendation: "it is imperative to find some really effective means to enable the teaching staff to participate in a responsible manner in the running of the school, such as a school advisory council, frequent staff meetings, panel meetings, etc."

There was some discussion over the question of student participation in these contacts between staff and principal. In the end it was decided to recommend that whatever means are adopted to establish this dialogue "provision should be made in secondary schools for the possibility of the participation of senior students in matters which affect them closely".

The next recommendation of the text urges that "a council of principals should be organised for the purpose of exchanging educational and administrative experience". Some delegates thought such a council is necessary in order to hammer out an agreed policy for the running of Catholic schools and as a means of ensuring a united stand on problems felt to be of vital interest to education in Hong Kong. But most of the delegates were opposed to the suggestion. It was felt that since principals already belong to various educational groups, the organisation of still another would not be welcomed; and anyway they could achieve nothing that the Catholic Education Council could not achieve more effectively. It was decided to delete the recommendation.

"Local competent laymen should be appointed principals of schools". The first delegate to speak on this recommendation wanted to know if it implied that the local laymen already principals are not competent. Another wondered out loud whether it intended to exclude local competent religious. A Sister said she was not opposed to local lay people taking over the running of schools founded by religious as long as they are willing to take over the liabilities also (debts, etc.). An other delegate pointed out that at the 4th Asian Catholic Education Conference it was strongly held by some that competence should be the sole criterion used in choosing a principal and that the question of his nationality or whether he is a priest, religious or lay person is irrelevant. It was finally decided to omit this recommendation also.

The next recommendation discussed urges that teachers of all Catholic schools should be paid the same salaries as their counterparts in Government schools. To some this recommendation seemed unrealistic. Private-assisted schools, it was asserted, just could not continue if they had to pay salaries at the level proposed. In a recent study of 35 such schools, 28 said they are constantly in the red; the four which claimed modest surpluses achieve this result only by paying the teachers less than they would like to. Is the answer then to raise school fees? But this is against the whole trend today. Should the diocese reappraise the ways it uses its available resources and assist Catholic schools to pay Government-scale salaries? This did not seem the right solution. The recommendation, it was agreed, should be addressed to Government and point out that there is little justification for the privileged situation of, for instance, grant-in-aid schools. It is a question of educating children and these are all equal. Teachers too are doing equal work for which they should get equal pay—and this should extend to fringe benefits also.

Time put an end to the debate at this point. But it will be resumed at the Group's next—and hopefully final—meeting on Wednesday, March 31.