

## Convention News

WHEN the regular meeting of the Working Groups came to an end last Easter, the Diocesan Convention entered its final phase, that of voting. At a meeting of the Steering Committee and the Conveners of the 11 Working Groups held towards the end of 1970 it was decided that voting should take place only on the practical recommendations contained in each of the revised documents and that this voting should take place through the post.

It had been hoped to be able to send out the first set of recommendations immediately after Easter. But unfortunately none of the Groups had their recommendations ready. It was not until four weeks later that the first two sets were handed in to the Steering Committee for circulation among the delegates. Thus in the middle of last month the recommendations of Group 4 (Laity) and of Group 11 (Evangelization) were sent to 401 delegates. It is hoped to be able to keep on sending out the recommendations at the rate of two sets every fortnight.

The delegates are requested to mark each recommendation on the voting papers *Yes, No* or *Yes with Reservations*. Those who choose to give a qualified assent are asked to write out their reservations. The Evangelization and Laity voting sheets were to be marked and returned before the end of May.

At the moment of writing, of the 401 voting papers sent out containing recommendations on the Laity, 187 have been returned; of the same number of voting papers with recommendations on Evangelization, 183 have been received.

This is a rather disappointing return. It means that considerably more than half the delegates did not, for one reason or another, get around to sending in their votes. And this in spite of being sent a stamped and addressed envelope to make things as easy as possible! Some would say that a 20-25 per cent return on a questionnaire should be considered satisfactory. However the voting papers were not sent to a random selection of people but to delegates elected by their parish council or by their priestly or religious colleagues to assist in their name in the work of renewal in the diocese.

On the other hand those who did reply very obviously took a good deal of care in making up their minds on the recommendations. The number of those who wrote out reservations on one or more recommendation was nearly 85 per cent. The frequent correction of the few misprints that crept into the voting papers (especially in the Chinese version) was evidence that they had at least been carefully read! This shows that the gloomy forecasts of many who predicted that the delegates would simply say *yes* uncritically to every recommendation were wide of the mark.

Going through all these reservations and analysing them is going to prove a lengthy task. Eventually they will all be handed over to the Bishop along with the recommendations to which they refer. Until a more careful study has been made it is impossible to say whether in the case of a number of them it might be suggested to the redrafting committees to modify their text slightly in accordance with the opinions expressed.

The number of negative votes on any one recommenda-

tion has not been very great. Many who voted *no* took the trouble to add the reason for being unable to agree to the proposal concerned.

A number of people apparently felt unqualified to give their opinion on the recommendations of the Evangelization Group and so returned only the Laity voting paper.

One delegate put "Congratulations" at the end of his voting sheet on Evangelization. This was rather reluctantly taken to refer less to the efforts of the Steering Committee than to those of Working Group 11 who had drawn up the recommendations. However a number of other delegates were not so flattering.

To some respondents the language used was unnecessarily difficult: "Too much gobbledegook", was one terse comment. "This is full of unintelligible ecclesiastical jargon", was the opinion of another, who pleaded for plain statements in plain English. Many took exception to the use of the words *kerygma* and *kerygmatic*, "which 99 per cent of the Catholic population do not understand". The delegate who made this comment added that he had consulted four or five English dictionaries but had failed to find these terms. He wanted to know had we turned our back on Latin only to take up Greek.

Two other general comments on the Evangelization recommendations: "These recommendations could be said of any diocese in the world; they are not relevant to the Church in Hong Kong"; and "I find voting *yes* to some of these recommendations like voting *yes* to *Do you believe in God?*"

A number of the recommendations met with some opposition — but they were not the more important ones. For instance, many delegates did not agree that it would be a good thing to have a special "paraliturgical service to mark the solemn renewal of baptismal vows on some fixed occasion during the year", pointing out that we already have such a service during the Easter Vigil ceremonies.

Another recommendation suggested that "charitable works such as schools and hospitals should issue regular financial statements showing how profits are used". "Nonsense", said one delegate. "What profits?", asked another. "Interfering in the private affairs of an Institution", objected a third. A priest thought it would be better if the diocese as a whole issued a regular balance sheet, and remarked that Caritas does in fact do so each year. To another delegate it seemed unwise to stress this point: the important thing is to see that these institutions really serve the cause of evangelization.

"We suggest that the Church in Hong Kong consider the possibility of an inter-faith service with members of non-Christian religions as an initial step in expressing the unity of all men who worship God". Many delegates had serious hesitations about this recommendation. One delegate pleaded for discretion, especially if newly-baptised persons were to be involved. Another felt it should not be done at the student level. "We cannot begin with an inter-faith service before we know one another and before the faithful are (at least in some way) prepared for such an event", was another thoughtful comment.

The laity recommendations also came in for their share of

criticism. They were too preachy, too narrow and (unkindest cut of all!) definitely pre-Vatican II, in the opinion of one delegate. Another felt there were too many items, not all strictly on the subject, and that the word *should* was grossly overworked. "I found an over-reliance on instruction, e.g. courses, etc., to change attitudes and solve problems", declared a Sister-delegate. An anonymous respondent said that some points were too minor and that others would be better left to the documents of other Convention groups.

A number of delegates remarked that the recommendations were all very fine in theory, but wondered whether there was any chance of their being put into practice. A few respondents thought we were in danger of not seeing the wood for the excessive number of trees; "what is most essential is a solid formation of good leaders—priests, religious and laity. The only way to ensure the vitality of the Church is to concentrate on this fundamental need", was how one person put it.

The proposals that drew the most comment were, predictably enough, those dealing with sex education. Some considered that this whole matter received exaggerated attention in the recommendations. Others felt that the role of the parents was not given sufficient prominence. Quite a few delegates thought from the way the recommendations were framed that there was not enough insistence on forming attitudes and too much on biological detail. Many remarked that education in this important area should start much earlier than the time implied in the recommendation which spoke of children of secondary school age. One delegate remarked that he had been told by secondary school boys that they had learned about sexual intercourse from their companions at the age of five or six. ("Let's update a bit, shall we?" he pleaded). Many of the comments insisted that the time for parents to start this education is when the child begins to ask questions.

Among other recommendations that delegates found difficult to accept in the form in which they appeared were: Parents should always respect the freedom, independence and personal opinions of their children (many felt the need here for some qualification); all families should subscribe to the *Sunday Examiner* or *Kung Kuo Po* (some took this to imply some sort of compulsion to which they were opposed); the Church should keep in contact with the graduates of Catholic and non-Catholic schools (all graduates? Catholic graduates only?); our diocese should establish homes for problem boys and girls, rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, and non-profit-making funeral homes (many felt that these were unnecessary; others, that if there was a need for them, the diocese should cooperate with other bodies interested in the same field).

Appeal to Delegates: if any delegates have not yet voted on and sent back one or other of the sets of recommendations they have received, would they kindly sit down and do so now. The time limit for returning the voting papers should not be taken to imply that replies received after the date will be ignored.