

Holy Child Lay Apostolate Institute

by Mother Mary Paul, S.H.C.J.
(Suffern)

We religious must take our places in the front ranks of Christ's Church, praying, discussing, experimenting, endeavoring always to draw out Christ in the thousands of young people entrusted to our care. This is our sacred challenge and never before have we had such opportunities for placing this vision in its proper focus. The Holy Spirit is with us and surely He is guiding the forward movements in the Church.

A Meaningful Experiment

In response to this challenge, we had an interesting experience in June, 1964 which may partly answer the question: "How do we make Christ a reality to the adolescent?" We realize that it is only one small aspect of the many experiments of progress current in Catholic education. From June 14 to June 19, seventy-five Juniors and Seniors (age 15-18) representing nine Holy Child High Schools from six states descended on St. Paul's Abbey, Newton, New Jersey, for an intensive *LAY APOSTOLATE WEEK*. Something happened to all of us that week that is difficult to describe. In essence, we might say that we learned to love one another more deeply, to see Christ in Person as well as in Bread, and we saw more clearly than ever before our obligation to share Him with others. We worshipped in true Benedictine style: Mass facing the people, Offertory and Com-



High School listeners from Suffern, with
their Prefect, Mother Mary Paul.

munion Processions, relevant psalms and hymns, homilies that interpreted God's word in a meaningful way. All in all we experienced a real Eucharistic Banquet that helped us and made us restless to bring Him to others. For all, nuns and students alike, it was an unforgettable experience of living Christianity.

We had lectures and small group discussions; hootenannies and Bible Vigils. We were priests, nuns, lay leaders and students all integrated and really experiencing the Church. Freedom and much dialogue marked the week. Laughter and arguments resounded in the lounges and on the grounds, and student-made prayers began each activity. Adult leaders shook up this "new breed" and tossed challenge after challenge at them.



Miss Reid in Ghana's
Kente cloth, and Mrs.
Dorothy Herbert.

With that frankness and candor that sometimes disarmed us, the students accepted those challenges and responded.

Elizabeth Reid, an international Grail leader and author of *I Belong Where I'm Needed*, shared with us her moving experiences working for Christ's poor in Asia and Africa. Through her eyes we saw the two-thirds of us who are hungry, uprooted, longing for the material and spiritual help that only we can give them. She took us to the streets of Hong Kong and the villages of Kenya and made us see, not teeming masses, but persons longing for a meaningful answer to their sufferings.

With her we felt the aspiration of the family of man all over the world and understood the meaning behind the current "revolution of rising expectations" as men long for increased self-respect, education, higher standards of living. We saw as never before that we are a minority with a dynamic truth to share.

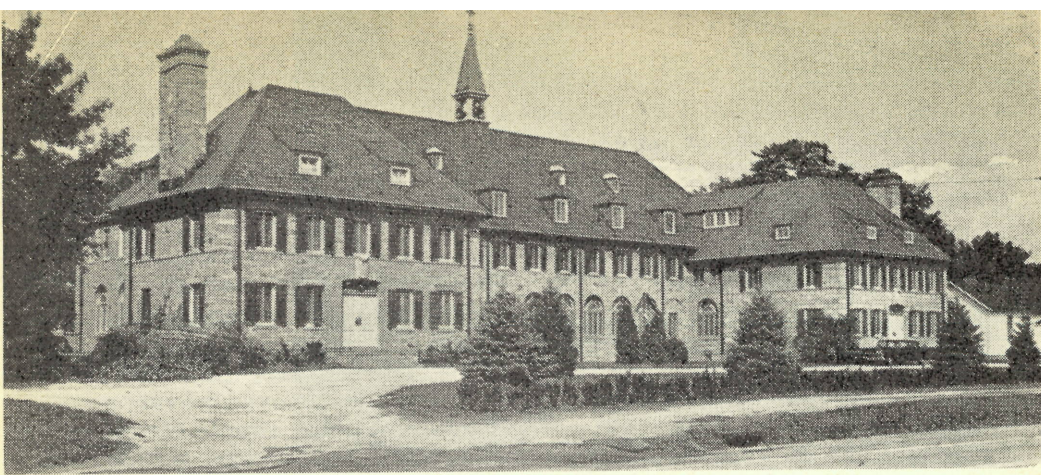
Helping the Negro, the poor, the sick, the homeless and the illiterate

became not just a charitable extra, but a vital living dimension in our lives. As we prayed, listened, and discussed, teachers and students shoulder to shoulder, somehow the urgency of communication and relevance came into sharper focus, as Miss Reid challenged all of us with these timely questions:

1. How are we going to form *social* consciences?
2. How do we form a *saintly* people, a community?
3. How do we form *committed*, not merely knowledgeable, people?
4. How do we strive for *fulfilment* of the law, not just observance?
5. How do we *project* the faith — not just protect it?
6. How do we *seek* the truth rather than claim we have it?
7. How do we incarnate Christ in Society in an ever-continuing process?

We did not solve these questions but we faced them. Perhaps one of the most interesting experiences for the adults was to see the young people's growth in awareness and responsibility. Their spirit was one of courage and joy as they sensed a new maturity, a new feeling of need, and a greater generosity.

Father Edmund Netter, director of Young Christian Students in the Archdiocese of New York, took these American adolescents as he found them. Through clear statements and discussions he helped them to understand their own problems as children of suburbia, perhaps over-protected yet trying to find themselves in this age of pluralism, and endeavouring to live fully their growing ideals. From their "how far can I go" mentality, Father Netter brought them to open and frank discussion of "how much can I give".



Queen of Peace Retreat House at St Paul's Abbey, Newton, N. J.

Father Stanley Grabowski. Director of Young Catholic Leaders Institute, Archdiocese of Newark, challenged them in a number of ways. He acted as a catalyst, shaking them up, provoking anger, helping them to see themselves honestly and to discover the tremendous need for excellence in the apostolate. There are too many starry-eyed enthusiasts, he told them, who collapse when opposition mounts — and not enough realists who know how to get to the root — Christ, who are able to penetrate the real spirit of the Gospels, “I was hungry and you gave Me to eat...” With Christ's spirit of Love, Father urged them to engage in dialogue, not an artificial, sentimental exchange with others, but a vital giving of themselves in service to their brothers and sisters in Christ. As the Gospel Spirit becomes their own they will move along “wise as serpents and simple as doves.” Father Grabowski helped these adolescents see the urgent need for Catholics who can think, not simply follow. His main criteria for leadership was a creative one, “A true leader is a person with ideas. He has also the ability, personality and character to put these ideas into effect. The more people he

involves the more effective the leader.”

As one student wrote, “When his discussion was over, the room was buzzing with girls not talking about lunch or the latest hairdo but rather responses to challenge and ideas behind action.”

Particularly timely was the section on integration led by **Father Elias Mayer O.S.B.**, director of the Queen of Peace Retreat House at St. Paul's Abbey, and the moving spirit behind the whole Lay Apostolate Week. Father helped us to see the agonizing position of the Negro in the U.S., and led us to realize that the concept of “colored” must be replaced by the concept of “humanity”, for we are all human beings first. No man, he said, can be free until *every* man is free. An apt statement by John F. Kennedy was quoted in this context: “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable.”

An effective follow-up to Father's talk was provided by **Mrs. Dorothy Herbert**, Registrar of Seton Hall University, whose topic was, “How it feels to be a Negro.” She noted especially the demoralizing effect of the constant downgrading of her race, and the difficulty that is experienced in attempting to give

Negro youth a feeling of confidence in its own intrinsic worth.

At Mass that day we used the beautiful and moving song, "We Shall Overcome" as we processed into Chapel. Never before did the Negro seem more our brother as we carried his and our problems to the altar. Here prejudice vanished and a love that was strong and free began to grow.

To place these problems in true perspective, **Mother Mary Jonathan S.H.C.J.**, spoke on "Christ, Our Model." His humanity extended and living today mystically in the Church took on new meaning for us as we lived out the week. Mother's theme was love and when she said, "Love is not so much two people looking at each other as it is people looking in the same direction," we knew we were loving, for all that week we were looking in the same direction.

After enjoying a cook-out at the lake and laughing at amusing skits, dances and impersonations, after feeling the bond which comes from singing together, we returned to the Monastery for Compline. The fun, the questions, the newly discovered Christian principles were

all offered to a loving Father who knows us each by name.

The last night, three members of the *Focolare Movement* came to share with us their ideas on the vocation of a Christian. In the students' own words let us see them:

"The speakers from the Focolare Movement moved me very much. They live such a simple life of love. Giovanna, who spoke to us, had quite a heavy accent but she had no trouble at all getting her point across because her love just radiated, and you could see in her own simplicity that she had really found Christ in each person."

Still another student, from Colombia, South America, studying at School of the Holy Child, Suffern, New York, wrote:

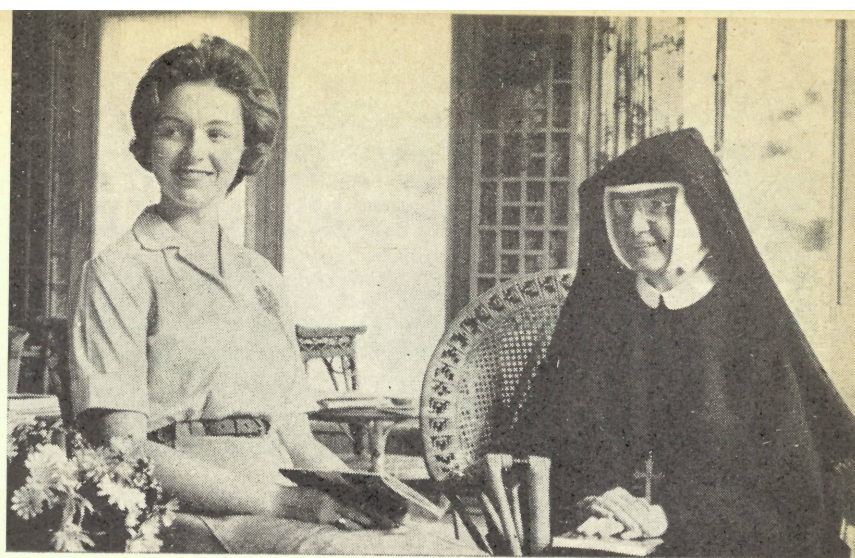
"These people really impressed me. Their love radiated. Their eyes were filled with it. They made me think that I knew the apostles or the early Christians by the way they loved each other."

On the last morning we gathered in the lounge to share our newly discovered ideals and to lay plans for future action. The first suggestion came quickly. "At noon each day during the coming year let us unite in prayer for each other." We then made plans for a follow-up week-end in January and for another such week in June where new students will be helped in this discovery. With a deeper charity, a greater sense of community, a more vital awareness of current needs, we left the Abbey, realizing as



A song-fest carries every mood from grave to gay.

Terry Dolan with
Mother John Mary,
Prefect of New
Sharon High
School. No need
to ask if they found
the week inspiring.



never before Christ's appeal "Love one another as I have loved you."

The Actions which followed the Week

Almost all who attended the Week engaged in some type of apostolic work during the summer. Some tutored at the Good Shepherd Home in New York City, or accompanied the girls shopping or drove them to the beach for a day's outing. Others shared their love with orphans at Divine Providence Shelter in New York City and at St. Agatha Home in Nanuet, New York. Some worked as counselors at the Manhattanville Day Camp for underprivileged children. Others did volunteer secretarial work at the Grail office in New York City, while two taught catechism with the Trinitarians in Virginia. Some worked as volunteer hospital aids in Summit, New Jersey, while others worked for the Urban League in Connecticut. Some did voter registration and attended inter-racial meetings in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Others from Massachusetts discovered their

need for a deeper spiritual life and on their own made a closed retreat. But all found new meaning in the Mass as well as a new meeting place.

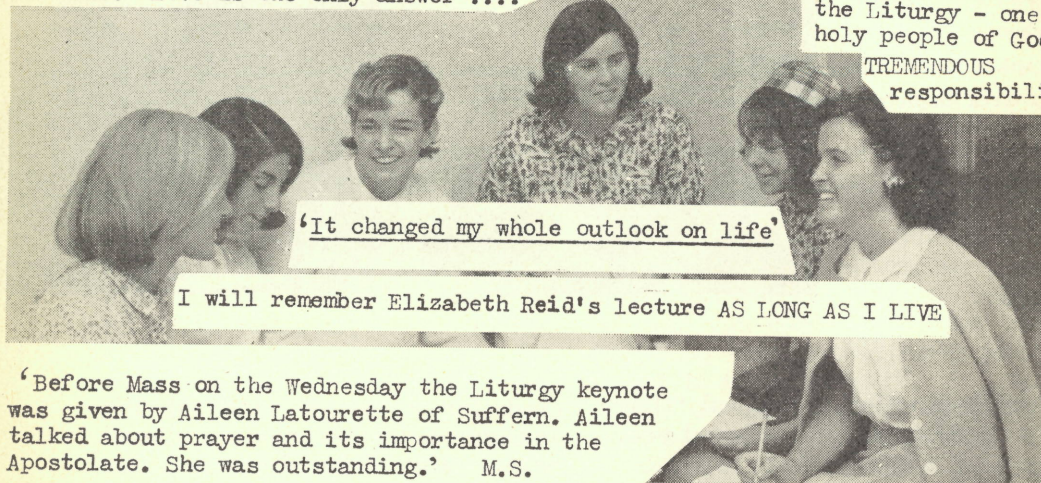
No class, no matter how brilliant, would have produced these changes. The young people themselves had to experience Christ and His love and His plans. They had to find Him in a Mass that was meaningful. They had to discover Him in each other in a new way. They had to see adults in a loving, human way before they could take their inspiration. They had to be given the vision of the world with all its wounds. But the students had to make the discoveries themselves and draw out of these discoveries the part they will take in this vision. May it be a vital response as one of the students who participated in the Week describes:

"Our mission is to bring Christ into every sector of society. The whole world lies at our feet. We must reach it. I believe in a parish, a nation, a world, a Church that is praying, risking, probing, renewing, serving, and sacrificing for Christ. We, the Church, the People of God, can do this."

'If the Lay Apostolate Week taught me anything, it taught me that the Incarnation is the pivot point of Christianity. THE WORD BECAME FLESH. My life must reflect this. My words must become an active response to the suffering flesh of my brothers. Love is the only answer'

'I have experienced what it means to be a member of the Mystical Body in the Liturgy - one of the holy people of God.

TREMENDOUS responsibility!



'It changed my whole outlook on life'

I will remember Elizabeth Reid's lecture AS LONG AS I LIVE

'Before Mass on the Wednesday the Liturgy keynote was given by Aileen Latourette of Suffern. Aileen talked about prayer and its importance in the Apostolate. She was outstanding.' M.S.



'Our relationship with the nuns was different, classroom pressures were absent. When they joined in our discussions it was not to lead but to contribute their experience.'

'The week was not without its lighter moments !'

SOME FACES AND COMMENTS FROM THE LAY APOSTOLATE WEEK

London and
Naples meet
on a
Yorkshire
Lake, as
described
in the
following
story.

