

AT THE FRONTIERS

SAINT THERESE COUDERC always called the Lord *le bon Dieu*, the good God, while fully aware of a world of problems. In this spirit, thirty-eight Religious of the Cenacle gathered in Rome this June for their Twenty-Seventh General Chapter. Coming from thirteen countries, they went through a month-long process to shape a focused worldview and then to work out its implications for Cenacle as an international congregation. Once again, they highlighted the foundational graces of the congregation--graces that allow them to live and to help others live an incarnated, inculturated spirituality that interweaves life, faith, and culture. They expressed an explicit desire to guard this triple legacy from Saint Thérèse Couderc, Foundress:

- ◆ Her vision of goodness in everything which impels the sisters to live and to enable others to live the experience of a *good God* and of a positive gaze on a world where the Spirit is at work;
- ◆ Her insight into self-surrender which roots them in this action of Jesus who surrenders himself for the sake of the world;
- ◆ Her Ignatian spirituality, which gives the means of discerning the forces that are at work in the world; of responding to the calls of God; of working for the transformation of the world; and of taking their rightful place in the struggle against the forces that are opposed to the Reign of God.

Working in small international groups, the Chapter members identified four major areas of concern, encapsulated in these short titles: Being Cenacle Today, Living the Gospel Radically in the World, Spirituality for Mission, and Leadership for Mission. Then, mindful of the realities of their own life-worlds, they reflected on the areas and made action proposals to the plenary. The approved proposals are on their way to the Congregation with processes for accountability and evaluation.

The Chapter elected a new superior general: Sister Yolande Guiraud, who has been Provincial of the province that incorporates France, Switzerland, and Togo. She will be assisted by a team of four sisters elected from Madagascar, the Philippines, England/Ireland, and the United States. The new administration takes up its mandate on 26 September, which every ignatian colleague should know as the feast of Saint Thérèse Couderc.

MAPLE LEAVES TURN RED AND GOLD in Nova Scotia in September. They will add a note of celebration to the meeting of The Atlantic Association of the Spiritual Exercises Apostolate. Celebration is called for, since the AASEA gathers to

"salute the past, express gratitude for the present, and plan our future thrust." The past it salutes stretches back twenty-five years, a quarter-century of work to bring Spiritual Exercises to the everyday life of as many men and women as possible. Similar groups will be celebrating similar anniversaries in Manila, Paris, Calcutta, Naples, and a lot of other places. Here is the "Mission Statement," that the AASEA has been living by--succinct but thorough, a unique grace but very like other groups' in intent and purpose:

"We are a people, who by grace have experienced God's love. As an association of men and women, we are a pilgrim people participating in the mission of Jesus Christ. Being formed in Ignatian Spirituality as a way of life, we are concerned with the support and on-going formation of our members and of those we accompany on their life's journey to God.

"To this end, we commit ourselves ♦ to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ in our daily life; ♦ to prayerful attentiveness to the signs of the times; ♦ to individual and communal discernment; ♦ to develop formation processes so that our members might prepare for, deepen, and adapt the Ignatian Exercises to the spiritual hunger and varying needs of individuals and groups in the Atlantic area; ♦ to promote an increase of lay involvement and leadership in the mission of our association; ♦ to promote the gifts we have to offer the local Church."

And the millennium isn't even here yet. Contact: Gilles and Lea Michaud / 6 Birch St. Box 73 / Slemon Park P.E.I. / Canada COB 2AO; after 30 September: World CLC / C.P.6139 / 00195 Roma Prati / Italy.

OASIS BY OASIS, YOUNG PILGRIMS JOURNEY to commitment. Some fifteen years ago, Jesuit Fr Alberto Luis Aguirre was missioned to Mendoza in Argentina's arid West. He found there a neat dry little city full of university students. The students, however, were not dry and in fact drugs were threatening to mar the city's social life. Fr Aguirre began working with the diocesan Movimiento Juvenil Peregrinos. That is a cursillo-like movement that invites the young to become pilgrims, to feel their lives re-enact the Exodus and the long walk to and from Emmaus. The movement offers a well defined program to help the young affirm their personal faith and to choose deliberately a life of discipleship in Christ. Fr Aguirre soon found that the early teens have different needs from the later teens, so he separated them from the students getting to or in their twenties. These latter are the university students he works with most.

This is the format he found: Recruits begin in Oasis One--we are on a pilgrimage through the desert, remember--"Foundations for the spirituality of the pilgrim." Everything is image and ideal, and week after week the young hear about getting out of Egypt, having their own gear in order, the person who is strong and really free. And the pilgrim is invited to pray "La oración del peregrino--*El Maranatha*," using a pocket-sized leaflet. The prayer is praise in the morning, thanks at night, and combines the

awareness examen with the means of living in the presence of God in Christ. During these four months, the young get the feel of conversion of life and are invited to join groups, called *remansos*. The Spanish word means still water or damn, and would remind Spanish-speakers of a *remanso de paz*, the ordinary Spanish for *a haven of peace*. The regular group meetings offer a kind of revision of life together, geared more to living faith than to teaching morals.

Oasis Two lasts two, three, or even four years, depending on how the young person gets along: "Discovering Self in the Search for my True Personhood." The experiences begin with values clarification and discovering personal limits and shackles within the real community of faith. The material offers models: Moses, the Lady Mary, and "el máximo referente," the Main Model, Jesus of Nazareth. The whole enterprise comes across as a search, a pilgrimage, a continued effort blessed now with success and now with failure. It uses the Jocist "see, judge, act" model very effectively. At the end of this Oasis, the young make a personal permanent commitment to Jesus Christ, Savior.

Oasis Three invites those who continue into membership in the movement. Early on, Fr Aguirre found that this period lacked depth, a coherent program, and any effective follow-up. So he introduced *Spiritual Exercises*, and that has made a great difference. Now Oasis Three invites the young to make a permanent commitment to "ser pueblo de Dios en medio de nuestro pueblo," to be God's people right in our own world. They make a retreat of election to live true discipleship, and they also form cells of Maranatha on their own. Each cell has its own form and acts (at his insistence) largely independently of Fr Aguirre.

Some outstanding members of Oasis Three become mentors for the young, a development that still surprises Fr Aguirre, though it happened a couple of years ago. He had attended a meeting of CLC in Bogotá in 1993 to learn about the formation of

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group guides. He felt no great enthusiasm then, but a while later realized that he had the key he'd been looking for: the mature pilgrims could be group guides for the beginners. By Oasis Three, university students are often in their late twenties, some married, and most are out of school and at work. So he offered them some training; last year, for instance, a five-day workshop on discernment. Then he invited them to recruit the

younger people and contribute to their pilgrimage through Oases One and Two. The twenty-five he chose found a hundred and thirty to begin Oasis One this year.

Annually, there are about 200 in the Peregrinos, which Alberto Luis Aguirre knows because he has them register themselves each year--an annual commitment! The presentations and meetings follow the liturgical year, with special events from Annunciation--incarnating Christ--to Ascension--Christ sending. So, two themes: communion and mission. The movement has made serious efforts at the parish level but the groups there rarely cohere and fall apart easily. Three times a year, Fr Aguirre writes a "pastoral letter" to the current pilgrims. If these are anything like the materials for the

Oases (which this office can supply a copy of), the letters are profoundly simple, wisely unadorned, and full of the love of God. It's an illusion, of course, but this work makes the whole of dry Mendoza seem a *remanso de paz*. Contact: P Alberto Luis Aguirre, S.J. / San Martín 746 -- Casilla 247 / 5500 Mendoza, Argentina. From abroad, FAX: +54-061 23 74 30.

MERELY FOR THE PERSISTENCE AND ZEAL of three leaders, the program "Contemplativos en la Acción" that began this year in Buenos Aires is interesting. It was initiated by three disciples of Fr Miguel Fiorito: Irma Lahargou, Tatiana Pizzo de López, and María Susana Pizarro. They each had made the thirty-day Exercises, and after years of spiritual direction and prayer, found themselves both desirous and determined to pass it on. It took time and persistence. Last year, they organized monthly conferences on ignatian spirituality, and--perhaps more impressive--got the Jesuits to carve time out of overloaded schedules to give the conferences. "Contemplativos en la Acción" was a good success. The program for 1999 will be even stronger. For during the year, the promoters have wrangled various mailing lists from the Jesuits and elsewhere, and have done a fairly massive mailing (the Jesuit college offers an equally massive venue). They persuaded Fr Ernesto López Rosas, then director of the Centro de Espiritualidad Ignaciana, to have the Center sponsor the program events. And they managed to organize three coherent series--on prayer, discernment, and the faith that does justice--and double the number of presentations.

The success of the women leaders' initiatives comes at a good time in the Centro's growth. Fr Provincial Alvaro Restrepo has mustered key Jesuits to collaborate as much as they are able with the Centro's new director, Fr Salvador Verón Cárdenas, an energetic man with broad sympathies. Expect the initiative and energy of the originators of "Contemplativos en la Acción" to spread further and fast. Contact: "Contemplativos en la Acción" / Sarandí 65 / 1081 Buenos Aires / Argentina. From abroad, FAX: +54-1 953 0778.

HOW TO START LATE IN LIFE: Fr Paul Schott began giving Exercises in Everyday Life when he was already in his seventies. (Well, he won't mind, and anyhow his age is public record). How he did it, using the kind of materials easily available now in almost any language, and what the results were make one wonder. Here is the story in his own words:

"There isn't too much to write about the little format I've used five different times now. When I was in [a former parish], I realized that people knew very little about the Exercises, and also that they wanted to learn to pray. So I decided to take them through the Exercises meeting once a week, asking them to pray daily between meetings. I used

Choosing Christ in the World almost exclusively, which made it easy, since I could copy the prayer assignments and give them a page each week.

"The first thing to say is that, in all five groups, there was lots of interest from the beginning. And the enthusiasm lasted throughout the months, with very few drop-outs, and with regret that we were ending when we reached a natural conclusion to the Exercises. I tried to work it out that we followed the liturgical year, starting with Advent, using the Introduction and the First Week; starting the Second Week in time for the Christmas mysteries and going on with Jesus' life until Lent; praying the Third Week then; and climaxing with the Fourth Week at Easter and going until Pentecost, when we ended. I suppose in all we met about thirty-five weeks, taking some time off for Christmas and other holidays.

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"What impressed me from the very beginning was how much the people got from the experience. Many grew dramatically, relishing a new understanding of prayer. I have given most of the groups a copy of Mark Link's *Challenge 2000* as a memento of our time together, urging them to use it daily as a prayer starter. I do not know what most expected when we began, but I know that they got much from the experience.

"I guess I did this originally because I did not see how I could do one-on-one Annotation 19 Exercises with as many people as I knew wanted something. I hit upon the group idea, and though far from the ideal, it is a good adaptation. I will continue to try to get some of these folks to go our retreat house to make an eight-day retreat or a five-day retreat. So far I haven't had a lot of success. But I haven't worked on it as hard as I should.

"I intend to start another group in the Fall. The group should be no larger than about fifteen, and it may be that ten is more ideal. They become close to one another through the experience. We ended last year's group with a social gathering; in my old parish, we would have had a home Mass and pot-luck dinner at the end."

The book Fr Schott mentions is from the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St Louis, and has been translated by Polish, Korean, and Brazilian Jesuits, taking its place on the bulging shelf of fine materials for giving *Exercises* according to Annotation 19 and according to all the parts of Annotation 18. The experience he describes is already fairly well-known worldwide: "And when a Jesuit does it, he can share so much of his own life and experience with the people, giving them an insight into our life and charism which they would not otherwise get." And offering them a consolation not otherwise easily available. Makes you wonder when this will be an established part of every Jesuit parish in the world. Contact: Fr Paul Schott, S.J. From abroad, FAX: +01-504 866 3391.

WHAT DID THEY HEAR FR GENERAL SAY? We do not often find out, and it is interesting when we can. In this one instructive case, we can overhear what one

province director of pastoral apostolates heard by shamelessly plagiarizing a newsletter to members of his sector.

"In October, 1997, Father General gave a most useful talk to the Jesuits of South Asia who are engaged in the parish apostolate. Besides providing some historical vignettes about the intriguing twists and turns of the Jesuit chilly/cool/tepid/warm relationship with parishes, he offers some valuable insights for all of us: 1) The integral mission of the Society (serving the faith that does justice) has three essential and mutually inclusive dimensions, namely, working for justice, transformation of culture, and interreligious dialogue. In every apostolate, including the parish, we have to work in such a way that all these three dimensions of the one single mission of evangelization are given due importance. 2) Once a province takes up a parish, it should assign to it the best and most qualified men possible, ardent in apostolic zeal, creative in apostolic work, capable of cordial human relationships and possessing a knack for administration. 3) Ignatius loved the great cities and had a preferential option for the big centers of population, culture and commerce. The cities were where the transformation of the human community was taking place, and he wanted Jesuits to be involved in the process. 4) Ignatius makes it quite clear that his companions do not become religious in order to be better priests, but that Jesuits become priests in order to become better apostles.

"These are just four of the thought-provoking paragraphs which I high lighted for my own meditation." Contact: *News and Features*, the Jesuit Curia newsletter (vol. 25 no.5, October-December 1997: 34-38), which delivers long excerpts of this important talk.

THE EMERALD OF THE INDIAN OCEAN, Sri Lanka used to be called. More recently, its fine reputation has been disfigured by ugly violence. This summer, however, the island's loveliness and peace embraced many Sri Lankan Jesuits and some from India. The occasion was Fr Herbert Alphonso's third summer conference on "The Spirituality of the Constitutions." The two-week conference must be good; news traveled from India, from Mumbai through Bangalore to Sri Lanka. This is the same H. Alphonso of "The Personal Vocation," a pamphlet now in sixteen languages, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, a pamphlet mostly out of print in sixteen languages. Fr Alphonso continues his nearly thirty years as professor of spirituality at the Gregorian University, during half of which he also headed what used to be the Center for Ignatian Spirituality. Fr Alphonso is in the founding group of the Council on Ignatian Spirituality. Contact: Pontificia Università Gregoriana / Piazza della Pilotta, 4 / 00187 Roma, Italia. From abroad, FAX: +39-06 6701 5419.

IGNATIAN COLLEAGUES, PASTORAL CENTERS, SECULAR UNIVERSITIES. How many members of Ignatian Congregations, C.L.C., and the

Company work on state campuses? Even a mildly informed survey suggests that many do. If you know one, make sure he or she hears about "on-campus directed-prayer retreats." These kinds of retreats are becoming very popular on secular campuses in North America, and exercises in the same or very similar design for university students are hardly unknown on other continents. The exercise usually runs from Sunday evening through Thursday evening. Busy students who sign up for these retreats through their local Catholic Student Center agree to do three things for four days: they pray for a half-hour each day; they meet with their director for a half-hour each day; and (if possible) they join a shared prayer session with the group each evening. These *retreats* have proven powerful experiences for the students and--particularly for colleagues who have little chance for spiritual conversation and even less for spiritual companionship of students--for the directors as well. Contact: the Secretariat. From abroad, FAX: +39-06 687 8293.