A study of the attitudes of a religious community toward work with the mentally retarded

Michael Marie Sweeney
A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF A RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITY TOWARD WORK WITH THE MENTALLY RETARDED

by

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A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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(Advisor)

Rev. Raymond Rude
(Reader)

Date June, 1966
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Current emphasis on the education of mentally retarded children has resulted in a great need for teachers and facilities as is clearly evidenced in a 1962 report:

The number of mentally retarded children enrolled in special education classes has been doubled over the past decade. In spite of this record, we are not yet meeting our existing requirements, and many more facilities must be provided. Less than twenty-five percent of our retarded children have access to special education. Moreover, the classes need specially trained teachers to meet the needs of the retarded. To meet minimum standards, at least 75,000 such teachers are required. Today there are less than 20,000 and many of these have not fully met professional standards.1

Since there is such a vital need for teachers and facilities, a comparatively new residential school program operated by a religious community, The Benedictine Sisters of Ridgely, Maryland, could be of value in helping to fill the need only if given the support and encouragement essential to the future growth and development of such a school. Moreover, since the support of the religious community is essential toward progress and growth of the work in this field, an evaluation of the attitudes of the individual members of the community toward work with the mentally retarded as a new aspect of the apostolate should prove helpful.

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A clarification of the religious community's attitude or attitudes may help to bring about a clearer understanding of the work for the retarded done by some of its members. The spiritual and apostolic mission of the Church is certainly involved in this field of activity. In teaching exceptional children the Sisters are helping them to fulfill one of their purposes in life, namely, citizenship both in time and in eternity. The attitudes of the members of the community as to how the staff, in the field of education of the retarded, are fulfilling their spiritual role in Christ's Mystical Body must be taken into consideration. Of what spiritual benefit is this work to the children, to the personnel involved, and to the community itself?

Furthermore, the apostolic mission of the Church is concerned primarily with the spread of the Kingdom of God. The prime purpose for performing good works is to bring Christ to men. In the light of this objective, how is the Benedictine School fulfilling its role as member of the Catholic Church in bringing His work to mentally deprived children?

Wholesome psychological attitudes are a result of a genuine acceptance and a true understanding of these exceptional children. The school must instill a real understanding of these exceptional children and their needs and make available to them all the assistance possible, through the efforts of the staff members and through the facilities at their disposal. Do the members of the community possess an understanding of these children and their unique role in the design of God's plan?

Vocation-wise this new field of activity may be a source of greater appeal to young women who are especially interested in teaching or working with these exceptional children rather than with normal children in the ordinary academic situation.
Since the work in the field of mental retardation has received great impetus during the past decade, all possible facilities available to these retarded youngsters were duly noted and the community involved in the operation of a residential school for these children will receive public recognition in association with work for the mentally handicapped.

All of the foregoing factors and their impact on the lives of the children, the Sisters, the community, and the Church itself must be kept in mind when considering the role of this work with retarded children as a phase of our apostolate.

Community attitudes are an essential factor in the growth and development of community participation in this field. The study proposed for this dissertation investigated an understanding or lack of understanding on the part of the members of a community concerning retarded children and their needs. Where there was lack of understanding and knowledge of the work in the field of mental retardation, a follow-up letter and explanation of the work undertaken was considered beneficial to the specific community involved in this study and to other religious communities as well. It may also provide a basis on which a selection of future personnel can be made to promote advancement over present endeavors in the field of mental retardation.

Since the proposed study was undertaken in an effort to evaluate the attitudes of the members of a particular Religious Community, namely the Benedictine Sisters of Ridgely, Maryland, the growth and possible future expansion of their own residential institution is here indicated.

The Benedictine School for Exceptional Children, founded in 1959, is located in Ridgely, Maryland, and is the only school of its type in the
State. Once known as St. Gertrude's Academy, it was the first and only boarding school operated by religious Sisters on the Eastern Coast.

In 1887, when the Sisters of St. Benedict purchased the 780 acre estate and manor house of the journalist, Thorndike Rice, it became the Motherhouse of this branch of the Order. An academy for girls was opened in 1896 and operated until 1959 when, because of the need for facilities for exceptional children, the transition was made from a girls' academy to a school for the mentally retarded. The initial enrollment of 19 mentally retarded children nearly doubled the following year. Each year after that witnessed an increase in number until the present enrollment of 96 children with mental retardation.

The facilities became inadequate because of a recent increase in admissions. The 38 boys and 48 girls enrolled in the school filled the dormitory accommodations. Consequently, a new building was erected and was ready for occupancy in September, 1964. The building provided classrooms and sleeping accommodations for 100 children. As the school continues to grow and develop, new and more varied needs are indicated. Its continued future growth hinges upon the support subscribed to it by the religious community both as individuals and as a group.

The retarded children in the Benedictine School are grouped according to age and ability and follow a carefully structured program. Classes begin at nine o'clock and end at three-thirty, at which time other planned activities begin.

The day at the school is planned, regulated, and supervised to develop the best abilities in each child. This program helps the Benedictine Sisters to achieve their objectives: to educate the educable retarded; to train the trainable; to develop to the fullest their impeded and somewhat
latent talents and abilities so that they can adapt themselves to society and home life at least to some degree.

The school has no restrictions as to race, color, or religion. Individual applications are submitted to a Board of Admissions which meets semi-annually and those children only are rejected who would not benefit by the school program.

The staff consists of nine teachers, five group mothers, one nurse, and two lay aides. A pediatrician, a psychologist, and a social worker are easily accessible to the school and will come whenever the necessity for each arises.

The Religious members of the faculty are assigned to the work on a strictly volunteer basis and the progress of the school will depend in large measure upon the personnel available. Investigation of community attitudes toward work with the mentally retarded, therefore, has vital significance for the future of this apostolate.

SUMMARY

The study proposed for this dissertation investigated an understanding or lack of understanding on the part of the members of a community concerning retarded children and their needs. Where there was lack of understanding and knowledge of the work in the field of mental retardation, a follow-up letter and explanation of the work undertaken was considered beneficial to the specific community involved in this study and to other religious communities as well.

There is an unquestioned need for facilities to train mentally retarded children. The continued public statements of the President of the United States and others have underscored this need. Attention to the problem of mental retardation is definitely on the increase. The training
and education of teachers in the field of special education in an attempt to meet this vital need has assumed tremendous importance in the field of education. As was already noted, there are not enough teachers in this work and there yet remains further need for more public education relating to mental retardation in order to instill the vital need for further facilities and well qualified teachers to assure growth and development in the field of special education of the mentally retarded.
CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF CATHOLIC FACILITIES

Recent emphasis placed upon the need for facilities for the retarded is evidenced by the slowly increasing establishment of residential and day care centers for these handicapped children. A brief survey of the Catholic facilities will be beneficial in assessing existing provisions and the areas where more of these provisions are most needed.

There are approximately five million retarded adults and children in the United States, and, out of that five million retarded, one and one-half million are Catholic. In the entire United States sixteen dioceses only have made provisions for the religious instruction of exceptional children attending public and state institutions.¹

At the present time, there exist 83 schools for mentally retarded boys and girls. This total comprises 24 residential schools and 44 day schools. In addition to these provisions, there are 61 special classes throughout the various states. Less than 7,000 of the total number of Catholic retarded children are provided for by the present facilities.²

There are seven Catholic residential schools for mentally retarded children under the age of six which enroll both boys and girls. Illinois, Louisiana, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Oregon can each boast of such an institution within its boundaries. 3

Among the 50 states there are 10 Catholic residential schools for mentally retarded children over the age of six. Three of these schools are for girls only and four are for boys only. The remaining three institutions enroll both boys and girls. However, this number is exclusive of the District of Columbia. Locations are illustrated in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

**CATHOLIC RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN OVER SIX YEARS OF AGE.** 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
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<th>Coed.</th>
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<td>Springfield</td>
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4 Ibid., p. 36-41.
The schools illustrated in Table 1 are the only strictly residential facilities for Catholic mentally retarded children over six years of age. However, nine states maintain institutions for Catholic children which offer both residential and day care services. Such schools are listed in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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</table>

Other states provide special day schools for Catholic mentally retarded children over six years of age throughout the various sections of the United States. Locations are illustrated in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**

CATHOLIC SPECIAL DAY SCHOOLS FOR MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN OVER SIX YEARS OF AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
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</table>

The remaining services offered to mentally retarded children are found in the special day class facilities which are extended to these handicapped youngsters in approximately sixty dioceses throughout the United States. Table 4 briefly lists these classes and their locations.

**TABLE 4**

**CATHOLIC DAY CLASS FACILITIES FOR MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN OVER SIX YEARS OF AGE.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Wheeling</td>
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</table>

A brief overview of the provisions available for the education and training of Catholic retarded children is evidence that many more such facilities are needed.

7 Behrmann, loc. cit., p. 44-50.
Furthermore, throughout the United States there are approximately 148 archdioceses and dioceses and only 60 of these have made some provision for special education for the mentally retarded. There are 32 dioceses with no provision for the retarded at all and the data for the remaining dioceses are not available. 8

SUMMARY

The tables provide a brief survey of the various types of special education programs provided for Catholic mentally retarded children by various private religious orders or offered at a diocesan level.

There has been a most significant increase in public awareness and understanding of mental retardation within the last few years. Yet much remains to be done. Not only is there a need to inform the public about the nature of mental retardation but perhaps more important, the professional elements must become better informed. The Physicians, social workers, educators, lawyers, psychologists, nurses, clergy, and others must understand mental retardation and have a practical knowledge of community resources available to the retarded. 9

8 Ibid., p. 8
CHAPTER III
RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

In order that an accurate evaluation of attitudes might be made, every member of the community of Benedictine Sisters at Ridgely, Maryland, regardless of the present area of activity, received a questionnaire which afforded them an opportunity to express their evaluation of the present phases of the program being offered to mentally retarded children at Ridgely, Maryland. The questionnaire also provided them with an opportunity to offer any suggestions or ideas for improvement of the current work being done by the community in the area of mental retardation. A copy of the questionnaire is found in the appendix.

The questionnaire was, for the most part, subjective in order to allow for individual expression of feelings and opinions concerning the community's efforts in the education and training of mentally handicapped children. It was noted on the questionnaire that failure to respond would be classified as complete indifference to the program.

Part one of the questionnaire dealt with the attitudes of the members of the community toward the program. Part two was an evaluation of the program as a form of the apostolate.

Regardless of her present area of work, each Sister who responded to the questionnaire seemed to possess the adequate understanding needed in order to give an accurate evaluation of her attitudes toward the present program.
Of the one-hundred questionnaires distributed, eighty per cent were returned. Distribution of the responses is shown in Graph 1.

Graph 1

Responses to Questionnaire

I. Wholehearted endorsement with no further suggestions

II. Wholehearted endorsement with suggestions

III. Reserved endorsement with suggestions

IV. No endorsement at all

Fifty-eight and seven-tenths per cent of the responses gave wholehearted endorsement to the present program but added suggestions for improvement of some phases of the work as well as suggestions for future expansion of community efforts into different areas of endeavor. These specific areas are treated later in this chapter.

Thirty-seven and five-tenths per cent of the responses gave wholehearted endorsement of the program with no further suggestions for future improvement.

Three and eight-tenths per cent of those who responded to the questionnaire gave endorsement with reservation toward the present phases of the work along with suggestions for improvement and expansion of facilities.
Graph 2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question pertaining to the suggested areas of activity.

Graph 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Areas of Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Physical therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Vocational Rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Speech therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Curriculum revision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-nine per cent of those who offered suggestions for future improvements indicated the need for professional physical therapy.

Twenty-nine per cent felt that there should be strong emphasis placed upon vocational rehabilitation which up to this time had not been initiated.

Twenty-three per cent suggested that the area of speech therapy be developed.

Approximately nineteen per cent indicated that renewed emphasis be given to the study and reevaluation of the classroom curriculum. Newer trends and advances taken from recent research in this area should be
employed.

The responses indicating improvement of present phases are shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3

Improvement of Present Phases

I. Recreational program
II. Music program
III. Classroom work
IV. No comment

Forty-eight per cent of those who responded and who offered suggestions for improvement in some phases of the work, indicated that the recreational program should be reorganized and given a new approach and greater emphasis.

Twenty-six per cent indicated a need for change and improvement in the music program.

Ten per cent indicated a need for improvement in the techniques employed in the classroom.

Sixteen per cent offered no comment on this question.
These responses clearly indicated the attitudes of the members of the community toward the present program offered at the Benedictine School with suggestions for improvements and future undertakings. However, the second part of the questionnaire, considering the work as a phase of the apostolate, brought more varied responses.

The Sisters were asked to evaluate the program as a phase of the apostolate from the following viewpoints. The distribution of these responses toward the spiritual phase is shown in Graph 4.

**Graph 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Cent of Responses</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Enhancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Detrimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. No comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Spiritual._ Sixty per cent felt that the program enhanced the spiritual life of the student, faculty, and community as a whole. Six per cent felt that the staff was too limited in number to do justice to the spiritual needs. Furthermore, they strongly indicated that any expansion
of enrollment or facilities might prove detrimental to the staff directly involved.

Another six per cent indicated that any work undertaken by the community, as members of Christ's Mystical Body, possessed its own spiritual value and that the spiritual value or benefits accruing to this particular work would be insignificant.

The remaining twenty-eight per cent failed to comment on this phase.

Distribution of responses toward the apostolic phase is shown in

Graph 5.

Apostolic.-Because Benedictines have no formal apostolate, they rise to meet the needs of the Church wherever they are found. Therefore, there was unanimous agreement from those who responded that our present program
for the mentally retarded fulfilled a real need in the Church at this
time.

Graph 6 shows the distribution of responses toward the psychological
aspect of the work.

Graph 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Cent of Responses</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Ill-will arising from the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Relief for staff periodically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Sound psychological effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. No comment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Psychological.-Forty-eight per cent felt that this work has a psy-
chologically sound effect on all those engaged in the endeavor, as well
as on those members not directly assigned to the school but who, from
time to time, come into contact with the program.

Twenty-six per cent felt that the faculty members of the Benedictine
School have been given opportunities for educational advancement in pre-
ference to the teachers in parochial schools. Consequently, resentment
and ill will have arisen.
Six per cent suggested that provision be made for the staff to be relieved of their duties for certain periods of time because the present number of staff members is too limited.

Twenty per cent refrained from commenting upon this aspect of the work as a phase of the Benedictine apostolate.

Distribution of responses pertaining to the physical aspect is shown in Graph 7.

Graph 7

Physical

I. Too strenuous

II. Not too strenuous

III. Faculty too few

IV. No comment

Physical.-Thirty-six per cent indicated that the physical work involved was not too strenuous nor too taxing. Thirty-six per cent mentioned that the faculty was too limited in number to meet the needs of the students and to do the necessary work entailed. Two per cent felt that the physical work involved was too strenuous. It was further indicated that the Sisters
should be relieved of their duties for certain regular periods since most of them were on twenty-four hour schedules.

Twenty-six per cent made no comment on this phase of the work.

Responses toward the effect of this work upon future vocations is shown in Graph 8.

Graph 8

Vocation-Wise

I. Positive effect

II. Negative effect

III. Source of discontent

Vocation-Wise.—Fifty-six per cent of the Sisters who responded felt that the work with the retarded would have a positive effect on vocations for the community. Many girls would be attracted specifically because of this one area of activity.

On the other hand, twenty-six percent indicated that the work could become a source of much discontent since it would necessarily involve divided interests among the Sisters. There might also be dissatisfaction among those who had been attracted because of the work with the retarded
and who were not assigned to it.

Finally, eighteen per cent indicated that the education and training of the mentally handicapped might be a source of concern to girls who were not attracted to the work, and who might be fearful of being assigned to it.

Graph 9 shows the distribution of responses toward the publicity resulting from the work with the mentally retarded at the Benedictine School.

Graph 9

Publicity - Wise

I. Helping the Community to be better known

II. Insignificant

Publicity-Wise. Ninety-two per cent felt that the Benedictine Community was better known than formerly because of the publicity given the school and that this would have a positive effect.

Eight per cent indicated that the publicity given the school was of
little, if any, importance in furthering the work of the community.

The emphasis given to the financial phase of the work is shown by
the distribution of responses in Graph 10.

Graph 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Cent of Responses</th>
<th>Financial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Useful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>III. Little emphasis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IV. No comment</td>
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</table>

Financial.—On this point, six per cent made no comment. Sixty per cent stated that the financial advantages are useful but not necessary and thirty-four per cent remarked that very little value should be placed upon the financial advantages of this program.

SUMMARY

Knowledge of the overall work being accomplished in the field of special education for the mentally handicapped is of utmost importance. Any new growth in this field needs the support and encouragement of all
concerned if success is to be assured. This is especially true in refer-
ence to the work concerned in this study. The attitude of every member
of the community is important if the work with the retarded is to make
progress and become an effective tool in helping the mentally retarded
realize their potentials.

The Sisters included in the eighty per cent who responded displayed
an accurate knowledge of the present program of the Benedictine School for
Exceptional Children. There was a small percentage who failed to endorse
the school without reservations. However, the program is largely endorsed
by the majority of those who responded to the questionnaire. Their interest
is evidenced by the constructive criticism offered along with suggestions
for future areas of activities and improvement of present phases of the
school program.
CHAPTER IV

DATA FROM PERSONAL LETTERS

Since there was only an eighty per cent return of the questionnaires, a personal letter was sent out to each of the remaining members of the community involved in this study in order to follow up the lack of responses. In this letter the Sisters were again reminded that their responses were needed to ascertain as completely as possible the attitudes toward and evaluation of the present work with the mentally retarded. Therefore, every Sister who did not respond to the original questionnaire received a personal letter from the writer to determine her feelings toward the present work at the Benedictine School. Furthermore, in this letter, the recipients were allowed considerable freedom in expressing their own individual opinions on any or all phases of the program included in the questionnaire, as well as anything that might be of special interest to them even though not contained in the original form. They were asked to write their general or specific opinions in individual letters and return them to the writer.

Most of the letters followed the original plan of the questionnaire in that the writers divided their ideas into the two parts as indicated in the questionnaire. Part one dealt with the attitudes toward the present phases of the program with the mentally handicapped and part two dealt with the work from the aspect of a phase of the apostolate. The responses were analyzed according to this division of the questionnaire.
Analysis of Personal Letter Responses

There was a ninety per cent return of the twenty personal letters sent out. These responses indicated a slightly different attitude as compared to the responses found in the original eighty per cent who answered the questionnaire. However, the overall tone of the responses was positive and offered constructive criticism pertaining to the various phases of the program now in operation in addition to suggestions for future activities, especially in the area of physical therapy.

Because of these slightly varied responses, the graphs shown in this chapter differ from the graphs in Chapter III which indicated responses to the original questionnaire.

Distribution of the responses to the personal letters is shown in Graph 11.

Graph 11

Responses to Personal Letters

I. Wholehearted endorsement with no further suggestions

II. Wholehearted endorsement with suggestions

III. Reserved endorsement with Suggestions

IV. No endorsement at all
According to part one of the questionnaire, among the ninety per cent of the responses to the personal letter, forty-four per cent gave wholehearted endorsement without further suggestions for improvement. Another forty-four per cent gave wholehearted endorsement with suggestions for improvement of the present program along with suggestions for future undertakings. The remaining twelve per cent indicated reserved endorsement with suggestions for future areas of activity. No one indicated an entire lack of endorsement.

Graph 12 shows the distribution of responses toward the suggested areas of activity.

Graph 12

In the area of suggested activities the highest percentage of responses indicated the need for engaging in physical therapy. Thus,
thirty-seven per cent suggested the program be extended to include professional physical therapy for these children. The next in importance as indicated by fifteen per cent of the responses was vocational rehabilitation. The area least in importance according to three per cent of the responses was speech therapy. However, the remaining forty-five per cent of the responses suggested no further activities to be added to the program.

The per cent of responses toward the improvement of present phases is illustrated by Graph 13.

Graph 13

The questions concerning suggested improvements of present phases indicated the greatest need for improvement in the recreational program, as presenting the greatest need in twenty-nine per cent of the responses. This same area received the highest percentage of endorsement among the
responses to the original questionnaire.

Five per cent felt there was a need for revision of ideas pertaining to religious observance. The remaining sixty-six per cent offered no comment on this question.

The above responses in the personal letters indicate the attitudes of the writers toward the present work of the community with the mentally retarded. The following responses indicate the Sisters' evaluation of the various aspects of the work viewed as a phase of the apostolate.

The per cent of responses toward the spiritual aspect of the work with the retarded is shown by Graph 14.

Graph 14

![Graph 14](image)

**Spiritual**

I. Enhancing  
II. Detrimental  
III. Insignificant  
IV. No comment

*Spiritual.* Thirty-five per cent indicated that the spiritual benefits accruing from this work were enhancing. Five per cent felt that it would be
Detrimental due to the limited number on the faculty and five per cent indicated that this aspect is insignificant since all works undertaken by the community merit spiritual benefits regardless of the type of activity. Fifty-five per cent offered no comment on this phase.

Graph 15 shows the distribution of responses toward the apostolic aspect of the work with the retarded.

Graph 15

Apostolic

I. Fulfills a real need in the Church

II. No comment

Apostolic.-Sixty-seven per cent gave agreement that work for the retarded fulfilled a real need in the Church. Thirty-three per cent gave no comment on this aspect of the work. Here the responses varied slightly from the responses to the original questionnaire which gave unanimous approval to this phase of the work.

The distribution of responses toward the psychological aspect of
the work is shown by Graph 16.

Graph 16

Psychological
I. Ill-will arising from this work
II. Sound psychological effect
III. No comment

Psychological — Twenty-three per cent responded that there was ill will arising from this work. However, they also indicated in their letters that this feeling of discord seemed to be disappearing as the Sisters became better acquainted with the school program for the mentally retarded.

Thirty-three per cent indicated a sound psychological effect arising from the work and forty-four per cent failed to comment.

Graph 17 illustrates the per cent of responses related to the physical aspects of the program.
Physical

I. Too strenuous

II. Faculty too few in number

III. No comment

Physical.-Five per cent indicated that the work was too strenuous. They indicated here that the dual role of group mother and teacher expected an unnecessary physical toll that could not be maintained over a long period of time.

Twenty-three per cent felt that the number of permanent faculty members was too few to handle the necessary physical work involved. Sixty-two per cent made no comment.

Distribution of responses pertaining to the effects of this work with the retarded on vocations to the community is shown by Graph 18.
Vocation-Wise. Fifty per cent indicated that work for the mentally retarded will have a positive effect on vocations to the community.

Twenty-seven per cent felt that this type of work would have a negative effect on vocations through influencing a girl to decided against the community if she did not find work with the mentally handicapped to be personally appealing. The remaining twenty-three per cent made no comment on this aspect of the work as a phase of the apostolate.

The responses toward the effect of the publicity on the community as a result of the work with the handicapped is shown by Graph 19.
Graph 19

Publicity-Wise

I. Helps community to be better known
II. Insignificant
III. No comment

Publicity-Wise.-Sixty-six per cent indicated that work with the mentally retarded helped to make the community better known. Six per cent felt this phase to be insignificant to the community and twenty-eight per cent indicated no opinion at all.

Graph 20 shows the distribution of responses toward the emphasis given the financial aspect of the work presently in operation.

Here is seen that the majority of those responding to this phase of the work felt the financial aspect to be useful but not necessary.
Financial—Twelve per cent felt that financial help was a necessary phase of the work. Forty-four per cent indicated that any finances resulting from the endeavor were useful only in so far as they were used as a means of furthering growth in this field. Twenty-two per cent felt that little, if any, emphasis be placed upon the financial aspect and further indicated that no child should be turned away because of lack of finances. Twenty-two per cent made no comment.

Clearly evident in the responses to the personal letter was the emphasis placed upon the need for undertaking the vocational rehabilitation phase as well as revision of the present recreational phase of the program. A point of interest evidenced in the responses to the personal letter was that among these members of the community the present work of the school
was less familiar, either because of a lack of firsthand knowledge or a lack of interest, as compared to the eighty per cent who responded to the original questionnaire.

SUMMARY

As was noted above, the responses received in answer to the personal letter gave evidence of a lack of interest and understanding toward the present program being offered at the Benedictine School. The exact cause of this lack of understanding and interest is not easily determined. One reason for this apparent indifference to the work of the school may be due to the lack of complete knowledge of the objectives and aims of the program presently in operation at the school. This lack of information indicates a growing need for further orientation and education of the Sisters who responded in this manner.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Community attitudes are an essential factor in the growth and development of community participation in the field of mental retardation. This study was undertaken in order to ascertain the attitudes of a particular religious community, namely the Benedictine Sisters of Ridgely, Maryland toward this work recently undertaken as a new phase of the apostolate. At present, the Religious members of the faculty are assigned to the work on a strictly volunteer basis. Consequently, for the time being, the progress of the school will depend in large measure upon the personnel available. Therefore, this investigation of community attitudes toward work with the mentally retarded has vital significance for the future of this apostolate.

In order to obtain an accurate evaluation of attitudes, every member of the community of Benedictine Sisters at Ridgely, Maryland, received a questionnaire which afforded them an opportunity to express their opinions of the present phases of the program being offered to mentally handicapped children as well as the chance to offer any new suggestions or ideas for improvement of the current work being done by the community.

Of the one-hundred questionnaires distributed, eighty were returned. However, since this response comprised only eighty per cent of the community, a personal letter was issued to the remaining twenty per cent of the Sisters in order to obtain a more complete expression of the attitudes.
of the community toward the education of the retarded as a community enterprise.

The Sisters included in the eighty per cent who responded to the questionnaire seemed to display an up-to-date knowledge of the present program of the school.

Of this eighty per cent response, thirty-seven and five tenths per cent gave wholehearted endorsement with no suggestions for further improvement. Fifty-eight and seven-tenths per cent gave wholehearted endorsement with suggestions for improvement of some present phases of the program as well as suggestions for future areas of activity.

Three and eight-tenths per cent of the questionnaire responses gave endorsement with reservation toward the present work along with suggestions for improvement and expansion of facilities. In regard to this phase of the questionnaire, the responses to the personal letter vary slightly, with forty-four per cent for improvement of the present program with suggestions for future planning and forty-four per cent of this group giving wholehearted endorsement without suggestions. The remaining twelve per cent gave reserved endorsement along with suggestions for future areas of activity. Noticeable in both groups of responses is the absence of completely negative attitudes.

Among the responses to the section of the questionnaire pertaining to the possible areas of activity, the area most frequently suggested was that of physical therapy. This area was indicated by twenty-nine per cent of the responses. The next area of importance seemed to be vocational rehabilitation indicated by twenty-seven per cent of the responses. Speech improvement or therapy was indicated as next in importance by twenty-three
per cent of responses and a revision of the present curriculum was indicated as next in importance by nineteen per cent of the responses.

Twenty-seven per cent of the responses to the personal letter also indicated physical therapy as a vital area of new activity. Vocational rehabilitation was second by an indication of fifteen per cent. Speech improvement was indicated as a new area of activity by three per cent of the responses.

In reference to the suggested areas of improvement of the program, the responses to both the questionnaire and the personal letter agreed in most cases but there was some slight variations. The responses to the questionnaire indicated by forty-eight per cent that the recreational program presently engaged in should be revised and new emphasis given to more physical activity both in and out of doors. The second phase presently engaged in which was indicated as needing revitalizing was the music program. Twenty-six per cent indicated need for improvement. Ten per cent of the responses recommended a reevaluation of the present classroom activities.

Twenty-nine per cent of the responses to the personal letter also indicated that the present recreational program was in need of improvement. Among these personal letter responses there also was a five per cent indication that a review be made of religious observance pertaining to the children's attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and other religious functions.

The above responses clearly indicated the attitudes of the community toward the present phases of the Benedictine program for the mentally handicapped along with suggestions for improvement of the present activities and for future growth. The second part of the questionnaire which dealt
with the evaluation of the community toward the work as a phase of the apostolate follows:

**Spiritual.** - Among the responses to the questionnaire, sixty per cent indicated that this phase enhanced the welfare of the community, six per cent indicated that it could be detrimental, and six per cent indicated that the spiritual aspect or benefits accruing from the program was insignificant. Thirty-five per cent of the responses to the personal letters indicated that the spiritual benefits were enhancing. Five per cent indicated that the program at the Benedictine School could be detrimental to the spiritual life of the community, while three per cent found this point to be insignificant.

**Apostolic.** - There was one-hundred per cent agreement on the responses to the questionnaire that work for the mentally retarded fulfilled a real need in the Church at the present time. However, among the responses to the personal letter, only sixty-seven per cent felt that it fulfilled a purpose while thirty-three made no comment on this point.

**Psychological.** - Twenty-six per cent of the responses to the questionnaire indicated that ill-will had arisen because of the program. Forty-eight per cent indicated that they felt it to be psychologically sound for all concerned, and six per cent indicated that the staff should be relieved of duties periodically.

Of the responses to the letters, twenty-three per cent indicated that ill-will and tension had arisen because of the program and twenty-three per cent felt it to have positive psychological effects.

**Physical.** - Twenty-six per cent felt that the work involved was not too strenuous and thirty-six per cent indicated that the faculty was too
limited in number to maintain the physical activity necessarily entailed.

Twenty-three per cent of the responses to the personal letters indicated that the faculty was too few in number to keep up the activity necessary in such an undertaking. Five per cent indicated that the work was too strenuous.

**Vocation-wise.** Fifty-six per cent of the Sisters responding to the questionnaire felt the work would have a positive effect on vocations to the community. Eighteen per cent indicated that it would have a negative effect and twenty-six per cent felt that it might be a source of discontent for girls who entered primarily to work with the mentally retarded but who could be given no assurance that they would be placed in the program.

Fifty per cent of the responses to the personal letters indicated that the work would have a positive effect on vocations while twenty-seven per cent felt it would have a negative effect. Twenty-three per cent made no comment on this point.

**Publicity-wise.** Ninety-two per cent of the responses to the questionnaire felt that the community was better known because of this new field of activity. Eight per cent felt this point to be insignificant. Sixty per cent of the personal letter responses indicated that the community was better known because of the work and six per cent felt that this point was insignificant while eighteen per cent made no comment at all.

**Financial.** Sixty per cent of the questionnaire responses indicated that any financial increment would be useful but not necessary to the community. Thirty-four per cent felt that the financial aspect should be given little emphasis.

Of the personal letter responses, forty-four per cent indicated that
that the financial aspect was useful and twenty-two per cent of these
letter responses felt the financial phase to be necessary.

Among the responses to the original questionnaire, only eight per
cent made no comment on the spiritual phase, twenty per cent failed to com-
ment on the psychological phase, six per cent failed to comment on the
physical phase, and six per cent made no comment on the financial phase.
The responses to the questionnaire would seem to indicate that these
Sisters have an accurate knowledge of, and a lively interest in, all of
the other phases as presented in the questionnaire. However, in contrast
to these results, of the questionnaires, the findings evidenced by the
responses to the personal letters indicate a slightly different picture.
The responses to the personal letter indicate a percentage of no comment
on all phases of the questionnaire. On some questions this percentage was
quite high as is indicated by the fifty-five per cent who gave no comment
on the suggested areas of activity and the sixty-six per cent who did not
respond to the question concerning improvement of the present program.

Many of the responses indicated that while much has been accomplished
in regard to the mentally handicapped served by the Benedictine residential
school, there remains much room for further improvement in many areas, in-
cluding administration, curriculum and rehabilitation services. On the
whole, the Sisters' responses appeared to reflect sincerity and their
criticisms were constructive in that they focused attention on the present
phases of the program in need of improvement as well as on areas offering
possible future activity.

However, because of some of the rather vague responses to the personal
letter, a further step was taken in order to ascertain a more positive
attitude on the part of those who responded to the personal letters. The writer initiated a series of personal interviews among a scattered sampling of the various members of the community of Benedictine Sisters at Ridgely, Maryland.

First and foremost, the administrative council of the community was contacted. The responses indicated by the representative member of the council showed that the community as a group was becoming more positively disposed toward the work with the mentally retarded. This council member indicated a growing awareness for the need of this type of special educational program as well as a positive attitude toward the efforts of the Ridgely Benedictine Sisters in this field of special education.

The information gathered from this personal interview with the representative of Mother Prioress and her council gave full indication that the program for the mentally retarded at the Benedictine School has, at the present time, the full support of the administrative members of this particular Benedictine family. Also indicated by the findings of this personal interview was the fact that the personnel assigned to the school was still on a volunteer basis only and would remain thus for the present time.

However, in contrast to these findings of the personal interview with an administrative member of the community, the data gathered from the personal interviews with a wide sampling of members who represented several other areas of education in which the community is engaged, were not so forcefully supportive of the whole program.

Regardless of their position in the community, the various Sisters who were interviewed indicated by their responses a positive attitude to-
ward the work with the retarded. However, these same Sisters felt that
the community was assigning too many of the teaching personnel to the
Benedictine School. They also indicated that assignment to the Benedictine
School should remain indefinitely on a volunteer basis.
The findings indicated by these personal interviews, whether the person
interviewed was high school teacher, elementary school teacher, or general
worker, gave a more positive response than those indicated by some of the
responses to the personal letters. These personal interview responses
differ in that they did not indicate any suggestions for improvement over
the present program of the Benedictine school but were rather concentrated
on the personnel immediately involved in the work.

Generally speaking, the findings of the personal interviews were
closely allied with the findings of both the questionnaire and the personal
letter, they gave support to the school as long as the personnel remain
strictly volunteer and as long as the teachers in the normal schools of
the community were given adequate opportunities for their own professional
training and education.

Here it should be noted that unless a vital awareness of the need
for full community participation and support of the work in the field of
the mentally handicapped is established, the present efforts of the members
of the community engaged in such work will not bear lasting results.

It is the opinion of the writer that the data analyzed from the
questionnaire, personal letters, and personal interviews clearly indicated
a lack of complete understanding of the needs of the retarded. This was
evidenced by the apparent resentment toward the educational opportunities
provided for the teachers at the Benedictine school. The obvious conclusion,
in the opinion of the writer, is that the members of the community do not realize the necessity of specialized teachers in the field of special education for the retarded.

The analysis of the data indicates that further education of the members of the community in the area of special education for the mentally retarded is needed. Communication between the Benedictine school and the religious community should be fostered. A recommendation is made that this study become available to all members of the community.

Facilities of the type offered at the Benedictine school are in demand for the education and training of the mentally handicapped but these facilities must give maximum services to retarded children in order to develop their potential abilities to the highest degree possible. Personnel concerned with these facilities and programs must be on the alert for new ideas and techniques in order to realize all possibilities for maximum growth and development. Any resources that cannot meet the challenge of growth and development is open to question.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A follow-up study to determine to what degree the suggestions given are put into practice might help both the administration and the faculty to realize all the possibilities of the Benedictine School.

A further study might be undertaken to establish the change in attitudes of the present community after an introductory course in understanding the retarded child had been given.

An investigation of the attitudes of such professional lay personnel as physicians, clergy, teachers, and nurses toward the mentally retarded, as compared to the attitudes of the members of a religious community, could
be the basis of a related study.
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### A QUESTIONNAIRE EVALUATING ATTITUDES
### TOWARD THE BENEDICTINE SCHOOL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN, RIDGELY, MARYLAND

**NAME**

**SCHOOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Taught or Type of Domestic Work</th>
</tr>
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1. The Benedictine School for Exceptional Children has now passed its formative stage. Considering its accomplishments so far, how much endorsement do you give the school?

   Wholesmhearted _____  With Reservation _____  None at all _____

2. Give specific reasons for your choice under # 1.

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. List the phases of our work with which you are acquainted.

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. Which of these activities do you most appreciate?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

5. What additional service to exceptional children do you think should be included in our present program?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. What phase of the current work do you think should be changed and why?

   __________________________________________________________
7. As a phase of our apostolate, evaluate the work from the following viewpoints:

A. Spiritual

B. Apostolic

C. Psychological

D. Physical

E. Vocation-Wise

F. Publicity-Wise

G. Financial

Failure to respond to this questionnaire will indicate indifference to our present program.

Please use the reverse side for any additional space needed.