Study of the effectiveness of Gospel initiation as a means of developing a sense of fellowship and service among mentally retarded adults

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A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOSPEL INITIATION
AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING A SENSE OF FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE
AMONG MENTALLY RETARDED ADULTS

by

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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The challenge which confronts the Church in our day and is expressed so concretely in To Teach As Jesus Did by the American bishops is that of proclamation of the Gospel to a world poised "between unprecedented fulfillment and equally unprecedented calamity."\(^1\) The Church searches to discover the means to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to all Christians and enable them to translate their belief in the Gospel into the actions of their everyday lives. The success of the church's efforts can be measured only to the extent that it enables men to hear the message of hope contained in the Gospel, to base their love and service of God upon this message, to achieve a vital personal relationship with Christ, and to share the Gospel's realistic view of the human condition which recognizes the fact of evil and personal sin while affirming hope.\(^2\)

To fulfill her educational mission the Church strives to integrate three essential elements: (1) the Gospel proclaimed to all Christians as a life source for a faith which is conscious, active and growing; (2) fellowship which springs from


\(^2\) Ibid, pp. 4-5.
our conviction that the central message of Jesus' teaching is universal brotherhood; and (3) service which naturally flows from the deepening awareness of Gospel values and experience of fellowship. That the Church recognizes more and more that her educational mission must be directed to adults as well as children in classrooms is undisputed. More than ever before Catholic religious educators are convinced that religious understanding is a lifelong process and that special programs must be offered throughout adult life if adult Christians are to realize the potential which is theirs. The Bishops' Pastoral emphasizes the importance of adult education and recommends that programs recognize:

not only the particular needs of adults, but also their maturity and experience...do not simply instruct adults, but also learn from them; they will only be heard by adults if they (teachers) listen to them. For this reason adult programs must be planned and conducted in ways that emphasize self-direction, dialogue and mutual responsibility.  

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of a program for adult retarded men to whom the Gospel has been systematically preached in a residential setting where fellowship and service are dramatically evident day in and day out. The conviction of the experimenter is that these men have had a unique life-experience, that although they are limited in the maturity necessary for marriage, rearing of children and the complex functioning of life in the business world, they have experienced the Good News of Jesus. The life they have shared in the residential setting with dedicated sisters and the daily

3Ibid, p. 12.
Eucharistic celebration have prepared them for a Christian ministry. That the lived experience is essential basis for fellowship and service cannot be questioned. The aim of the study was to deepen the awareness of these men so that the Gospel so familiar to them could be a conscious source of celebration and power to them in their life of fellowship and service with and to one another.

Justification of the Study

Since the Church has so forcefully stated her three-fold educational mission in To Teach As Jesus Did, the question of the manner of proclamation of the Gospel Word, fellowship and service to the adult retarded population has been explored by those concerned with the continued growth and development of faith among retarded people. The investigator observed the lives of those adults who have grown up as Christians within the residential home setting and undertook to determine if further concentrated emphasis on Gospel instruction could lead them to a deeper consciousness of fellowship and service to one another.

Aware that the thrust is to place long-term residents of state institutions into smaller community-based group homes, the writer hoped to provide a model for small-group Gospel study which would lead to the retarded adult's becoming an active, contributing member of the parish in which he lives. The Gospel Initiation could provide a very necessary preparation for the retarded adult for the Sunday worship and the challenges of his everyday.
Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of the study was one of time. The sessions were scheduled three times a week over a period of five weeks. The lessons were designed to prepare in two sessions for the Sunday Mass and recap in one session. In a group-home setting this many meetings would be more difficult to arrange due to work schedules and scattered work stations. As it was, the time available was the only half hour of free time these men had during their full day of farm or maintenance work. From the group of fourteen men in the experimental group two were absent more than three times due to tasks which made it impossible for them to come. Twelve men attended regularly.

The study was further limited by the fact that these men, due to their long stay within the Catholic residential home and the careful instruction in the Catholic religion given them throughout their lives, brought to the study a faith-life and Gospel values not found among many adults in the mainstream of society, let alone in other institutions for mentally retarded adults.

Since these men shared their lives so intimately, it was not possible to prevent the possibility of contamination of the comparison group by the experimental group members. It is quite conceivable that these latter men discussed their sessions with comparison group members, thus inadvertently preparing them for the post-test.

Finally, the personal expectancy of the investigator may be considered a limitation to the study. As was stated above, the investigator came to the study with the conviction that this
group of mentally retarded men were already living a Gospel ministry. They lived in the same household, shared the same prayer, worked at the same tasks and were provided good mode' for Christian living. Consequently, the investigator conducted the study with high expectations and rapport and affirmation were natural to her in her sessions with the men.

Definition of Terms

Educable Mentally Retarded:
A term used to refer to mentally retarded persons whose disabilities are such that they are incapable of meaningful achievement in traditional academic subjects such as reading and arithmetic. Also used to refer to those mentally retarded children who may be expected to maintain themselves independently in the community as adults or to that group of mentally retarded obtaining IQ scores between 50 and 70, 75-80.4

Religious Education:
Religious Education is the announcing, the proclaiming and the revelation of God's Word. It is a theological discipline. It is a part of pastoral theology and is allied to the study of preaching and the study of liturgical celebration. In fact, religious education is no less than the faithful transmission of the Gospel to the little ones, to adolescents, to the simple, to sophisticated adults.5

Gospel Initiation:
Term given a preliminary meeting with God's Word in preparation for the Sunday Mass: "On Sunday the priest will announce the same Gospel, and again we shall meet Christ, and now this meeting, for which we were 'initiated' will be confirmed and sealed in the eucharistic worship."6

Catechesis:
"includes the kerygma, preparation for the sacraments as well as more advanced instructions to nourish and sustain


a living faith in the community and its individual members.  

Catechist:  
"One who stands between God's message and man, as a prophetic mediator between the two. The program is three-fold: to inform, to form and to initiate. It is initiation that makes catechesis a religious event, for by it the student is led to experience God and make the act of faith surrender."  

Summary  
This chapter has attempted to give the rationale for adult religion education in terms of the bishops' messages, and especially to express the importance of a Gospel catechesis which leads to fellowship and service. The urgency expressed by To Teach As Jesus Did challenges the special religious educator to find appropriate methods and materials for initiation of the adult retarded person into a Gospel-ministry. This study is based on the hypothesis that retarded adults can be led through a concentrated Gospel study to reflect on their life experience and involve themselves in a living out of the Gospel values of forgiveness, service and communion.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The pastoral message of the American bishops, To Teach As Jesus Did, emphasizes the forming of persons-in-community and states that the educational mission of the Church is an "integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache) which the Church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinoia); and service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia)."

Earlier, in the General Catechetical Directory, the catechumenate for adults was said to include the three elements of catechesis, liturgical participation and community living.

The General Directory strongly affirms the need of catechesis for adults because of the responsibilities of adult life which demand that they "complete their Christian formation according to the norm of the word of God in a special and suitable way," but also for the reason that the adult "ordinarily becomes more capable of having

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3 Ibid, art. 92.
fellowship with others and of establishing relationships with them."\(^4\) The catechesis will "help adults to live Christian charity to the full."\(^5\)

The emphasis given adult religion education by the bishops in recent documents is welcomed by educators who recognize the need for continuing education for adults if their faith is to be "conscious, living and active." Sister Mary Charles Bryce traces the statements of our bishops through the past one hundred years and states:

It was only in the late sixties that the hierarchy gave explicit attention to adult religious education. Earlier allusions to it were embedded in passages on preaching, reading the Scriptures and advice on coping with critical national or social ills. For example, the 1931 letter, Economic Crisis, closed with this admonition: Catholic organizations should 'study the social teaching of the Church so as to prepare Catholics to take their full part in this great task of our time.'

Twice in 1966 the bishops pointed up the need for adult education. In Penitential Observance they recommended 'spiritual studies beginning with the Scriptures...' and in Race Relations and Poverty acknowledged that, 'adult education is also a great necessity.'\(^6\)

The integration of the three elements of message, fellowship and service mandated by To Teach As Jesus Did had at least been hinted at in the General Catechetical Directory when it dealt with catechesis, "Catechesis must include not only those things which are to be believed, but also those things which are to be done."\(^7\)

That the "things which are to be done" happen within

\(^4\)Ibid, art. 93
\(^5\)Ibid, art. 93


\(^7\)Ibid, p. 254.
the community is indisputable and affirmed consistently in religion education material for adults. Lawrence Losoncy, in a recent article, maintains that the presence of human community is an absolute requisite for growth of faith:

One assumption which underlies *To Teach As Jesus Did* is that human community is an absolute prerequisite for faith community. Another assumption is that we cannot make people believers nor can we force God to make people believers. Faith is a free gift freely chosen. But faith is next to impossible where human community is lacking. We cannot, therefore, engineer faith or faith community. We can, however, remove obstacles to faith and create favorable conditions for the nurturing of faith among those who believe...This means fellowship and service, for human community is characterized by interdependence (we help and need one another), a no-secrecy standard (openness) and shared destiny (tell me where your friends and neighbors are going and I'll tell you where you are going).8

In the same article Losoncy claims:

When we get serious about human community, we will find our programs to be simple. Just start on the premise that people need love more than words...Faith grows where people matter.9

This community-fellowship which is given life and actualized by the Word, Jesus, present among us is a reality to be lived and can not always be achieved, in the opinion of Sister Mary Charles Bryce, "by lectures, discussions and other cognitively oriented activities. To build community in the school or parish, he (the catechist) must use the liturgy (common preparation and careful execution of it)."10

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10Bryce, *op. cit*., p. 291.
The document, *To Teach As Jesus Did*, emphasizes for the catechist the importance of catechesis for the adult within the context of his community:

From a Christian perspective, integral personal growth, growth in grace and the spiritual life, is not possible without integral social life. To understand this is a form of learning; to foster such understanding is a crucial task of education. (art. 24)

...traditional programs (in the bare essentials of religious instruction) must be enriched with a variety of informal experiences to help pupils discover the meaning of Christian community life and its potential for service to others. (art. 96)

...the teaching of authentic doctrine supports and is supported by the building of community, and teaching and fellowship in turn supports and are supported by Christian service through sharing spiritual and temporal goods with those in need. (art. 32)

The task, then, of catechesis is the transmission of God's message--the Gospel of Jesus--to men for the purpose of evoking commitment and faith in the one to whom we give the message. The caution to catechists must be that he be really sure that it is God's message which is proclaimed and that the commitment be made to the Person of Jesus himself. Alfred McBride, in *Catechetics: A Theology of Proclamation*, defines the catechist as the one who

stands between God's message and man, as a prophetic mediator between the two. The program is three-fold: to inform, form, and to initiate. It is initiation that makes catechesis a religious event, for by it the student is led to experience God and make the act of faith surrender...

This initiation is the process, as distinct from instruction and information, whereby man is enabled to enter into

11 *To Teach*, op. cit., art. 24, art. 96, art. 32.

communion with his fellows and with God. The authors of SPRED see this initiation focus as one which has evolved historically from, "the primacy of instruction (wherein the goal is true), and from the importance of formation (wherein the goal is good) to a more primary goal from which truth and value follow, namely, initiation." They believe that this initiation is meant to establish a life of communion with God's presence which will lead the adult retarded person to a recognition of truth as personally meaningful and the good as personally valuable.

Gospel Initiation

What is Gospel Initiation? The term was first used following the Vatican Council by Mother Chabanel, IBVM, who asserted that preparation for the meeting with Christ in the Gospel and in the Sacrament of Eucharist was essential if God's work in the Gospel was to be lasting, powerful, and transforming in men's lives. She defined Gospel Initiation as:

a way of meeting Christ in the Gospel in preparation for the celebration of God's Word and Sacrament at Sunday Mass. We listen to the Word of God speaking to us in the Gospel; we come close to him, and hence we grow in grace. In speaking to us God not only communicates to us his truth, he touches our heart with his power, mercifully transforming them. We let ourselves be impressed by his message. Being able to listen to God at all, to understand his Word to us, is only possible because God's Spirit lives in us. We listen in Him. In him we begin now our response. It is this preliminary meeting with God's Word that is called the Gospel Initiation.14

The hoped-for outcome of this initiation is a response to the


Gospel Word. God says of his Word, "it shall not return to me empty, but shall do whatsoever I please." The listener responds because the Word gives him power to do so. When God speaks he acts. Hearing the Word in faith makes him a doer because God accomplishes in him what the Word says. Especially is this true, Mother Chabenel asserts, when the initiation is done within a group because the listeners share the Word and try to live it mutually supporting one another. This mutual support, communion, is celebrated most fully in Eucharist which Gregory Baum describes as the locus where Work and Sacrament are most powerfully combined. He says, in the introduction to Gospel Initiations:

The gifts of Word and Sacrament together, combined with the element of offering, are present most powerfully in the central act of the Church's liturgy, which is her eucharistic celebration. There God comes to us in the Word, sealed and confirmed by the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood, and there he enables us to implicate ourselves in, and make our own, the one and perfect sacrifice of the New Law...

There is perfect unity between Word and Sacrament. In every celebration they go together, and this has been so from the very beginning... Word and Sacrament are one because together they have been chosen to render Christ present in the community. 15

This readiness, or initiation, in the Word has as its goal a participation in Eucharist and a very real personal ministry one-to-the-other which extends beyond the Sunday liturgy:

The Liturgy is indeed one of the most powerful and appropriate educative instruments at the disposal of the Church... The members of a parish grow in fellowship by coming together to worship God and by making a shared response of faith on occasions of joy and stress. Creating readiness for growth in community through worship and through the events of daily life is an integral part of Catholic education. 16

15 Gregory Baum, "Word and Sacrament In the Church", Gospel Initiations, op. cit., pgs. 17, 19.

16 To Teach, op. cit., articles 9, 25.
If then, as the literature indicates, a primary goal of religious education for adults is this life of Word and Sacrament which leads to commitment to Jesus and the Gospel values He lived, we question how fully the retarded adult can live-out his ministry. The answer given by the SPRED staff is positive:

The retarded person who is capable of a relationship is capable of faith in a life shared with a believing community of Christians. Many rightly think that if faith is the same as knowing about God in an abstract manner, the retarded may be hopelessly uneducable. This opinion is true. But if faith is relating to the Lord at work in life, then the retarded person may be very apt for growth and education in faith. This applies to the adult retarded as well as to the child and adolescent.\(^{17}\)

Contrary to the belief formerly held that to be retarded was to be a perpetual child, a "holy innocent", special religious educators are convinced that the retarded person does grow in his ability to choose and act-out his choices. He is not locked forever within, but is surprisingly more disposed to the world of communion because the world of discussion (ideas, theories, etc.) is closed to him.\(^{18}\) The authors of SPRED question what values are most important for the retarded adult:

He might not develop into a physically beautifully, hard working, socially skilled adult. The test for everyone concerned is, what really matters? What are ultimate values? What does the future hold for any person? What is the true promise of life? Where is ultimate growth? Is anyone called to unlimited growth? Is anyone free to languish?...As the strangest of paradoxes, the retarded person may be most apt to welcome the kingdom of God, the true future of all men. His sufferings, his frustrations, his efforts and struggles on his own level are

\(^{17}\)SPRED Charter, op.cit., p. I-1.

\(^{18}\)Jean Vanier, "Live The Faith You Teach", NAMR, June, 1972, p. 3.
his preparation. He has been called to life, to growth, but on a level that is not so obvious to those around him...19

The mystery of how the retarded person learns and to what extent educators may justifiably challenge them to assume the responsibilities of adult Christians is yet to be researched. But special religious educators have conclusive evidence that the retarded person has a sense of the sacred which is intuitive and affective rather than cognitive and that he can be led within a believing community to a deep sense of belonging. Within this believing community he can come to know who he is:

Within a believing community which is nourished by the Word of God, the young adult discovers that he is chosen to belong to the family of God, the Kingdom of God. He feels that he is gifted. He is in harmony with the mystery of life within himself and all around him in other people and in the universe.20

That problems exist in continuing education "in the Kingdom" for the retarded adult is inevitable since the Church is confronted with difficulties in programming for normal adults. Specific problems arise with regard to religious education for the adult retardate:

Religious education of the adult retarded person faces several problems which stem directly from the prejudice the retarded live with all the time. The first comes from the parent or guardian of the person who takes the attitude 'He can't learn anything anyway,' or 'He's too old now,' or maybe even, 'He made his first Communion already.' In all of these cases...the basic underlying fact is that faith is looked on as a set of facts to be learned or answers to be memorized...21


Parallel with the problems of prejudice against the retarded adult whose intellectual development is so limited, is that of understanding his life experience. To juxta{

pose the life experience of a thirty-seven year old man against the back-drop of a nine-year old mental age is the challenge which confronts the catechist of special religion programs for adults. The catechist must help the retarded adult to interpret (understand) the events of his daily life in the light of the Gospel:

Together a Christian level of awareness is sought. Ultimately the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, whose presence the Community experiences when gathered together, in-spirits the members. The whole community hears the Word of God, not just with ears but with hearts. At this point the distinction between the so-called mentally retarded and the so-called normal catechist has little meaning in the group. The community of believers has experienced a new level of awareness, in the light of the gospel, and this is cause for rejoicing and peace. 22

So the isolation so frequently a characteristic of the life of the retarded adult is broken and he is able to see and hear God's Word spoken to him. Within the community of believers (adult and adult-child) he is able to see the human experience of every day as worthwhile because they are given life and power by the Word. The catechist of the retarded adult is a friend within the larger community of believers who is aware of significant events in his life. A friend who knows how to take the event, help the retarded person unlock it, reflect on it and celebrate in the light of the Gospel. 23

Contrary to belief formerly widely held, religious education is


important for retarded adults as well as children. This is strongly asserted by Sister Mary Therese Harrington:

Retarded adults have a great deal to cope with in the light of the Gospel. They could really appreciate the help of a group of believers...Discussion groups or lectures would not be the style for maximum nourishment but reflection on life events in a symbolic manner in the light of the Gospel would be very helpful...24

That the retarded have a particular vocation from God is asserted numerous times by Jean Vanier and the SPRED staff, "No matter how handicapped he may seem to us, the retarded is equipped to respond in a particular way to the God who reveals Himself to him".25 How to enable and celebrate this unique "vocation" is the task of the community in which the retarded person lives:

In a world which is continually becoming harder, where men are obliged to work furiously to acquire riches, where kindness is not respected and is drowned in a mounting tide of efficiency, the mentally handicapped have an important part to play, because they have time to look and think and marvel and love, they are a continual reminder of the value of community.26

The ministry of the retarded adult is not measurable in terms of efficiency or usefulness to society but as Vanier asserts, "The affectionate and delicate gesture of a so-called 'subnormal' man has more value before God and for the world than great human acts carried out with a desire for power and domination."27

Vanier's experience in living with mentally retarded adult men has taught him a gospel he feels he could not have learned

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27Ibid, p. 45.
elsewhere:

More than this, I have discovered Jesus in them, Jesus radiating goodness, Jesus the sign of purity, Jesus meek and humble, and sometimes Jesus suffering and in every... in the radiation of the week one touches on another mystery; a divine presence through simplicity and love... a tender love, confident and faithful.28

The important difference between the life of the normal adult and the retarded adult is that the affective rather than the cognitive level of understanding motivates the retarded person. "Perhaps it is because they live more by the heart than by reason that they are able to receive the presence of Jesus within them."29

Bogardus in Christian Education for Retarded Persons extends the "knowing of Jesus" into specific objectives of "living Jesus"; "Stories of Jesus showing love to others--the sick, lonely and troubled--help them understand what love is. At their level of ability to do so they may be helped to understand that God expects them to help others and to live up to the best they know."30 Her assertion is that through this ministry of fellowship and service a very real fulfillment is felt by the retarded person,

As ways are opened to the retarded person to make worthy contributions to his group, to find satisfaction and achievement and to have good relations with others, he is helped to experience self-fulfillment...31

The minister of the retarded person necessarily presupposes good models of ministry and guidance, "As is true for all

28Ibid, p. 46.  
of us, this is learned primarily through actual experiences with others who live 'in the spirit of God' in their relationships. Some learning is by imitation when 'the word becomes flesh' for them and they are furnished with an example of good relationships."32 The catechist then, must responsibly lead the retarded persons to imitation of the positive examples close at hand and help them to reflect and evaluate the "here and now relationships which are most real to them."33

Bogardus points out that the "learning comes from within... new ideas, changed attitudes, better ways of behaving are not applied externally. The teacher's responsibility is to provide the environment for learning..."34 This modeling and setting the scene will help the retarded adult to reach out and, "as he reaches out helpfully to others, and as he receives from others, he experiences the meaning of 'love one another'."35

Stubblefield gives concrete accounts of institutionalized adults who participated in Sunday worship and later in counseling sessions related the Bible reading and sermon to the problems they were experiencing in their everyday lives:

The chaplain asked William what God wanted us to do when we misbehaved. He said that God wants us to apologize...He believed that if he were bad he would go down into torment but that if he were good, if he would behave himself, he would live forever in the life after death. At this point the chaplain interpreted that God does want us to be good, but he also knows we are only human and that we make mistakes. When we do wrong and are sorry, he forgives us. William asked where this was found in the Bible...36

35 Ibid, p. 64.
The aim of the ministry to the adult retarded person is to interpret his life experience in the light of the Gospel, "In interpreting the life situation of the retarded, the chaplain is informed by his pastoral ministry. Thus the Christian faith is presented as story, even as personalities, not as abstract doctrine. The dynamic qualities contained in the story, such as love, hope, faith, obedience and courage are related to the life of the residents."\(^{37}\) The problem of relevance of biblical study to daily life is one shared by normal and mentally retarded adults but Goldmann affirms that a partial solution is achieved if,

...the material to be taught has been selected wisely at the level of thinking and experience of the age group being taught. Religious truth cannot be seen as relevant if it deals with experience foreign to the person to whom it is to be communicated. Personal experience and relevance must go hand in hand.\(^{38}\)

Vanier quotes from 1Cor.1: 26-29 to remind his readers that God sometimes chooses the weak to confound the strong, "What is nothing so as to bring to nothing what is not in being..."\(^{39}\) and states that possibly the greatest suffering of the retarded adult is to feel different and useless,

He needs friends who will help him to discover his own personality and his place in society...But most of all he needs the Love of God which he may discover through them. If, through faith and especially by experiencing the presence of Divine Love in himself he can discover how much Jesus really loves him, then I venture to say he is no longer handicapped. It is a question of creating a truly human community where they can find the necessary security in

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\(^{37}\)Ibid, p. 129.


order to progress in every human and spiritual domain... 40 

In focusing on the future of religion education for all adults, normal and handicapped, the literature points to this same emphasis: community.

The church's education in the future will be structured around adults... It will be person-centered... the church will recover a sense of religious community and nurture a Christian lifestyle among all its people... The church will become the kind of learning community that encourages individuals as they seek to live the Gospel life. Small groups of Christians, mutually encouraging one another as they seek to live the life of God in the world... 41

We will return to basics and recognize Christian adults as basic learners,

... the Church is a community of concern in which mature Christians encourage each other, and through the strength given by God in its life and sacraments, live the Gospel in their everyday lives. 42

Summary

In this chapter related literature was surveyed with focus on the challenge of religion education to adults with specific emphasis on the need to bring the goal of catechesis to realization. The impact of Gospel initiation on the life of the retarded adult Christian and the ministry possible for him was studied within the larger scope of adult religious education.

40 Vanier, op. cit., p. 50.

41 Iris Cully, "Focus on the Future", Catechist, January, 1974, pp. 9-10.

42 Ibid, p. 10.
CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Purpose

In a sense "philosophy" may be defined as any set of beliefs regarding any reality. The investigator's philosophy of adult religious education for the mentally retarded, and specifically, for the group of men in the study with whom she worked, is summed up very simply: These men have lived a "good news"--a Gospel--for most of their lives and can be drawn to a deeper consciousness, celebration, and awareness of their fellowship and service to one another if given frequent, planned opportunities for reflection on the Gospel. The study was made to test the hypothesis that adult retarded men could be helped to live Gospel values more consciously through intense preparation and follow-up of each Sunday's Gospel reading.

Population

The adults selected for this study all lived together in a cottage within a larger residential community. They shared the same daily labor of farming tasks and have had a median length of residency of twenty years at the residential facility. Their chronological age range was from nineteen to seventy-six years and the median mental age was eight years, nine months.
The group of twenty-eight men residing in one cottage was pre-tested and divided into experimental and comparison groups randomly according to the even and odd numbers of an alphabetical list of surnames. After fifteen sessions with the experimental group of fourteen men, all were post-tested. The comparison group was not prepared through planned sessions for the Sunday Gospel but all the men heard the Gospel read and preached together at Sunday Liturgy.

The educational needs of these men (both experimental and comparison groups) are shared with most of the adults who call themselves Christian and strive to understand everyday experiences in the light of the Gospel challenge of Jesus.

Besides personal needs for affirmation and support within the Christian community, adults require others who share a Christian vision and faith which enables them to handle the conflict, fear, loneliness and misunderstanding which is a part of daily living and still continue to "grow-up" as Christians. This growing-up Christian is never, consequently, a place or time enterprise (school or childhood). It is on-going and everywhere, wherever people strive to grow in becoming more human, till they become the full human persons which Saint Irenaeus asserts is "the glory of God". Anticipated outcomes of the Gospel study were formulated with reference to post-session understandings, attitudes and skills. The investigator conducted the study with specific behavioral objectives all of which aimed to develop within this group of men forgiving, serving, loving attitudes and skills.
Design

The fifteen sessions with the experimental group followed the sequence of Gospel readings selected by the Church for the post-Easter, pre-Pentecost season of the Church year, a period in the Church year when all Christians are called to a deeper consciousness and commitment to Jesus, and the power, life and spirit He offers us to enable us to live Gospel values. The lessons were approximately thirty minutes in length three times a week for five weeks. Two lessons were designed to prepare for the Sunday Gospel; one to recap and strengthen the Gospel message.

Besides the Gospel message, the principal content was taken directly from the lives of the men involved: their work, responsibilities, recreation and relationships. Their daily experiences, from the early morning celebration of Eucharist through their scattered tasks throughout the institutional farm and gardens, and home to their evening rest and recreation in the house they shared, provided more than enough material to "reflect upon in the light of the Gospel."

As adults with many years of life experiences, they brought a simple, child-like faith in Jesus and practice in Christian living to the study. The Bible readings, the Person of Jesus, united them as adults called to be more active believers, engaged in growing to understand a ministry of service to one another.

Each half-hour session was designed to examine the life experiences of the men in the light of the Gospel teachings of
Jesus and to extend the Gospel Word beyond the reading at Eucharist into a lived ministry. For this reason each lesson's objective was expressed in terms of observable behavior: to express forgiveness, to offer to share, to help someone out, to stay with someone who is troubled, etc., and the evaluation at the lesson's conclusion "tested" whether the men could perform the behaviors.

The methods used to link the Gospel message and the life experiences of the men varied. Music, especially familiar hymns used for liturgy, filmstrips of people in need and in helping situations, pictures depicting people ministering to one another, (as in the Corporal Works of Mercy) all helped to bring discussion to life. Each man was drawn to some response during the course of each lesson but recognition was made of both speech impairments and limited verbal ability. As was pointed out earlier, the time designated for the sessions was the only half-hour free for the men, the half hour immediately following the noon meal. Efforts were made to create an informal discussion atmosphere but, despite the efforts a "schooly" atmosphere was felt. Since a lived ministry was the primary objective, the investigator attempted in casual encounters outside the lesson time to reinforce the men in the experimental group and make them conscious of their individual importance and contribution to the larger residential community.

In contrast to the tri-weekly meetings to discover what meaning the Gospel can have in our lives with the experimental group, the comparison group had no planned preparation for Sunday's Eucharistic Liturgy. The Gospel as it was read on
Sunday and the homily (which on these five Sundays was taken almost entirely from the Gospel) were the only instruction the comparison group received. However it would be naive to assume that the comparison group was a "controlled" group since the thrust of the experimental group was toward ministry and sharing the "good news" there must have been some carry-over of ideas and questions from the session to the house the groups shared together.

Following the fifteen sessions with the experimental group, both groups were tested on the same questions contained in the pre-test and the same personal interview format was followed. It was hoped that the responses of the experimental group would be significantly more varied and concrete than in the pre-test. It was further hoped that the men would, as a consequence of this study, know many different ways to extend the forgiving, offering and communion of the Mass and that they would express a certain conviction that Jesus speaks directly to them in the Gospel and calls them to a ministry of service and fellowship.

Summary

This chapter describes the purpose, population and manner of carrying out the study. The men selected for the Gospel' Initiation study brought a unique faith and life experience to the sessions and were able to show behaviorally that they understood the content of the different lessons. The post-test was designed to measure the sessions' effectiveness in stimulating practical applications of the Gospel message by the experimental group.
CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The results of this study are defined in terms of Gospel application. It was suggested that with intense focusing on the Gospel message for a given Sunday, mentally retarded men can be led to a deeper awareness of the challenge Jesus makes of them to be forgiving (Preparation of Mass), offering (Offertory), and loving persons (Eucharist).

The pre-test interview with each man indicated a strong sense of relationship with Jesus but did not evidence a similar relationship on the human community level. A personal "Jesus and I" stance was manifest with prayer and obedience as primary characteristics of the Christian. The aim of the fifteen sessions was to expand the focus of the participants "beyond" Jesus to the community, and specifically, to an applied Gospel ministry of forgiveness, service and ministry. The post-test was designed to measure the effectiveness of the Gospel Initiation sessions in stimulating practical application of the Gospel message by the experimental group.

Within the post-test questions were those which the investigator designated six key interpretive questions:
A Christian is a person who follows Jesus Christ. What does Jesus ask you to do?

What can you do when there is trouble or hurt feelings?

What does Jesus ask you to do when you leave Mass?

What can you offer with the bread and wine?

Why does Jesus come to you in Holy Communion?

What does Jesus want to do for you when you leave Mass?

These six questions (from the total of eighteen) were selected because of their focus within community and the implied challenge to "live out" the preparation, offering and communion of the Mass. It was judged that the post-test responses to these questions would best indicate if attitudinal changes had occurred as a result of the fifteen sessions and if movement from the "Jesus and I" posture to a broader community ministry consciousness had taken place.

Evaluation of the pre- and post-test responses was provided through a measurement scale designed by the researcher. Four levels of responses were charted. As was indicated earlier what emerged in the pre-test was a sense of personal relationship with Jesus, often expressed in the words of the catechism: "He wants me to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this world," often legalistic and reflective of a vertical spirituality. The investigator labeled this general pre-session response as a level 2 answer with levels 0 and 1 providing for no response at all, and irrelevant responses. From level 2 responses the investigator hoped to lead the participants to a level 3 answer which would indicate a movement toward fellowship and community. The level 4 answer would manifest a definite application of the
Gospel to the life situation, and an awareness of Gospel ministry.

The difficulty in evaluating the responses was due to the fact that the verbal facility of the men was so varied. Some could as facilely "parrot" responses directly from the Gospel Initiation sessions as they had the catechism answers in the pre-test. Others, because of speech impairment or language limitations responded in monosyllables. The investigator attempted to employ "other languages" in the behavioral objectives of the individual sessions but the pre- and post-tests were limited to verbal responses.

Since the post-test was meant to evaluate the effectiveness of the Gospel Initiation lessons with the experimental group the responses of those men are examined in detail. An examination of the six selected questions and interpretation of the responses of the experimental group follows:

The participants in the experimental group in their pre-test reflected a felt relationship with Jesus and the need for obedience, work and prayer "for Jesus." In answer to Question 1, "What does Jesus ask you to do?", the men generally responded that Jesus wanted them to pray, to be good, to obey, to work hard. Only two said Jesus asked him "to love" or "to know, love, and serve Him in this world." In the post-test, on the other hand, all the men, with the exception of six, expressed a sense of relationship beyond Jesus to the community. Their responses were specific in terms of actions such as helping, forgiving, listening, etc., but not applied to specific people or situations. Two men gave responses which applied the
Gospel lessons to life:

(1) "Jesus asks me to go and be kind. To feed His lambs and be good to everybody."

and (2) "Listen. He expects me to listen, in other words, we're supposed to go and live it, your religion. We're apostles."

Question 2 asked, "What can you do if there is trouble or hurt feelings?". Because the question obviously focused on the other and community living the responses were more generally relational. But as before in question 1, the pre-tests suggested that to pray to Jesus, tell Sister, or avoid the trouble was the best solution.

In the post-test all but five of the men responded with concrete ways they could "Keep from getting crabby", "talk it over with the boys", or "ask if I can do anything to help them out". The only applied Gospel-to-life response came from a man who responded, "Try to avoid trouble" in the pre-test, and "I can keep from getting crabby with Brother. Just like last night I got so mad I threw the keys on the floor." in the post-test.

Generally the men had some difficulty with the concept that they could be supportive of one another. This may be due to the institutional formation they've received wherein there are always adult authority figures present who comfort and reconcile differences or hurt feelings.

In an effort to extend the Gospel message from the Eucharistic Liturgy throughout the day, Question 3 asked, "What does Jesus ask you to do when you leave Mass?". The general response in the pre-test was one of repetition of the words from the last blessing, "Go in peace" and "Go in peace and
God bless you, that's what Father says at the end of Mass."

Only four men gave level 3 responses in the post-test and they too only "hinted" at the notion that they might be able to live-out the Mass: "Go spread the Word to the world" and "Serve Him and be good to one another" were sample level 3 responses.

In the pre-test only two men responded to Question 4, "What can you offer with the bread and wine?" on level 3. Later, in the post-test five men expressed level 3 responses indicating that they could, "offer our work," "our sacrifices, prayer and thanksgiving," and "ourselves." It was evident that the concept of living in service to one another was really difficult for them to understand or not easily expressed.

Question 5 was meant to draw out a felt experience of being loved and to emphasize Jesus' desire that "we love as He has loved us." With the exception of only one man the experimental group participants all expressed level two responses in the post-test. This was the case in the pre-test as well, however in the pre-test six men had made either no response or an irrelevant one. The general response to Question 5, "Why does Jesus come to you in Holy Communion?" was the simple, but profound, "He loves me."

The pre-test responses to Question 6, "What does Jesus want to do for you when you leave Mass?" showed lack of understanding on the part of six of the men who gave no response or irrelevant ones. Those who gave level 2 responses said that Jesus would stay with them, help them, make them better, but these same men in the post-test, indicated that Jesus would "stay with me the rest of the day," "wants us to be good," and
"Jesus wants us to be good to everybody, help everybody along", indicating a somewhat extended movement toward ministry. The only level 4 response in the post-test referred to the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, "Jesus wants us to go and feed His lambs and feed His sheep—in other words, be good to everybody."

Although the application of the Gospel to life is expressed verbally by only a few men from the experimental group of fourteen, there is definite evidence of attitudinal change and movement from level 2 responses to level 3. Figure I shows the pre-test and post-test evaluation of responses of both the experimental and comparison groups. Whereas the comparison group began at the same point, that is for the most part on the level 2 response, and reflected little change over the five week interval, the experimental group did manifest growth. It can at least be suggested that over a longer period of time and with some degree of reinforcement from the Sunday pulpit, all the men involved could have been led to a deeper realization of their ability to respond to the Gospel message of Jesus.

Although the groups (experimental and comparison) were judged comparable in intellectual ability and life experiences which would call them to "follow Jesus", the consciousness level of the experimental group was raised through the Gospel Initiation sessions whereas the members of the comparison group changed their responses in only a few cases. In response to Question 1, one man expressed a level 2 response in the pre-test, "Well, for one thing He wants us to love. We are soldiers of Christ, try to go away from the bad, try to be good." and a level 3 response in the post-test, "Go out and preach our good
### EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

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**What does Jesus ask you to do?**

**What can you do when there's trouble or hurt feelings?**

**What does Jesus ask you to do when you leave Mass?**

**What can you offer with the bread and wine?**

**Why does Jesus come to you in Holy Communion?**

**What does Jesus want you to do for you after you leave Mass?**
example to other people, act as Christians." The only other significant change in response was made by a man with a severe speech impediment who was more relaxed and intelligible in the post-test.

Summary

In summary, the results of this study indicate there is some measurable evidence that the Gospel Initiation sessions effected a change in the experimental group. Their awareness of their ability to respond to the Gospel challenge to be forgiving, serving, loving people was heightened. Evidence of movement from a "Jesus and I" vertical spirituality to a sense of community-responsibility to one another as Christians is manifest to some degree. The minimal gains realized in this study suggest that extended programs of Gospel Initiation for adult retarded persons are not only feasible but would yield successful results.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Problem

This study was made to test the hypothesis that mentally retarded adults could be led through a study of the Gospel message to a sense of fellowship and service. The effectiveness of the Gospel Initiation sessions was judged from the responses of the experimental group in pre- and post-test as compared with the comparison group who were instructed solely through the Sunday homily.

Population

Twenty-eight men ranging in age from seventy-six to nineteen with a median mental age of eight years, nine months and residency of twenty years were selected for this study because they shared the same Eucharistic celebration, household, dining room, and institutional tasks. The essential elements of Christian living had been shared by them for many years. The study aimed to deepen their consciousness of Gospel ministry to one another.

Results

Pre-test responses indicated a strong felt relationship to Jesus and a somewhat "vertical" spirituality which was
expressed in catechism-learned responses of prayer, obedience to the commandments and "being good". The fifteen sessions with the experimental group were intended to raise the general starting point of level 2 responses to a level 3 response which would give evidence of a community-responsibility consciousness. It was hoped that level 4 responses indicating the ability to apply the Gospel message in daily life situations would be possible for some men at the conclusion of the five week study.

All the men were pre- and post-tested individually. Rapport was obviously a factor after the fifteen sessions with the experimental group and their responses indicated some measurable difference in attitude. The comparison group, on the other hand, indicated the necessity of more than unprepared exposure to the Sunday Gospel and homily if they are to grow in a community-responsibility sense. Their responses in the pre- and post-tests changed only in a few cases and manifested the vertical, "Jesus and I", legalistic stance. Gains were general in the responses of the experimental group despite definite problems in articulating feelings.

Implications

The religious education of the men selected for this study was atypical in that it was within the Catholic institutional setting and over a long period of time. (As was said earlier, the median length of residency was twenty years.) The example of Christian living after which they modeled their lives was one of hard work, devotion and dedication. Unquestionably, the lives of these men had been uniquely "formed". The investigator hoped to extend the consciousness of the
experimental group through the intense focus on the Gospel preparation. Some measurable evidence implies that this type of adult religious education wherein the Gospel is discussed and applied to the life experience can be programmed for adult retarded persons. The attitude of the men involved was one of positive appreciation and affirmation of one another. If the duration of the study, or of future studies, could be of greater length, appreciable change in attitudes might justifiably be realized. The men involved expressed hope that the sessions could continue "next year". This would seem to indicate that the experience was stimulating to them, and in the opinion of the investigator, this would be reason enough for further study.

Since the study was conducted to test the feasibility of adult religious education for mentally retarded persons according to the definition of bishops in To Teach As Jesus Did, the framework of "message, fellowship, and service" was utilized. This was reasonable within the institutional setting where the selected population all participated in the same Sunday Eucharist. However, if the study was to be used as a model for groups of mentally retarded adults in sheltered home settings, some adaptation would be necessary. Not all would be Catholics, nor would all have shared the same religious formation or instruction before coming to the group home.

The fact that religious education must be extended beyond school years is affirmed by most current literature. That it might be a source of support, strength and stimulation to adult retarded persons is suggested by this study.
Suggestions For Further Research

The findings of this study give evidence that the men who participated in the Gospel Initiation study were enriched in their celebration of the Sunday Eucharist and more able to perceive themselves as listening, forgiving, offering, loving persons.

Further research projects might profitably extend the Gospel Initiation over a longer period of time. It might prove valuable as well if the investigator (this would be possible in the group home setting) lived with the men involved so that reinforcement of the Gospel message might be made naturally throughout the day, where the listening, forgiving, serving response is called forth.

Conclusion

This study was meant to involve mentally retarded men in a process which would deepen their consciousness of their special gift to respond to Jesus' Gospel and to one another in a ministry. This is the primary aim of religious education and, essentially of all education according to Dr. Leo Buscaglia in Love: "...Education should be the process of helping everyone to discover his uniqueness, to teach him how to develop that uniqueness and then to show him how to share it--because that is the only reason for having anything."¹

APPENDIX A

Pre-test - Post-test

1. Your name, ________________, was given you when you were a tiny baby. When you were baptized you were given the special name, CHRISTIAN. A Christian is a person who follows Jesus Christ.

What does Jesus ask you to do? What example does He give you?

2. When we go to Mass together we talk to Jesus. In the first part of Mass (when we begin Mass) we say the LORD, HAVE MERCY. We ask Jesus, Our Lord, to forgive us.

For what?
What can you do better?
What can you do when there is trouble? Hurt feelings?
How do you forgive someone?

3. When we go to Mass we listen to the reading. The reading comes from a special book. What book?

The reading is called the Gospel. It is good news. What good news does Jesus give us (tell us)?

What does Jesus ask us to do when we leave Mass?

4. When we go to Mass together we offer gifts to God the Father. What are the gifts we carry to the altar?

What is offering for?
What can we offer with the bread and wine?
What can we offer after we leave Mass?

5. At Mass we receive Holy Communion. What is Holy Communion to you?

What does Father give you in Holy Communion?
Why does Jesus come to you in Holy Communion?
What does Jesus want to do for you when you leave Mass?
Objective: Following the class as the student participates in the adapted Liturgy of the Eucharist, he will respond to the priest's prayer before the Gospel with the prayer: "May the word of God be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart."

He will then demonstrate his reverence for the Word of God by listening attentively to the reading.


Motivation: Today we're going to listen to very special words from this book...the Bible...the Good News of Jesus. Each one of you will have a chance to show that you know how special this book is.

Presentation: Since this book is God's holy book and it tells us how much God loves us, there is a very special prayer we pray before we read it. Let's say the words of the prayer together: May the Word of God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart.

What does that mean, word of God be in mind? Is that the same as something being on my mind? Something I'm thinking about most of the time? Does it mean that what God says to us in the Bible is pretty important and that we should remember it well?

What does the prayer mean, word of God on my lips? That we should tell others about God? about Jesus? That we should teach others about God's book, the Bible?

What does it mean to say, word of God in my heart? Could it mean that we must love God's word? Does it tell us that we have to hold God's word--the Bible stories--close to our hearts? Does it mean we should remember God's word in our hearts the way we remember the people we love?

Let's say the prayer again...This time let's make a cross on our heads, lips, hearts (show this).

Who does the cross make you think of? And the word of God tells us about Jesus, right? The words in the Bible are all about God. The words in the Bible are all about Jesus.
Session 1 (cont.)

Let's listen to one story in the Bible about Jesus. Let's say our prayer first. Can we mark our heads, lips and hearts with the cross?

Read slowly the story of Jesus and the Disciples (John 21: 1-19)

Evaluation: Is the word of God in your mind? Tell me one thing Jesus said.
Is the word of God in your heart? Tell me how Jesus felt.
Is the word of God on your lips? Tell me what you think the disciples said to Jesus.
Session 2

Objective: Following the first attentive listening to the Gospel reading for Sunday the student will "rephrase" in his own words the setting, people (Jesus and...) involved in the story and actions of Jesus and response of people.

Readiness: Link to previous day with pictures (Bible and priest) from Sadlier...Sing "Song of Good News" and ask: "What does the song ask us to do?" (Open our ears, open our hearts)

Motivation: Today we are going to listen with all our attention to a reading from the Gospel of St. John. How many of you can listen and tell me three important things? Before we listen, let's say our prayer to ask God to help us: May the word of God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart.

Stop after verse 4 and ask, "Who are the people in the story so far? What are they doing? Is Jesus in the story yet?"

Continue to verse 14. Ask, "Did Jesus' friends know (recognize) Him at first? What told them for sure that the man on the shore was Jesus? How did the friends of Jesus feel? How do you know?"

Continue to verse 19. Ask, "After the good breakfast of fish and bread with Jesus, how did the disciples of Jesus feel? Do you think Peter was ready for the question Jesus asked him? How many times did Jesus ask the same question? Why do you think he asked it again and again?"

"Jesus is asking us the question he asked Peter. He doesn't ask us to feed real sheep, but He does ask us to follow Him. How can we follow Jesus? What can we do to show we love Jesus? How can we show each other our love?"

Evaluation: Contained in the presentation.
Conclude with the prayer, "May the word of God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart."
"Will you keep Jesus' words to Peter (to us) in your mind? How can you speak the 'good news' to others? How can you open your heart to others?"
Session 3

Objective: During class session following the celebration of Mass the student will be expected to listen again to the same reading and tell in his own words the one important idea the Gospel teaches.

Readiness: How many heard Father Keyes read from the Bible? Did you listen with your mind? Did you listen with your heart? Can you tell others what Jesus said in the story? What he did?

Motivation: Today I want you to listen and maybe sing with a song about the Word of God:

> We will hear your word one in love
> We will love your word one in love
> We will spread your word one in love

Listening (hearing) the Word of God is really important, right? Loving what God says to us is special too. But what else does the song tell us is important?

Presentation: Our task today is to listen well...to hold the word of God in our hearts (to love the word) and to spread the word of God to everyone we meet. Now as a little test I want you to think of a secret...Got it? Your face is telling me that you're thinking of something very special. Your face is spreading the news that you're remembering something that makes you happy. Your face is almost telling the good news that is inside you. Maybe you will need some words or a pencil and paper to let your friend know the secret. And it's just the same with the Good News in the Bible. We know what Jesus is telling us about his love. We know how Jesus helped everyone he met. But do other people? Do the people who meet you on the playground, on the farm, in the garden know it? Does your face show it? Can your lips tell them the good news of Jesus? Let's ask God to help us: "May the word of God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart."

Listen: (Read John 21:1-19)

Who is the most important person in the story? Who does Jesus talk to, ask a very important question? What is the answer to Jesus' question? What is the most important thing to remember in this story?

Jesus asks us the same question: "Do you love me?" What will you answer? How loudly can you shout your "Yes"? We don't have any sheep. How can we show we follow Jesus? How can we follow Him more closely? Every day?

Evaluation: Ask each student to tell in his own words the most important thing Jesus was telling Peter (us)

Listen to DAY BY DAY and make it the closing prayer.
Session 4

Objective: To show an understanding of the fact that the Gospel message is to be lived out, the student must tell in his own words one way he is going to "spread the word" through his action.

Readiness: Sing: "We will hear your word one in love We will love your word one in love We will spread your word one in love."
The Gospel is the Word of God...God is talking to us. We listen...We hold God's word in our hearts...What else do we do?

Motivation: How have you "fed Jesus' sheep" this week? Can you each think of one way you have told others the good news of Jesus?

Presentation: Our Good News for this Sunday is an old story you know very well. It is about Jesus the Good Shepherd. This picture might help. (Sadlier: Jesus and Sheep) What do you see? What is happening in the picture? Is it a quiet or a noisey picture? Is it a happy or sad picture? Can you tell the story?
The filmstrip will help. As we watch I want you to help me tell the story. Who is telling the story? (Jesus) Who is Jesus telling us about? (A good shepherd) What does the good shepherd do? (Watches over, cares) What do the sheep do? (Listen, follow) What happens when one sheep gets lost? (Search) What happens when the lost sheep is found? (Celebrate)

Jesus is our shepherd. We belong to Him. He cares about us. What does he ask us to do?

How can we listen to Jesus? How can we follow Him?

Do we sometimes wander off like the lost sheep? Who comes searching for us? Who celebrates when we come back?

Forgiving is one important way to spread the good news. When we "wander off"--don't do our job, are ugly, refuse to do what we know is right...Sister Claudiana forgives us...searches for us...helps us. Our friends celebrate when we are on the job again, friends again, with them again.

What about you? Can you forgive? How? Help in the search? Go out of your way to make things right? Say, "It's O.K."? Stand by the one who "didn't listen, didn't follow"?

Evaluation: Each must tell one way he will forgive...to spread the Good News of Jesus the Good Shepherd.
Session 5

Objective: Given the story of Jesus the Good Shepherd and time to reflect on "all that we already know about Jesus" the student will dramatize positive and negative responses to Jesus' request that we follow him.

Readiness: "We will hear your word one in love" Sing together. Recap session 4 with questions on forgiveness. How do we "spread good news" when we forgive? How do we feel when someone forgives us?

Motivation: How well do we hear Jesus' voice? As well as the sheep hear the shepherd? How well do we follow?

Presentation: The Gospel for Sunday--the Good News of Jesus--is a story you know very well. We will listen together to the reading and then help each other tell how we can listen and answer Jesus, our good shepherd.

Let's begin with our special Gospel Prayer: "May the word of God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart."


"My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me; and I give them eternal life; they will not be lost in eternity, for no one can snatch them out of my hand. The Father, who has entrusted them to me, is all powerful; and no one can snatch anything out of my Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

About whom is Jesus talking? Real sheep? Jesus is talking to us. He wants us to put our name in the story. Let's try it..."Ed, Anton, Bobbie, listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me." Jesus promises us LIFE with him forever.

Remember the story of Jesus at the Wedding party...He wanted the people to have a good time. He cared about them. He wanted them to be happy together.

Remember the story about Jesus and the birds and flowers? How much God the Father cares...how valuable we are...

Now, when we listen to Jesus, when we hold his word in our hearts, it makes us happy people.

Jesus wants us to follow him. He wants us to say "Yes" to him. How can we do that?

work together well--without arguments...
talk to one another--listen to each other
share our things--take care of others' things

Evaluation: Sing: "They'll Know We Are Christians"
Act out: walking hand in hand/ in anger and silence
working side by side/ refusing to help

How can we know if we follow Jesus? If we are Christian?
Objective: In demonstration of his understanding that Jesus came to lead us (as a Shepherd leads his sheep) to happiness and that as Christians (those who follow Jesus) we must do what we can to make others happy, the student will describe verbally a time when he needed a friend...and a time when he was friend to someone who was lonely, troubled, sad or in trouble.

Readiness: Listen to the recording of BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS. When we are weary (tired), troubled, afraid, alone...can anyone help us? Make things better? Is it possible for a friend to be like a bridge? Can a friend "lead" you from sadness to happiness?

Motivation: Listen to just a part of the record again. How can you be a bridge for someone? Can you make sadness go away? Can you make loneliness go away? No really...but a bridge helps us cross over.

Presentation: In the everyday life of each of us there is some suffering, some worry, some trouble, loneliness... Raise your hand if you have never been sad. Raise your hand if you have never felt lonely. Raise your hand if you have never been in trouble. Isn't it a good thing (Good News) that we aren't all sad, lonely and in trouble at the same time? When you're down, your friend is usually ______ (up?) When he's in trouble, things are going ______ for you. So your up-ness can help his down-ness. And Jesus shows us how to help each other. In the Bible he says, "Follow me and I will give you LIFE"

In the Bible he tells us to comfort the sorrowful. How can we do that? In the Bible he tells us to help those who are weak. How can we do that? In the Bible he shows us how to be kind to the sick. How can you follow his example? In the Bible he is friend to those who have no friends. How can you follow Jesus?

When you know someone is in trouble...you can't take the trouble away...what can you do? (stay near, stand by) When your work gets to be "too much"...no one can do it for you, but they might be able to help. How about when someone is very angry with you...does it help if someone helps you make peace?

Evaluation: The students will each tell how someone in the group helped him when he was lonely, troubled, etc., (round robin style until everyone has been named)
Session 7

Objective: To demonstrate his understanding of forgiveness as an important part of our preparation for Eucharist the student will ask forgiveness of one person in the group and express forgiveness to another when asked.

Readiness: Use recording of "Love One Another"
To love someone we have to forgive him when he hurts us. If he is our friend we want things to be "right" with us. How do we make things right?

Motivation: Remember what Jesus asked Peter three times? Instead of "Feed my sheep", Jesus could have said, "Forgive". When he said "Love one another as I have loved you..." he could have said...?

Presentation: In the very first part of Mass, before we listen to Jesus' good news in the Bible, what do we do? We say the "Lord, have mercy"; we ask Jesus, our Lord, to forgive us...For what?

But Jesus says we must forgive each other. Not just with our lips... But in our hearts.

Jesus says to us: "Before you bring your gifts to the altar, go to your brother and forgive him from your heart... make peace with him and then come and make your offering."

When we're angry with someone...what can we say? (I'm sorry I was angry with you. Will you forgive me?)

When someone refuses to help us...what can we say? (I will help you when you need me. I forgive you.)

Can you give other examples of times when things are not right with us? How can we give forgiveness?

Suppose the same person causes us trouble again? Talks ugly to us...talks about us...is unkind to us?

Jesus told Peter he must forgive again and again. When Peter asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he wrongs me (Matt 18: 21)", Jesus said, "Seventy times seven"...which means everytime.

Evaluation: Take all the time necessary to participate in an exchange of forgiveness. Give each student time to receive and give forgiveness.
Session 8

Objective: To demonstrate his understanding of the offering of gifts during the celebration of Mass, the student will tell how he will offer to help someone during the day.

Readiness: Remember how Jesus told his friends (disciples, followers) that they must forgive each other from their hearts before they could bring their gifts to the altar? Today we're going to talk about "gifts" and what we can give to one another.

Motivation: Sing "Special Gifts"
You, You, You, There's no one like you, you, you
You can be a gift today, you can give yourself away...
Each one of you has some special gift, some special work only he can do best. You can't easily wrap up these "person gifts". What are they?

Presentation: Show pictures of people together at celebration of Mass. Where are these people? What are they doing? Mass is our celebration...gathering together to pray, listen to God's "Good News" from the Bible, sing and thank God together. Show picture of the offering of the gifts. What are these people doing? Why do they take the gifts to the altar? We can bring gifts to thank God. We can bring gifts to ask God's blessing. We can bring the gifts to tell God we are happy. We are happy to be his special people.

What can we offer with the bread (hosts) and wine? Our love? For God? For Jesus? For __________?

What special work can we offer? The helping on the farm? The working in the garden? How about forgiving? (Is that a special gift?) How about listening? Being good to one another?

Jesus tells us in Sunday's Good News that he wants us to love one another the same way he loves us. He tells us to let our love show. He says we don't need to keep our gifts...our love...a secret. We can let it show all day.

Let's listen to the reading for Sunday (John 13: 31-35). More than anything else, Jesus wants us to remember, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another, if you keep on showing your love among yourselves."

So we offer gifts of bread and wine at Mass, BUT we offer even more. We offer the gifts each one of us has. We give our help to one another, we offer to share, to listen, to forgive.

Evaluation: Have each student tell one thing he can do for someone, "a gift he can be to someone."
Session 9

Objective: Following the discussion of Sunday's Gospel (John 13:31-35), "By this will all men know that you are my disciples...love one another as I have loved you", each student will describe how the work he does each day makes the world a better place.

Readiness: Filmstrip of people working in all different situations, mother in kitchen, builder in road construction, office girls, mailman, doctor... Ask for a one word title for film.

Motivation: Could we do without the work in the pictures we saw? Why do you think the world is good? What would happen if people did not work, did not help each other? (Wonder together...)

Presentation: In Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells us good news and some bad news too... "...only a little while longer am I with you. You will miss me and, as I told the Jews, so I tell you at present; where I am going you cannot come..." Jesus' friends (disciples) were sad that He was leaving them. They were afraid that they couldn't get along without Him. So He gave them the good news: "Love one another; as I love you, so I want you, too, to love one another. By this token all the world must know that you are my disciples--by cherishing love for one another."
Jesus tells us that we must let our love show. Jesus wants us to let everybody know the good news that He loves us all. Can you say "I love you" with the work you do? (Take time... for each one to tell)

Replay the filmstrip but stop for each frame and ask:
What do you see? Who is the worker?
What is the worker doing?
Does the work this man does help you?
How is God helping this person do his work?
How does the work you do help make the world better?

Evaluation: Make a list of all the workers present. Pray together a litany of thanks for all those who make our world better (our St. Coletta world).
For Bobby who takes care of the flowers... We thank you, God.
For Anton who cleans the stairs and tunnel...
For Billy who works so hard in the barn...

Sing: TAKE OUR GIFTS, ALMIGHTY FATHER
or
TAKE OUR BREAD, WE ASK YOU
TAKE OUR HEARTS, WE LOVE YOU
TAKE OUR LIVES, O FATHER, WE ARE YOURS, WE ARE YOURS.
Session 10

Objective: As evidence that he understands that the gifts of bread and wine are changed into Jesus during the Mass the student will compose his own prayer of faith and thanksgiving.

Readiness: Sing, "Lord, accept the gifts we offer at this Eucharist feast. Bread and wine to be transformed now, With the action of your pirest".

Motivation: When we offer (bring) our gifts to the altar we ask God to accept (take) our gifts. What are the gifts we bring? (bread, wine, our work, our forgiveness, our sharing, our listening, etc....) Who can tell us what happens to the gifts we bring?

Presentation: In the song we sing so often at Mass we ask God our Father to take our gifts. We ask that our gifts be transformed...what does that mean? To form means to make...God makes our gifts of bread and wine become Jesus. The bread and wine become Jesus' Body and Blood. The bread and wine don't look different. But we believe they are transformed by God's power through Father Keyes' words and action.

Could we sing our song again and this time think of what we're really saying. We ask God to take our gifts of bread and wine and transform them...but we ask Him too, to "transform" our lives. What does that mean?

What do we offer with the bread and wine? What do we offer after we leave Mass? Is there need for some change in how you share? how you help others out? how you listen, forgive? God's power transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. God's power can help us live like Jesus shows us in the Gospel.

God's power will transform our lives, help us to live the commandments of "Love God and love your neighbor".

We ask God to transform our gifts. We can ask Him in the song we sing at the offering time of Mass.
We can ask Him all day long... How can we do that?
What words do we need?
We want to tell God we believe in His power to change our gifts... How can we do that?

We want to thank God for changing our gifts... How can we?
(Give each student a chance to respond...
Take enough time... Faith and Thanksgiving response)

Evaluation: Present in presentation itself.

Sing: TAKE OUR BREAD, WE ASK YOU
     TAKE OUR HEARTS, WE LOVE YOU
     TAKE OUR LIVES, O FATHER, WE ARE YOURS, WE ARE YOURS.
Session 11

Objective: Through discussion of Sunday's Gospel (John 14: 23-31) the student will state, in his own words, the two conditions which make it possible for God to "make his dwelling among us."

Readiness: Sing: We will hear your word one in love
We will love your word one in love
We will spread your word one in love
What do we say (shout, proclaim, sing) in the song?
That God's word is in our minds? on our lips? in our hearts?

Motivation: What about doing God's Word? How can we DO God's word? Let's listen to Sunday's "Good News" and see if Jesus tells us...

Presentation: Read John 14: 23-31
Who is talking? (Jesus) To whom? (disciples, us)
Tell me one thing... the first thing Jesus said.
(If anyone love me, he will keep my word.)
What does Jesus mean? (Keep means to obey)
Is it enough just to listen, hold Jesus' word?
What else... what must we do with Jesus' word?
How do we spread Jesus' word... his love?
Let Him love us?
Let Him transform (change) our lives?
Let Him teach us how to love each other?

If we love and keep Jesus' word... what promise does Jesus make? ("We will come to him and make our abode with him.")
What does it mean that Jesus' abode will be with us?
What does it mean that Jesus will make his home in us?

If Jesus makes his home in us, dwells in us, what kind of people must we be?
Will we have to do some things better?
Listen when someone has trouble like Jesus did?
Listen with Jesus' ears?
Forgive when someone causes us hurt, trouble?
Say we're sorry (ask forgiveness)?
Help someone who needs help?
Share with someone who needs a friend?
Keep our mouth shut when we are angry?

Think of two things you can do to invite Jesus to live in you, make his home in you.

Is there some "housecleaning" to be done? Make peace with someone? Set things right with someone?

Evaluation: Listen to WHAT MAKES LOVE GROW
What makes Jesus' Life grow in us?
(Give each one a chance to tell.)
Session 12

Objective: Through the continued discussion of Sunday's Gospel (John 14: 23-31), the student will state in his own words what Jesus promises to give us (the Spirit) and what will happen in our lives because of this Gift.

Readiness: Think of a promise someone has made to you, maybe when you were little your parents promised you a bike, or when you were in school Sister promised that she would take you to the Milwaukee Zoo, or when you grew up...like right now, Sister Sheila promises you that you can live in the new building. How does a promise make you feel? Each time you remember?

Motivation: Do you remember the promise Jesus made to his disciples (us)? "If you love me and keep my word, the Father and I will make our home in you..." In the Gospel (Good News) for Sunday Jesus makes another promise. Let's listen.

Presentation: Read John 14: 23-27

Jesus only lived a short time on earth. Who knows how long Jesus lived?
Jesus wants us to continue his work...and who does he promise will help us? (Holy Spirit)
What does Jesus say the Holy Spirit will do for us? (He will teach you all things and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you.)
The Holy Spirit will show us how to do loving things...how to do kind things...how to love one another.
The Holy Spirit will breathe in us...help us remember that Jesus loves us and lives in us.
The Holy Spirit will help us be strong Christians.
The Holy Spirit will confirm us...help us to stand firm.
The Holy Spirit will set our hearts on fire...REALLY?
excite us, move us forward, inflame us.

How will our lives be? Different?
How did the lives of the first disciples change?
How did the Spirit of Love transform (change) their lives?

How does the Spirit of Love change your life? less crabby, less lazy, less rowdy? more helpful, more sharing, more gentle?

Finally Jesus gives us his Peace. (Read John 14: 27-29)
No trouble in our hearts...No trouble in our families...
"Do not let your hearts be troubled..."
Jesus promises us the Spirit of Love, Spirit of Peace.
Can we share Jesus' peace with each other?

Evaluation: Ask each to tell one way (besides words) he can share the love and peace of Jesus.
Session 13

Objective: Given situations describing Community and our need for caring, sharing, helping, etc., the student will choose (from several presented in pictures) the one way he can live out the communion of the Mass.

Readiness: Sing: WE ARE ONE IN THE SPIRIT
WE ARE ONE IN THE LORD
Jesus' spirit of love makes us one family... one community.

Motivation: How many things do we share in our Christian family?
Same Father God... Same Baptism... Same Eucharist

Presentation: More than anything else Jesus wanted us to be one family. Jesus prayed to His Father to make us one... bring us together in one community. And he told us to share His Body and Blood--Holy Communion and remember Him.

Jesus promises to live in us... give us life... help us grow... help us know how we can love each other.

Let's listen: (Read John 17: 20-26)

How can we be one family... a community?
Use posters depicting people sharing Eucharist
sharing family meal
sharing grief
sharing a new baby
sharing work
sharing toys, "things"
sharing T.V.
sharing friends

Can you put yourself in the picture?
How can we live Mass in the morning and carry Jesus through the whole day?

How can we show the whole world (everyone at St. Coletta's) that we are one in the Spirit? One in the Lord?

How can we show the whole world Jesus?

Evaluation: From many different "need" pictures... Choose one.
Take all the time to have each one choose a picture and describe how he can bring Jesus into the picture... how he can fill the picture with the Spirit of Love.
Session 14

Objective: During the class discussion of the Sunday Gospel (John 17: 20-26), the student will demonstrate his understanding of Community by telling of at least one person he has helped and one other he knows he can help, one action that can make us a stronger community.

Readiness: Sing: We are one in the Spirit...and we pray that all unity may one day be restored... The song says that we work together, walk side by side. What else?

Motivation: We know that Jesus shows us in the Gospel how we can care for one another...but in this Sunday's Gospel Jesus does something else. Listen and see if you can tell me what Jesus did.

Presentation: Read the Gospel for Sunday. (Say the mind, lips, heart, prayer) John 17: 20.
To whom is Jesus talking? Hard to tell, isn't it? Let's go back to the beginning of this chapter and see if we can tell. (Read John 17: 1) Now do you know? Jesus is asking his Father--our Father, God--for something very special. What is it? (Read John 17: 21-23) Can you tell us in your own words...say what Jesus said.

Jesus wants us to be one...a unity... a community...
Community means one family...living in one house can make you one family; eating in the same dining room can make you one family; sharing the same work can make you close friends. What else can you think of?
(Try to get at...One Father, One Baptism, One Eucharist)

Read John 17: 24-26) Jesus asks his Father to make us one...a community...
What else does Jesus ask? (That the whole world will recognize His community.)
Now to recognize? What does that mean?
When I walk across the blacktop and see you...do I have to ask your name? Not any more...why not? Because I know you very well. I recognize you at a glance.

How can you know if you're looking at a Jesus person? A Christian person?
What does he wear that's easy to recognize? Nothing...
What does he say that's easy to recognize? Something?
What does he DO that tells you for sure?

AND THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE...
How can you make sure people recognize you as a Jesus person? Think of one (community means one) person you've helped...
Think of one person you can help today...
Think of one act you can do to say that you're Christian.

Evaluation: (within lesson)
Objective: Through discussion of John 17: 25-26 the student will re-phrase Jesus' prayer and especially his understanding (These men understand and know that You have sent me) of the love Jesus gives him, how he can help the world to recognize Jesus.

Readiness: WE WILL HEAR YOUR WORD ONE IN LOVE
WE WILL LOVE YOUR WORD ONE IN LOVE
WE WILL SPREAD YOUR WORD ONE IN LOVE
In Sunday's Gospel Jesus tells us that the world does not recognize Him...that everyone has not heard the GOOD NEWS.

Motivation: How can you spread the Good News of Jesus? How can you help the whole world know and recognize Jesus?

Presentation: Jesus prays to His Father in Sunday's Gospel. Let's listen and try to pray what Jesus prayed, in our own words.
We have to pray with Jesus...and we have to do what Jesus did. We have to follow Jesus' example. What did Jesus do for everyone who came to him? (listened) How can you imitate Jesus?
How did Jesus act...what did he do when someone was in trouble? (He asked if he could help.) What can you do to help someone in trouble?
What did Jesus do when he met sad, unhappy people? (stayed near) What can you do when someone is sad, unhappy in your house?
Jesus asks us to love one another as He loves us.
Can you show someone you love him...help him recognize Jesus? What can you do better? Be good news to someone?
Jesus wants to live in us...make his home with us...How will others know that Jesus is living in you? What signs will they see? How do you show you're a Christian? a Jesus person?
When we begin Mass each morning we say the Lord, Have Mercy. But we also have to ask forgiveness of each other. How?
What do we do when someone asks us for forgiveness?
When we listen to the Gospel...Jesus' Good News, who do we hear Jesus talking to? What does that mean?
When we offer our gifts, what do we offer with the Bread and Wine? What do we offer after we leave the Mass? Is this a good way to show the world how much Jesus loves?
What about Holy Communion? Jesus comes to us, to live in us, to give us life. He promises to be with us all days. Why?
What kind of life does Jesus give us?
How can we help the world to recognize Jesus? How can we live Jesus' Good News?

Evaluation: Within the presentation.
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