

Formation Group Meeting Report

Saturday February 3rd 2007

Br Benet

Present: Owen Smith, Mike Worthington, Benedict Foy, Vin Kilty, Barry O'Sullivan, Benet Conroy, Mary Guthrie (Ireland), Trish Carroll (Australia)

Apologies: Siobhan Simms, Aidan Dowle

Paper: Report of Meeting with Australian Formation Team in Rome, 14th-15th January 2007 provided by Ben Foy

Trish Carroll (Director of the Australian Formation Team) was welcomed to the meeting. Her explanation of the training programme in Australia was to be a main component of this meeting. Mary Guthrie (District of Ireland Formation Team) was also welcomed; Mary is invited to all the Formation Group meetings.

The Australian formation programme was set up in response to perceived local needs and as an alternative to the Buttimer Programme (USA) which made significant time, travel and cost demands on individuals and the District.

The changing formation needs in Australia (not dissimilar to Ireland and GB-Malta) led to the setting up of a team and the time and resources in order to develop a coherent and manageable programme that has evolved into interactive on-line training and development. It was initially aimed at middle and upper management in schools and began with a trial group of just 14. The scheme is modular, progressive and carefully tutored. It is aimed at promoting Lasallian values and understanding, in a way that is accessible to busy teachers and leaders and which build up to a possible Masters (accredited by the Catholic University of Australia, Melbourne). The Australian Team is Trish Carroll, Gerard Rumery FSC and John Cantwell FSC.

The interactive scheme also recognises that technology is the language and environment of young people and is geared to offering very practical experience in this area. The modules are very well researched and supported by material (written, visual and auidial) and provide an in-depth insight into the Lasallian story, pedagogy, spirituality and philosophy – but in a practical way, related directly to school and college environments. The study is related back to the individuals actual school, with research and development tasks to be tested and implement-

ed on a regular practical basis. There is accordingly a significant amount of feedback from staff and students, as well as dialogue between the other members of the "course". Most is done on-line, with face-to-face sessions with tutors and fellow students built in.

The programme was a response to need: training of Lasallian leaders in schools, induction of new staff, incorporating other interested schools into the Lasallian network, and providing validated and accredited qualifications should these be desired. It also recognised the reality of the busy lives of leaders and teachers and offered a manageable course on a daily/weekly basis over a 2-year period. Because it was on-line, it was cost effective, allowed immediate communication and contact, and made all materials available on demand. There are no travel costs; books are on-line and time is managed by the individual in consultation with their tutor. For the employer, it was an all-ready programme, resources and materials were provided, reduced significantly release time and after a one-off set-up cost was on-going in maintenance and development.

The programme works because:

- the student works at his/her own pace
- the course is structured in modules and mini-modules that allow study to become a normal part of the student's day/week
- it is enjoyable, fun and highly do-able
- it is directly related to personal concerns in schools and in relationships with colleagues and students
- it is inter-active and allows continual assessment of the course and practicals
- it incorporated colleagues and students in school based research
- assessment is on-going and cumulative
- it is and can be collaborative since all students have an on-line chat room where discoveries, questions and research are posted and face-to-face exchange takes place (as well as conferencing facilities using webcams)
- there is a built-in limit to the amount of written response to course questions and practicals, keeping writers to the point
- the technology is very user-friendly

- the site is constant, so the programme can be accessed anywhere, and continues regardless of changes in personnel in schools
- delivery is consistent
- there is excellent (automatic) record keeping and accountability

Recent research has highlighted the impact of technology on young people and how they learn and think; young people are gradually thinking and processing information differently and this is taken into account in the programme. Educators are introduced to a new world of multi-media and multiple intelligences.

The programme is over 4 semesters and this is the outline:

1. History of Lasallian Pedagogy
Then and now. The Lasallian story
2. Contemporary understanding of Lasallian Pedagogy
3. Lasallian Spirituality
Applied to self, colleagues and the school environment.
It is very practical.
4. Lasallian Leadership

Each unit has 8 modules; each is structured in the same way and has a separate list of resources (which are accessed directly from the site or through links).

The student responses are “posted” onto the chat/meeting site so that all work is available to all the others. This generates discussion and experimentation. However, work can be sent individually and not into the shared forum.

The emphasis is on formation; qualification is a bonus.

The programme is password protected and this is a matter of security and copyright, as well as making sure the administration of the programme brings in the fees needed to run the programme. The whole scheme has been very well received and interest has been expressed by other regions. The Australian District is considering a scheme of licensing individual students from elsewhere; the programme is up and running with full resources; a key element is the 1-to-1 tutorial and this requires trained tutors. The Australian Team is prepared to take this on.

A further development is to train trainers, so that schools have staff capable of offering on-site formation to staff and new teachers. Another aim

was to have a Lasallian co-ordinator in each school.

We were shown a sample of the Formation Programme and we were impressed and enthusiastic with what we experienced. It is thorough, well researched, serious and practical. We also learned that this was but one of five programmes run by the Australian Formation Team. The most popular is “Re-charging the batteries” after 4/5 years of teaching. This seems to be a critical time for retention of new teachers.

The group discussed the programme, asked questions, considered its relevance to our Districts, and decided to put its introduction as a definite proposal as a matter of urgency and excitement. This was in conjunction with the re-vitalising of the LACE programmes. A District Centre could be built round these two elements.

For this to be implemented, full time administrative support would be essential. It has been key to the success of the Australian programme. It does not in itself mean a permanent Centre for conferences but does require an administrative secretary and support. In Australia the support secretaries prepare the brochures and advertising materials to a very high standard. Setting up a Formation Office would require a strategic plan and a budget.

Action: A job description and descriptive formation package for the Palm Sunday Assembly.

To be prepared by Palm Sunday

* The LACE weekend needs to be advertised again since the initial notices provided little real information. Barry O’Sullivan to prepare a flyer during the half-term holiday.

* Lasallians GB & Malta to be used as a means of wider contact.

* Mike Worthington to prepare a draft Mission statement for the Formation Group, and to indicate what is in preparation.

* Alan Murphy to be consulted about MA accreditation if we went ahead with joining the Australian programme.

* A formal invitation would be sent to Malta with regard to LACE and membership of the Formation Group.

* Ben is to liaise with Trish to prepare a short presentation for the Palm Sunday Assembly.

Next Meeting:

Saturday 3rd March 2007, in Oxford. Beginning at 10.0 a.m.

Main topic: The LACE weekend programme and items outlined above