

# DRAFT MINUTES OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> MEETING OF THE INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE STEERING GROUP AT HEYTHROP COLLEGE 30.11.07

Present:

**Ann Cunningham** (Newcastle Dominicans, Conference of Religious)

**Benedict Foy** (De La Salle Brothers, Group of Brothers' Congregations)

**Damian Howard** (Assistant Novice Master, Jesuit province formation programme)

**Christopher Jamison** (Benedictine, Conference of Religious, Compass project)

**Cath Lloyd** (Religious of the Sacred Heart, Intercongregational formation programmes, Buckden, Formation Think Tank)

**John McDade** (Jesuit, Principal of Heythrop)

**Margaret O'Shea** (Poor Servants of the Mother of God, Conference of Religious, Formation Think Tank)

**Martin Poulson** (Salesians of Don Bosco vocations & formation team, Heythrop, Compass, Association of Younger Religious)

**Gemma Simmonds** (Congregation of Jesus vocations director, Heythrop, Formation Think Tank)

**Catherine Skelton** (Daughters of St. Paul, Conference of Religious)

1. A brief outline was given of current provision in the UK (Buckden, Hawkstone, Kinnoul, St. Anselm's, St. Luke's and in Ireland, Loreto House course for formation personnel). Much of the good work done in these institutions is process-based and experiential, with emphasis on human development. The proposed Institute of Religious Life [IRL] is not seen as replacing but complementing these courses with a more focused theological content.

CJ & GS also reported on their contacts with the Center for Religious Life in Chicago and the Centre Sèvres in Paris. The former is primarily a research institute, organizing training programmes to implement the fruits of the FORUS study of religious life in the US by Nygren & Ukeritis. It takes a theme a year from the study & organizes 10-day programmes in different centres, publishes docu-

ments & supports the 8 bodies which exist in the US to support religious life. It is primarily geared to survival in the face of severe demographic challenges facing US religious, especially the women.

In Paris a 2-tier course on the theology of religious life is offered by a Jesuit & 2 Helpers of the Holy Souls, for initial formation & formation for leadership/ongoing formation. Courses run by the Claretians are also available in the Philippines, India & Spain. No other provision is known to exist in the English-speaking world, so there is a gap in the market here.

2. A discussion took place about the mission statement of the IRL, whether it was exclusive to Roman Catholic religious, exclusively to focus on academic study & how it might relate to and in a multi-cultural context. It was finally decided that the mission of the IRL is:

**To foster a theological vision of Christian religious life through study and research**

- To offer courses of study in English about the religious life to British and overseas students
- To undertake in-depth research about the religious life
- To support a new generation of writers and experts on religious life for a new generation of religious, reflecting on the future, not fixing exclusively on the post-conciliar period
- To provide an input 'bank' of experts as a resource for other groups, possibly linking in through other programmes of study for accreditation
- To reclaim the ground of the consecrated life and foster an appreciation of its role within the church, addressing that context. To serve the consecrated life through a balance of study and reflection on lived experience and to disseminate good material reflecting this understanding through various media for the widest possible access

These aims will be expressed initially by pursuing the following objectives:

- The development of modules in religious life studies validated by a university
  - The delivery of these modules and other related modules to those who wish to study them and to students in BA programmes
  - The development and delivery of an MA programme in religious life studies
  - The development of research into the current state of religious life
  - The development of research into the theology and spirituality of religious life.
4. It was proposed to seek a **Project Manager**, accountable to Gemma Simmonds as the Steering Group Convenor, who would work for one year in a half-time post funded at £7,500, developing the IRL project according to a specification to be written by GS and approved by the steering group.
  5. It was proposed to invite Paul Rout (Franciscan, Heythrop) and Dr. Susan O'Brien (Margaret Beaufort Institute) to be part of the steering group. Further nominations, possibly for a future board, rather than for the immediate steering group, were Fr. Richard Moth (Southwark), a bishop from the Joint Commission of Religious & Bishops, a member from Scotland & a member from CoRI.

Current academic methods such as action research and the training of reflective practitioners would support the balance between theoretical academic study and personal experience. Current public discussion about 'Foundation Degrees' in which two years of an undergraduate programme are done in conjunction with work experience might also be considered for this context.

**3. Funding** was discussed. This is not a project external to religious life, like a particular ministry or charitable work project. It lies at the very heart of the identity of the consecrated life and its meaning. Therefore it seems reasonable to ask the Conference of Religious to make a foundational contribution of £10,000 to enable the Steering Group to take the IRL forward. This would cover a project manager's stipend and expenses. Catherine Skelton offered to bring this to the attention of the CoR executive.

6. A letter about the IRL will be drafted by GS, approved by the steering group and sent to the Joint Commission, Kathleen McGhee (CoR), the Papal Nuncio and the National Office for Vocation.
7. **Next meeting** to be in January, before the next CoR executive meeting and determined by email.

Gemma Simmonds 30.11.07