

Report of Brothers' Meeting

St Vincent's Centre, Carlisle Place, Westminster

1st April 2008

Present: Bros. Benedict Foy, fsc, Michael Newman OH; Joseph McKee fms; Terry Mulvey OAR; Joseph Adams SDB; William Jordan SJ. Frs. Matthew Power SJ; Patrick Lonsdale OFM;

Apologies were received from 21 individuals – provincials, priors and abbots.

The meeting was opened by Benedict who welcomed everyone and invited everyone to introduce themselves. Michael led us in a short time of prayer.

Benedict explained that 85 male religious congregations in GB had been invited but replies were received from only 37, some explained that they have no Brothers or very few and very elderly. Some groups have made a decision no longer to recruit Brothers. Others said please send us some Brothers if you can find them for us.

There are two key foci for our group: the Promotion of the Brothers Vocation and the Encouragement of Brothers in their Vocation. Effectively our "motto" is "we stand alongside people" – alongside Jesus, our brothers and those we minister to and with.

A Review of the last two years since the previous meeting of representatives.

1 What has gone well:

Twice annual Steering Group meetings – Bros Benedict James and Michael – have been a time of support and learning for ourselves.

October 2006 Youth Gather Birmingham – Benedict and Michael represented 13 brothers groups. Lots of discussions with young people. Vocation a poorly understood concept. Leaflets produced.

Worth Abbey Retreat 2007 – 26 Brothers from six congregations focussing on the prophetic role of religious led by Bro Philip Pinto cfc, Raimunda Jordan OP and Abbot Christopher Jamieson OSB, was inspiring and was very well received, participants wanted further retreats. Abbot Christopher commented that one real insight for him was how Brothers carried the pain of others.

Vocation Directors Training, Buckden Towers – Benedict and Patrick participated – good input and good networking opportunities.

National Vocations Sunday 2007 – a number of individual Brothers, De La Salle and Hospitallers spoke in local churches – cards were produced.

National Vocations Pilgrimage to Walsingham 2006 and 2007 – a number of brothers were present, Michael played a leading role in 2007.

Compass Sessions Worth Abbey – James Hayes spoke at one session – had some interest, Matthew is a member of the steering group – worthwhile for those considering religious vocation.

Links with National Office of Vocations – Benedict, James and Michael met with Paul Embury and had a good discussion. Benedict and James participated in two of the Consultation Forums (at Worth and Oscott) run by NOV. James was the model for one of the characters in the 2007 advertising programme. Some concern about still being addressed as lay-brothers – we prefer Religious Brothers (as in Canon Law) or simply Brothers, though Franciscans are happy about usage of lay brothers as they are re-emphasising Fraternity.

Representation:

Religious Life Institute – Benedict is a member of the steering committee for the establishment of this Institute based at Heythrop for the study and research of Religious Life. Eventually leading to Masters in Religious Life Studies. Courses are to be offered from October '08 in London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Edinburgh.

Formation Think Tank – Michael a member of this group which organises courses for inter-congregational initial formation

Compass – James is involved in these sessions and possible additional sessions to take place in the North of England.

Responding to Brothers in Clerical Congregations – Some Brothers in Clerical congregations have asked to be involved in the activities of this group – hence the expanded membership present today.

2 What has not gone well.

Study Session at London Colney "The Church in 2027" only four takers. Session cancelled

Regional Overnight Gatherings at London Colney and Hinsley Hall Leeds. Only seven takers between the two venues sessions cancelled.

It was felt that active people have a lot of demands on them, age is a factor and alternatives should be considered.

B Hopes and Plans for the Future

National Vocations Sunday 13th April – Brothers are encouraged to speak at local churches and card were made available for distribution

National Vocations Pilgrimage Saturday 21st June – we were urged to invite people to join us and to contact Peter Preston (Salvatorian) and Paul Embury (National Office of Vocations) to signal participation.

Brothers Exhibition Materials – Michael said that a local firm would be able to produce easily managed good quality exhibition displays which could be used in Parishes, Schools, Universities for about £500. He was asked to look further into this and consider sharing the cost.

Printed Materials – what we have already used was shared and we are happy to coordinate material which could be used in common / collectively.

Compass – James, Michael Power or Abbot Christopher should be contacted about placing possible candidates on one of these sessions.

National Office of Vocations Forum “Sowing Seeds” will be taking place at The Hinsley Room, Westminster Cathedral 29th May 2008, 10.30 – 4.00 Contact Fr Paul Embury, NOV, UK Vocations Enquiries.

Website – James, although he was unable to be with us because of a family bereavement left information about a possible website. It was agreed that this needs to be done properly and that the individual congregational website should be linked to it. The cost of this needs to be shared.

Contact Details – Discussion took place about who best to contact – Provincials’ desks are often a blockage point. It was agreed that we should develop a wider database of addresses and e-mails for contacts between ourselves.

C Brothers’ Gatherings

National Conference – the possibility of such a conference based in a hotel or Conference Centre for two / three days should take place in October 2009, on the theme “the Future of Brotherhood as a Mode of Religious Life” to which a variety of Quality speakers / workshop leaders should be invited and participants invited from around Europe. Various names and locations were suggested.

It was agreed that a Brothers Retreat should be planned for the summer of 2010.

Links between Brothers including those in abbeys and Clerical Congregations. It was agreed that individual communities be encouraged to invite religious in their local areas for a day / an even of sharing of spirituality, prayer and social time.

Opportunities for mutual support – we will look for opportunities in ministry, formation vocation promotion eg. In schools, colleges or parishes, to work collaboratively to offer a wider image of Church.

D Vocations Promotion

The principle of Collaboration was agreed as important and we agreed to seek opportunities to make this happen. The Need to be proactive in getting ourselves invited to Diocesan, Regional and National Gatherings especially of young people. We need to contact groups like diocesan Youth Coordinators, Youth 2000, New Dawn at Walsingham, College and University Chaplains, Heads of RE – as Vocation is a topic on GCSE courses. Normally it is useless sending piles of vocation materials to such people unless there is a specific purpose or need. Small cards and website links are more effective.

E Formation

Seekers weekends are dispiriting when only one or two people are available – thus collaboration and coordination suggested. It was agreed that the weekend of 25th / 26th October 2008 be pencilled in as a weekend for a joint session for men considering the Brothers Vocation. Benedict will coordinate this session.

Continuing Formation – Brothers were requested to share information about possible opportunities in their own networks for continuing formation with Brothers. of other congregations. It was felt that the New Religious Life Institute could be most helpful.

F Conclusions

Participants in the meeting expressed their satisfaction with the meeting, with the encouragement which they received to appreciate that things were happening and to find the possibilities for collaboration and cooperation. It was felt that a meeting next February would be important for Provincials, Vocations Directors and other representatives of Brothers to encourage the work which is under way.

The Meeting concluded with the singing of the Regina Coeli.