

## HISTORY OF BRISBANE NCGM/YCW 1945-70

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Just by way of introduction I would like to explain why I wrote the history of the National Catholic Girls Movement (NCGM) and the Young Christian Workers Movement (Girls) (YCW [Girls]). First and foremost because it is an important story which needed to be told. *Catholic Action* was a very important movement in the Church especially as it was to be run and organized by the laity and therefore radically changed how the laity perceived themselves and their role in the Church. Secondly women's contribution to the Church and society has not been researched or written about very much and for those first 25 years the girls' section operated as a separate and independent entity.

I wanted the story to be a tribute to what the Movement stood for and what it did for those who were members and to be a true and faithful reflection of members experiences and the impact it had on them while members and in the rest of their lives.

'*Catholic Action*' in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s had a specific meaning. It is not what we would think of today when the term is used. To-day people would probably think, if they heard it, of Catholics acting collectively or just the action of individuals or groups of Catholics doing good works, going to Mass etc.

However, in the period of this history, '*Catholic Action*' was the term used to describe the movement in the Church that began in the 1920s and was developed to revitalize the Church and reassert its influence in a society that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Church believed was basically pagan in its outlook and characterised by materialism, exploitation of workers, attacks on Christian values and a decline in personal and collective moral values.

The Church hierarchy *believed* that the laity had to be involved and, in fact, play the leading role in achieving the rechristianising of the world. They even went further and *said* that the laity had to be involved hence the statement of Pope Pius XI: 'I forbid the laity to be inactive'.

There were to be special Movements established for specific purposes and for specific groups in society. One of the principles of *Catholic Action* was that to achieve success action had to be by like to like (e.g. youth to youth, worker to worker). These Movements were to be specifically mandated by the relevant bishops for the role they were to play. 'Mandated' meant: officially declared by the hierarchy as a *Catholic Action* movement with a specific role to perform as part of the official apostolate of the Church or, as Cardijn said, officially commissioned by religious authority. The Movements were, through the relevant chaplains, responsible to those bishops. The laity were 'to participate in the work of the hierarchy'. The mandating of organizations varied from country to country and diocese to diocese. For example, the Grail was a mandated *Catholic Action* movement in Europe but not in Australia and the Legion of Mary tried on more than one occasion to be mandated as a *Catholic Action* movement in Australia. The Episcopal Committee of Catholic Action refused; however the Archbishop of Perth did give them a mandate in his archdiocese.

It was the first instance in modern times of the laity being acknowledged as having a specific role in the work and life of the Church. They were not to be the passive followers of their priest and bishops but the leaders, the organizers, the initiators and the activists in the work. What is more, they were to be systematically trained so that they could assume these roles of leadership and activism in the Church and society.

The bishops in their *Statement on Catholic Action* said that it was not like the sodalities and other pious organizations as its main aim was not solely the sanctification of its members. Its prime work was not to assist in the efficient working of parish life as if it were a parish committee. It was not just a matter of spreading Christian influence from one person to another by means of good example and by performing acts of personal charity designed to help them. It was not merely a movement of preservation or defence.

The main aim of '*Catholic Action*' was the transformation of the world and it was integral to the mission of lay people. Lay people had to exercise their mission in transforming the social aspects of their daily lives, and the institutions of society; including the broad spectra of politics, economics, law, medicine, the environment, culture, etc. and lay people needed systematic formation to enable them to perform their mission.

*Catholic Action* was based on the principles that Christian ideas and values had to be part of the whole of life and as Priests and Religious were excluded from much of that life only the laity could do it. Christianity was a religion based on love and not just a set of rules that had to be obeyed. *Catholic Action* was the duty of ordinary people and that action had to be motivated by love.

It had to be proactive rather than just against things and it had to reach out to all, especially those outside the Catholic ghetto. It was to carefully avoid the formation of a separate elite trying to influence the masses from above. A leader's role was to inspire others to be apostles and to work together to achieve change. It was to be flexible and adaptable to different situations, groups, countries and environments. *Catholic Action* was to achieve extraordinary things by people performing the ordinary tasks of their daily lives, extraordinarily.

No one would be asked to do anything beyond ones capacity. A person didn't have to achieve things alone. One of Joseph Cardijn's favourite sayings was 'a leader doesn't say who will go and visit this person but who will come with me to visit this person'.

*Catholic Action* was to be an organized apostolate. Training and formation were to be given by the priest and experienced leaders through the study of the gospels and by reflection and action. The technique used was to be the 'See, Judge and Act' method utilized through group inquiries and campaigns and the personal review of life. Influence was multiplied by group action, recruiting more leaders and using teams and general members and by organizing social, sporting, educational and representative activities.

The idea of *Catholic Action* really challenged the understanding by people (both lay and clerical), of the nature of the individual's relationship with God, the Church and the world. It was a very radical departure from the thinking at that time. It was a tremendous challenge to both the laity and the clergy to come to terms with the new relationships and responsibilities it implied. It was in fact a prophetic forerunner to Vatican II and many believe that *Catholic Action* made Vatican II possible.

They were revolutionary ideas and Father Joseph Cardijn was the key person in converting these ideas into reality. Cardijn's part in this revolution began with the idea of, and his insistence on, the value of the individual worker whose worth was because they were 'sons and daughters of God'. This was a challenge for workers to see themselves as valuable and important; it didn't matter who you were, what you did, where you lived, your level of education. Everyone was valuable. Everyone was special. As the 'sons and daughters of God', the working class had a divine mission to change the world for Christ.

The other part of the revolution was that the specialized *Catholic Action* movements provided a framework within which these ideals could be presented, examined and reinforced and at the same time provide the organization and technique to transmit them into practice. Members of *Catholic Action* movements with the co-operation of those outside those movements could transform the world just as the early Christians had.

The Young Christian Workers (YCW) was the first officially mandated *Catholic Action* movement. It was given that mandate by Pope Pius XI in 1925 when its founder Canon Joseph Cardijn went to Rome and laid before the Pope his vision of a movement to save the masses. The YCW was a youth movement for those aged fourteen to twenty-five years with two separate sections: one for boys and one for girls.

Cardijn was an extraordinary man with an amazing capacity for work and the ability to relate to young people. He developed the technique of formation based on the reading of the gospels, prayer, study, reflection and action (See, Judge and Act) which transformed ordinary young men and women into people who were apostolic and missionary with an extraordinary commitment to changing the world for Christ. It was this combination of reflection and action that was the key to the success of the YCW.

Cardijn realized that when all the study and reflection at meetings flowed over into action in leaders' own lives their formation was complete. Then all they would need would be support and ongoing training and they would do the rest. He understood the principles and aim of *Catholic Action* so well that the YCW became what Pope Pius XI said was 'an authentic form, a perfect example of that *Catholic Action* which is the leading idea of my Pontificate'.

The weakness in *Catholic Action* was that though the underlying principles had been stated by the Pope, there were no specific rulings regarding their organization, structure or method of operation. This led to a certain amount of confusion and misinformation - sometimes deliberate misinformation and deception - regarding what *Catholic Action* really meant, its role and how it should operate.

One of the main consequences of this lack of specific guidelines was that two streams of *Catholic Action* developed that came to be known as the Belgian/French model and the Italian model. The main differences were the role and relationship of the clergy and the laity.

In the Belgian/French model the laity were to be the principal organizers, initiators and directors of the Movement and its activities. The chaplain was to be the advisor, the helper, the one who formed and inspired the leaders to 'See, Judge and Act'; but *not* the director telling them *what to see, how to judge and how to act*. The chaplain was to train leaders to be apostles. At meetings - apart from the chaplain's talk - the priest was expected to remain silent unless his comment or advice was asked.

In the Italian model, though its membership consisted of lay people, the priest was to be the main organizer and director of what the organization did and how it operated.

In writing the history one thing I came to understand was how extraordinary, in fact, was the establishment and development of *Catholic Action* in Australia because *Catholic Action* was intellectual and action-based and European and so very different from anything Australia's Irish-based Church had ever seen or contemplated. Colin Jory, in his book *The Champion Society and Catholic Social Militancy in Australia* (1986), has some interesting things to say about *Catholic Action* and the Church in Australia.

He said this about the Church in 1929.

Indeed, the intellectual backwardness of Australian Catholicism precluded the development of *Catholic Action*, which of its nature presumed a thorough understanding of Catholic social teaching. Whereas *Catholic Action* bodies were required to be militantly apostolic seeking to spread Christian ideas and ideals, Australian Catholic lay associations were almost entirely inward directed and socially protective.

Even when the Church began to be interested in *Catholic Action* and had a national conference in the early 30s Jory (1986) said 'There was a great enthusiasm for *Catholic Action* but it was an enthusiasm based on ignorance.'

In Australia in the 1930s very little was known or understood about *Catholic Action*. In fact, information was available only through the written word. There were some books available on *Catholic Action* and in 1932 one of the Melbourne priests began a correspondence with the YCW in Europe. Therefore it is to the credit of the bishops that in 1937 they set up an Episcopal Committee of Catholic Action (ECCA) and the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action (ANSCA). The latter was given the task of establishing and developing the official *Catholic Action* organizations for students, young working men and women, rural youth and for adult males. By 1943 there were five official *Catholic Action* movements:

- The National Catholic Rural Movement (NCRM)
- The Young Christian Students (YCS)
- The Young Christian Workers (YCW)
- The National Catholic Girls Movement (NCGM)
- The National Christian Workers Movement (NCWM)

Four of these were successful but the NCWM, which was established in Melbourne, failed to take hold there and was not attempted in any other dioceses.

This 'Movement' should not be confused with the Catholic Social Studies Movement (CSSM) which was established by Mr. B. A. Santamaria in 1941 and mostly referred to as 'The Movement'. The CSSM was never an officially mandated *Catholic Action* movement.

The Secretariat elected for the Belgian/French model of *Catholic Action* so all the official organizations set up by it used this model. Even this did not solve the problem in Australia as the Sydney archdiocese never really participated with ANSCA though Archbishop (later Cardinal) Gilroy was originally a member of the ECCA. Sydney set up its own Diocesan Secretariat of the Lay Apostolate that favoured the Italian model. Of course not all bishops and priest were convinced of the need or importance of *Catholic Action* therefore the *Catholic Action* movements were not established in all dioceses nor in all parishes of participating dioceses.

Looking at the list of the five movements set up by the Secretariat three things require comment. Firstly there was no movement for adult Catholic women; secondly the name given to the girls' movement (especially as in every other country the girls movement was called YCW [Girls]); and thirdly, the use of 'Christian' instead of 'Catholic' in the name of three of the movements. One suggestion made for a name for the girls' movement was the Company of St Joan.

There are various anecdotal reasons given for the first and second but no official ones, however, I think they are related to the Church's view of the role of women in the Church and society at that time. The Catholic Women's Social Guild (CWSG) in Melbourne wanted the Secretariat to accept and include it as a specialized *Catholic Action* movement. Their request was refused. Mr. Frank Maher, the first president of the Secretariat, refused as he believed Catholic women were restricted in what they could do by their environment and their environment was the family.



The Bishops in their statement on *Catholic Action* said of the NCGM that it should assist all girls to achieve their proper destiny by the organization of educational courses to prepare them for marriage.

The members of the NCGM were fortunate that the Ladies of the Grail and the early chaplains did not share the views of the bishops. The members of the NCGM always knew that they were really a YCW movement (they used gospel discussions and the See, Judge and Act from their inception) and as a result changed the name from NCGM to YCW (Girls) at the National Council in 1959.

The use of the word 'Christian' in what were *Catholic Action* movements indicated the real nature of *Catholic Action*. Its aim was to rechristianise the world and in all its literature, training and activities the emphasis was never focused on the narrow view of being Catholic but on being really Christian. Even when the girls' movement was called the NCGM the emphasis was always on being real Christians.

It is impossible to talk about the NCGM/YCW (Girls) without talking about the 'Ladies of the Grail' and the youth movement for girls they set up: 'The Grail'. It is even more important because of the unique role the Grail played in Brisbane in setting up the NCGM. The Ladies of the Grail - or to give them their original title - 'The Women of Nazareth', were a group of lay women set up by Father Jacques van Ginneken in the Netherlands in 1921. They established The Grail as a movement of young Catholic women in 1929. They came to Australia in 1936 at the urging of Bishop Dwyer from Wagga Wagga as he had been impressed by them at the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin in 1932.

Father van Ginneken had a vision of the new vibrant woman of the Catholic Church who would need to be spiritually strong, modern in her outlook, way of life and use of technology and confident in herself and her abilities.

He believed in the potential of women and that they had an important role in changing society. where they should define their own role and cultural parameters. He considered that they were not the moral guardians of society and that education was their right; not a privilege allowed by men.

Father van Ginneken thought women needed to be in, and of, the community and that they had to maximize their independence. He believed Christ's perfection embodied a harmony of masculine and feminine and that this should be demonstrated in this way to the world, with the aim of achieving a more balanced society in which neither men nor women would be superior.

The Ladies of the Grail were years ahead of their time and had an intellectualism and commitment to the 'Apostolate of the Personality' which, when united with Cardijn's vision and method, provided a great basis for the building of a compelling and powerful movement. 'The Apostolate of the Personality' said you developed every part of your being (intellect, will, personality) to its utmost to better serve God and Cardijn's vision was not only to change youth but the very water in which they swam. It was this unique blend of the ethos of the two Movements that gave the NCGM in Brisbane its depth of understanding and level of commitment to *Catholic Action*.

The Ladies of the Grail became involved in *Catholic Action* in Australia at the request of the Secretariat. In 1938 the Ladies of the Grail organized a course on *Catholic Action* for the members of the Catholic girls' groups in Melbourne.

The Secretariat and the Ladies of the Grail combined their respective expertise to organize training for leaders, the establishment of leaders' groups, the development of parish group programs, a leader's bulletin and national campaigns. The Ladies of the Grail had established Grail groups in various dioceses in Australia but with the exception of Brisbane they were mostly central activity groups.

In 1941 ANSCA decided it was time to organize a national movement as the various groups involved were sufficiently developed. This meant the relationship between the Ladies of the Grail and ANSCA had to be formalized.

The main points of the agreement were that the Ladies of the Grail would not set up a mass movement for girls and that any Grail groups that were established would be central, and in no case parish groups; that the Ladies of the Grail would assist the NCGM in training but only NCGM programs, bulletins and campaigns would be used.

The NCGM was to be a federation of all the existing Catholic girls' groups in Australia. For example, the Catholic Girls' Movement in Melbourne, the Junior Catholic Women's league in Adelaide, the Junior Legion of Mary in Perth . Prior to 1941 the central Grail groups in Brisbane (the Brisbane Catholic Youth Group) and parish based groups called 'The Urban Youth Movement' merged and changed their name to the Grail. Also the Brisbane Secretariat of *Catholic Action* under the leadership of Mr. J.P. Kelly, with the approval of Archbishop Duhig, decided not to affiliate with the national movement. This caused quite a deal of trouble as Mr. Maher felt that ANSCA couldn't set up a national movement without Brisbane as he felt if Brisbane stayed out all the other Queensland dioceses would too.

The temporary solution was found when the Brisbane Secretariat said it was in support of the national movement and would affiliate when a Grail house was set up in Brisbane. At the time it was anticipated that a Grail house would be set up in Brisbane and Archbishop Duhig came close to buying a property for it. The architect for the diocese, Mr. Frank Cullen, recommended the purchase of Ashton House at the corner of Bonney Avenue and Victoria Parade, Clayfield for that purpose. However, the Ladies of the Grail were not able to come to Brisbane on a permanent basis so the purchase never eventuated. This made the establishment of the Grail in Brisbane even more extraordinary as it was the policy of the Ladies of the Grail not to set up the Grail unless they had a house in the diocese.

The formal arrangement between the Ladies of the Grail and ANSCA lasted until 1944 when the Ladies of the Grail asked to be relieved of their direct role. ANSCA agreed and after 1944 the Ladies of the Grail involvement was confined to helping with training and formation and by 1950 all input had ceased.

In 1944 there were one central and nine parish Grail groups in Brisbane (Ashgrove, Buranda, Central, Coorparoo, Corinda, East Brisbane, Ipswich Road, New Farm-Valley, West End and Wooloowin). In early 1945 the members of these Grail groups voted to change from the Grail to NCGM. All those groups except Corinda formed the nucleus of the original NCGM groups.

By 1950 the number of parish leaders' groups had grown to twenty-three. The additional groups were: Banyo, Bardon, Bulimba, Ekibin, Graceville, Moorooka, Red Hill, Rosalie and Wynnum-Manly. At the end of the 1950s there were thirty groups. In 1961 there were thirty-eight groups, which had increased by 1964, to forty-four. By the end of the 1960s there were fifty-four, including groups outside the metropolitan area: Beaudesert, Boonah, Burleigh Heads, Childers, Coolangatta, Gayndah, Gympie, Maryborough, Nambour and Southport.

During the period 1945/70 the NCGM/YCW (Girls) had groups in 82 parishes at some time or other and occupational groups for nurses, student teachers and factory workers. Although some groups did fold permanently or for short periods, out of the twenty-three groups in existence in 1950, twenty still remained in 1969. This meant that there was a continuing presence of groups in at least twenty parishes for at least twenty years. This gave the Movement great stability, continuity and presence in the diocese.

Four of the main strengths of the Movement were its structure, training/formation, techniques (See, Judge, Act) used and the activities organised (service, education, representation). The Movement in those times did have a well developed and set structure. The basic unit was the parish leaders groups that were linked together under the direction of an elected diocesan executive. Each diocese was affiliated nationally under the control and direction of an elected national executive. Though the structure was set and formal it operated in a very cooperative and informal way for no diocese could be forced to follow a national program and individual parishes were free to adapt the format of the meeting to suit their individual requirements.

Each leaders' group met weekly and followed the same program that was contained in the national leaders' bulletin. The format of a leaders' meeting was: opening prayers, gospel discussion, collection of subscriptions, parish census, review of each leader's personal apostolate, inquiry/campaign, chaplain's talk, general business and final prayers and to last no more than two hours. This meant all leaders in Australia were studying the same gospel discussions and working on the same campaigns at the same time.

In the late 1960s, a decision was taken that each diocese would develop campaigns relevant to its own diocese. The method of multiplying the influence of the Movement was achieved by continually recruiting new members who also met weekly and were

trained by the existing leaders; also each leader tried to involve those outside the Movement either individually or by forming informal groups in their work and social environments.

Movement members had great formation and training and the great chaplains and other interested priest were a key to this. The content of the talks and discussions given as part of the training and formation encompassed two distinct themes – the religious and the Movement.

The religious talks, always given by the clergy, covered two areas - the development of an understanding of Church doctrine and theology and the development of a personal spiritual life. At that time the leaders were a very privileged group who had a great opportunity to learn about the teachings of the Church in the depth we did. Very few of the laity, let alone young people were exposed to such a broad and in depth understanding of the Church's doctrines, teachings and liturgy. This short list of talks shows just how broad it was:

Mystical Body, Baptism, Charity,  
The Mystery of the Two Natures of and One Person of Christ,  
The Trinity, The Mass, Grace, and The Sacraments.

The input of the priest helped the leaders to reach their full potential and understand what it all meant and helped them to persevere and persist in their activities.

The Movement theme talks were mostly given by the diocesan executive members or older experienced leaders. The talks covered the importance of *Catholic Action* and how it fitted into the Church; how crucial the role of the laity was; the environment of young girls and how it differed from the Christian ideal; the ethos, spirit and commitment needed for a leader to fulfil her role as an apostle; the actual techniques and methods of the Movement.

The training and formation gave them an understanding of the true nature of our society and what they as individuals and as a group could do about it. The summer schools, training days and camps all had something to teach them; but it was the reflection and discussions at meetings and the action that stemmed from them which were the real basis of the formation. For Cardijn, you were formed in and through action or you were not formed at all. They learnt to know Christ and His message through the Gospel discussion and by studying what he said and did, they could relate Him and His message to their lives and actions. In the course of a year a leader would participate in at least 40 gospel discussions. This at a time when reading the bible was not encouraged.

The See, Judge and Act method of examining the environment, making decisions and deciding on action to be taken was the ideal way to educate leaders about the reality of their world. It enabled them to see how it operated and what were the main things influencing it and how they could act to change or modify it. It is after all the basic method of all research. This is why so many past members consider their experience with it has proved to be so useful in understanding all areas in their lives and society and deciding what action to take. Many past members commented on how they still use it in their work and that it gave them an advantage over their contemporaries as they came naturally to the practice of study, reflection and action planning which is so essential in many work and life situations.

The aim of the Movement was summed up as to restore all things in Christ by serving, educating and representing youth. It was to be achieved in all aspects of people's lives at the individual, group and society level. This meant that Movement activities were limited only by the extent and scope of young people's lives. Because of this the activities fell broadly into social, sporting, leisure, work and other social justice issues.

Because of the structure of the Movement activities were carried out at the individual, parish, diocese, state and national level. Though the nature of the activities undertaken varied over time, as the interests and concerns of young people also varied over time, there were many constants.

The annual debutante balls began in 1947 and continued into the 1960s. The sporting competitions, especially the netball, that began in 1945, continued into the 1960s. The monthly parish socials were a feature of Movement activities and a host of other social functions, and fund raising activities: raffles, silver circles, fetes, walkathons and car rallies.

All the sporting and social activities were a form of service as especially in the 1940s and 1950s there were few organized activities for young people. The activities organized by both the Movements provided a safe and secure environment in which girls and boys could grow up and test out their social skills and their ability to establish relationships. The activities were always well run because the older members made it their responsibility to unobtrusively take care of the young members.

Apart from these general activities the Movement provided some specific services that were organized to meet specific needs or for specific groups. From the mid 1950s the Movement had an association with the Good Shepherd Home for Girls firstly providing a program of formation and training for the girls and later in the 1960s they participated in the netball competition.

Other services were:

- \* visitation of young girls in hospital;
- \* provision of an accommodation service for young girls especially those coming from the country to work or study;
- \* a library service to encourage young leaders and others to read; and



- \* the involvement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls culminating in helping run a hostel for them while they studied at business college.

One of the important benefits of organizing the services and activities was the training it gave the leaders. They learnt organizational skills that built their self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of self-worth. In later years many past members were surprised at how much organizational skill they had acquired.

The main educational activities centered around educating girls for life and 'Talks for Young Girls' ran for many years and both Movements were involved in helping organise the preparation for marriage courses (originally called Pre Cana). Education was also undertaken on a leader-to-leader basis and through organized campaigns on a variety of topics – preparation for marriage, leisure, saving, reading, work, Christmas.

Representation ranged from helping individual young people achieve justice at work to making submissions to local and state governments concerning issues relevant to young people.

All the training, formation and action lead to commitment and conviction - commitment to each other, the Movement and to working - with others - to change the world. Last but not least were their understanding and commitment to, and living out. the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. They really did believe in Christ and His message and that belief transformed them. They believed, more than believed, they knew that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. I think the Spirit was a real presence in their lives and there was no doubt that they would succeed. They knew that if they believed, prayed and worked as hard as they could they would do it.

Coupled with this was love. Not love based on liking nor external things; but a love based on the desire to see everyone experience Christ and to develop their full potential and create a truly Christian community where there was care, concern, joy and a place for all. It was that inclusiveness that was the real mark of their love for each other and those outside the Movement, for a real Christian always looks outwards towards others.

All this did combine to provide a unique experience which without fully appreciating it formed them into something like what a true Christian community ought to be and gave them a glimpse of what life could be like if everyone lived Christ's message of love. That is what the ethos and spirit of the Movement was all about – inclusiveness, love and concern for all. All of that and at the same time they were having a really great time – the picnics, dances, balls, parties and the satisfaction of achievement.

Despite this they were not perfect nor as virtuous as they sometimes thought they were. Sometimes they were too rigid in their beliefs, overbearing, thoughtless, arrogant, outspoken and just plain misguided, however, there was usually someone older or wiser to lead them beyond those failings into calmer and more thoughtful and productive activity. As the chaplains were largely responsible for this it is appropriate here to acknowledge the important role they played in achieving the stability and maturity of action which was characteristic of the Movement.

The chaplains, though not members of the Movement, made a great contribution to its success. The priest' role was summed up by Archbishop Rush. ' In *Catholic Action* the priest was nothing but at the same time he was everything'. Their ability to form and inspire leaders was even more remarkable as *Catholic Action* was never part of the curriculum in any seminary. Their knowledge of *Catholic Action* would have come through reading, discussion with other priest and from the leaders. That is why ANSCA organized and sponsored summer schools for seminarians from 1948.

There was mutual trust and confidence between chaplains and leaders. The chaplains gave the Church a human quality that enabled leaders to discuss any topic with them. The interaction between the leaders and chaplains bridged the gap between the laity and the clergy long before Vatican II. Sometimes chaplains had to restrain the brashness, high spirits, outspokenness and thoughtfulness of leaders but they did it without damaging that bond of mutual respect that existed.

It is not possible to mention all the chaplains by name but a few words about the diocesan chaplains are appropriate. Father Bernard O'Shea was the great figure in the development of the Girls Movement in Brisbane. He was chaplain from 1945 to 1952. In the seven years he was chaplain he together with the early leaders laid the foundation of the Movement. He not only trained the leaders but also helped and encouraged others to be chaplains. He was well regarded in the diocese and this helped the standing of the Movement. He like all subsequent diocesan chaplains had a great understanding of youth and was prepared to spend a great of time on their training and formation. All the diocesan chaplains made major contribution to the Movement and were in order Father Frank Douglas, Father John Clarke, Father Edmund Stapleton, Father John Gerry (later Bishop) and Father Peter Callanan.

In speaking of the role of chaplains I cannot fail to mention the contribution of Archbishop Duhig to the success of the Movement. Not because he had a great understanding of *Catholic Action*, (most leaders felt that he didn't have a real understanding of it) but because he was a great supporter of the girls and their activities. This was crucial in the early years as his interest and attendance at their activities was a great boost to their self-esteem and self-confidence. He attended summer schools, gave talks and came to their social gatherings.

If the archbishop was for you it didn't matter that some of the older priest weren't and even referred to the leaders as little Hitlers or Nazis. His support validated the Movement and gave it an official standing and role in the diocese.

If there was a failure of the Movement it was their failure to realize just what they did have and the failure to recreate it formally in their adult lives. I think they did it in their own lives and families but the failure to consolidate it in a formal way meant they missed the opportunity to keep the momentum going into that wider world of adulthood. There were many reasons for it such as the demands of their own lives and situations and the impact of Vatican II which many believed would carry the ideals and work of *Catholic Action* into the wider Church and society. They also didn't fully appreciate how the various forces in the Church and society operate to influence and control what happens.

Of course the Church also failed to realise the great potential there was in the past members.

Despite this nothing can take away the success of the Movement and the impact it had on the lives of the members for members were trained

- \* to be leaders;
- \* to be thinkers;
- \* to be independent in their thoughts and actions;
- \* to be proactive rather than passive;
- \* to take control of their lives;
- \* to research and reflect on the society in which they lives;
- \* to examine the truths of the Church;
- \* to understand christ and his message;
- \* to apply it in their lives; and
- \* to influence others to do the same.

Membership of the Movement had a great liberating effect on the members.

They learnt that Christianity didn't have to be a sterile life based only on the narrow view that obeying the Ten Commandments and going to Mass on Sundays was the essence of religion.

They learnt that religion was not to repress, suppress or impose conformity but to build people up through positive qualities of self-control and self-discipline and to care and be concerned for others.

But above all they learnt to love themselves and others, that Christianity is a religion based on love, acceptance and inclusiveness for all and that people have to be proactive in promoting and pursuing them. This was the revolution of *Catholic Action* and that is what Movement members have carried with them all their lives and what current members are doing now.

I wanted the story to be both a tribute to what the Movement stood for and a true and faithful reflection of members' experiences within it and the overall impact it had on their lives.

### **Bibliography:**

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