

Service Ste Bernadette

I must begin this report on the past twelve months in Formation by recording the sad news of the death of our Irish Councillor, Rosita McHugh which occurred in November, very soon after our last reunion and only 18 months after she joined us on the *Conseil de Service*. Despite her comparatively short time as a member of St Bernadette Service, Rosita was much loved - but a very private person and thus news of her illness and passing came as a surprise to many. May she rest in peace.

Rosita's place on the Council has been taken by Catherine O'Carroll and 2016 also saw the appointment of a new Spanish councillor, Francisco José Pacheco. Two new trainee English formateurs have joined our ranks (with at least one more lined up for 2017) and four of our previous trainees are now ready to go solo, which should go some considerable way to ensuring an English language presence for each week of the pilgrimage season. This was almost the case in 2016 in fact and I am particularly grateful to Josephine Lathan, Kathleen Dawson and Pamela Ryan, who made it so by "stepping up to the plate" and offering additional weeks of service to cover gaps in the schedule, and also to our German colleague, Ursula Sottong. In addition Peter Chamberlain, Brother Ben and Lori Ehrmann made themselves available after their service had ended to help cover for absent formateurs. To all of those, and to any others whose help I may not be aware of, my sincere thanks for displaying the true hospitalier spirit of *disponibilité*. At this point I would also like to record my thanks to John Dilger who has decided to stand down as a formateur and wish him a long and happy retirement.

We appreciated the supportive presence of our new *aumônier*, Père Brito, throughout most of the season, despite occasional prior commitments to retreats and preaching appointments elsewhere, and his sermons and occasional addresses to the assembled multi-national groups in Formation were well received by those who understood French (albeit a challenge for those in our number who were not well equipped for unprepared translation!)

The year saw very little change in the weekly formation schedule for 1st to 4th year stagiaires but greater efforts were made to organise *ratrapage* – catch up sessions for the increasing numbers, notably of first years, obliged to travel midweek and unable to attend modules on the days they are scheduled. (I think it says a lot that it has taken the effects of the introduction of low-cost midweek flights from Italy for the powers-that-be to finally become aware of a problem that has affected English speakers on flights from Ireland, Malta etc. for years!) Continuing Formation sessions on Thursday evenings and Friday continued to be poorly attended (across all languages), partly because of a continuing lack of promotion in the other services and perhaps also because of an additional commitment in hospitaliers' diaries – the new *Engagement* ceremony on Tuesday evening.

We formateurs were, of course, involved in the preparation and implementation of this new ceremony, brought about by the separation of *Engagements* from the Wednesday HNDL Mass (during which *Consécrations* continued to take place this year – but apparently for the last time). To say that these changes and the reasoning behind them received a mixed reception would be an understatement! However, after several revisions in the early months, a beautiful – if somewhat lengthy – rite was put in place for the remainder of the season on Tuesday evenings, which placed greater emphasis than before on the new hospitaliers and their personal commitment.

The scheduling of the *Engagement* ceremony on Tuesday evenings did, however, create a dilemma for non-French formateurs. The reduced amount of preparation time before it meant that we were expected to be in two places at once – both assisting the new *engagés* during the rehearsal and translating for Sr Chantal's demonstration of *technique* to the first years! In addition the Spanish had to move their Mass to Monday evenings and Fr Paul Horrocks was frequently obliged to delay the start of our own English-language Mass until closer to 9pm to allow us time to get there! I am grateful to Fr Paul, not only for continuing to celebrate Mass

for us in the absence of a successor to Fr Brian but also for his patience and understanding in such circumstances.

That situation is not expected to continue in 2017, however, and I should perhaps leave it to our President or Secretary General to speak more authoritatively than I can on developments planned for next year. As far as Formation is concerned I think I can say that, in accordance with the wishes of the Bishop and after two years of discussion, 2017 will see a major reform of the Formation programme. Precise details still have to be ironed out and approved by the Bureau but the following is an overview of our intentions :-

Based on the premise that Formation should comprise

- § Doctrinal and religious Formation (based on new texts prepared by the Aumônier)
- § Devotional Formation (participation in ceremonies, meditating the rosary, Way of the Cross, footsteps of Bernadette etc)
- § Practical Formation i.e. *technique* (completely the responsibility of the services) at Piscines, accueils, station etc.)
- § Knowledge of the Hospitalité (statutes of Association / Archconfraternity, Hospitalier spirit ...)

and conscious of the fact that stagiaires arrive with widely differing levels of knowledge of the faith, Père Brito has drawn up what he has called a kind of ABC of Christian formation, drawing on the Catechism of the Church, Vatican II and Church teaching and a draft timetable has been prepared which will focus essentially on group discussion on doctrinal topics, mostly in the mornings, and devotional / practical elements in the afternoons.

The likely distribution of doctrinal topics will be as follows :-

- 1st Year : The Message of Lourdes
- 2nd Year : Particularities of Christian life, sources of spirituality, the hospitalier spirit and the spirituality behind it
- 3rd Year : Deepening knowledge of the sources of spirituality (Word of God, Bible, Gospels, devotion to Our Lady) and developing the ideas of sin, evil, suffering.
- 4th year (2017) / *Engagement* year thereafter : the church, its mission, the missionary life of the Christian and the mission of the Hospitalité.

The plan is for stagiaires to receive supporting documentation prior to arrival, for them to read, meditate and ask questions (probably by email at the time they book their first stage but also available on the website) and formateurs will have at their disposal a range of questions based on these documents and adapted to different levels of knowledge to support them in bringing the group to a common level of knowledge, whatever their starting point.

We have also been promised that the Chaplains will be ready and willing to help formateurs and, in the continuing absence of an English-language coordinator for the Sanctuary, Père Brito has assured me that an American priest in a nearby community (Fr James Phalan ?) has agreed to spend part of each week in Lourdes assisting us in Formation.

Two major innovations : Firstly, it is anticipated that in future it will be possible to request to make ones *Engagement* after 3 years of stage instead of 4 but applicants may be asked to wait for a year or more if they have an insufficient number of days of service or if their councillors feel they are not yet ready for it and recommend an additional period of reflexion or discernment. And it is intended that formation should now occupy 6 days of the week, running in two three-day cycles so that those unable to arrive at the start of the week may take part when all modules (apart from engagement preparation) are repeated from Thursday to Saturday.

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