

## **PASTORAL LETTER OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR 1985**

The United Nations has called on the people of the whole world to observe this year, 1985, as International Youth Year. The reason for doing this is to emphasise how vital it is that young people make the best use of that important time in their life, their youth, and that older people give them the opportunity and the encouragement to do so.

The Church fully supports International Youth Year. Pope John Paul II has given his personal approval and enthusiastic encouragement in two ways. Firstly by writing his message for the 1985 World day of Peace on the theme: "Peace and Youth go Forward Together", and secondly by addressing a special apostolic letter in March to the youth of the world. In Southern Africa the Catholic Church has joined with other churches in giving support to the Churches' International Youth Year Committee.

As in most other kinds of activity there are two aspects that can be considered, namely, what is common to all human persons and what is specifically Christian. Though in the life of a Christian it is impossible to separate these two aspects, we can, for the sake of explanation and discussion call them the 'human' and the 'Christian'.

The word 'human' refers to knowledge, freedom, work, family life, community relations, culture, industry, commerce, politics and so on. The word 'Christian' refers to the faith and way of life given by Jesus through His Church and the manner in which that faith and way of life affect everything in the experience of believers, everything in their personal, domestic and social experience. Both the 'human' and the 'Christian' aspects are important in the observance of International Youth Year.

In launching this year the United Nations asks the youth of the world to aim at participation, development and peace.

Participation means active involvement in a task. The task in mind is the betterment of human life. Through International Youth Year the call goes out to youth groups of every kind – clubs, classes, associations, movement – to reflect together on human life as they see it in themselves and in their neighbours, on the problems hurting them or other people and what they can do about these problems.

In Southern Africa the experience of different groups of youth is very diverse. In the Republic of South Africa the majority of young people suffer under the apartheid system and many are deeply angry and resentful. Not a few have experienced the violent situations that have arisen in many parts of the country. Other young people are affluent and privileged and almost totally unaware of the conditions in which the former live and suffer.

### **A beginning**

In the face of such differences it is not easy to suggest common programmes for International Youth Year. Those who are angry and resentful dream of radical action. Among the privileged, social concern is almost non-existent. In both cases a start has to be made somewhere. Radicals need to learn the discipline of planning and striving

for development of justice. The privileged need to discover the social evils that surround them and the change of outlook required of them.

One of the best methods in both cases is taking up some practical issue, discussing it thoroughly and trying to find if something can be done about it.

One thinks of such problems as public transport, street lightning, water supply, drains, lack of recreational facilities, lack of school amenities, poor housing, unemployment, neglect of old people, of the sick and the handicapped, lack of communication between parents and children, lack of communication between one group and another.

The problem chosen or the aspect of it should be something young people can tackle. They must tackle it together as a group or team, deciding together what precisely the problem is, what the best means are to solve it, what help can be obtained and who must do what. That is participation.

For Christians, participation must draw its inspiration and strength for Christian faith, from the Gospel, from Christ dwelling in us and moving us to perform our task out of love, the love of God and love of our neighbour.

There are also special ways in which young people can participate in Church activity. In a pastoral directive in youth ministry published in 1982 entitled Youth in the Church Today, we (bishops) urged that young people should be encouraged to play a full part in programmes for “leadership training”, personal growth, spiritual development, social awareness and marriage preparation. In many cases parishes need to learn from and cooperate more with international youth movements, which have already accomplished so much in the field of training.”

### **Development**

Participation in community activities, whether promoted by the Church or other bodies leads to what is expressed in the second word ‘development’. For as young people involve themselves in solving a practical problem together, they bring development both to the situation they deal with and to themselves. Improving a situation is development. In achieving this, young people develop themselves: Their practical ability, their compassion, their determination, their team work and their spirit of community service.

All this is deeply Christian. In the case of believing Christians it flows from the faith, hope and love in their hearts. Moreover, since we are created in the image of God every gain in human development makes the image of God in us better and brighter.

### **Peace**

Participation in development leads on to peace. Just as conflict flows from selfishness, from respect and concern for others.

Respect and concern for others are just other words for love. There can be no peace without love. Acts of practical love are the best promoters of peace.

As Christians we should be enthusiastic promoters of love and peace remembering what an important place they occupy in the Gospel. Jesus said: “I give you a new

commandment: Love one another; just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this love you have for one another everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35).

No wonder then that the Church has taken up so eagerly the International Youth Year proposed by the United Nations and is so anxious that her young people, according to their various groupings and capacities, should do their best to make the year a success, a year of keen participation, true development and healing peace.

By actively promoting these objectives, young people will bring about immediate improvement in the situation in which they live and work and will prepare themselves to play a valuable role in the Church and in society. There is much to be done in the Church in the fields of religious education, liturgy, preparation for marriage and family life and preparation too for an active participation in the life of society, in the promotion of culture, justice and peace, human development and liberation.

With fatherly love we bestow our blessings on all the young people of the Church in Southern Africa and assure them of our prayers and good wishes for themselves, their families and friends and for a successful contribution to International Youth Year.