

ARE TEACHERS STILL NECESSARY?**New Lasallian ventures in Amazonia**

The poverty and neglect of most of the settlements in north and north-east Brazil are well enough known. Time and again, the needs of recent settlements have been highlighted, whether these are the result of official planning or represent simply the spontaneous migration of people looking for a better life.

The Brothers have accepted requests for help from the local churches of Para and Maranhao, and in recent years, have set up communities in Transamazonica, in the town of Abaetetuba, not far from the Marajo islands, and in the diocese of Candido Mendes, in Maranhao, near Para.

Apart from involving themselves in religious and social pastoral work, the Brothers have felt the need to set up courses to train teachers and village leaders.

1. Our Aims.

Basing ourselves on De La Salle's "Seminaries for Country Teachers", our aims are as follows:

- The training of teachers to work in rural areas by means of intensive residential courses in theoretical and practical pedagogy, and in community life.
- The setting up of schools completely in touch with the needs of rural communities, and catering for the needs of the local youth in such a way that they do not abandon the rural areas to swell the flood of people flocking to the city suburbs.
- Improvement in the quality and effectiveness of teaching, and the raising of the level of education in the area.
- Improvement in the quality of life through social and political action, increase in Christian commitment, increase of the influence of trade unions, and greater local involvement.
- Improvement in living standards, and the commitment of people to the struggle for social justice.
- To stimulate the growth of critical faculties, so that people become aware of their true worth, and of their strength when they unite and work together.
- An increase in wages.

2. Implementation.

The situation in Transamazonica and Abaetetuba in the Para region differs from that in Candido Mendes in the Maranhao region, but the general approach to the situation is more or less identical, and is as follows:

- * The creation of an officially approved Education Centre, able to function at different levels, in particular, to issue

officially recognised diplomas to students. In Transamazonica, this Centre, known as the "La Salle Training Centre", is located in the small town of Uruara, and has a catchment area of about 450 kms. In the town of Abaetetuba there are courses, including teacher training, already being run at the Francis Xavier College. In the diocese of Candido Mendes, the La Salle Education Centre is based on a Brothers' school in the town of Presidente Medici, and extends its work to three other schools: Turiaçu (near the coast and 107 kms away), Zé Doca (106 kms away and on the BR 316), and at Candido Mendes (near the coast and 200 kms away).

- * This Centre not only provides students with an officially recognised programme of studies, but it also coordinates the intake of students, their classification, the curriculum, the replacement of teachers, and the choice of classrooms.

- * Depending on the intake, primary and secondary school courses are run during the holidays in July/August and January/February, and are divided up according to subject units, depending on which teachers are available. It takes 40 to 50 days to cover a unit at the rate of 10 to 12 hours of class per day.

- * Teachers are recruited locally, and Brothers from the District of Porto Alegre volunteer to help and coordinate the process.

- * In addition to their lessons, pupils receive free board and lodging and classroom materials, thanks to the help sent by such international organisations as CEBFMO-Holland, or by our own District.

- * Students following primary and secondary school courses have also to do homework.

- * The Brothers and the lay volunteers who run the courses have noticed what a great impact they have on their students. These latter may be lacking in what is commonly accepted as culture, but they have strong feelings of community, social justice, and a willingness to fight.

3. Those who benefit.

Our priority in all cases is to recruit first and foremost lay men and women, working as teachers in rural settlements, whether in officially approved schools or not. Settlements with no teachers head the list of priorities.

For the most part, teachers are chosen by the community itself, with the advice of the Parish Priest, religious and local pastoral coordinators.

More than 50 % of candidates are educated to about the 3rd year of primary school level. Some cannot read or write.

About 40 % are married women with children who, in addition to all the work at home, give themselves body and soul to the service of the community. Many of these women bring their children with them. More than a dozen

have given birth on the way to the Centre, or at the Centre itself.

In our houses we lodge not only teachers, but also community leaders, young people seeking their vocation, and even others depending on local needs and circumstances.

Teachers who have completed their secondary schooling follow more advanced courses in pedagogy.

The only condition we insist on when we accept a newcomer is that he promises to work for the good of the community, and to help the poor and destitute.

4. Completed Courses.

In Transamazonica we set up our first course for a group of 90 lay teachers and some young people with certain responsibilities in the community, and for a dozen seeking their vocation. Of these 90, 54 completed their primary schooling in December 1981.

In January 1982 we set up a course in secondary schooling for 80 students of whom 70 completed the course in March 1984. The course consisted of 5 residential sessions of 50 days each followed by further study at home.

In July 1982 we set up another primary level course in the little village of Nazare in Altamira, some 200 kms from the Centre, and 95 kms from Altamira itself. The course was for two groups of 45 students. Later on the State took over responsibility for these students, with Brothers coordinating to a greater or lesser extent. At present these students are completing their secondary studies.

In these four years the following courses also have been run either by Brothers or by the La Salle Teaching Centre: 3 courses in Art, 2 in Pedagogy, 1 in the Humanities, 1 in Mathematics, and 1 for training future headmasters.

In the town of Abaetetuba, near the island of Marajo, at the confluence of the rivers Tocantins and Araguaia, the Brothers gave their help to two groups of teachers and members of their island communities, by directing their primary and secondary studies between 1982 and 1985. In addition they helped to run more advanced courses and seminars for teachers and trade union leaders. Even to this day, the State continues to a certain extent the work begun by the Brothers.

In the diocese of Candido Mendes, the Brothers have set up another La Salle Education Centre in their own community house. This they did on seeing the extremely precarious position of education in the region, in which hundreds of local communities have no schools, and hundreds study in State schools on a salary less than 7 dollars. This Centre has jurisdiction over the whole diocese. Courses began in 1984 with a group of 65 students in the town of Presidente Medici (also known as Santa Teresa do Parua). These students finished their primary school course in 1985, and the secondary course ended in August 1986, with 49 students remaining.

In answer to a request made by the Bishop, Mgr. Guido Maria Casullo, some Oblate and Holy Family sisters have set up a course in secondary education exclusively for a group of seminarists and novices at Zé Doca. This group has now reached the stage of preparing directly for the teaching profession and will finish their work in August.

In April 1985, following a request made by the Parish Priest of Turiaçu, Fr. Antonio Foggia, a primary school course was set up for rural leaders and catechists, and consisted of 7 sessions of 30 days. This group will finish its primary school course in July this year.

Several secondary school pupils belonging to the parish of Turiaçu, have undertaken as a special project to run a course for 30 pupils, in sessions of 15 days each every 2 months.

A new community of Brothers is moving in at the present moment into Candido Mendes with a view to running an agricultural centre. There are plans to form a group of primary school teachers for the month of July.

5. Some Results.

Although we have, for a variety of reasons, lost some of our students, and accept that some more thought will have to go into preparing our courses, yet we can list some positive results:

- an increase in status for teachers;
- involvement on the part of many teachers and group leaders in trade union action, in teachers' associations, in supporting claims for social and community rights, and in the struggle for social justice;
- involvement in political campaigns supporting candidates fighting for the rights of the common people;
- greater coordination and efficiency in work;
- improvement in educational standards in the area and in the communities where projects have been run;
- creation of new schools on the initiative of already trained students.
- a stimulus to local teachers to improve their own intellectual and pedagogical standards.
- the stimulation of local authorities and regional Secretaries of Education to look into alternative forms of education;
- preparing the ground for vocations among the young people in the schools.
- the cultural readjustment of Brothers and lay volunteers working in formation.

If there were more people involved in coordinating work and giving time to the students, the result would certainly be greater efficiency and work of a more lasting nature.

Finally we think we can say that we still have a lot to learn from the first schoolmasters of 300 years ago, especially in our return to the "poor" Founder.

Br. Jerônimo R. Brandelero.