

East London Pastoral Planning

Bishop Victor Guazzelli

Editor: So far the East London Pastoral Plan, under the guidance of Bishop Victor Guazzelli, has been the most thorough-going attempt in the Catholic Church in England to draw on Latin American schemes for bringing Inner City dioceses closer to the objectives of Vatican II and to the Church's commitment to the poor. Here is a slightly shortened version of a description of the Plan, written by Bishop Guazzelli. The parts of it which we have cut have been those primarily of local or historical interest (especially those on how priorities were selected and implemented). Readers who want to see the complete text should write to us.

In 1971 a Joint Working Party was set up by the Bishops' Conference, at the request of the National Conference of Priests, to study the question of a Pastoral Strategy for the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It was the result of much heart searching and uneasiness expressed by the priests of the Conference about their own service in the mission of the Church.

In *The Church 2000* (the first paper issued by the Working Party) the question was asked: 'What did Christ establish the Church to do?' We then went on to ask ourselves what the Church in England and Wales should be doing in the years ahead. We tried to answer both in the light of Vatican II applied to our own situation. Our understanding of that mission was reaffirmed in the final document *A Time for Building*:

The Church exists as a sign that Christ is still present in the world. As it moves out into the world the Church becomes the instrument by which the redemption achieved by Christ is made available to all. So the Church exists for the world and in the world. It is present in the world in order that the world may be changed.

Brave words! And a worthy offspring of the Vatican Council Documents, and precursor to *Evangelisation in the Modern World*, the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI in 1975. The question that caused anxiety for every priest and every bishop, and that still remained to be answered, was how to engage the gears which would set the Church into movement to fulfil the purposes of Christ.

We knew that each generation has to discover for itself the Spirit of the first Pentecost, and an understanding of the Church's mission to the world. How do we become fully alive in Christ, and actively respond to the driving of his Holy Spirit within us? In *A Time for Building* several important

signposts were set up; one pointed to small groups, another to basic Christian communities.

Among the most important means of achieving Christian formation is the small group. There already exist many groups doing excellent work helping to form better Christians, but there is no overall strategy for this work. We believe that one of the most significant developments in the Church will be the emergence of very many more small groups, and we foresee them playing a vital role in Pastoral Strategy.

Of basic Christian communities we had this to say:

We foresee the formation of communities, groupings small enough to enable members to know and feel involved with each other but large enough to provide and sustain the main functions of the Church. Within one Christian community there would normally be a number of small groups working independently but co-operating together to create a community which is open and welcoming as well as close knit and supportive.

Clearly we do not yet know the exact shape, organisation or method of working of these groups and communities. There can be no blueprint. The Church must respond to human needs and possibilities, and obviously changes will take place gradually, and new structures will grow both from within and alongside existing ones. Such a strategy will demand deep personal renewal at all levels.

The challenge that faces every bishop and priest is how to enable the people committed to his care to grow into a living community, conscious of its mission in Christ. We have to share the agonising of St. Paul: 'I am in travail till Christ be formed in you' (Gal 4:19). How can we transform our large congregations into communities? I have always felt myself the answer lies in the small group. On the pattern of a diocese divided into parishes gathered around the cathedral church, my vision of the future is of a collection of small groups gathered around the parish church, drawing their eucharistic life from that centre but developing and adapting that life in the group. The experience of Christ that we all need in the living out of our faith must first be found in individuals with whom we can share and, by sharing, develop our faith.

In 1979 a young man, James Pitt, knowing of the importance I attach to the building up of small groups, offered his services to the Eastern Area of Westminster. He had already made a name for himself in the building up and defence of neighbourhood groups in the borough of Islington. He had just returned from a visit to Brazil, where he was our representative at a study project that had been launched three years earlier by the Brazilian Bishops' Conference. In the month he spent there he was able to study the Brazilian approach to Pastoral Planning and to catch the spirit of renewal

that is transforming the Brazilian Church from a 'frightened, conservative, clerical institution into a united people of God which studies, lives and proclaims the gospel.' The booklet he wrote on his return, *Good News to All*, published by CAFOD and CIIR, is regarded by David Reegan, the Urban Pastoral co-ordinator to the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, as an outstanding report: 'I cannot think of anything I have read, in any language, which so well captures what is happening in the Church in Brazil.'

James Pitt felt that the Pastoral Planning process that he had seen in action in Brazil could be adapted for our English scene, especially in East London, where the option for the poor, which is the watershed for the Latin American Church, could be seen to apply.

Pastoral Planning Process in Brazil

The purpose of pastoral planning is to renew the Church. Its strength comes from the people who take our Lord's word at face value:

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the down-trodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. (Luke 4)

They go further: alive in Christ and prompted by his Spirit, they believe this is now their mandate: to bring good news to the poor (taking an option for the poor), new sight to the blind ('conscientization'), freedom to the oppressed (working for justice). *Conscientizacao* is a Portuguese word in constant use in the Brazilian pastoral plans, and is a key concept for the understanding of what is happening in the church there. It is also untranslatable. The word refers to a process of awakening, of becoming conscious of the nature of society, of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and what one can do about them. The term does not simply mean 'becoming aware of'. Essential to it is the idea of taking creative action. It is consciousness-raising-with-action. (*Good News to All* p. 6)

Pastoral Planning now takes place at all levels of the Brazilian Church—national, regional, diocesan, area, deanery, parish, and at base level. The procedure is as follows:

First Stage — Reflection and Questioning

The purpose of this stage is to ask the people of God two questions: what ought the Church to be doing in our world today and in our situation here?; and how can we become that kind of church?

Through discussions at all levels leading to a diocesan assembly a general objective is formed for the diocese. In the archdiocese where Dom Helda Camara has been bishop for nearly twenty years the general objective is this...

To seek the communion of all people with God and with each

other through Jesus Christ in the energy of the Spirit ... in the process of a continuous struggle for the fundamental equality of all people that was revealed by our Lord and Master ... starting from the perspective of the poor, conscious that action for justice is a constituent dimension for evangelisation.

In São Paulo the general objective is

To reach, through the gospel, all people in their own reality, stirring them to different forms of participation in the ecclesial communion and in human solidarity.

These objectives are always very general. They also contain the two essential constituents, that we have to be alive in Christ, and that we have to do his work in our world.

The general objective has to be translated into lines of action that fit the lives of people in the reality of their own situation. The people of God are invited to answer these kinds of questions: What are the real needs of people in this area? What is our overall objective? What sort of world do we want to see? What is our vision of the Kingdom of God? What prevents us from making this a reality? What helps us? What are we doing to overcome obstacles and make the most of things going for us? What should we be doing? It is this last question which really produces recommendations from the people about the priorities which should engage their attention as a Church.

Second Stage — Decision on Priorities

There will now be a diocesan assembly, where all the possible priorities are examined in the light of the local situation. Several priorities will be chosen.

In São Paulo, where pastoral planning is probably most developed and effective, the current priorities are basic church communities, human rights and the marginalised, the world of work, and the people in the periphery of the city.

Basic Church Communities: 'To promote forms of communitarian living which may stimulate the development of basic church communities, where Christians may assume co-responsibility for the life and mission of the church.'

Human Rights and the Marginalised: 'To awaken and conscientize Christians and others in a way that enables them to announce, promote and defend human rights as an answer to the demands of the gospel in the face of social reality.'

The World of Work: 'To promote in the light of the gospel the world of work, giving priority to the workers, through their "conscientization" as the main agents of the humanizing transformation of economic, industrial and commercial structures.'

The Periphery: 'To promote missionary action in the periphery of the city of São Paulo, to unite in communities the people who are dispersed, and answer their needs so that they may become subjects of their own history.'

Third Stage — Construction of the Plan

Every group or body in the diocese is now invited to reflect on the agreed priorities and decide what they themselves wish to do about them, if anything. This is a crucial part of the dynamics of this pastoral planning process: no one at any stage tells anyone else what they have to do or not do. The diocesan objectives are an invitation rather than a set of commands. What is important at this stage is that at every level—diocesan, deanery, parish, group—decisions will be taken about what should be done, the means by which it should be done and the person or group who accepts responsibility for the action, as well as the time period in which this must take place.

Fourth Stage — Accompanying the Plan

A leaflet can now be issued with a statements of objectives and lists of activities. It becomes the reference point, a constant reminder and encouragement to those who have committed themselves to action within the plan.

Fifth Stage — Assessment

After an agreed period there is an evaluation done at all levels but particularly at the base where the work takes place. How have we been getting on? What has changed? Have we some higher priorities that have developed in the last few years? So now new possible priorities emerge and the process of choice begins all over again.

East London Pastoral Planning

The Eastern Pastoral Area of the diocese of Westminster is made up of four London boroughs: Camden, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. Hackney and Tower Hamlets in particular would come under the concern expressed in *Faith in the City*. Forty parishes are involved.

In 1979, on his return from his Brazilian experience, I engaged James Pitt as my Pastoral Assistant, Area to see if it was possible to transpose the strategy of the Brazilian pastoral planning into the East London scene. The opportunity for this was the National Pastoral Congress that was held in May 1980. From the very early stages of the preparation for the NPC the East London Pastoral Plan grew. The pastoral planning is based on the SEE — JUDGE — ACT method popularised by the YCW movement and canonised in the Vatican II document on the laity:

... formation for the apostolate cannot consist in merely theoretical instruction ... laity should gradually and prudently learn how to view, judge, and do all things in the light of faith as well as to develop and

improve themselves and others through action, thereby entering into the energetic service of the Church. (29)

The principles guiding the operation were fourfold:

- the church exists to evangelise the world.
- this evangelisation needs to be planned.
(We need to know why we do what we do)
- no one should tell any one else what to do. Our strength comes from doing because we see why it should be done.
- we seek unity in objectives but encourage diversity at the level of action.

Stage One — Listening

The first stage of pastoral planning was set in motion in preparation for the NPC with the intention of identifying the local areas of concern.

I asked each Parish Priest to find three lay people (one man, one woman and one young person) willing to act as 'bridges' between myself and the parishes. I met with the 'bridges' and asked them to get the help of others to *listen* to what people were talking about, to discover the local concerns. During Lent of 1979 some one hundred and fifty people in the East London Area listened wherever groups of people met; at work, at home, in the pub, in school playgrounds, at bus stops. They kept simple notes of what they heard and sent them to me. The themes which came up most were:

- 1 The Prices and the Cost of Living — rents, rates, wages not keeping up with costs, the effect on family life.
- 2 Lack of Respect for the Young and Old — young people feeling ignored, put down and at the same time pressurised to succeed; old people feeling unwanted
- 3 Changes in the Church — especially in the liturgy: role of the priest and participation of the people.
- 4 Generation Gap — expectation of parents, the need of the young for privacy and greater freedom.
- 5 Race Relations — discrimination and prejudice, attitudes of the police towards black people, tension (all this especially at Hackney and Tower Hamlets).
- 6 Housing — cost, bad design, effect of high rise flats on family life, difficulties of young people finding a home, fear among whites about being 'swamped by foreigners'.
- 7 Power of the Unions and Strikes — including low wages as cause of strikes, effect of strikes on the elderly.
- 8 Schools — declining quality, poor discipline, role of Catholic schools.
- 9 Vandalism and Violence — old estates, street crime, role of police, stiffer sentences for young offenders.
- 10 Work — shortage of jobs, shortage of the right sort of job, job

- satisfaction, honesty at work.
- 11 No One to Turn to — breakdown of community, isolation, complexity of modern living.
 - 12 Politicians and Powerlessness — local council does not care e.g. rubbish on the streets, bad transport, feeling of powerlessness among the community etc.

Stage Two & Three — Parish Discussion and Decision on Priorities
Bishop Guazzelli then describes how discussions were organised in the parishes, and also a Young Peoples' Conference held, which produced reports and recommendations that formed the basis of the agenda for an Area Pastoral Conference. This voted on priorities. He continues:

The five pastoral priorities chosen were:

- 1 Basic Belief in Christ. We need to recognise that not all those who bear the name of Christian are necessarily committed to Christ or believe in the truths of the gospel. There must be a spiritual renewal and conversion of the *whole church*. Each member of the church needs encouragement and support to realise that she or he is chosen and needed by Christ.

This support can come from small communities, prayer groups, other small groups, adult religious education in the parish, and house Masses. Support will also come through the clergy, who need to be relieved by the laity from administration, thus enabling them to spend more time with people. This will also give them more time for spiritual renewal and will add strength to their homilies.

- 2 Racial Harmony. As the church in East London, we must be aware that we are part of a multi-racial and multi-cultural community. We need to work for racial harmony.
- 3 Ministries in the Church. Everyone in the church is responsible for evangelisation. We need:

to recognise that the *whole* parish community is involved in teaching the faith.

to reassess all the ministries in the church, including the role of priests.

more education of the church community; in particular we need opportunities for the training of laity, especially to prepare them for social responsibility e.g. in housing.

- 4 Re-examine Catholic Schools. The whole question of the purpose and methods of Catholic education in schools needs re-examination. We need better teachers of R.E. and more material resources for R.E. We should consider abolishing R.E. exams.
- 5 The Old and the Young. The church in East London must recognise and respond to the needs of the elderly and the young. The young who

are the church of today, and who are capable of doing things for themselves, need encouragement and support.

These pastoral priorities were then sent to the National Pastoral Congress Committee, and were to form the basis of the East London Area Pastoral Plan. I was able to send them in a Christmas card to every family in the parishes as 'The New Year resolutions of our Pastoral Area 1980.'

Stages Four & Five — Translating Priorities into Action & Implementation
I had previously committed myself publicly to accepting whatever priorities were recommended by the conference or, if I was unable to do so, give reasons why. I had no difficulty in accepting the five priorities. As a result of the process leading up to the conference a small but powerful group of lay people and priests had been formed to assist the process. They now helped me to draw up a list of activities which I must initiate in order to put the priorities into action. I did this for each of the priorities and ended up with a formidable list of thirty-four points where I or members of my Pastoral Team were committed to an action at Area level. Thus the *Area Pastoral Plan* was formed. It was published and available to all.

The bishop then describes the working out of the plan.

Stage Six — Evaluation

The last stage of the Pastoral Plan is to evaluate what has gone on before and perhaps to recognise the presence of new issues that have become priorities. Evaluation has to take place at deanery and parish levels as well.

This is done at the Area Assemblies, which often follow soon after a programme has taken place. It enables those who are preparing for the next programme to learn from mistakes and to benefit from successes. Other Assemblies at longer intervals (two yearly?) help everyone to keep referring back to the original objectives.

Priests

One of the principal obstacles to the smooth running of the Pastoral Plan was the reaction of some of the priests. And it must be said immediately that this was an honest reaction by men who were loyal to their bishops. For example, some were uneasy about the tang of liberation theology ('Marxism'), which had not yet become a respectable term.

Undoubtedly tension existed between myself and some of my priests. To deal with this tension I decided to ask all of the priests engaged in pastoral work in my Area to come away with me for the inside of a week to discuss our various theologies. It was quite clear to me that my ecclesiology (my vision of the church) was not shared by all of them. So came into existence the Bishop-and-Priests Away Weeks in the Area. The first was on the Ecclesiology which lay behind all the Pastoral Plan. It was the ecclesiology contained in the two

documents of the Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. Fortunately we had Bishop Butler to introduce the weeks (there were two so as not to deprive the Area of all its priests in one week).

The main thrust of the Week was to recognise the dignity and responsibility of lay people in the church, and of the need to bring trust and openness into our relationship with our people. We looked squarely at a very serious recommendation of the Vatican Council:

... Let sacred pastors recognise and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of lay men and women in the church. Let them willingly make use of their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with Fatherly love the projects, suggestions, and desires proposed by the laity. Furthermore, let pastors respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city. (LG 37).

If we were not faithfully accepting that recommendation and putting it into practise, we were impeding the freedom of the Holy Spirit in working through all the members of Christ's body.

The second Bishop-and-Priests Away Week took up the Papal exhortation *Evangelisation in the Modern World*. We discussed the document in full and took away with us two important sections:

As the kernel and centre of his Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is, above all, liberation from sin and the evil one... All this is begun during the life of Christ... but it must be patiently carried on during the course of history....

Evangelising means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. The church evangelises when she seeks to convert solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, as well as the activities in which they engage their lives and concrete surroundings (EN 18).

With two blows from such an exalted source, much of the suspicion about the theological content of the Area's discussion papers and the morality of their political and social implications was swept away. In this current year all the priests have been engaged in a race-awareness programme. This initiated a year which we are devoting to tackling the second of our Area priorities — Race Relations.

I, as a bishop, like the rest of my team have been able to learn from mistakes. Lack of communication between pastoral planners and priests in the parish undoubtedly created a great deal of unnecessary tension and problems. One of the solutions was to appoint a Pastoral Plan Assistant, whose task it was to work with the parish priest and with him to be responsible for

communicating the plan and its various parts to interested people in the parishes, and to act as the energizer in establishing small groups. By this time we had learnt that priests and lay people had to work and pray together before a satisfactory description of the role of Pastoral Plan Assistant could be drawn up.

Another means of improving communication was to ensure that the Deans' group (twelve priests made up of the four deans, four sub-deans, and four elected young priests of the deaneries) was actively involved at every stage of the pastoral planning right from the beginning.

Lay People

The central focus of all the discussion groups was to make people think about themselves as the church, what the church should be doing, what they should be doing as a church. Just as priests are not trained to hand over responsibility, so our lay people have not been trained in the past to accept responsibility. Group leaders were formed and before each programme were given training skills on how to form groups, how to run a group, and on the basic theology of the church in that programme.

One of the greatest effects of the Pastoral Plan was to help in the evolution of a strong team of pastoral workers. James Pitt always told me that his work had to be a limited one: if he did not succeed in working himself out of a job, he would have failed. No one has taken his place as a dynamic and often flamboyant pastoral assistant. And he was right. His work is now being done by a team of highly committed and efficient lay men and women, the Eastern Area Pastoral Team.

Priests and Laity

One of the most encouraging developments here is the decision taken a year ago by the Deans' Group to have their monthly meetings in future together with the lay Pastoral Workers' Team. It was this combined group which at the beginning of this year recommended to the priests of the diocese that their Away-Week with the bishop should take up seriously the question of Race Relations in the Area. They have also worked out a programme for the whole of the year, Pentecost 1987 to Pentecost 1988, in which Religious Sisters and people from the parishes should undergo the same race-awareness programme. The year will end with a set of discussion papers centering around prejudice and discrimination, in its forms of racism and sexism. The whole of the Area at last will face up to a problem which everyone knows exists, but no one is prepared to admit in him or herself.

Parishes

The effect on the various parishes differs widely. In some parishes very little evidence exists of the presence of a pastoral plan for the parish. But in running through the list of the parishes in the Eastern Area I was encouraged to see that in seventeen parishes developments are taking place which show the existence of a pastoral plan taking its spirit from the Vatican Council, and recognising the relationship that must exist between priest and people.