

VACATION CHURCH SCHOOL AND DAY CAMP

July 9 - August 18, 1990

Report: September 8 - 12, 1990

Here at St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church of Coney Island, we have been running extensive summer programs since 1978. We have been running them in the format of those which the Rev. Leslie C. Schulz of First Lutheran Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, ran them for many years. Pastor Peter Krey trained with Pastor Schulz, working in three programs, the summers of 1969, 1970 and 1976. For most years, Pastor Krey called Les Schulz for consultation before running the one week training session for the staff, called the VCS Leadership Training Laboratory. Perhaps this program has only gone a little of the distance that Les Schulz's has covered. He has a charisma that Pastor Krey does not yet have in such abundance. But in telling some of the story of this summer's program, and entering some of the journelling recorded during the hot and hectic summer, perhaps you will agree that we are pioneering in a very important mission of our church, and ours may be representative of many congregations, who are struggling with the same kind of a sense of mission without being able to focus on the purposes and aims as well, or being able to verbalize them for that matter.

Basically we are trying to help the children grow in faith and maturity. We want to provide an alternative environment for them to the street, the hot pavements, and the brutality and violence of the life where God's hand is so heavy upon the people and there seems to be no escape from failure, and no way to avoid human destruction. But in order to provide an alternative human environment, the directors, teachers/counselors, and aids have to grow themselves in faith, life, and maturity and this is what the Leadership Training Laboratory is all about, which is held from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. each day, Monday through Friday the week before the five school and day camp weeks.

A whole vocabulary has developed to facilitate this growth in the staff: a gut-feeling, a growing edge, a hang-up, a coming out party, blowing it, telling it like it is, soul-talk, etc. Perhaps our program has also talked of bringing something up, (i.e. leveling with some one, in V. Satir's terms), of the ingredients of a person's personality as if a person had a recipe which described their personal make up, seeing people with the eyes of the heart, seeing them in bold-relief, crossing the intimacy barrier, growing pains, boot camp of the soul, among others. But through the years Paul Tournier was a mentor, Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir, Cognitive-rational approaches, transactional analysis, family therapy, i.e., especially family sculpture, and now last but not least, in no way the least: M. Scott Peck, M.D. Most recently V. Satir's book, Peoplemaking has been used extensively for the communication training, while the positive I-messages and negative I-messages and shifting into active listening, was the communication theory we used immediately before that.

This summer I first read M. Scott Peck's People of The Lie before the program, because I could not find his: The Road Less Travelled. This book I read during the program, and then his book: The Different Drum after it. I wish I had read this his latter book before the program, because it gave an important road-map to the goal of our training and school, some methodological skills, as well as the description of the stages of the group process that need to be gone through to get there. I used to say, we didn't get off first base in the training sessions, intuitively knowing what was aimed at. Peck puts it plainly: the stages of the group process go from pseudo-community to chaos, to emptiness and community. Usually we would speak of crossing the intimacy barrier where he talks of entering community. Also he helped me get methodological clarity. I would not do individual therapy in the group, because we were preparing for the task of reaching out to the children. Peck showed that you have to keep your eye on the group process, and only in so far that an individual obstructs that process through the four stages toward community would you do individual therapy. And he also talked of the resistance of some that can be so strong, that the group has to be prepared to partially exclude such a person. There is so much that I learned from these three books, that I could virtually write a book relating our thirteen programs to all his insights, some of which we came to on our own. But let it suffice to relate some of this year's program's break-throughs and conflicts to his conceptual, experiential, and Christian confessional help.

Monday, July 9, 1990. Leadership Training Laboratory 9:00 A.M.

Billie¹ had opened the door of the church and was there with a big smile to meet me at 9:00 A.M. sharp. Alice, really thirteen years old, with her boyfriend, Rob, were just coming into the church yard, with Jill coming right behind them. Jill was a retired nurse, come to us from another church, where her expertise and leadership seemed to threaten that of the entrenched powerful there. She was very welcome with us, but was only volunteering, and here she was one of the first, with none of the senior staff anywhere yet in sight!

So as we started our first session of leadership training, we were holding up our spirits, because ...where was everybody? But I began to orient Billie, Alice, Rob, and Jill to the hopes and aspirations of our leadership training for the staff and for the children coming in the next week. The discussion went very well, with Jill and Rob being the main talkers. It was a quality beginning, but we were only a quarter of the staff.

¹ These names and some crucial details have been changed for the staff in the program in order to protect their identities.

Debbie and Sis came in at about 10:00. Debbie (aged 19) has been our dance instructor, and Sis (aged 16) has worked as an aid last year and in Sunday School. Yolanda, a mother of two, and wife of the Bus driver, Al Rivera, called and then came in at about 11:15. I called the assistant director, Mary, and could not get her on the line. Where was my director, Muriel Rodriguez?

In our first session, Alice, Jill, Debbie, and Sis did some good sharing and some helpful communication took place. We spoke of incidents that challenged our sensitivity, of scapegoating and rejection, of determining who owns a problem, attempting to shed light on ourselves and upon our relationships. Jill seemed to be thirsting for what we were beginning, and seemed to have an antenna for what we were doing. She is very experienced and tried to elicit responses from the teenagers. The topic of inspiring teachers we knew got us into a lively discussion. Our focus is self-knowledge and growth.

Our challenge in this training was leveling, or "bringing something up", to use our vocabulary, but to make a relationship stronger and not to break it. "Bringing ourselves up to bring up what our true feelings are - and to help 'bring up' the kids. We are struggling together to get the moral courage to bring something up - bringing about honesty in our relationships, which is very helpful and synchronic in the 'up-bringing' of the children and the growth and maturity of the staff. 2

We concluded the first session as others from the staff started to arrive around 11:00. We took a fifteen minute break before beginning the second session. I talked with the director and Yolanda. The director had had to take family to the airport. That had made her two hours late. It seemed the assistant director could not work with us because of baby-sitting problems and a commitment she could not get out of. This was unacceptable. I called Mary to get her to reconsider, to try something.

After the recess, we had
Worship.

We sang Sunday School songs,
especially singing: "We Are One In the Spirit" as the first.

Read the Scriptures: 1 John 3: 1-2 (3)

and a second reading: 1 Corinthians 13.

The gist of the discussion for the former lesson: We are the children of God. We are growing in God's love. We don't yet know how we will appear, but when Christ appears, we will be like him.

What a promise for personal renewal for us! The false images we hold up of ourselves, and all the energy expended to establish a false self, saps us of all creativity. We do not yet know ourselves, but Christ can raise up our true selves, which will

2 Personally, I am the eleventh child of a family of sixteen children, and I used to joke that the up-bringing ran out before they got to me.

conform with his.

The second lesson, 1 Cor. 13.

Yolanda read and responded to this the Love Poem of St. Paul's. She found it giving her direction and interpreting her life at that point, and she was moved deeply and shared from her life to all in her interpretation of the profound passages. Billie spoke of genuine and pure love versus love that seeks its own advantage and wants benefit. We could have childish love or mature love. Love is pure when you get nothing back.

I tried to speak about our consciousness being in darkness, and hoping to celebrate the light in which we see the character of our relationships, and see and experience ourselves and others in true self- and other-awareness. I told the story of the young woman who was deathly afraid of spiders³ who discovers that her mother has her in her clutches much as a spider would have a fly, and that she herself then experiences herself much like her mother. She in character also resembles a spider, clutching and sucking the life out of those who attempt a relationship with her. This is seeing and experiencing oneself in bold relief, and being challenged to change into a true self.

Alice talked of her friend's father shot by police in a subway station. She was grieving for him, because she had been very close to him. She wanted to be strong for her friend. Members of our group "attended" her.⁴ It turned out she did not feel close to her friend. She had not mourned and been able to grieve helpfully. Rob's father had died. He tried to be strong for his mother. Yolanda explained how her crying with her sister helped bring the grief and tears out of her sister, which helped her sister. Being strong for someone in such a way is usually a protection of oneself and is rather self-deceitful. Alice heard it. But we are still in discussion rather than real interpersonal work of the soul.

Billie tends to be theological even when she talks about personal support. To put our discussion in general terms, Billie sees faith as such the support that relieves parents of using their children as support in absence of the other spouse. We discussed the problem that many husbands abandon their wives, who then turn to their eldest son for support. This can be husband or wife, separation by divorce, death or whatever. Somehow her theology is not integrated because she interprets faith as a substitute for support in personal relationships, which needs to take place among peers, rather than parents taking advantage of

3 M. Scott Peck, People of The Lie, (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1978), page 146.

4 To "attend" someone means to exercise active listening with them, to participate with them in their struggle to understand and come to terms with themselves or their own feelings.

their children. People of strong faith often make many mistakes in interpersonal relationships. So faith does not vary directly with sound psychological judgments. *

On this same issue, Rachel, a strong disciplinarian, and a professional teacher, with daughter's in college, could not agree that leaning on children was a weakness. It was natural to lean on them, because you knew them, while you did not know strangers who were your peers and could not therefore use them for support. Here Rachel seemed to chose keeping all sharing and support within the family, not wanting to be open outside it.

An issue then emerged about how much training could be missed before one could no longer be part of the staff. I postponed the whole training to the week after July Fourth to not miss one day for any one, and here some staff want to miss one or two days! In consultation with Muriel, the director, and for the sake of getting our assistant director, Mary, on board we made the rule that a staff member could only miss two days of training, otherwise too much of the group process would be lost. The sessions would have to be closed on Wednesday. A long conflict arose because of this rule. Somehow the conflict did not make sense, because Rachel was fighting for Mary, ostensibly, but Mary's issue was not one of the training at this point, but of not being able to work in the program at all. Also she fought for Rocio's (who was attending a paralytic father) being able to come onto the staff. But this all seemed to clear up for me after the session, when Rachel held my hand, a thing she never does, and asked if her daughter Beth could still be hired even though it appeared that she could not come back from college in time for Wednesday. It had been an exercise in indirect communication, because all the while Rachel was trying to get her daughter hired again.

Some real sparks were flying between Rachel and myself. She is trying to challenge my rule that training is required to belong to and join our staff. "So, then, this is the whole staff?" she asked pointedly. She implied that I was making a rule that would be defeated by the fact that most of the staff was still missing anyway. But under that comment is the secret wish that our program would do away with the nonsense of all this sharing on a personal level. It was unnecessary, because you really didn't get to know anyone anyway until you saw them work, according to her, as she asserted in our last staff session. She was corrected by Jill then, who said, we had to communicate with each other first, and get our impressions of each other. Then when we worked together we either corrected and changed our impressions of one another, or we received more evidence from our observations which validated them. That reaches from the first session (for Rachel) to the last one, (in the last week of school) and the coming out of Jill in affirmation of our personal enterprize and mission.

(A session always ends with prayer going around the horn for those so moved. Often I lead the prayer. Then we sing the

* 10. *the more faith, the more sound the psychological judgements.*