

The Training for becoming a Christian Brother until 1970.

This paper gives my description of the training of Christian Brothers as I recall it. Following 1970, the Juniorate (high school) was discontinued; and in subsequent years the novitiate process was also updated because of the increase or lack of vocations or greater pre-preparation of candidates.

THE JUNIORATE

Whether it was called Mont La Salle High School, the Juniorate or the Novitiate Preparatory, it was the high school at Mont La Salle for young men who had an interest in becoming a Christian Brother. The building was two stories with dorms on top floor, classrooms and chapel on the main floor and a basement for gym, shower room. The size of the student body fluctuated from about 20 to about 60. The buildings held two large dorms with adjacent bath rooms, classrooms and labs, a chapel, a large common room where each student had their own desk, a small but well stocked library, typing room, and auditorium. Recreation opportunities included swimming, and all sports.

The curriculum was strictly college prep and most of the classrooms had about 20 desks. Most students took French and Latin as their language requirement; the curriculum followed a strict college prep academic program.

The schedule included rising at 6:45, morning prayer, Mass, breakfast, clean-up (also called Manual labor), classes, lunch, afternoon classes, recreation, study time, spiritual reading, dinner, private study. One of the interest jobs was barber; and trained students would gave others hair cuts. Wednesday was usually a half day to make afternoon hikes or sports available; and Saturdays included the classes that were missed on Wednesday. Night prayer was about 9 pm followed by what is called in religious life "the Great Silence" and bed time.

On feast days or holidays there were opportunities to do hobbies and usually a film for all in the auditorium. Visiting Sundays for families were once a month and most students except those from long distances enjoyed these days. Feast days were times to relax and enjoy

The school year also included a summer school program where students could take special courses like typing, music and art in a more relaxed atmosphere. Feast days offered special schedules. Vacations home were for about a month during the summer.

Students had the opportunity for an individual counseling session with the Brother Director a couple of times a month. During these times students could discuss any problem as well as the development and comfort with their decision to continue with the vocation of a Brother. When a student decided he was no longer interested or capable, his family could be notified and transportation arranged to get home; and sometimes assistance in getting to another school in his area.

Meals were done in silence with each taking a turn at reading the book, magazine or religious work that was selected by the Director. At times, the reading was cancelled and the students could talk. Some students acted as waiters and all took turns in the cleanup and set up for the next meal.

Since the school was nine miles or so from downtown, students could get a ride to town for medical, dental or other necessities. In my day we could have our laundry done by a laundry in Napa for a price or send our clothes home to be laundered and sent back to us. In more recent years, wash machines and dryers were available to launder our own clothes.

Usually at the beginning of the school year or at the end, the group would travel by bus to the

Brothers encampment on the Russian River for a week's vacation there. There were also picnics at places in the area, hikes to various areas, too.

The Novitiate

The Novitiate was a year or more for special reflection, exercises and prayer to prepare for the religious life. It started with a postulancy of 2 to 6 months in preparation for the novitiate year; At the end of the postulancy, candidates received the robe of the Brothers, their new name and first real commitment to the Brothers life. During the novitiate year, novices would become exposed to mental prayer, Gregorian chant, studying the rule of the Christian Brothers, spiritual reading, daily Mass, conferences Physical exercise and sports games and hikes were helpful in balancing physical needs. Each novice had their own room. Individual counseling was done with the novice director, an experienced Brother. Spiritual reading was a daily exercise too.

The novitiate was a building that held conference rooms, a common room, recreation room, private sleeping rooms, a music room, library, gym, shower room and carpentry shop.

Garden work was a healthy outlet for novices as they tended the gardens, built projects saw the results of their care. Though the area was surrounded by vineyards, novices did not work in the vineyards. Thought other religious orders might expect this to be done, the Superiors believed that focusing on such work would take away from the purpose of the novitiate, preparation for the religious life.

At the end of the novitiate, a young Brother would take his first vows; and at that point move on to the Scholasticate at St Mary's college for their college education. During the novitiate year, it wasn't unusual for a young candidate to decide to leave as he evaluated his commitment.

We were lucky to have a Director who was a great counselor who focused on the young Brothers growth as a person as well as growth in the religious life

The Scholasticate

The Scholasticate was a time when the young Brothers would take their college courses in the same classes as the lay students at St Mary's college. For most it was a three and a half year experience; however science majors usually had four years. Summer schools helped the young Brother to accomplish a full four year program. Scholastics lived in Assumption Hall and when that was too small groups lived in Benilde hall. Meals were taken in common and the food was prepared by the College's cooks. Summers also provided the opportunity to take educational classes related to mythology in preparation for the teaching career.

The Scholasticate was a time to experience community life as a Brother as well as study a college curriculum. Each Scholastic had a private room, but would student in a large common room where we also heard conferences and did our individual studies. Prayers, Mass, spiritual reading, catechism study, Gregorian chant were important. Recreation with in-season sports was an important outlet to balance the stress of education and formation. Individual conferences with the Brother Director was also to examine problems, hardships, insights and questions a Scholastic might be experiencing.

Before the beginning of each school year, the Student Brothers would have a vacation at St Joseph's Camp on the Russian River. We always looked forward to this time. Also in the second or third year, the young Brother got to get a taste of his future by visiting a Brothers school and do a week's practice teaching. or observing accomplished Brothers teaching. This gave the candidate a chance to experience teaching and also to live in a community with a Brothers group.

At the end of the Scholasticate, the young Brother would be assigned to a Brothers school to begin his teaching career.