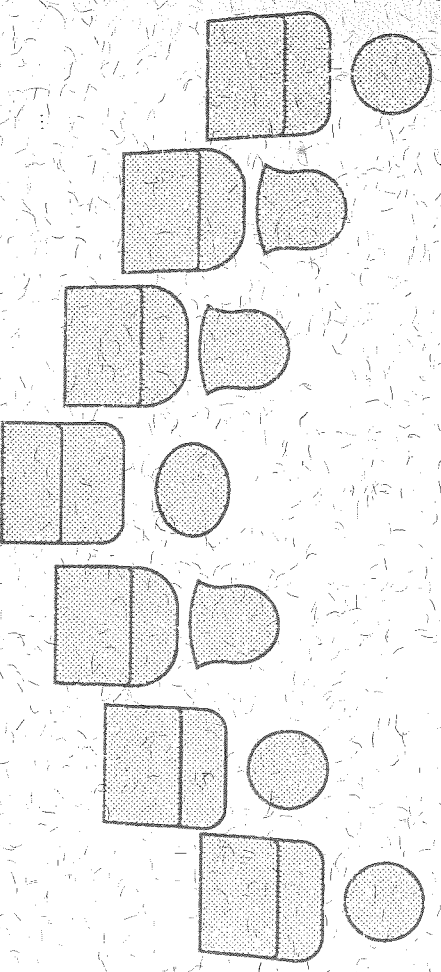


Lay Adult

Christian Education

Principles and Possibilities

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Christian Research Association

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Preface

The research on which this book is based was conducted between April and August 1991 for the Board of Ministerial Education, Uniting Church, Synod of Victoria. The Christian Research Association was asked to undertake a study of lay adult Christian education resources and methodologies with a view to recommending how the Uniting Church in Victoria should develop its facilities. This book makes extensive use of material prepared for the report to the Uniting Church.

The research involved an examination of current practices in lay adult Christian education, not only in the Uniting Church, but also in other denominations. Particular attention was paid to three adult education centres: the ELM Centre of the Uniting Church in New South Wales, the Lay Education Centre of the Uniting Church in South Australia, and the Catholic Pastoral Formation Centre of Victoria. Discussions were held with a wide variety of people: some involved in providing resources for adult education, and other people concerned about the need for it.

A survey was conducted amongst Uniting Church attenders in Victoria. The survey was distributed to all people attending church in twenty-seven parishes in Victoria in June 1991. These parishes were randomly selected from a total of 308 Uniting church parishes in Victoria. Approximately 1760 questionnaires were distributed and 1383 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 78.5%.

The Christian Research Association is grateful to all who shared their experiences and concern for Christian education amongst adults. In particular, we wish to express our appreciation to the Board of Ministerial Education of the Uniting Church, Synod of Victoria for allowing the material to be generally released.

Philip Hughes and Peter Bentley

Chapter 1.

The Foundations of Christian Education

Christian education has always been a very important function of the church. It is the process through which people seek to come to grips with the nature of God and with the implications of the Christian faith for life. Christian education is contingent upon the self-disclosure of God.¹ Christian education can be seen as that process through which we seek to become aware and help others to become aware of God's revelation.

Some people would make a strong distinction in fundamental philosophy between Christian perspectives on education and some non-Christian perspectives on education. Some people consider education to be an activity which in itself leads to salvation, offering wholeness to human beings and human society, and providing a solution to human problems. However, many Christians would say that education only becomes part of the movement to salvation as it is part of the proclamation and exploration of God's activity in reaching out to human beings. The solution to human problems does not lie in the methods and processes of education alone, but as people come to understand the self-disclosure of God, accepting and responding to God's grace.

A large part of Jesus' ministry was teaching. He taught the crowds which gathered to listen and spent time teaching his disciples. The Church has been called to continue that work of making disciples, which explicitly involves teaching people. As the Church calls people to follow Christ,

1 Alva I. Cox *Christian Education in the Church Today*, Nashville: Graded Press, 1965 quotes from a statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ in U.S.A.: "The objective for Christian education is that all persons be aware of God through his self-disclosure, especially his redeeming love... and that they respond in faith and love."

so it must be involved in the work of teaching them what that means. Indeed, the people of God are involved in a pilgrimage in which there needs to be a continual openness to a developing understanding of faith.

Much of what the individual parishes do can come under the heading of Christian education. The Parish has an important role to play in the general tasks of Christian education in which the Church explores the meaning of its faith and in which it seeks to bring something of the self-disclosure of God to those beyond the Church.

The *Combined Churches Survey* conducted in 1987 by the Christian Research Association found that more than one third of church attenders identified educating people in the Christian faith as one of the two most important things which the church does. This identification of education as the primary role of the church was particularly strong in the Anglican and Catholic denominations with over one quarter of attenders identifying it as the major task of the church. More than one fifth of the attenders surveyed identified the primary role of the minister as that of educator. While around 40% indicated they were satisfied with the education that was offered in the services of worship, in groups and other activities in the local church, many indicated they were not satisfied.

Personal Development

Christian education has a number of functions. One of these is personal development through which people are equipped for life as Christians. Education helps them in making decisions and developing appropriate patterns for living. Education is not just a passing on of knowledge, but is a process through which people develop as whole persons. It is a process which may touch every part of a person, cognitively, affectively, behaviourally and spiritually.

A major study by the mainline denominations in the United States has re-affirmed the importance of Christian education for adults. Amongst its major conclusions are the following:

In examining the religious biographies of adults, one of the two lifetime experiences most associated with higher faith maturity is the *amount of exposure to Christian education*.

Regarding the impact of congregational life on faith maturity, the congregational factor most associated with helping people grow in faith maturity is the *degree of effective-*

tiveness in Christian education programming. This finding is true for both youth and adults.²

Prophetic

Christian education has a prophetic dimension. It is important that the processes that are organised do not just support present structures, or serve to maintain the *status quo* in the institution of the church. The task of Christian education is that of equipping people, as individuals and as communities, to be involved in God's activity. In so doing, there will inevitably be an element of challenge. Christian education should not be a process in which beliefs are 'deposited', to use Paulo Freire's term, or which merely builds systems of thought. The processes of Christian education themselves should evaluate and even confront what people believe and how they live.

Enhancing Gifts

Apart from the general processes of Christian education through which the faith of the Church is nourished, challenged, and regulated, there is also that area of Christian education in which people are equipped for particular ministries. It is part of the nature of the Church, that the Holy Spirit endows people with various abilities and brings them together so that they can serve each other and the wider world.

Growth in Community Education

In recent years, there has been increased attention given to adult Christian education in Australia. Perhaps this has resulted from the awareness of the attention community education has received in the general community. It may also be a result of the sense that society is changing rapidly and it is becoming increasingly difficult to know how to apply the basic tenets of the faith to the variety of situations one meets in society.

2 Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Ekin, *Effective Christian*

Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations: A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty and Congregational Life. Search Institute, Minneapolis, 1990, p.4.

Throughout this century the division of labour and specialisation of circumstances have increased. Increased mobility through greater access to private cars since World War II has enabled people to participate in a wider variety of interest and hobby groups, sports and leisure activities, and community groups than has ever been possible in the past. It has become correspondingly difficult for individual parishes to provide appropriate education that does justice to this variety of life circumstances.

There may have been a time when education was largely something for children and for those apprenticed in preparation for a vocation. Today, the rapid changes occurring in society mean that education must be a life-long process.

Adult education is a rapidly growing industry in Australia. In 1988, it was estimated that 2,500,000 Victorians were involved during that year in an adult education course, either through a TAFE, a CAE, or through one of a multitude of other organisations. The Council of Adult Education in Melbourne engaged 950 sessional tutors to present over 3,900 course programmes to 46,000 students.³ It appears likely that the demand for adult education will continue to grow. Indeed, the rate of change in society itself means that lifelong education is imperative. The *Report of the Ministerial Review of Adult Education in Victoria* said that the rapid changes in society necessitated more than re-training: recognition of a culture of change in which continuing adult education was seen as necessary.⁴

Uniting Church attenders, like people in other sectors of the community, are involved in adult education. In the sample of Uniting Church attenders, 48% indicated that they had taken an educational course within the last five years.

18% had taken a course at a church or with a church organisation.

16% had taken a course with a hobby or leisure group.

12% had taken a course at a TAFE or CAE.

3 Dr. Shirley Randell, *Australian Senate. Inquiry into Adult and Community Education. Submission from Council of Adult Education*. Melbourne, 1991. p.2.

4 *The Report of the Ministerial Review of Adult Education in Victoria*, chaired by Dr. Don Edgar, 1987. Melbourne: Ministry of Education, 1988. p.4-5.

11% had taken a course at their place of work.

The attenders were asked for what reason they had taken courses.

24% had taken courses to help with work.

21% for personal satisfaction.

19% for spiritual growth.

18% to improve their leisure life.

7% to enhance their home life.

Thus, the idea of adult education is far from foreign to many church attenders. Many are interested in further adult education within the church.

Chapter 2.

Loci of Christian Education

1. Parish Christian Education

For most people in the Uniting Church, the parish is the primary locus for Christian Education. It has already been noted that approximately one third of Uniting Church attenders (nationally) identify the primary role of the church as that of Christian education. For most people, this means primarily the local church.

Within the parish, the most important Christian education event is the Sunday service. Just over half of the sample of Victorian Uniting Church attenders said that in the last two years, Sunday services had had "much" importance as a resource for Christian life and ministry. The Sunday service tends to be seen as more important, however, by women than by men, and more important among the older people. People under 30 showed greater dissatisfaction. It had greater significance for the 'devotional' orientation to faith, in which the central focus is the personal relationship with God, than for people with other orientations, such as those for whom the focus of Christian faith is the way of life and the values it provides.⁵

In some churches, small groups have a great deal of importance. A little over half of the sample had been involved in a small group at the church some time over the last two years, and half of those people said that the group had "much" importance as a resource for Christian life. Some small groups take up particular courses. Others develop their own topics for consideration and discussion and plan their own activities. In Uniting Churches, some groups use *Kerygma* which is a lengthy theology and

5 These orientations to faith were developed by the Christian Research Association on the basis of the data from the *Combined Churches Survey*. For details, see Philip Hughes and 'Tricia Blombery, *Patterns of Faith in Australian Churches*, Melbourne: Christian Research Association, 1990.

Bible discovery programme published by the Joint Board of Christian Education. A new series is being launched in the latter half of 1991 by the Joint Board entitled *Christians in Every-Day Life*. In some Anglican churches, *Education for Ministry*, which is distributed by the General Board of Religious Education, is popular. Other groups use the Serendipity series, in which considerable attention is given to the fellowship of the group as a focus for attention. Another option is Bethel, which is a tightly structured formal educational system. Some parishes and groups structure their own programmes.

The parish may promote Christian education in other ways. Some parishes have libraries and encourage the reading of books. Others lend cassettes and videos. Some run seminars, workshops and camps, or short courses of study.

As in the lives of individuals, some of the most significant educational experiences may arise unintentionally. The learning that occurs when a church begins working with a particular migrant group living in an area, or seeks to minister to people living in high-rise flats, for example, can lead to some very important educational experiences.

However, what parishes can offer needs supplementing. Parishes deal with a wide cross-section of people, with different needs and interests and from a variety of situations. In any one parish there will be limited educational resources. This is particularly true of smaller parishes. The following are some of the limitations in parish programmes.

1. **Lack of depth.** Few parishes are able to offer in-depth studies in any particular area of Christian thought or personal development. On Sunday morning, the minister is confronted with a wide range of people, and must prepare the service for that range. Time and situation constrain the depth to which teaching can be developed in that situation.

Small groups allow a group of people to develop their concerns and interests at some depth. Some programmes, such as *Education for Ministry*, are used by parish-based groups, and can be effective in allowing in-depth study by a group within the parish. In general, however, only in larger parishes will it be possible to find sufficient people of a similar level of interest and commitment to mount such a programme. There is also the problem of finding suitable leadership.

2. **Lack of specialisation.** Few parishes have the opportunity to offer Christian education in specialist areas.

Again, the problem is that of finding sufficient people in any one area of specialist interest to warrant the mounting of a particular programme. There may be sufficient people for something in the area of parenting, or retirement, but it is unlikely that the particular concerns of an occupational group, such as accountants, or health workers, could be developed. Again, it may also be difficult to find suitable leadership.

3. Poor resources and methodologies. The sermon has grave limitations as the basis for Christian education. It does not encourage people to be actively involved in learning, or allow people to follow through their own particular applications. It does not encourage systematic or disciplined study or any form of assessment or evaluation.

The problem also exists in small groups, although these are more flexible, and some groups can apply themselves effectively to education. However, leadership is a problem. Few clergy have any training in Christian education, and even less have training in the methods of adult education. Some clergy feel threatened by those who pursue theological education at some depth.

The parish can be an important base in Christian education. Through the weekly service, people may be educated in the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Few parishes are able to deal with the specialised interests and applications of the faith that arise in our increasingly complex society where work, leisure, and other aspects of life have become very varied and specialised. The major problems are those of finding a group with a similar level of ability and desire to study at a particular depth, and in a particular area of life or faith.

2. Specialist Groups

There are many organisations inside and outside parishes and denominational structures offering a wide variety of courses related to faith and church life. To note a few examples, Scripture Union has its workshops and training days oriented towards work with youth and children and beach missions. The Council for Christian Education in Schools offers short courses for training people for religious education in the state schools. The Victorian Council for Christian Education offers training for children's ministries. The Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society seeks to provide resources for help people to link faith to the issues of society.

There are many other organisations offering a wide variety of courses and other educational activities, from universities offering degrees in religious studies and the Council of Adult Education offering a wide range of religion-related short courses and seminars to clubs and societies such as the Jungian society which offer courses, workshops and seminars related to their special interests.

While a few of these are general in nature, such as those offered by the universities and Council of Adult Education, most of them are related to the specific interests of the sponsoring body.

3. Christian Education at Denominational Levels

The various departments of most of the major state denominational structures become involved in Christian education. Sometimes this involves consultancy work. People are employed to conduct leadership training or parish development in individual churches, for example. Consultancy can play an important role in the total arena of Christian education, working with individual churches or groups of churches to help people focus on and to introduce new ideas, to develop church structures and train leadership. Through consultancy services, denominations are able to cater for the needs of particular churches and deal with specific situations which arise in them.

However, consultancy does not provide resources for the individual within a parish who wishes to go further with some aspect of Christian education. It can also be a very expensive exercise, demanding on staff time and energies. In many cases, consultancy is dependent on individual churches perceiving the needs and seeking advice. Sometimes the problem is that churches are not willing to look for advice.

Some denominational departments take initiative in organising programmes. Most of these are limited in duration and extent and are designed for a specific purpose. For example, a denominational department may organise a short programme of youth leadership training, or arrange lectures on evangelism.

Some denominations organise longer courses for lay people or for specialist ministries through their theological colleges or through centres dedicated to lay Christian education. The South Australian and New South Wales Uniting churches, and the Victorian Catholic Church, for example, have lay Christian education centres. The two Uniting centres are located on the grounds of theological colleges but are independent of them. The Catholic Centre is at some distance from the theological

college. These centres may run modular courses for general Christian education, and a wide variety of courses of matters of specialist interest. Often such centres are involved in the promotion of Christian education through the parishes. The General Board of Christian Education of the Anglican church has worked primarily through parishes, providing programmes and training leaders.

4. *Theological Colleges*

Full-time courses and single subjects in the disciplines of Biblical studies, theology and other areas can be taken at the various theological and Bible colleges around Australia. Many lay people take these opportunities. Some theological colleges are finding that whereas twenty years ago, students not preparing for candidature for full-time ministry were rare exceptions, today they may make up 75% of the student body. For example, of 290 students enrolled in 1991 at the United Faculty of Theology, approximately ninety of them were candidates for ordained ministries.

The theological college is oriented almost entirely to individuals rather than providing theological education for communities. In that sense, it complements the educational programmes offered by denominational departments.

In recent years, with increasing numbers of people not preparing for ordained ministry taking individual subjects and whole degrees, there has been some pressure to meet the needs of lay people. Nevertheless, it is limited as a resource for lay education for the church as a whole. The first limitation is that, in general, tertiary educational levels are expected or required of students. Most courses involve considerable time commitments. In general, the teaching is oriented to theological disciplines rather than to life situations, and the choices in curricula are narrow.

The most rapidly growing area in adult education is among people who are newly retired. However, few of these people would be willing to undertake the sorts of commitments and restrictions of a formal theological course. Nor would the methods be particularly attractive to them.

The variety of facilities for Christian education that exist beyond the parish involve only a minority of church attenders. The *Combined Churches Survey* found that 18% of attenders had been involved in a non-denominational organisation and 11.5% in a denominational organisation or programme in the past year.

Chapter 3.

Possible Areas for Development

Parishes are the major base for Christian education for most church attenders. Theological colleges provide facilities for the in-depth, formal study of theological disciplines. Denominational and specialist programmes generally provide for parish development and special interest education. However, five areas are identified below in which Christian education for non-ordained people might be developed.

1. *General Christian Education (for Ministry).*

There are many people who would like to explore in some depth the Christian faith and equip themselves for discipleship and ministry of a variety of kinds but do not want or are not in the position of being able to undertake a course at a theological college. Larger parishes may be able to meet a greater variety of such needs, but other parishes are not able to do so.

Programmes developed on a regional basis have a number of advantages over what a parish can generally offer.

1. A greater variety of facilities can be offered to cater for people who want a greater depth in their exploration of their faith, or who have some specialist interests to which they wish to relate their faith.
2. Key speakers and other specialist resources can be used more effectively.
3. There is a possibility of cross-fertilisation between people from different parishes, and the possibility of interchange between people from a greater variety of backgrounds but with common interests.
4. People are able to leave behind, at least for the process, their parish situations. This can mean, sometimes, leaving behind problems or difficult relationships, and allowing them space for creative reflection.

The fact that there is an interest in such facilities for Christian education is shown by the success of centres for lay education.

Two major paths along which adult Christian education could be developed are leadership training and faith development.

a) Leadership Training

The emphasis in Christian education beyond the parishes could be placed on leadership training. In discussions with church officers, the need for leadership training is often mentioned. Church leaders are attuned to the needs of the church as an institution. They see the importance of developing lay leadership within the church, for encouraging people to become leaders of small groups, and for training people for work with children and youth.

There has been a growing emphasis on lay involvement in worship in several denominations, and, at the same time, a desire for greater variety in the times and form of worship. For people to be effective in leading worship, there needs to be training and thorough preparation.

Small groups are one of the keys to flourishing church life. They can play an important role educationally, in fellowship, in evangelism, and in worship. However, many churches lack people who can competently lead small groups.

b) Faith Development

Results from the survey circulated to Uniting Church members on adult education suggest that a different path for Christian education may be of greater interest to church attenders. Many are looking for more resources for exploring the Christian faith than their parishes are able to provide, but their primary interest is in their own personal faith development. While 13% expressed interest in eldership training and 10% in small group leadership, 27% were interested in resources on personal relationships, and 22% on finding meaning in life.

There was a particular concern about relating faith to life with almost half the total sample indicating that this was an area of "much" importance to them. Earlier research in the *Combined Churches Survey* indicated that people were not interested so much in formal introductions to traditional theological disciplines. They were interested in learning to live as Christians, responding appropriately to the demands of modern living, and developing the ability to live out their faith in the world.

It should be noted that comparatively few of the resources listed in the above review focus on how faith applies to life. While some courses may

maintain that this is their aim, in most cases, curricula are based on the traditional disciplines of theology and Biblical studies, or on the specific development of skills for particular forms of ministry. In few cases do the curricula take the situations of life as their starting points and bring to bear the Christian traditions and resources on those situations.

There were four areas in which the *Survey on Lay Adult Education* asked people about their interest in education. The first of these was aspects of faith and life. The second had to do with personal development. The third was that of ministry through the church. The fourth area was ministry beyond the church.

While it may be desirable from the point of view of the church institution to concentrate on areas of faith and ministry, these cannot be divorced from areas of personal development. Personal development may often be necessary to prepare people for wider ministry to others. It is an important initial step in preparing for leadership.

The interest shown in each of these areas is found in the following tables.

Faith and Life Issues	"Much"	"Some"
How faith applies to life	48.8	20.4
Understanding the Bible	35.6	26.8
Modern Christian thinking	20.5	25.3
The mission of the Church	19.5	29.1
Church history	8.9	22.1
Personal Development	"Much"	"Some"
Personal relationships	26.8	26.6
Finding meaning in life	21.8	25.7
Stress management	20.8	25.9
Developing self-confidence	20.0	26.5
Decision-making	16.5	25.0
Marriage enrichment	16.2	20.3
Retirement	15.5	24.1
Parenting	13.9	12.7
Ministry in the Church	"Much"	"Some"
Sharing faith with others	25.7	28.1
Pastoral care and visiting	17.9	26.9
Church music	16.6	18.3
Working with children	14.2	18.3
Counseling	13.5	21.3
Eldership	12.9	15.8
Workings of Uniting Church	12.7	25.8
Small group leadership	9.6	18.9

Ministry beyond the Church

	"Much" interest	"Some"
involvement in community	16.9	29.0
ethical issues in society	12.3	21.7
work or professional life	11.6	17.7
social or political issues	10.6	20.5

When asked about the contexts in which people preferred to do their learning, apart from the traditional parish-based contexts of Sunday services or small groups, the most popular option was that of day workshops. This appears to accord with general patterns. It was reported by the Melbourne Council for Adult Education that there is a tendency towards shorter courses.

Resources of Interest	"Much"	"Some"
Day workshops	12.7	15.3
Regular magazine	10.5	19.4
Book or study kit	7.7	16.3
Video or cassette resources	7.6	15.3
Short course in Presbytery	6.9	12.9
Correspondence course	4.6	7.8

15% expressed at least some interest in taking up studies for a degree or a certificate course either at a city centre or by extension. Some people may prefer to choose to do such courses by correspondence, either because of distance from centres, or because of the convenience of doing it in one's own time. Any correspondence or extension programme needs to be supplemented by short workshops and seminars in various convenient locations, and where possible, by the organisation of small groups to meet from time to time where individuals could encourage each other, work together on projects, and help each other. The following table indicates the sort of courses in which people would be interested.

Area of Course	"Much" interest	"Some"
Pastoral care and counselling	6.6	8.7
Spirituality	6.3	9.1
Theology and Biblical studies	6.2	9.2
Religious education	3.1	8.7

When the emphasis is placed on relating faith to life and community change, education may be more effective if it takes place in the context of a community. A correspondence course which is taken alone may be suitable for the passing on of certain knowledge and concepts, but is not appropriate for other kinds of education. Thus, it is often preferable for education to occur with people in groups where there can be a sharing

of experience and reflection together on situation and faith. If the aim of the educational activity is community change, then it is important to work with the community.

The figures above represent a fairly substantial interest in increased resources for Christian education, and indicate that parishes are filling only part of the demand. 20% indicating "much" interest in a particular area amounts to 280 people in our sample. If it is assumed that all those people who received a questionnaire but did not complete it were not interested, the percentage interested is reduced to 16% of church attenders. However, this is still a very substantial number.

2. Training for Specified Ministries.

A second area is the need for training for the increasing numbers of people who have recognised ministries in the church, paid or voluntary, apart from that of 'the general practitioner' minister or priest. In other words, there are increasing numbers of people in the churches who have responsibility for ministries, but who may not be in a position to do a full theological degree, or find that necessary for their ministry.

Amongst such people, are youth leaders, pastoral assistants, educators, children's workers, administrators, chaplains, some missionary workers, lay preachers and lay pastors.

In some denominations, the facilities for training people for most of these ministries are scarce. There are few recognised schemes for training.

The 1991 national Assembly of the Uniting Church moved a long way in recognising such ministries. It named as 'specified ministries' those of lay pastor, and youth minister, along with that of lay preacher and initiated the task of developing criteria for suitable preparation and accreditation. The *Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church* suggests that people who are called to such ministries should

undergo a period of formation for their ministry. This formation will vary in length and content according to the particular ministry, and may be pre-service, in-service, by theological education by extension (distance education), long or very short. It will focus on developing an individual's gifts and skills and may involve acquiring a qualification.

Ideally, such education procedures would be designed independently of those of the theological colleges, continuing education for clergy, or lay education, allowing people preparing for such ministries to orient

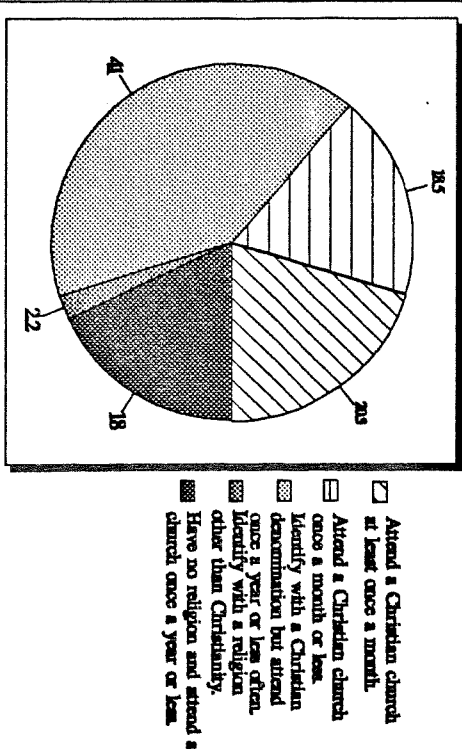
their studies fully to their special ministries. In practice, appropriate training may combine elements found in various locations. It would also be necessary to include specific courses of training involving field education, in which there was reflection on the practice of their special ministries.

3. *Christian Education for non-Church Attenders*

There is a third area of Christian education which could be taken up. There are many people in our society who do not attend churches, but maintain the values of the Christian faith. Indeed, this is the majority position among Australians. According to data from the National Social Science Survey of 1989, 28% of Australians identify with one Christian denomination or another, but attend never or less than once a year. Another 34% of Australians identify with a denomination but attend occasionally - no more than once a month. Most parish programmes touch only the 17% of Australians who attend more than once a month. There is a large target clientele of 62% of Australians for Christian education activities designed for those who never or occasionally attend church.

Many of these people may be open to the appropriate forms of Christian education. This may be especially true if those forms were separated from local church life. Some people are wary of local church involvement. Many of them have specifically rejected the church, yet may respond to other ways of encouraging them to take seriously the challenges of the Christian faith. For example, people take courses in religious studies at university to work out issues of faith in a "safe" and, in their view, neutral environment.

It may be possible for the churches to encourage TAFEs, universities, Councils of Adult Education and other non-church bodies to run such courses. The Council of Adult Education in Melbourne, for example, has indicated that it would be quite prepared to run seminars and short courses in conjunction with the Uniting Church, and is already doing so with the Australian Council of Churches. The Council would assist with advertising and administration, while the church would organise venues, curricula, and provide facilitators. On the other hand, it may also



Church Identification and Attendance of Australian Adults

Source: National Social Science Survey, 1989.

be possible for agencies of the churches to operate such courses themselves outside the parish structures.

A range of educational activities for these people is possible, including some with a specific religious or Biblical focus. Other activities might seek to discuss community and social issues in such a way that a Christian perspective might be introduced. Such activities may well be means whereby the church could promote informed discussion and community decision-making on social issues. They could provide an opportunity within a Christian framework for serious thought to be given to Christian perspectives on many aspects of life.

Issues of conservation, health, education, and economics might well be considered, for example. While there are many interest groups in our society promoting such discussions, it would be of great value to the community if the church took a lead in providing a forum for such discussions, and perhaps sought through them to find Christian perspectives.

There is an immense range of possible forms of activity in this area. Here are a few ideas:

1. Study circles (small groups) on theatre or films, perhaps showing films or promoting theatre and inviting people to engage in discussion following the event.
2. Holiday-time retreats in which reflections on faith were combined with recreation and times for spiritual formation.
3. Conferences on particular topics or themes.
4. Workshops on issues.
5. Overseas tours for observation of other cultures and religions.
6. Meetings for specific occupational groups.

Christian education designed to be of interest to non-church attenders could have immense possibilities. Yet, because of the lack of previous models, would take much time, effort, initiative and vision to implement.

If the first two areas of general Christian education and professional training correspond to the kind of training Jesus gave his disciples, then the third area corresponds to the teaching of the crowds.

4. Resourcing Christian Education in the Parishes.

Any programme which seeks to bring in individuals to a centre out of the context of their parish will attract only a limited number of people. For a wider influence, it is important that churches seek to raise awareness and levels of professionalism in Christian education in the parishes. There are some important advantages in working through parishes:

1. There are pre-existing communities which may be strengthened through educational programmes, and which may continue after a specific programme has been completed.
2. People are challenged to work together in community so that they seek together to implement change. The implementation of change is more likely to occur if a group for one parish works at the process together.
3. The parish setting may sometimes be closer to the environment to which people wish to relate their reflections. Thus, it may provide a more adequate setting for reflection.

The RENEW programme in the Catholic church is a good example of how a Catholic Lay Education Centre has had a tremendous influence with large numbers of people by working through parishes. The Centre

adapted the programme for local needs, encouraged the adoption of the programme, trained leaders, and provided resources. In many places, the results of the RENEW programme will long be felt.

5. Co-ordinating Available Resources

A major task is the co-ordination of available resources for lay education. As has been seen, a wide range of options is already available. Most lay people know little or nothing of these. While clergy receive some information through the mail, it is difficult to evaluate what is suitable for the congregation. The mere task of providing information to the members of the parish of the possibilities is formidable.

An important task which needs to be done in a centralised way is that of keeping records of what courses are available. There needs to be one place which people know they can contact for reliable information, and which can also promote and advertise relevant courses and resources.

The promotion of resources across denominational boundaries would enhance the ecumenical process and ensure that the widest range of resources become available to people of all denominations.

Chapter 4.

Basic Principles of Educating Adults

In recent years, there has been a growing realisation of the differences between the education of adults and the education of children. It has been traditionally assumed that in the education of children, there is a certain content which must be transmitted. In order for that transmission to occur, there must be an environment which encourages receptivity. Teachers must be respected. There must be some forms of assessment which ensure that the learning has taken place.

The process with adults is quite different. M. S. Knowles in *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* lists some basic assumptions whose validity has been widely recognised.

1. Self-Directed

Adults are generally self-directed in their learning. They will not take kindly to being told exactly what to do. Rather, it is important in adult education to enter into negotiations with the learner in order to determine the shape of the learning. This ability to be self-directed can be a great strength as it permits students to specialise in exactly those areas that are of particular interest and concern. Those responsible for organising the learning experience may allow students to negotiate their own tasks, and then assist the student by providing the facilities for accomplishing that task. With the growing use of computers and other facilities for learning, it has become increasingly possible for many programmes to be self-paced and even self-assessed.

This does not mean that adults prefer to be isolated in their learning. Rather, they look for the educational institution to provide the resources they need which will enable them to work on those resources.

7 See Paul Inglis, *Supporting Learning*, Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Queensland, 1989.

2. Own Experience

Adults have a reservoir of their own experience which they bring to the learning process. Adults do not come with a *tabula rasa*, but with a wealth of experience, to which new learning must relate. Adults bring to any formal or intentional experiences, the skills and knowledge that come from unintentional education. Much of our learning takes place through living in the world and through coping with the contingencies of life-situations. For intentional education to be of value, it must build on and integrate with these experiences where unintentional education has occurred.

Adults are aware of their own situations, their challenges and possibilities, and will often be looking for specific ways of dealing with their situations. As educational activities are designed, ways must be sought to relate them to the participants' own situations and frames of reference. One way in which this may be accomplished is by allowing adults to contribute to and participate in the educational activity. They will have their own views which they will want to express.

Many lay people undertaking Christian education have expertise in their own specialised areas. Their knowledge of particular disciplines or areas of life may provide them with conceptual schemes for dealing with the world. Such expertise may be useful tapped and developed both in the planning and the execution of educational activities.

Adult learners bring to the education activity a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. In any city in Australia, they will come from a variety of cultures and traditions. Adults also vary greatly in the pace at which they can work and assimilate new material. This variety will serve as a challenge to an adult educator, but if appropriately tapped can bring great richness to an educational activity.

Adults can encourage each other in learning. Their experiences are an important resource to be drawn upon.

3. Immediate Application

Adults have an expectation that learning will have immediate application. It is of considerable importance to adult students that they see the educational activity as having relevance to their personal interests and life-situations. Most adults have many constraints on their time and energy and will avoid those activities they see as having little immediate value for them.

Application of the learning is important for the educationalist as well. From an educational perspective, it is important that education not be a mere "depositing" of ideas or systems of beliefs, as Paulo Freire puts it, but involve the development of the living beliefs of the individual.⁸

These three principles of adult education have many implications for the ways in which adult education is conducted, including the following:

1. **Teaching Methods.** The lecture method is often quite inappropriate for the education of adults, except within limited areas of education. While there are times when information needs to be transmitted and opinions outlined, it is important that adults have the opportunity to express their opinions and to work on themes and problems themselves using a range of resources and materials given to them. It is of great importance to allow adults to draw on their own experience within the context of learning.

2. There will be many occasions when the contracting of specific educational activities will be appropriate, allowing students to specialise in those areas of specific interest and work at their own pace and in their own ways.

3. **Curriculum Design.** Curricula should generally be problem centred rather than subject centred, in order to ensure that the application of education is at the centre of the process. Thus, it may well be desirable to build courses around problems rather than trying to systematically cover areas of knowledge.

4. **Assessment.** Traditional forms of assessment through examination are often inappropriate. Tests do not recognise the variety of experiences which adults bring to their learning, or their desire for self-direction, or their interest in immediate application. It is interesting to note that in 1990, two thirds of students enrolled for the Th.A. through the Australian College of Theology failed to present themselves for examination. Other forms of self-assessment, and assessment through assignments, interviews, presentations, and journal-writing may be much more appropriate for adults. Nevertheless, there is an increasing concern in adult

8 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin, 1972. ch.2.

education that what has been accomplished is publicly recognised, and is recognised in such a way that it provides pathways to further learning.

5. **Planning and Administration.** From the initial stages of planning adult education activities, adults who may be involved should be permitted to be part of the planning process. L. McKenzie in *The Religious Education of Adults* emphasises that the need for participation does not just occur within the learning context, but also in the planning of the provision of the learning context. Only in that way can the participation of people be ensured.

6. **The Teacher.** The adult teacher must be a facilitator, rather than a lecturer, in order to motivate adult learners. The teacher must seek to draw out of the learner what is already known and experienced, and to help the learner to move beyond that, exploring new ground in a non-threatening way. The teacher must take into account the particular needs and interests with which the learner comes, and build on these as the motivational ground for the educational experience.

In addition to these general principles of adult education discussed by Knowles, there are some other principles which apply generally to lay adult Christian education.

4. *Learning Within the Situation*

It is sometimes appropriate to enable people to learn within their situations rather than take them out of them. Many educational experiences explicitly remove people from their life-environment. Yet, this can make the learning artificial and hard to relate to the practical problems of the life situation. It is helpful, although sometimes more difficult, to work with people in their situations. On the other hand, there are occasions when it is necessary to withdraw from the situation to see it more clearly.

It was argued in an article in the *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education* that conventional methods of university training for agricultural students had led to graduates who had a very fragmented view of their world, and had little idea what it was to be like to be a farmer living in an environment of uncertainty and ambiguity. The article said that such graduates are ill-prepared for a complex, dynamic

world, where it makes more sense to think in terms of 'messes' of many problems interacting together rather than simple problems with technical solutions (and where it is more appropriate to think in terms of 'improving situations' rather than 'solving problems').⁹

This is a problem likely to arise with traditional methods of Christian education in which people are removed from their situations and taught in such a way that makes it difficult to apply concepts to the practical contingencies of life situations.

5. *Education in Community*

It is sometimes preferable to work with communities. Often change occurs, not through the change in individuals, but change in whole communities. To the extent to which we are interested in changing church communities and social communities beyond the church, it is important to work, where possible, with the whole communities.

Sometimes people who have had important educational experiences, and who have new insights and visions can no longer fit back into the environments from which they came because other people have not changed. This has been the experience in some youth training programmes, for example. Young people have caught a new vision of the work of the church but have felt frustrated with their own parishes. Where possible, it is better to seek to change the whole parish although it may be a much slower process than working with a few individuals who are looking for education.

It may be possible to educate people within a community by conducting the educational activities with a group from a particular parish or locality, and preferably in their own environment. It can also be done sometimes by working through the pre-existing groups and structures in parishes and Presbyteries.

Working with communities ensures the building of community. It helps people to build continuing friendships that may well be effective in continuing the educational experience and application of the learning.

9 Richard Bawden and Robert D. Macadam, "Towards a University for People-Centred Development: A Case History of Reform", *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, Vol. 30, No.3, November 1990, p.144.

6. *Avoid Clericalising the Laity*

It is important to avoid clericalising the laity. The lay people, in general, do not want to be "little clergy". Indeed, many are very wary of this, and will avoid what they see as the study of the discipline of theology. Many hold theological colleges in suspicion. The language of theology and its methodological assumptions appear to be irrelevant to their own 'secular' situations. This is a good reason to divorce lay education from theological education for the training of clergy. If the two are separated, and the lay education successfully builds its own image as relevant to living in the world, it will appeal to a much larger group of people than if training of clergy and lay people is not separated.

One of the most widely circulated discussion starters in the Uniting Church on the question of the ministry of the laity is an article by Andrew Dutney in 'A Worldly Calling: The Uniting Church Begins A Second Decade'.¹⁰ In his article, Dutney quotes Ronald Wilson's Presidential address "It seems to me that the church has yet to learn to provide you and me consistently with the relevant support that we need in order to be faithful witnesses to the presence of God in the places where we live and work". This is the critical point which Dutney expands:

In the name of 'lay ministry' we have encouraged members to relocate their witness within the church's own 'inner structures' and, as a church, virtually ignored 'that part of the world where its members live and work'. So we recruit our members for fund raising. We put them on our administrative committees. We channel their energy and creativity into our liturgical life. We devise parish programmes of pastoral care and community service. And all so that our members can exercise their gifts - within the church. We have begun to ecclesiasticise and clericalise the laity. We have begun to domesticate the witness of the church."

This issue has been taken up in *Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia*. In relation to people seeing their worldly calling as a vocation for ministry, the report says,

Clearly, the church has a vital educational task in order to fully acquaint its members with the nature of their ministries in the world. [p.26.]

10 *St Mark's Review*, Spring 1988, No.135.

Ministry in the church and in the world do not necessarily conflict. Indeed, if the church is true to its mission, its ministry will be to the world. There will be need to be a movement in training for ministry which begins with seeking wholeness and fulfilment for individuals in their own situations, dealing with their own problems and conflicts, but finding its ultimate resolution in their preparation for ministry to others. So there will also be a movement from dealing with church life and preparing people to participate in it towards helping people to find the fulfilment of that in ministry in the world. Nevertheless, in practice, it is easy for that movement to stop short of dealing with ministry in the world. There is a tendency for church institutions to train people to serve the needs of the institution rather than focusing on the world beyond the institution. Because people involved are contacted through the institution of the church and identify the education-giver in that context, there is a tendency for them to expect that of the church's educational processes. It will involve an extra-ordinary effort for education for mission in the wider world (not excluding the church) to be the true focus of lay education. But unless that occurs, such education will not be true to the nature of the church's mission.

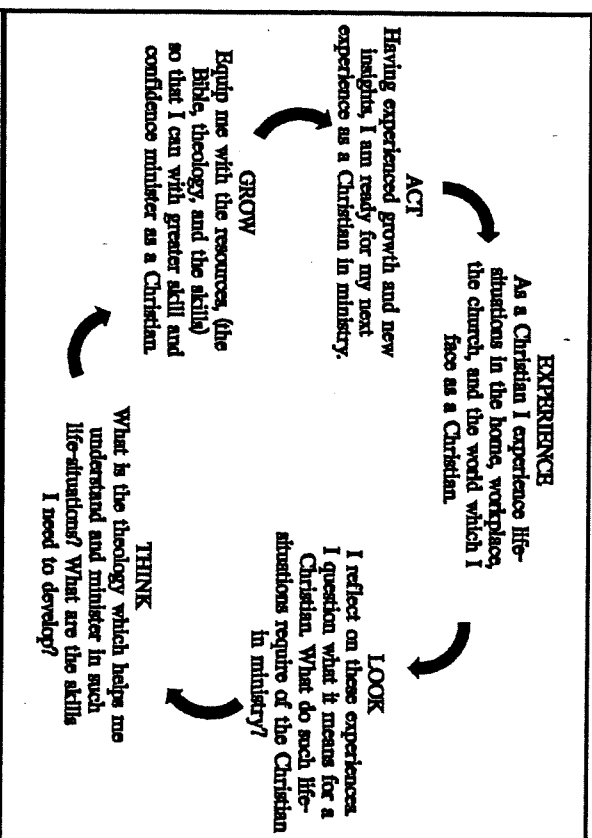
The principles expressed in the introduction to the Uniting Church South Australian Lay Ministry Certificate Course are interesting.

The life-situations and experiences in which we are placed as Christian disciples are the beginning and the continuing point for learning. The life situations to which we are called by God are those for which we will be learning and becoming further equipped.

How will this be done? The diagram gives us the direction. At each point we have Christian living, action and service in mind. The episodes of our experience are to be reflected on and questioned. We will see the resources of our faith, and the methods of Bible study, prayer, theology and skill-training to grow in our effectiveness as Christians. Then we will face new life-situations both better equipped but also keener to reflect, adapt and grow.¹¹

To this statement from the Handbook of the Lay Ministry Certificate Course in South Australia, we would only add that, where appropriate,

- 11 Uniting Church in Australia Synod of South Australia, *Lay Ministry Certificate Course Handbook 1991*. p.2.



The Learning Cycle

Source: Lay Ministry Certificate Course Handbook, Uniting Church, Synod of South Australia. 1991. p.2.

the cycle of experience, reflection and action, takes place, not just as an individual event but in the contexts of a communities of people.

These principles are not only educational, but reflect some themes in current theological thinking. The Liberation theologians, for example, have drawn argued that theologising is a process that interacts with human experience of the world. They have drawn attention to the fact that thinking of every kind necessarily takes place in a cultural milieu and a political context. Thinking about the Christian faith is no exception. In order to be true to the faith, we must continually reflect on it in relation to our situation.¹²

- 12 Juan Luis Segundo speaks of the hermeneutical circle in *The Liberation of Theology*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977. This has been applied to the Western situation by Robert Schreier in *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985.

Chapter 5.

Motivation

In some adult learning, there is external motivation provided by an employment situation. By moving successfully through a course, the learner gets a certificate which will enhance work prospects. Some skills are developed through which new tasks at work may be tackled allowing the person to apply for new positions. This may well be the case in the education of people for specified ministries, particularly when people are receiving some remuneration from churches.

In most adult lay education in the church such external motivations are not present. The learner cannot look forward to a higher income or a better position as a result of learning. Thus the inner motivations have all the more significance. Religious education must consider life-stage questions and personal interests.

There is a possibility of conflict between designing education around the needs of the institution rather than the needs of the individuals undertaking education. If the survival of the church as an institution becomes the motive for education, then it is not likely to attract many people to its programmes.

For many people, learning is painful. Learning is especially threatening to those who have low self-esteem. People are afraid of being shown as ignorant. Gentleness and sensitivity are very important in motivating people to want to learn.¹³

Motivation is a major problem today in the face of what might be described for many people as a lack of focus in life. Especially in urban areas, people are living in a much wider community than they used to do. Part of the reason for this is that they have ready access to private transport. They are no longer restricted to facilities within the immediate neighbourhood. The fact that the majority of married women are

engaged in the work-force means that they also spend less time in the immediate neighbourhood. There are few ties with the neighbourhood that enable a sense of community to be built. The result is that people engage with a variety of communities through their work, their long-term friendships, their leisure activities, their hobbies, their shopping and through other forms of community involvement. Children's involvement in a range of activities increases the strain. These activities take people into a variety of communities have little overlap and are often in different geographical localities. The result is that life becomes fragmented. People have no focus to life in one principal community, but are pulled in many directions. Some people fall between the fragments and feel no sense of belonging to any community. Many find it difficult to commit themselves to any particular focus. There are many things they would like to do in life, but few they actually get around to doing.

The particular demographic characteristics of the possible users of Christian lay adult education should be noted. The percentage of retired people is likely to increase rather than decrease, in part due to demographic characteristics of the population. (In the sample of Uniting Church attenders in the *Survey on Lay Adult Christian Education* 24% were over 70 and a total of 46% were over 60.) Older people are increasingly open to the fact that they can still learn, but their interests are often different from those of younger people. In general, the goals of older people in religious education will include:

1. A broadening of the mind. Desire for a sense of integrity and wholeness.

2. Social contacts.

3. Spare-time enjoyment.¹⁴

There are some older people who feel that education is beyond them. This was evident in some of the responses to the survey. However, there is a pool of younger retirees in their sixties who might take up opportunities, as long as they felt that the educational opportunities would be paced at a rate they could manage, and would not be too dependent on memory. They may be joined by other people in their fifties, whose children are no longer at home, and who feel they have time for some extra activities of this kind.

¹³ Arthur Pearce, *Motivation within Adult Religious Education*, 1982. Griffith University, Grad. Dip. R.E. thesis.

¹⁴ See Linda Jane Vogel, *The Religious Education of Older Adults*, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1984.

In the past, married women with older children might have taken up opportunities for Christian education. Today, many of those people are engaged in the work-force and have little flexible time. There may also be some younger people who might take up courses: people who have not started their own families, but who feel they are still finding their careers and discovering their directions for life.

In order to motivate people, a number of things need to occur.

1. General Expectation of Engagement in Christian Education

There needs to be a rise in the expectation that people will in fact engage in Christian education. Expectations develop gradually. If some are doing it, others may well follow, especially if it seen as "the thing to do". Clergy can play some part in raising expectations. Councils and committees of the church can also suggest that those with leadership positions take up opportunities to do some courses or workshops related to their responsibilities.

The motivation goes back to the training that clergy receive. Few clergy do much training in Christian education. Few see that as a major task of the church - although many of the laity do. If education is a recognised part of church life, then there is a greater chance that people will engage themselves in it.

The development of that expectation resides in the understanding of the nature of the Christian faith. If the faith is seen simply as "doing to others as you would have them do to you", there will be little perception of a need for adult Christian education. On the other hand, the faith may be seen as a dimension of life in which there is always a need for growth. As people seek to relate to and cope with the constantly changing social and personal environment, faith will provide resources and directions. As people respond to the constant stream of information and propaganda which bombards them, faith will inform and shape their responses. Then, people will see a need for on-going Christian education. The structuring of church activities with an emphasis on small groups and on the on-going exploration of the faith will encourage people to engage in further education.

2. Co-ordinated Planning and Advertising

Co-ordinated planning and advertising can assist in promoting Christian education. It is important both to discover what people feel they want and to seek to make people aware of possibilities and challenges. Just as it is difficult to find out what is wanted, so it is also difficult to tell people what is available, when, where and by whom.

Some denominations could develop a more co-ordinated approach to planning and advertising. The development of bodies which might provide a data-base of available resources would be of great value.

In the development of programmes, market research can assist in understanding people's current interests, and what groups of people might respond. In providing programmes, it is important to target particular groups and provide appropriate facilities. For example, older people will be reluctant to go out at night. Younger people may require child care facilities. Few families are willing to accept the idea of courses at weekends.

3. Facilities and Resources

There need to be appropriate facilities and resources. The ease with which people can attend programmes and the comfort they enjoy while there are important to motivation. Most people have a high standard of comfort in their homes. Cold, uninviting rooms, lecturers who do not prepare, do not make personal contact or take personal interest, resources which are recommended but unavailable, and poor facilities all help to discourage adults from engaging in educational activities. It is important that "school rooms" or even "lecture rooms" not be used. Such an environment can be very off-putting.

Courses need to be located relatively close to where people live. Most people, for example, who participate in courses at the Melbourne Council of Adult Education live within 14 kilometres of the Centre. Some people will go 100 kilometres for a one-day workshop or residential school. However short-term courses and seminars need to take place in local centres.

If residential facilities are provided these must be of a high standard. Most people high standards of comfort in their daily lives, and it is of even greater importance to many older people. There need to be adequate provisions of public telephones and even fax machines if professional people are likely to be involved.

People also expect the availability of modern technological equipment in educational activities, and expect that it will be well-used. Teachers should be trained in the use of over-head projectors, and facilities made available for producing them on laser printers, for example. People expect hand-outs, and expect these to be of high quality with a prolific use of graphics. Many younger people especially are not used to reading large blocks of text.

4. High Quality Educational Activities

A consistently high quality in the programmes is essential to maintain people's interest. The Council of Adult Education noted that people will not easily tolerate poor quality teaching. Programmes need to be of high quality to engage people. This does not mean that a great deal can be assumed in content, or in theological language by those organising the educational activity. It does mean that many people will bring a high level of conceptual ability - although often from other frameworks.

There needs to be feedback during courses and careful evaluation at the end. The involvement of those who have come to learn in those processes of evaluation helps them to take a little more responsibility for the courses.

5. Public Recognition of Course Involvement

Motivation is increased as there is public recognition of what is done in such courses. Ministers, elders councils and other groups within the church can be encouraged to recognise publicly what people have accomplished, and ensure that skills that have been developed are appropriately used.

The potential of the development of lay adult Christian education is enormous. In our rapidly changing society, education which assists people in relating faith to life and coping with the complexity of life has become very important. Parishes need assistance in providing appropriate facilities. Few can meet the range of needs in depth or in diversity of interest within their own congregational structures.

In the past, churches have been very significant providers of education for adults, although not all would have seen the Sunday sermon in that way. Unless Christian education is taken seriously today, the churches will be left behind in this rapidly developing enterprise.

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