

The Story of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)

In Canon Law, a confraternity is a voluntary association of the faithful, established and guided by ecclesiastical authority for the promotion of special works of Christian charity and piety. The special work of our Confraternity is the religious instruction of Catholic children attending Government schools.

Confraternities of Christian Doctrine were set up in the Post Reformation period, when Catholic schools had not come into general usage. They commenced in Italy, where an organisation of lay people undertook the task of instructing children in the truths of the faith.

In 1905 Pope Pius X ordered that a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine be set up in every parish in the world. This decree has been incorporated in Canon Law. This Church law was acted upon and grew rapidly in the United States of America, where there was no provision for teaching religion in other than church schools, which were few in number.

In Australia early this century, most Catholic children attended church schools and the number attending Government schools did not warrant a fully established confraternity, although there were lay catechists attending some schools. These children were also catered for by lay people, especially the Theresian Association, who conducted Sunday and afternoon classes.

However, there was a huge influx of immigrants to our country during the post World War II period and Father Kevin McGovern was asked in 1958 to look into this situation and do some experimental work. This having been done, it was essential that a competent committee be set up to organise and train catechists to meet the needs of the Archdiocese of Sydney.

In 1959, His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy commissioned the then Bishop James Freeman to set up a working model for the commencement of the 1960 school year. A group of four priests under the leadership of Father R. Davey formed a committee to establish the CCD. An appeal was made and responded to by 600 untrained men and women.

The Sisters of St Joseph had a series of lesson leaflets, which Sr Peter Dwyer RSJ (Sr. Kathleen) had written for a correspondence lesson scheme for country children. The Sisters put these at the disposal of the Confraternity. In February 1961, the first Diploma Course was established and the first Diploma 1 certificates presented on April 25, 1961. The course was held in eight centres of the Archdiocese.

Much hard work was put into this project by all concerned, but they were rewarded to see its rapid growth, of which all Catechists are now a part.

Win Thompson