

To the Patriarchy of Romania, Department “The Church and the Society”, and to
Priest Dorel Nicolae Motoc, Patriarchy Adviser

Below you will find several remarks on the Manual of Youth Clubs, proposed by the New Horizons Foundation, Lupeni, concerning the implementation of the social project “The Consolidation of Community Initiatives for Prevention of HIV / AIDS, and of Domestic Violence in Romania”, financed by the Government of the United States of America, through the USAID program.

1. The manual under discussion has been realized by the Community Initiative Clubs for Youth (IMPACT);

2. Taking into account that the Romanian Orthodox Church, as institution, alongside its servants (priests, religion professors etc) have a special impact on youth and on society in general, the initiators of this project seek to engage the Church, through priests, religion professors and youth, in the development of social capital in Romania.

It is justly considered that Romania’s weak development is to be explained, among other causes, through the deficiency of social capital. For this reason, through this project the Church is given the possibility to guide the citizens on the path of societal harmony, not only through the classical means - teachings, religious masses in the Church etc - but also through practical activities outside the Church. Only in this way, in the long run, we may hope for the eradication of social problems like the poverty, child abandonment, environmental issues, corruption etc;

3. The program focuses on teaching the youth to manage and overcome the crisis situations encountered in life, for example the unemployment. The program intends to develop skills, stimulate youth’s initiatives, develop a strong psychological structure, raise the optimism and the enthusiasm of the youth;

4. Starting from Father Dumitru Staniloae’s approach of the Orthodox theology - with a strong emphasis on love, opening towards God and love and caring for

one's fellows – the authors of the project advance ways of translating this theology into practice, within the Church and the community.

This means moving from discourse to practice, in a highly pragmatic manner. In this way, the extraordinary theological intuition of the Holy Fathers and of Father Dumitru Staniloae acquires applicability and liveliness. Actually, the education through community service represents a way to transform theology into practice. The fact that the initiators of this youth program and the founders of IMPACT are American citizens converted to Orthodoxy illustrates the evolution from theory to practice and tangibility;

5. The structure of the weekly meetings organized by IMPACT (consisting of games, moralizing stories, learning how to write a project) encourages, in a laudable manner, the development of a sense of solidarity and empathy between people, in an increasingly secularized society, where isolation, individualism and self-interest predominate;

6. The pedagogy used by IMPACT is a pragmatic one, reminding that it operates with games and stories. When applied by priests or by religion professors – with the help of examples from the lives of saints, and of parables offered by Jesus - this pedagogy will be very efficient, contributing to the promotion among youth, of healthy moral and spiritual values.

7. In order to promote such moral and Christian spiritual values, the education model advanced by the project can become beneficial and efficient under a sole condition: to be applied mostly by priests and by trained religion professors. Otherwise, the boomerang effect may appear, as using unconventional teaching tools may result in the manipulation and alienation of youth. This is due particularly to the fact that the proposed model uses a pedagogy which reminds, in many respects, of the pedagogy used in the Waldorf schools (anthroposophist pedagogy). Additionally, the very notions of “youth club”, “club manual”, “networks” (New Age like), so frequently used in this program, are questionable from this perspective.

8. The project under discussion – the way it is conceived and presented - does not intend to promote exclusively a religious education among youth, although being developed by priests or religion professors, the education may acquire such character. That is why the project has to be adapted by the “facilitators”, the IMPACT leaders (in our case the priests and the religion professors). By and large, the project promotes an education which encourages the equality among the members of a community, by eliminating the idea of authority, of a “boss”, from

the mentality of participants. The purpose of this education is to stimulate the self confidence, the trust in one's own powers, the emancipation and the discovery of one's latent energies. This kind of education can be beneficial in many fields. Within the Church, however, the idea of authority derives from the very authority of God. That is why, if applied strictly in this way, the project may produce unfortunate effects for the conscience and the mentality of youth. The priests and the religion professors who will be co-opted in the implementation of the program must be permanently aware of the fact that, in their relation with God and with the Church, these young people need to maintain a balance between freedom and responsibility.

9. Conclusions

- the education model proposed can be applied without difficulty, under the supervision and authority of the Church;
- developed under the authority of the Church's servants, the program can become an applied theology, contextualized and beneficial for the youth to whom it addresses;
- the program can contribute to stimulating the youth to care for the others, to be concerned for the community, and to courageously overcome the crisis situations;
- applied under the above mentioned conditions, the program excludes any social, moral or other type of risks.

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