

The “Cube of Love” Education Programme

As a preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, the “Cube of Love” programme has been gradually introduced to primary schools around Ireland.

Up until recently the “Cube of Love” was used mainly by children and some primary teachers who know the Focolare.

Last July the Focolare met with Fr Kevin Doran, Secretary General of the International Eucharistic Congress (IEC). He spoke about how the IEC was not merely an important event in 2012, but that it was a journey with the preparation for it, and the follow-up afterwards also an integral part of the programme. A number of ways in which to collaborate were suggested, and one was by introducing the “Cube of Love” to primary schools (for children 4-12 years old).

Áine Jordan, one of the “Cube of Love” team in Ireland explained: “Some teachers and parents reflected on the theme for the Eucharistic Congress: ‘The Eucharist: Communion with Christ and with one another’. We realised that the “Cube of Love” could really help us to respond concretely each day to the call of Jesus (whom we receive in the Eucharist) to love one another as he has loved us.”

The “Cube of Love” is now rolled every morning by an estimated 2500 children in over 40 primary schools around Ireland, ranging from small rural schools to large city schools. It is regarded as “a great way to start our day”. Each face of the cube has a phrase based on the Gospel, such as “love one another”, “be the first to love”, “love your enemy”. The children (and the teacher!) take that phrase as their personal and class motto for the day. They read a prayer from the “Cube of Love” Prayer Booklet corresponding to the phrase that came up when the cube was rolled. Now they are ready to start their day!

“What’s important about the ‘Cube of Love’ is that the children are not just learning six phrases based on the Gospel, but they are learning how to put the Gospel into practice in their normal school lives” said Declan O’Brien, who recently retired as principal teacher of St. Conleth’s Primary School in Co Kildare, and who has used the “Cube of Love” throughout the school over the past 6 years. “I was interested in it as it as a way to teach gospel values in our school which is a Catholic school but also has pupils of other faiths and of no faith at all, but no one seemed to have any difficulties with using the Cube of Love.”

Shane, an 8-year-old boy from Kildare, had many experiences of putting the Gospel into practice throughout the day in school and at home.

“My two friends were fighting with each other. One of them wanted to play with me, and to leave the other person out. I remembered: **Love everyone** and I said: ‘we should all play together.’ So we all went for a cycle together and had a lovely time,” he described one.

Sophie, a 9-year old girl from another school in Dublin, told how she was very insulted by a classmate and explained: “One day somebody called me a boy. I thought it was not very nice

and for the rest of the day I did not feel good, and that person did not say sorry. I thought of the Cube of Love: ‘**Love your Enemy**’ and I forgave him.”

The “Cube of Love” is being introduced to schools in two distinct ways. The programme is advertised on the website of the International Eucharistic Congress (www.iec2012) and many teachers and whole schools have been asking for the “Cube of Love” pack via this website. These teachers are offered further support as they implement the programme, and are encouraged to give lots of feedback also. The Cube of Love team have been impressed by this response from schools: “We have recently spoken to a representative of the Association of Religious advisors for Primary Schools who is using the cube with great results in the schools of her diocese. She would like us to present the Cube of Love to the Association’s AGM in September”, they told Living City.

Members of the Focolare in Ireland are also introducing the “Cube of Love” to their local schools; in particular the priests have been enthusiastic in rolling the cube in their parish schools. Another surprising development is that because of demand, the team are now busy producing an Irish Language “Dísle an Ghrá” pack for those schools where all subjects are taught through Irish.

One primary teacher, who knew the Focolare as a child and as a teenager and now teaches in a school for children with special educational needs, found the “Cube of Love” to be of immense help when preparing his class for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The local bishop also became involved, and after the Confirmation ceremony, the pupils themselves introduced the “Cube of Love” to younger children in their school who were preparing for First Holy Communion. (see panel for more).

The International Eucharistic Congress finishes with Mass in Croke Park – Ireland’s top sports arena - on June 17. However, the pupils and teachers of many primary schools around Ireland will be rolling the “Cube of Love” long after that, getting closer to Christ and to one another as they spin that little cube every morning.