

New Concepts of Fire Safety Result From Holocaust at Chicago School

BY LOUIS CASSELS
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Great tragedies can teach great lessons.

On Dec. 1, 1958, fire destroyed Our Lady of the Angels parochial school in Chicago. Ninety-two children and three nuns died in the holocaust.

Numbered by horror and fully aware that a similar disaster could occur in any community, the nation began taking stock of the fire safety precautions in its schools.

From this study, new concepts of fire safety have emerged which promise better protection for America's children.

One of the most radical decisions which safety authorities have reached is that so-called "fireproof construction"—actually, the use of fire-resistant materials in buildings—has been greatly overrated as a first line of defense against school fires.

Revision Proposed

The National Fire Protection association recently proposed a far-reaching revision of its code which would virtually eliminate present requirements for fire-resistant construction.

Association officials feel that fire-resistant construction, which adds enormously to school building costs, may do little good, and indeed may do positive harm by inducing a false sense of security.

"The spread of heat and smoke in a fire is so rapid that effects are likely to be fatal if occupants have not already escaped long before the building structure itself becomes involved," explained Horatio Bond, the association's chief engineer.

The new recommendations of the association put primary emphasis on other safety measures, including an abundance of well-located exits; the prohibition of certain wall-finish materials with high combustibility; and the installation of automatic sprinkling systems.

Sprinklers Valuable

Bond said sprinklers are especially valuable because they tend to prevent a fire from expanding beyond its point of origin, and help to bring it under control before the entire building is filled with lethal gases, smoke or flames.

Robert M. Dillon, architect-consultant to the education facilities laboratories, said the emerging concepts of school fire safety are built around the recognition that "the first few minutes are the crucial ones."

"From the standpoint of life safety, the problem resolves itself into getting the children out of the building as fast as possible after a fire begins."

The ideal safety situation, he said would be found "if the

school were so designed that each classroom had massive, direct exits to the outside, and a system that would give warning within seconds after the inception of a fire."

While schools should certainly be equipped with the best modern fire-warning devices, authorities emphasized that undue reliance should never be placed on any automatic equipment.

"Mechanisms and devices are subject to failure, even with continual inspection and maintenance," said Charles F. Carroll, North Carolina's State Superintendent of Public Instruction. "If one method of alarm fails, another should be immediately at hand. Since anyone may discover a fire, everyone must know what to do if he does."

Student Training Advised

Carroll has advised North Carolina schools to train all students in giving fire alarms, and to conduct "realistic" fire drills.

Too many fire drills, he said, consist of "the orderly marching of complacent companies of carefree children—always out the same door at the same time of day."

To condition children against panic when a real emergency comes, he advocates injecting realism into drills by such methods as "the blocking of a familiar exit" or "choosing an inconvenient time, such as a lunch hour, a basketball game or a rainy day."

Oil Firms Worry About Small Cars

Tulsa, Okla. (UPI)—Small, compact cars are causing a ripple of concern among major oil companies, the trade magazine Oil—Gas Journal says.

Gasoline consumption for passenger cars in the U.S. this year will be about 2 per cent below what it would have been, if all cars were standard size, a Journal survey showed.

For the individual compact-car owner, improved mileage should mean a saving of about \$60 per year.

MAIL TRIBUNE, Medford, Or.
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Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, a newspaper editor, a women's editor and two writers. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors.

Mrs. K. G.—She is involved with a good-for-nothing. Pauline G.—Love is more important than money.

Mrs. K. G.—My husband and I are heartbroken about our 22-year-old daughter. Pauline. She recently turned down a fine young man who is going to inherit a successful business because she is in love with a good-for-nothing.

Pauline has been going out with Bob since she was 18 and he doesn't seem any nearer to making something of himself than he was four years ago. He has worked as truck driver, gas station attendant and a lot of other things, but he doesn't stick to anything and doesn't have ideas about advancing himself.

Aside from that he is unsociable and makes a very poor appearance. What does a pretty girl see in a man like that?

Pauline G.—I think my parents are horrible. All they think about is money, money, money. I think love is a lot more important.

My parents did everything in their power to push me into marriage with Bert—just because of his money. But I couldn't stand him. After I came home from my dates with him I just cried. I did my best to force myself to go out with him for my parents' sake, but it was just no good.

My parents have hated Bob from the beginning, but they have never been able to break us up. We sometimes try to break together, again. I think this proves we really love one another and that's the only thing that counts.

The Council: Young people like to believe that all strong attachments are based in love, but unfortunately this just isn't the case. Psychiatrists and marriage counselors might go out of business if it were. Most of the couples consulting them are strongly attached, yet unable to give any love to one another.

Pauline's parents are making a mistake by emphasizing money as the big issue in this problem. Actually, it would not be a big issue if the young man in question was determined to marry. He would then do his level best to make a living and Pauline and he would be able to marry—even if they couldn't live in the highest style. The parents might wish for more material advantages for their daughter, but they would undoubtedly adjust to the situation and rejoice in the fact that she was happily settled.

As matters stand, however, we gather that the young man is not entirely focused on marriage. Possibly he uses his job shifts as a device to put off any important decision on the matter. Job-hopping isn't bad for a young fellow, provided he does a little growing from job to job. He should develop some sense of direction, decide where he wants to go and how he plans to get there.

Most young women eager for marriage avoid drifters like Bob. The fact that Pauline has become so fixated on such a man is a hint that she may not be as desirous of marriage at this time as she thinks she is. Her attachment to Bob may be one way of avoiding it.

We think the K.G.'s should let up the pressure and Pauline should try to concentrate on expanding and advancing her horizons, both job-wise and socially. She may suddenly find her problem has disappeared.

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