

Church Women Early In Ecumenical Work

By MRS. THERON T. HOLDEN, Director, United Church Women

"The work of church women is the work of women both in the church and corporately in councils of church women. United Church Women is more a 'movement' than an organization. Individuals with deep commitment and true dedication in their but greater opportunity through joint action in the community, the nation, and the world." These words were written for the April, 1964 "Church Woman" (interdenominational magazine) by Mrs. W. Murdoch MacLeod, national Director of United Church Women from 1918 to 1965.

This idea of church women moving out untidily into areas of need is clearly stated in Article I of new By-laws adopted in October, 1966: "The name of this movement shall be Church Women United in the U.S.A. Church Women United is a movement in which church women come together in a visible fellowship to witness to their faith in Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior and, enabled by His Spirit, go out together into every neighborhood and nation as instruments of His-reconciling love."

Women of the Protestant Churches have been pioneers in the ecumenical movement, uniting their efforts across denominational lines and joining Roman Catholic Women and women of other faiths in many areas of mutual interest and concern. They have had the courage and the wisdom to move out from their churches and from their denominations wherever and wherever certain things could be better done together.

United women's work actually began over 100 years ago when in New York City a "Union Missionary Society" was formed to meet the need for special work among women and children on the mission field. This helped to stimulate an interest in missions and from then on many missionary groups were organized on the local levels. The natural outcome was a special Day of Prayer which had its beginning in 1887 and is now observed annually on the first Friday of Lent and known as "World Day of Prayer."

In the early 1900's denominational women working together, accomplished many things which helped to coordinate missionary interests: they conceived the idea of interdenominational study materials and made this idea a reality; they planned and promoted area, regional, national and international schools of missions held during the summer months; they or-

ganized the "Committee on Christian Literature" to provide new readers in China, India, Korea and Japan with simple reading material. All of these united activities are still important parts of our interdenominational program.

During these years as church women became increasingly aware of the social problems in their communities, many local interdenominational groups were formed to better meet the challenges which surrounded them. Such a group was organized in Rochester in 1922 when representatives of eight denominations chose the name "Council of Church Women of Rochester and Vicinity" with the stated purpose: "To unify the women of the churches for Christian civic and social endeavor by the exchange of experiences and inspiration in



Open-house programs have given Catholics, Protestants and Jews opportunities to visit one another's places of worship informally for guided tours which explain ritual items and religious beliefs of the various denominations. This picture shows Arthur Bamann welcoming a group to St. Margaret Mary Church, Irondequoit, while another group gets a close-up glimpse of altar.

Vatican Council Unity Prelude

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tion of the Eucharist or commemoration of the Last Supper. I believe, nevertheless, that the logic of the decree must lead us in this direction.

Like the Orthodox, some of the Churches issued from the Reformation possess true sacraments, including the priesthood and the Eucharist, and they enjoy apostolic succession. The principles enunciated by Cardinal Lercaro for the Orthodox have equal validity for them.

Nor is the possibility of joining in commemoration of the Last Supper excluded even for those Churches and ecclesial communities which do not or may not possess sacraments as we understand them. For the decree insists that "when they commemorate the Lord's Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await his coming in glory."

Such developments may not be too far ahead in north-western Europe (Germany, France, the Low Countries), the same region in which the Reformation began. Thanks to the common suffering endured in two World Wars and the persecutions of Fascist and Red dictatorships, Christians there rediscovered each other in bomb shelters, jails and concentration camps. Elsewhere, the evolution will take more time.

In the United States, Catholics and Protestants live peacefully as citizens, but they have little understanding of the spiritual values each holds for the other. There is no doubt that since the Council we have many more contacts. But much remains superficial, at the level of politeness rather than that of confrontation.

The Council opened up yet another ecumenical arena, the theological implications of which I have as yet not seen explored anywhere. Its statement about the Jews in the declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions does more than correct beliefs commonly held by Catholics.

By stressing the "spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews," it poses the challenge of a return by Christians to worship in the synagogue. It was in the synagogue that Jesus taught and worshipped. The apostles decided at the First Council of Jerusalem that gentile converts were not bound by the prescriptions of the law of Moses, but they never suggested that it was improper to follow them. Here, it seems to me, we have a fruitful unexplored area for ecumenical meditation and action.

COURIER-JOURNAL 17B Friday, May 12, 1967

Barrett Montgomery who helped establish the annual observance of a "World Day of Prayer" had established an ecumenical study group as part of the Rochester council's program and then was named a member of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches and its American Committee; and — of course — Mrs. Harper Sibley "whose contagious spirit has touched the hearts of countless thousands in a common care for unity and the things that make for peace." This quote is from the October 10, 1966 program in Omaha, Nebraska at which time Mrs. Sibley was one of the three outstanding Christian women honored by the Board of Managers of United Church Women.

Mrs. Sibley's contributions to the total ecumenical movement are countless — particularly she has used her special gifts to help develop ways by which women may share in God's mission in their own communities and throughout the world. She has always served in so me-

capacity on the Rochester Council, and is a past-president and now Honorary President of its Board.

The United Council of Church Women chose Mrs. Sibley to be its president for three consecutive terms (1944-1950). Organized in 1941, this national Council became the General Department of United Church Women of the National Council of Churches when that body came into being in 1950. It is now one of five departments in the Council's Division of Christian Unity and in October, 1966 was renamed, "Church Women United in the U.S.A."

Through all of these changing patterns, one fact has remained firm: the local councils (of which there are approximately 6500 in the United States) have been the very heart of the movement. One of these is "United Church Women of Rochester and Vicinity, Inc." and it brings together women from approximately 150 churches, representing 15 different denominations in a broadly based program of worship, study, and action.

Specific projects it sponsors, include:

- Annual Legislative Institute on the most urgent and controversial legislation.
- Annual Mission Training Institute to present the interdenominational study materials.
- Literacy Volunteers (Each One Teach One) designed to

Exodus Blamed On Renewal Lag

Auckland — (NC) — A U.S. Benedictine priest, speaking at New Zealand's Christian Life Week liturgical conference here, told his audience of priests, religious and lay people that "in the United States there is almost a mass exodus from religious communities."

The priest, Benedictine Father Godfrey Diekmann, of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., went on to say that religious are leaving their communities "because they see no indication that the spirit of the Second Vatican Council is being taken seriously and new structures are being formed."

Big Type Paper From NY Times

A weekly newspaper with type larger than twice the size used by regular newspapers will be published regularly by the New York Times for the nation's visually handicapped. The first issue was issued Monday, March 6.

Described as the first publishing venture of its kind, the Large Type Weekly will include a review of the week's major national and international events, taken from the Sunday Times' News of the Week in Review section.

reach adult non-readers how to read and write.

• "Daily Hello" for shut-ins living alone.

It also co-sponsors:

• The Monroe County Migratory Ministry with the Council of Churches.

• "Open House" Project with Roman Catholics.

• "Living Room Dialogue" groups with Roman Catholics.

• WICS (Women in Community Service) — a program designed to recruit and screen young women for the Jobs Training Corp — with Roman Catholic and Jewish Women.

It supports international missions at home and abroad. It holds World Community Day, May Fellowship Day, and 35 World Day of Prayer Observances and promotes special projects in connection with each of these days. It offers hospitality and special opportunities for international students. It recruits volunteers for social services. It offers a Girl Scout God and Community Award.

In addition, UCW cooperates with other community groups such as Women's Human Relations Council; Volunteer Bureau, Council of Social Agencies; Christmas Bureau, Rochester Association of United Nations; Rochester International Friendship Council; et cetera.

In general, UCW works to coordinate the efforts of organized groups of church women of its member communions in areas of common concern and responsibility and "it offers membership to all women who are members of churches and communions which confess Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Savior and who desire to manifest oneness in Him through fellowship, study, and cooperative action."

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