

To Break Down Barriers Between People

Inner City Priests, Laymen Look at Church's Future Work "Where the Action Is"

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If you ask the average cleric or layman what the Church will be or must do in "The Next 100 Years", he will have to pause before making a guess and a prophecy. But this is not so with priests, Sisters and laity already deep in open-street ministry.

"The work of the Church in our day is to break down barriers between people." This statement by a diocesan priest, expresses a desire which is reinforced by the daily service of other priests, Sisters and laypeople now living in inner-city parishes of Rochester and Elmira.

Spatial barriers are breaking down, territorial lines once thought so sacred have given way to the arrival of workers from other parts of town and even parishes have grown by the arrival of people from all parts who are interested in the unique work of that church.

Most striking have been the new definitions of "ministry" and "mission" and "involvement"

which are expressed when priests and laity explain why they are working where they are and what the "action" of their work-day and night really is.

Father Benedict Ehmann, pastor of St. Michael's parish in Rochester, feels that his chief ministry is to make God real to his people by example, by persuasion and loving service, and to make the people real for God by reverence, by relevant preaching and by dynamic and joyful liturgy.

Disintegration of the old community in the Clinton-Joseph Avenue area, has been the chief social change in St. Michael's within the past few years; the incoming dwellers—Italians, Puerto Ricans, Negroes—have not as yet become integrated into one community.

Father Ehmann plans an ecumenical outreach to touch the lives of the unhurled: a youth ministry; a ministry to the aging; cirrillos; fiestas and Span-



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ish vernacular Masses for the Puerto Ricans and Cubans; special liturgies for the Italians; adult education, especially in scripture and theology; parish celebrations of neglected feasts.

In predicting the future of the church in inner city, Father Ehmann says:

"I cannot predict the sociological changes which may or may not profoundly affect the life of the Church in the inner city. I cannot say what will be. But I can say what there must be: the Church always "present" in the inner city—not necessarily or even desirably as an oversize, unwieldy parish, but perhaps much more desirably as a congeries of small communities, an interlocking, intercommunicating constellation of small congregations, alert, reaching out, constantly assessing themselves; reshaping and regrouping as the Spirit forwards their progress or as

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