

PEOPLE AND EVENTS



Vice President Spiro T. Agnew presents a National Brotherhood Award to Mayor Walter E. Washington of the District of Columbia. The National Conference of Christians and Jews' citation was given to the city's first mayor for his leadership. In accepting, Mr. Washington said he was optimistic about correcting urban problems so long as "Jew and Gentile, black and white move together." (RNS)

Pittsburgh Bishop John J. Wright will join 22 world religious leaders at a conference on Religion and Peace in Istanbul, Turkey, Feb. 21-23. . . . The National Conference of Christians and Jews has cited Washington, D.C.'s first mayor, Walter E. Washington, for his leadership in attacking "the most critical human problems facing our nation's capital."

LaSalle College of Philadelphia is now under control of laymen as its board of trustees has been enlarged from 12 to 18 members, 11 of whom must be laymen. . . . Father Antonio Goncalves Pedro has been named to replace "Father Happiness", Father Jose Felicidade Alves who was dismissed as a Lisbon pastor following his attacks on the Portuguese national administration and criticism of church structures in that country.

CHURCH AND THE CITY

What We Can Do about Housing

By Father P. David Finks

Courier-Journal editor, Father Richard Tormey, wrote a moving article last week on the Steuben County fire that claimed eight lives, a father and seven children. He noted the massive frustration of Father John Hempel and the other members of the diocesan rural mission apostolate in the face of such tragedy: "Housing for the helpless people of this area is the most frustrating worry of my job."

As indescribable as the housing conditions are in rural America, the urban needs are intensely greater.

Rochester in 1960 had 20,600 "substandard" dwelling units. ("Substandard" means "dilapidated", "deteriorating" or "without all plumbing"—Housing Needs, League of Women Voters, 1967). The housing inventory for low income families is seriously deteriorating year by year.

The final report of the President's Committee on Urban Housing (A Decent Home, 1969, U.S. Government Printing Office, \$2) singles out housing for the poor as the nation's number one urban problem. The committee found 7.8 million families unable to afford decent housing in the midst of the richest nation that the world has ever seen.

What can we do as concerned citizens? What can the church do in the diocese of Rochester to promote decent housing? Can we offer nothing but rhetorical sympathy when tragedy tears open the world of misery of the otherwise invisible poor?

The real tragedy is our massive apathy and ignorance which means we are part of the problem rather than the solution. Our own Catholic people are often part of the opposi-

tion to opening up of suburban towns to low and moderate income housing.

The seriousness of the housing crisis leads me to present a number of concrete suggestions:

- Traveling workshops are needed to educate our parishioners throughout the diocese. Like the "labor schools" of the 1930s we need social action institutes to give our people "handles" and techniques to influence their communities to meet the housing crisis.

Urban Ministry is developing such training institutes now with professional help. These could be operative by summer if the Diocese will contribute a fair share of the needed funds.

- Serious financial support should be given to the "Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation." However, many people in the community are questioning the announced plan of outright grants given to a few individual families for down payments as a waste of use of such money. Tried and true organizations such as Rochester Neighbors and Better Rochester Living are constantly in need of money to help poor people gain needed housing. Such groups have proven they can obtain housing for poor families in significant quantity.

- "Seed money" should be provided to help citizen groups hire planners, architects and legal advisers to help them gain federal funds to build and rehabilitate large numbers of dwellings in urban and rural areas. This money is returned in full to be used by another group once the federal government approves the project.

NOW HEAR THIS . . . Little Hope in Rural Slums

By Father Richard Tormey

Five years ago Congress created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). This was the opening gunshot in the War on Poverty.

Big cities, where skillful administrators and sociologists had experienced know-how on dealing with Uncle Sam were quick to take advantage of the appropriations offered by OEO. The inner city poor became the concern of thousands of communities and expensive programs designed for their betterment excited wide interest.

But out in the rural byways, where the poor survived on isolated farms, in tumbledown tenement shanties and in clusters of shacks out of the high-rent district, there was little leadership to help them fight the problems of their misery.

Rural America contains less than one-third of the U.S. population, but 43 per cent of those labeled "poverty people" by the Federal government (because their income is under \$3,000 annually) live in the rural slums where there are few public services to assist them, marginal employment and continuing hopelessness about a better life.

The Rochester Diocese, centered in affluent New York State, has three statistically poor counties—Wayne, Steuben and Yates—where grinding poverty, miserable housing, unemployment and poor health are the daily cross of thousands of our neighbors.

Priests of our diocesan Secular Mission, based in these and three other of our poorer and most rural counties, report that besides thousands of known and desperately poor families in their care, they have daily contacts with others in "enforced poverty," people living on the border-line of critical want but legally beyond the reach of welfare programs and agencies.

Housing (as discussed here last week), clothing and medical needs are services needed by thousands in our diocese. The rural apostolate priests are bringing these wants to the attention of local and diocesan authorities.

But poor health, as related to degrees of malnutrition and even hunger in this area, is also a shocking worry of our countryside, they report.

No one knows how many Americans are chronically hungry. But some official estimates say there are at least 6 to 9 million people for whom hunger may be almost a daily fact of life. Thousands of these live in this diocese.

The best educated guess comes from Dr. Thomas E. Bryant, assistant director of national Health Affairs for the OEO. He believes that there are 12 to 15 million "hard core poor" in the nation, whose annual income allows them less than \$1,284 for food, said by the Department of Agriculture to be minimum cost of an adequate diet for a family of four. He says millions of these are chronically hungry because a family earning less than \$3,000 is very hard pressed to feed itself healthily after meeting other essential human needs (rent, clothing, utilities, auto, installments).

But Steuben County has 19,000 poverty people (under \$3,000 income per family). Wayne knows about 15,000 "afflicted by the pall of poverty" and Yates admits that "one-quarter of the county is in the poverty bracket". There must be many who are undernourished and hungry.

Another way of viewing the impoverishment which should concern us is to cite Wayne County's own figures: "With an average of 5.6 persons per household, if \$3 is allotted per person for food each, the total food bill amounts to nearly \$180; but there is only \$150 to pay for food plus any clothing, school supplies, entertainment etc. which the family may need" out of the \$348 per month disposable income in the "average poor family" of the county.

In Wayne County the average poor family is said to spend \$53 for rent, \$15 for utilities, \$60 for installments

on various possessions, \$50 for an auto, \$20 for heating fuel.

But consider how these living expenses and food costs are affected when there is sickness in the family, a short layoff or an accident for the breadwinner, or a fire such as often damages their uninsured shacks.

Two popularly held notions about the poor in the rural areas of the diocese must be contradicted: The first misconception is that the poverty stricken are migrants from outside this area while the second is that the impoverished are Negroes.

Figures from Wayne County (and they match the averages from the other poorer counties of the diocese) prove that close to 70 per cent of the families in the "poverty" group have resided in the county for nine years or more. Only 2,416 out of the total Wayne County population of 73,837 are black.

COMMENTARY

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ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Two Kinds of Catholics

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

In a recent letter to an ultraliberal Catholic weekly, an "over 40" female named Sally wrote:

"Most of my friends from the Old Neighborhood are in fact, narrow, provincial, restrictive and, I hope, much meaner than God when it comes to judgment. And they like it that way. It's so safe.

"They can send their sons off to war without a quivering chin. It's been stamped patriotic by church and country both. They can dress their children up for first communion; it's so solemn, even if with borrowed money. They can have more babies than they have time or talent to rear, and fight with their spouses daily.

"Their religion is perfectly safe from the inroads of nagging doubts about the modern world . . ."

This poor, perverse letter interested me, because for some time I have been admiring a young man who belongs to "the Old Neighborhood" mentality. But rather than being full of vice, as Sally finds, he is my idea of what the Church constantly renewing itself has been advocating and producing for 2,000 years.

He is about 30, happily and faithfully married. He was in the army and regards his military service as part of his duty as a citizen, and adds: "It did me good." He works

steadily and provides for his family. He is also actively concerned about relatives and friends who have had problems of health and relocation.

One night I nearly fell over his feet as he was kneeling at the darkened parish shrine of Our Blessed Mother, reciting her rosary. I met him later in the evening and said: "It is good to see your love for Our Lady. Are you going to the parish meeting tonight?" (He is deeply involved in the parish community work.)

He replied with the ease of a man at peace with the world: "Not tonight. You know, I like to come to the church when it's quiet and pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and say my rosary at Our Blessed Mother's statue."

"I'm glad to do what I can for the parish, but I get awfully tired of meetings, and talk, talk, talk. I like to be quiet and talk to God alone once in a while."

"My friend is remarkably generous but perceptive in his judgments. He is patient and kind. He loves the Church, which he considers not a building, but the People of God — though I doubt that he would express it that way. It is people like him who keep the Church vital. I suppose Sally includes him in her peeling letter as an unprogressive, smug dud.



Evidently Sally belongs to the now not so new elite who from their cranky heights look down in contempt on normal Catholics who fulfill their vocations as good fathers, mothers, parishioners and citizens—even though they suffer the usual effects of original sin.

Lent has come. I wonder if Sally won't join an elite study group and grow in her contempt for the Church. Her concluding salvo in her letter to the editor was: "In a collective age, maybe it is appropriate to think of ourselves as the collective conscience of humanity arising up in judgment against all the brands of corruption rampant in a leprous church."

Lent has come, and I wonder if my friend over whose kneeling feet I nearly tumbled, and the other non-elite People of God won't be marching off to Mass, making the Stations of the Cross, saying Our Lady's rosary — and just BEING GOOD, in the Pauline sense: "Love is patient; is kind."

Between Sally and her vision of "the leprous Church" and my friend with his vision of "Jesus Christ living in His members", it seems to me that the latter is the authentic Catholic Christian.

And to add to my joy, he is reading IS IT THE SAME CHURCH by Frank Sheed for Lenten spiritual reading.

ST. PAUL AND LENT

The Task of Reconciliation

By PETER SCHINELLER, S.J.

The author of the following article, the first in a series of seven Lenten meditations, has taught as a scholastic in New York City high schools, and currently is in second theology at Woodstock.

RECONCILIATION

"It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." — St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 5, 18.

In TIME magazine's presidential inauguration issue, several essays outlined possible ways to heal the nation. A section on what the individual can do concluded that each American must set "more community as the American goal."

It may be a small beginning, but is there any other if the nation is to be truly healed?

The apostle Paul viewed this work of building community as one of the main tasks of the Christian. In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, he states that the Christian response to the reconciling work of Christ is that each Christian become an ambassador of reconciliation, uniting

man to man, and all men with God.

To find out what Paul means by reconciliation, it is helpful to look at the original meaning of the word. The image evoked by reconciliation is "the peace that follows upon war," signifying a change in the relation between two opponents.

Those who were at war are now at peace with each other. Paul proclaims that through the death and resurrection of Christ, man is again in God's favor, after a period of estrangement and rebellion.

This reconciliation is the main effect of Christ's redemptive activity, the restoration of man to a state of peace and union with God the Father. The barriers and distinctions between slave and free, between Jew and Greek have been broken, and all men become one in Christ through baptism.

During this Lent we must reflect on the lack of peace and unity in the world today. Students protest against university administrators, the gap between rich and poor widens. The white and black communities live in constant tension.

Almost daily, war threatens to break out in the Mideast. Civil war

reigns in Nigeria, and peace is yet to be found in Vietnam.

Yet Paul proclaims that man has been reconciled with God through the mystery we celebrate at Easter, and that we must carry on this work of reconciliation. God's reconciling activity gives us the courage to dare to love our fellow man.

The task of reconciliation means that we take the initiative in working for peace and equality among men, beginning in our own communities. Although we will never be present at the peace negotiations in Paris, we can in some small way, by our concern and interest in the problems of others, Christian and non-Christian, black and white, share in the challenge of making all men one.

We will have done our part in this ministry of reconciliation, if what Martin Luther King Jr. wanted said of him could be said of us: "I'd like somebody to say that I tried to love somebody. I want you to say . . . that I tried to be right, and walk with them, that I did try to feed the hungry, that . . . I'm in peace, & I try, that I tried to love and serve humankind."

(To be continued next week.)

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