



JAN. 16-25
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
 Christian-Unity Week

This is the poster for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity to begin next Sunday. The week is sponsored by the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute. (Religious News Service)

Bishop's Plea on Racism Hailed in Mississippi

Jackson, Miss. — (RNS) — A preliminary meeting of statewide religious leaders was held here amid favorable reaction to a Catholic bishop's plea for action to curb widening racial polarization in Mississippi.

The meeting, aimed at setting up a statewide conference with a complete representation of church leadership, came as a result of a Christmas message issued by Bishop Joseph B. Brunini of Natchez-Jackson.

In that message, the bishop said that Christmas 1969 offers Christians and their leaders "an opportunity to make a tremendous leap forward." He said that from his contacts with Protestant and Jewish leaders he believed the "time is ripe" for a united voice to be heard throughout Mississippi "to help lead our people out of bondage."

Primate Hails Ban On Death Penalty

London — (RNS) — The permanent abolition of capital punishment for murder in Britain will honor the nation, according to Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual leader of the world's Anglicans.

In a formal statement issued shortly after both houses of Parliament agreed to abolish the death penalty, he said:

"Abolition of capital punishment, once and for all, will help create a more civilized society in which to continue the search for the causes of crime, and to continue experiments in penal reform. I sympathize with those who are worried about Parliament's decision, but I am certain it will redound in very many ways to the advantage and honor of the nation."

There has been no official Roman Catholic statement on the issue, at least recently, but it would appear there is division in their ranks, just as there is in the population at large. This was admitted in a comment by the mass circulating Catholic newspaper, the Universe, just before the House of Lords' decision.

This newspaper said, "The Church has always in the past upheld the state's right to execute criminals, though there is some difficulty in discovering what precisely is its present attitude to capital punishment. One reason for this is that Catholics have not been prominent in debates on the subject that have been going on all over the world, particularly since the war."

2 Million Urge Dr. King Holiday

New York — (RNS) — More than 2 million signatures asking that the birthday of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., be made a national holiday have been turned over to Congress, a committee making the proposed observance said here.

The Citizens Committee for a Martin Luther King Holiday asked that U.S. and New York State declare Jan. 15 a day to mark the life and work of the civil rights leader murdered in April, 1968.

At least two bills advocating the holiday were in the House of Representatives' Committee of the Judiciary when Congress adjourned in late December. Congress is not due to reconvene until Jan. 19.

The birthday of Dr. King will be marked in New York City by the closing of public and parochial schools. There will be a rally in Central Park and other special observances.

Slum Drive Launched by Archbishop

Montreal, Que. — (RNS) — Archbishop Paul Gregoire of Montreal has launched a \$100,000 experimental, two-year program to combat poverty in one of this city's worst slum areas.

With the accent on developing local leadership and participatory democracy, the program will begin in Pointe St. Charles, where 25,000 people live in tenements between the Lachine Canal and the Canadian National Railway freight yards.

The project will concentrate on the establishment and development of co-operative food stores and free medical clinics.

Residents will be expected to participate directly by electing their own spokesmen. Only four or five professionals will be hired.

Archbishop Gregoire said that pockets of poverty in affluent cities are a disquieting phenomenon "that cries out for the attention of the Church."

In anticipation of possible objections that "the Church is becoming involved in politics," the archbishop insisted that the program was being undertaken "out of concern for the public interest."

"The Vatican Council clearly showed the interest of the Church in the protection and expansion of human rights," he said.

He stressed that the project will reject violence, propose constructive measures, and "respect the rights of others."

Archbishop Gregoire announced a \$20,000 contribution from archdiocesan funds, and appealed to Catholic groups to finance the balance of the fund.

Dr. Niebuhr: I Was Wrong On Catholicism

Chicago — (RNS) — One of America's most eminent Protestant theologians says he misjudged Catholicism when, in an assessment made a decade ago, he rather harshly judged the Church for its partisanship.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote of the contemporary opportunities for Protestant-Catholic ecumenism in a Christian Century series called "How My Mind Has Changed." His article appeared in the Dec. 31 issue.

The professor-emeritus of Union Theological Seminary (N.Y.) had contributed to a similar series 10 years ago. At that time he had attributed a "fanaticism to Catholic enthusiasts of natural law" which he felt was not a viable choice for meaningful Christian exploration. And he did not hold out much chance for change.

Dr. Niebuhr wrote in his 1969 article that he came to know he was wrong through the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent events in the Catholic Church.

He said he had particularly found developments in the Jesuit Order stirring his response to Catholic ecumenism.

The Jesuits, according to Dr. Niebuhr, were once the strongest advocates of the unity and authority of the Catholic Church under papal power. The order he added, is now in the process of "recovering liberty," a theme which has been foremost to Protestants.

At the same time, said Dr. Niebuhr, the World Council of Churches has gained a "new" perspective on unity so that the old "bone of contention" between liberty and unity is no longer of primary significance between Catholics and Protestants.

These developments "reveal that . . . contrasting and supplementary values are not the exclusive possession of either side," he said, and there is now a chance for both traditions to gain a new appreciation of what they have in common.

Bishop Brunini told Religious News Service that the response to his appeal thus far has been quite favorable. He said he received 25 to 30 phone calls, letters and telegrams from religious leaders throughout Mississippi and the nation supporting his call for positive action, stemming mainly from the school integration problem in Mississippi.

The bishop's appeal was also cited in the Memphis (Tenn.) Commercial Appeal as "the latest move for peace on this segment of the earth." The daily paper noted that the prelate, whose diocese includes all of the state of Mississippi, called for a statewide meeting of clergy to head off the "intensified threat of polarization between the state's million white and million blacks."

In a later issue, it referred to the bishop's plan as a "summit-meeting" of Mississippi religious leaders to prevent racial polarization over the public school crisis.

Noting several optimistic notes, the Catholic prelate said that "growing closer" and that this advance includes Jewish groups. He said, "We need the ecumenical approach if we are to appeal to all the people of the state."

A rallying point, in the bishop's estimation, is the common love of all the people of Mississippi for the public school system and the common desire that the schools be preserved, improved and become the producers of high-quality education.

Bishop Brunini, at 60 three years the head of the Mississippi diocese, asserted that the U.S. Supreme Court and the law "are on our side" and this has given the Christians of the state "a new lease on life."

He said the initial purpose of a statewide conference will be to agree on a common statement of religious purpose that will appeal to all the people of the state.

'Substantial Victories' Reported for School Aid

New York — (RNS) — Proponents of government aid to non-public schools won "substantial victories" in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Ohio, according to a survey conducted by the American Jewish Congress.

Despite the fact that legislatures in 17 other states rejected such proposals, the Jewish agency predicted that 1970 will see a "continuing effort by religious groups to win public funds for parochial schools."

The states where efforts to obtain government funds for non-public schools were unsuccessful were Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Vermont, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.

In the three states which voted some state aid for non-public schools, the survey noted the laws were basically similar, providing funding in the form of partial payment of teachers' salaries.

In Connecticut, the law provides direct aid under a plan similar to one in Pennsylvania. There, state funds pay part of the salaries of teachers in parochial and private schools under what is known as a "purchase of services" formula.

In Rhode Island, the law makes available state under-writing of up to 15 per cent of a non-public teacher's salary.

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