

Bringing Christ into the Marketplace

Lake Grove, N.Y. — (NC) — Bringing Christ into the marketplace has true ecumenical meaning at a shopping center here, with five major religious denominations working together in what is called Smith Haven Ministries, Inc.

The interfaith operation at the big Smith Haven Mall in the center of Suffolk County on Long Island has no church or chapel.

Its main concern is social renewal in the suburban-rural area it serves.

The idea began among Long Island Presbyterians three years ago but now includes the Roman Catholic diocese of Rockville Centre, the Episcopalian diocese of Long Island, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Eastern New York Methodists.

While the extensive covered shopping center was being built, the Presbyterians decided to get into the mall itself. The Rev. A. David Bos started the Nesconset Experimental Ministry which became Smith Haven Ministries as other groups joined the Presbyterians.

A Catholic priest, Father T. Peter Ryan, was recently re-assigned from his parish to work full time as associate director of the ministries.

Father Ryan listed some specific projects that Ministries is concerned with: community information and referral, group housing, work with low-income black and white families to help them adjust to responsibility as home-owners for the first time, and finding adequate housing for those in substandard housing.

"The ministry is in touch and working closely with three neighboring opportunity (anti-poverty) centers in Gordon Heights, Central Islip and Brentwood," Father Ryan continued.

"We look at it as an effort to try to put the Church into a new framework that is pastoral and not parochial," Father Ryan said about Catholic participation. "So many suburban parishes are bedroom parishes. But this shopping mall is the place where people from all walks of life come, and many of them are not actively involved in parish life."

Rather than competing with conventional ministries in helping people, Father Ryan said, "We consider ourselves really as an outreach of local parishes and congregations."

One of the earliest ventures at shopping center ministries was planned by the United Church of Christ at Oakbrook Shopping Center near Chicago, known as the "Agora" (Greek word for market place). It has found its major role as a type of "chaplaincy" to the business and shopping community.

Moving in another direction, "The Church on the Mall" sponsored by the Presbytery of Philadelphia at Plymouth Meeting Mall, conceived and planned a congregation in the shopping center, worshipping in the center and seeking to develop a ministry in the midst of the market place.

A third direction is illustrated by the "Market Place Ministry" at Landmark Shopping Center in Alexandria, Va. Sponsored with ecumenical dreams by the Presbytery of Washington City, the Landmark project sees a multi-faceted ministry as a self-supporting program, focusing on child care, counseling and the theater.

Another project is being developed in Pittsburgh at South Hills Village Shopping Center, where at least 20 area congregations have joined to form a corporation for shopping center ministry.

In Paramus, N.J., the Carmelite Fathers are constructing a Catholic chapel for shoppers at Bergen Mall. It is being erected on space donated by Allied Stores Corp. and will be directed by Father Mark Dittami, O. Carm., who had been

director of a similar chapel at a shopping center in Peabody, Mass.

Three Masses will be offered

at the chapel daily — morning, midday and early evening — with confessions before each Mass. Counseling services will also be offered.

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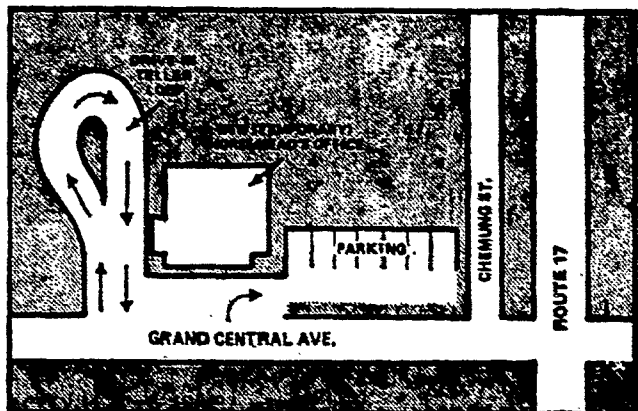
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