



Mrs. Mary Schwartz, housewife and mother, lives on Calvin St. She's trying to form a FISH organization with seven area churches. She has lived in the northwest all her life, but "very few young people will stay here." FISH needs young people to volunteer in order to be a success.

Northwest Rochester: Its People... And Its Problems

Sociologists, residents and politicians have become aware of the urban blight corrupting the core of Rochester and making life in the inner city a jungle of misery and deprivation.

Block groups, neighborhood associations and community organizations have sprung up in the inner city to give its residents a chance to control their lives and to give them a lever to move unresponsive officials.

With the growing recognition that organization is power, inhabitants of the outer city of Rochester have also begun to look for ways to preserve and rehabilitate their own neighborhoods.

Five Rochester churches in the northwest outer city have banded together to finance an ecumenical study of whether methods developed by community organizers like Saul Aulinsky and Msgr. Gino Baroni can work in their neighborhood.

Target area of the study runs north from West Avenue to Otis Street, and west from Broad Street to Mt. Read Boulevard. Bill Droel, a seminarian from St. Bernard's, and Loretta Dennis, released from her job at the Office of Human Development to work full time on this new project, are doing the spadework.

Industry and residential areas in this section mingle with small shops and businesses, and railroad tracks lace the entire area. However, changes in recent years have destroyed many of the conglomeration of small neighborhoods that gave the area its character, and more are threatened.

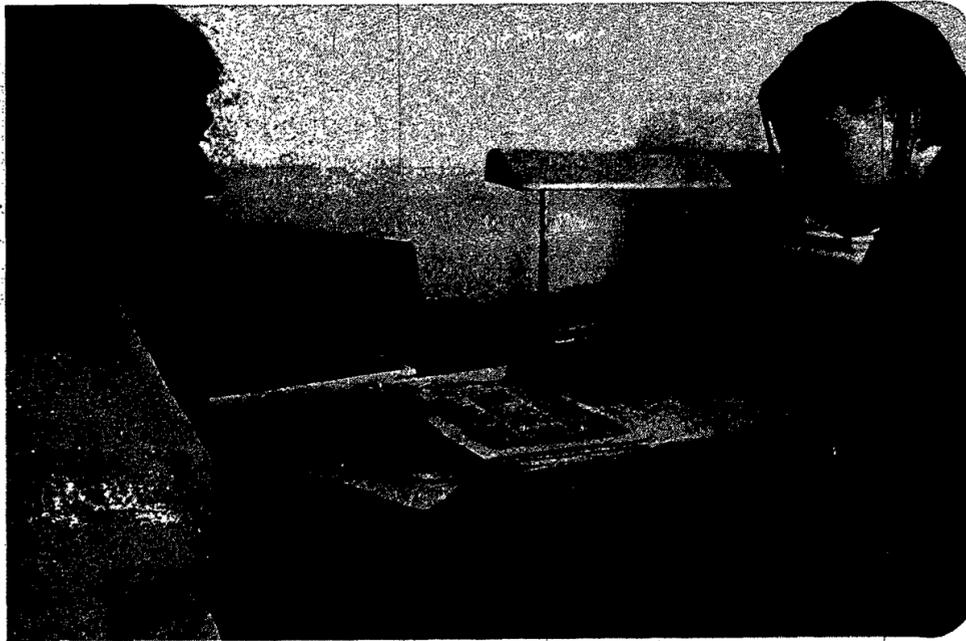
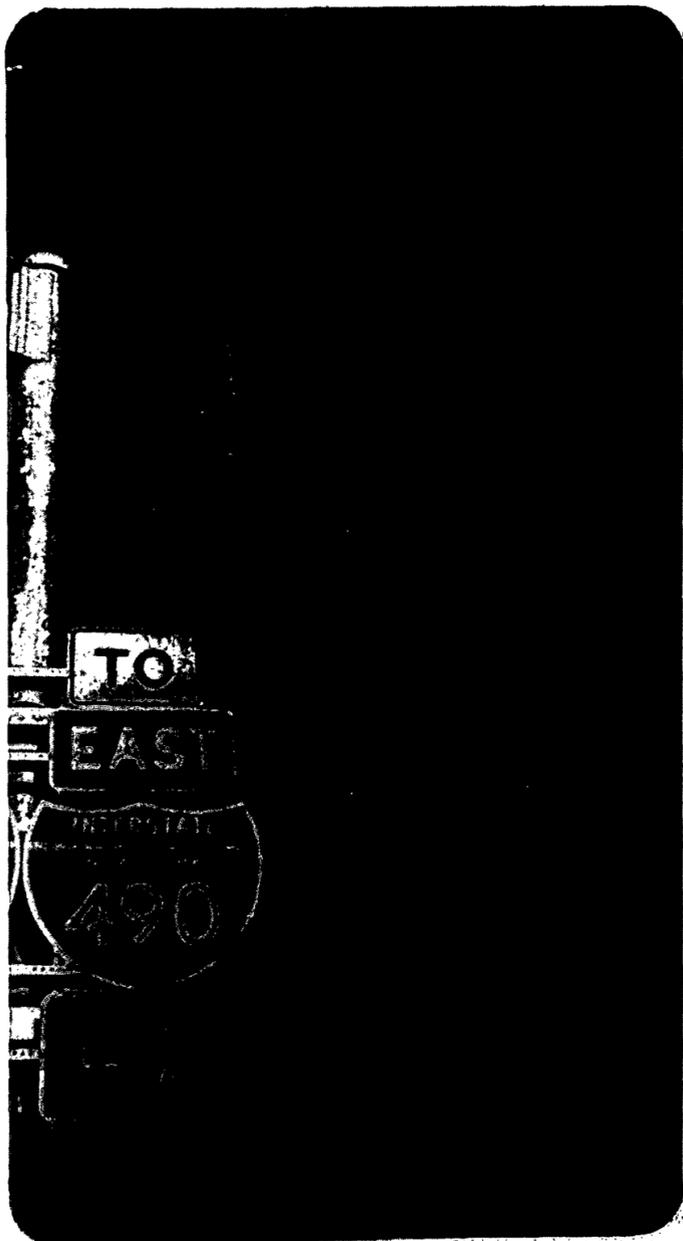
Interstate Route 490 West now cuts the entire area in half in order to give suburbanites quicker access to their jobs, but in the process it tore out hundreds of homes and turned many residential streets into dead-end alleys. In many cases, an easy stroll was turned into half an hour of frustrating city driving.

The Rochester economy is changing as the city becomes a financial center instead of a mass-production area, thinks Bill Droel, and as evidence he points to the empty factories in the northwest portion of the city. As industry is attracted elsewhere, boarded up factories become eyesores and run down the value of homes in their neighborhood. This further contributes to the deterioration of areas already hard hit by high property taxes and the movement of young families to the suburbs.

Rochester's northwest outer city has a long tradition of ethnic, working class neighborhoods, but the expressway, assimilation, and the removal of industry have combined with high taxes to bring the problems of the inner city to new and formerly stable parts of the city.

The need to study and resolve these problems, has led five churches to back the project of Bill Droel and Loretta Dennis, known officially as the "Otis Area Community Organization Process." The churches are Trinity Lutheran Church, Holy Family Church, Trinity United Church of Christ, Holy Apostles and Grace Presbyterian.

At present they have a six month contract to study "the day-in and day-out worries of working-class Americans." The culmination of their work might be the formation of a new and powerful machine for social and political reform, or such ideas may be rejected by people of the community. This much remains clear: the problems are there to be solved.



Loretta Dennis and Bill Droel are working on the "Otis Area Community Organization Process." The sign at left might seem to say that the road to heaven is Interstate 490, taken across the altar of Trinity United Church of Christ, but churches in the area with dwindling congregations do not think so.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY LAURENCE E. KEEFE