

# Churches Urged to Strengthen City Ministries

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

Urban ministry has once again become a focus of attention for denominations and congregations as they seek to define and implement ways to meet the physical and spiritual needs of inner-city dwellers.

Organized programs of ministry in the inner city are not new. But as the urban crisis intensifies, and government agencies find themselves less able to meet human needs in the cities, the Churches are coming up with new approaches to respond to these challenges.

There is growing recognition that Churches could be the spearhead for neighborhood revitalization, reducing reliance on the power of federal money alone to reverse three decades of urban deterioration and neglect. President Carter's national urban policy, presented to the Congress in late March, proposes that not much more money be spent on city needs — but that the \$30 billion given to local governments be "targeted" for more efficiency. Three-fourths of the spending would go for jobs and economic development.

In the view of one top aide in the Carter administration, the role of the Churches and synagogues should be the mobilization of their congregants to help save their neighborhoods, and thus revitalize the cities.

Msgr. Geno Baroni, a Roman Catholic priest on leave to serve as assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, says that government cannot "revitalize cities by themselves." Neighborhood groups took the issue of "redlining" to Washington and got a law passed, he has pointed out, and adds:

"People don't really live in cities, they live in neighborhoods. And if neighborhoods die, cities die."

The social agenda of Churches, Msgr. Baroni claims, should be to serve as a catalyst for organizing neighborhood, people-oriented, self-help institutions and coalitions that "will make life more liveable."

Within inner city neighborhoods, inter-ethnic cooperation is being promoted as the only effective approach to urban ministry. The Rev. Don Sharp, pastor of Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago, told a Southern Baptist conference for churches in racially changing communities that "the black church and the black leader must be recognized for what they can provide not only to the black people but to the white people. If we can effect an integration of the resources of each (blacks and whites), we have hope for the city."

He and the Rev. Dale Cross, director of metropolitan evangelism

strategy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, stressed that "if we are going to minister in the city, it will be through black and white cooperation."

A neighborhood approach is being advocated by Church leaders who feel that inner city ministry can best be approached by focusing on the local parish, rather than attempting to deal with an entire metropolitan area as a whole.

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York has declared that local parishes "are a promise of stability, of permanence in a storm of change, of security that at least one of the major structures of our society — the Church — has not pulled out and thrown up its hands in frustration at the appalling convergencies of urban crisis."

The Catholic bishops' domestic anti-poverty outreach — the Campaign for Human Development — has channeled more than \$50 million since 1970 for a wide variety of self-help programs. Many of them have been rooted at the parish level in broad-based neighborhood coalitions.

The Division for Mission in North America of the Lutheran Church in America has issued a set of guidelines for city ministry which affirms that "every congregation has a responsibility to minister with people in its immediate geographic neighborhood and to join with other

neighborhood organizations in addressing issues affecting the welfare of persons in the neighborhood."

It urges congregations to analyze carefully the needs of their surrounding areas and develop plans and strategies which "take into account the particular needs and characteristics of such neighborhoods."

Renewal in one urban area — Salt Lake City — has been significantly aided through projects of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints (Mormon) which has either directly financed or assisted 24 major building projects and paid for them in cash.

"About 15 years ago we were in danger of becoming a sleepy and stale intermountain city," says Mayor Ted Wilson. "The Mormon Church was instrumental in reversing the trend. It acted as a catalyst."

A pioneering church agency in the field is the Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry (CCUM), which was organized in August 1967. Father John A. Coleman, S.J., a sociologist on the faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, writes in America magazine that "while maintaining cordial relations with the hierarchy and the established bureaucratic Church, CCUM is neither its arm nor its agent. It seeks no funds directly from the hierarchy or the U.S. Catholic Conference. It is an

independent, autonomous group in the service of the Church."

According to Father Coleman, CCUM's achievements have included the building of bridges between various constituencies and the creation of "a truly autonomous grass-roots network to validate and enable social ministry as a constitutive part of the mission of the Church."

Several seminaries and divinity schools have developed programs to train theological students for urban ministry. Some are being organized on a cooperative basis, like the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE), which was founded two years ago and provides a year-long program for students in several Protestant seminaries.

SCUPE recently held an "Urban Congress" in Chicago which was directed primarily at evangelicals. Sociologist Anthony J. Campolo of Eastern College, St. Davids, Pa., received a standing ovation after he told participants, "The Church has not left the city; it is the middle-class evangelicals who have left."

In his address, Dr. Campolo urged white evangelicals to study the "sectarian" styles of storefront and indigenous inner city churches to learn

the meaning of faith in action, and called for such actions as advocacy lobbying to prevent redlining, and if necessary, economic boycotts to influence "oppressive institutions."

Dr. Avery D. Post, president of the United Church of Christ, has urged American Churches "not to hesitate in risk-taking ventures" involving ministries in the nation's cities. He has called for the training of large numbers of urban ministers and other specialists in the political, economic, and social fields to deal with the issues and problems facing life.

"The acts, the methods the approaches are as many and as varied as are the number of dedicated people using their multitude of abilities," said Dr. Post.

In contrast to churches which leave cities for greener pastures in the suburbs, St. Peter's Lutheran Church made national news at the end of 1977 when it dedicated a \$7 million house of worship on land in midtown Manhattan shared with the international headquarters of Citicorp, one of the giants of U.S. banking.

In his dedicatory sermon, Pastor Ralph E. Peterson said, "There is magic in being in New York City," and added that "we celebrate a new New York because we anticipate a new Jerusalem."



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