

THE SUN RISES IN HARLEM

A UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY





ON EASTER DAY, 1965, the Rev. Dr. M. Moran Weston, Rector of St. Philip's Church, Harlem, New York, told the congregation at the 6 a.m. Eucharist: "The sun rises whenever you and I know that Easter is God's answer to disappointment, to loss of nerve, to despair, to surrender."

Proclaiming that answer is the fulltime mission of this parish, the largest in the Episcopal Church. St. Philip's is set in the midst of some 233,000 people, about 220,000 of whom are Negro and 8,000 Puerto Rican.

Racial segregation, overcrowded housing, low income (the neighborhood median is sixty per cent of that for the entire city), inadequate community and cultural facilities, and crowded second-rate schools have created an environment in which it has been easy for young people to drift into juvenile delinquency and crime as a way of escape. Living in the midst of desperation, many never develop an incentive to learn and, consequently, achieve very little in school and in the work they do later in life.

St. Philip's Church has been called to minister in a situation which all too often seems devoid of hope. Established in downtown Manhattan in 1818, the congregation moved uptown as the city grew, finally building a church and parish house in the central part of Harlem in 1910. Since then, the parish has used its facilities for programs to give meaning to the inner lives of people living near it.

Twenty years ago, a Fun Center was begun in the parish house so that neglected children in the neighborhood would have a place to use their energies joyfully and constructively. The recreation program was enthusiastically received by neighbors and grew broader and more effective as time went on. St. Philip's gained a national reputation as a parish church

working hard to make a difference in its neighborhood.

In 1962, it became evident that the 52-year-old parish house, with its small rooms, narrow hallways, and cramped, dark offices, was inadequate for the needs of the parish's community program. The gymnasium on the top floor—the only large room in the building—had been condemned as a fire hazard. Nearly twenty parish organizations needed more space to be effective. Sixteen of the forty Sunday school classes were crowded together in



one room in the basement of the church building because there was no room in the parish house. St. Philip's Community-Youth Center (successor to the Fun Center) used the parish house during the rest of the week.

The deep-rooted needs of the neighborhood called for bold, adventurous action by a parish determined to respond to these needs. St. Philip's Church decided to rebuild, expand, and make the best possible use of church properties.

Under the leadership of the rector and vestry, the congregation began a campaign to raise money to build a parish house-youth center in one basic building, surmounted by a fourteen-story residence tower with apartments for senior citizens.

The 4,600 members of the parish pledged \$235,000 over a three-year period. The total cost of the new parish house-youth center was estimated at about one million dollars, exclusive of government financing for the residence tower, plus new program budget needs. Obviously more money was needed, but where could it be obtained?

The parish applied for and received a grant from the United Thank Offering. Work is now underway and the parish house-youth center is coming closer to reality because of \$75,000

offered in united thanks by the women of the Church.

“Easter is God’s answer to disappointment, to loss of nerve, to despair, to surrender.” The validity of this truth continues to be demonstrated by this parish as it strives to make a difference in its neighborhood.

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Our gifts to the United Thank Offering have made and will continue to make many such differences possible in many neighborhoods throughout our nation and our world.

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