

And  
the  
walls  
came  
a-tumbling  
down

A UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY

“And the walls came a-tumbling down” is the final line in a song which tells of Joshua’s conquest of Jericho. The air was filled with sounds of trumpets and shouting. But there were no shouts when dry rot, termites, and general decay brought damage to the walls of St. Simon’s Church, Gamboa, Canal Zone. There was no great, crashing collapse, but the quiet, insidious attack brought ruin almost as quickly as if the trumpet had been sounded.

The congregation immediately set to work to erect a new church. With a grant of \$12,000 for building materials from the United Thank Offering, the men and boys, under the leadership of the Rev. Eugene K. Fenninger, agreed to do the construction work themselves.

The old building was completely demolished. Working Saturdays, holidays, and evenings the



men and boys constructed the new concrete block church and parish hall. The women kept the workers fed.

And so, with an additional \$4,000 raised locally, the church was completed; and on October 24, 1965, it was consecrated.

The parishioners of St. Simon's are nearly all citizens of the Republic of Panama and, for the most part, they are second or third generation Canal Zonians.

Many older people of the parish were in Gamboa at the time the Canal was dug at the turn of the century. One old parishioner recalled that in 1904 the Canal Commission paid him ten cents an hour wages.

Living conditions for people in the Zone are adequate, though usually crowded. Wage earning members of a family are either employed by



the Canal Commission itself or as domestics throughout the Canal Zone.

Although many adults have completed only eighth grade educations, today's young Canal Zonians usually finish high school. A few have gone on to a Canal Zone college.

The community is not immune from problems. Many young people smoke marijuana and gamble, although both activities are illegal. As elsewhere, the laws are difficult to enforce. Therefore, St. Simon's active youth program is a realistic counter to some of the problems. Aiding in construction of the new church building, the youth found wholesome weekend activities as well as a new house of worship.

St. Simon's do-it-yourself building project was the first of its kind undertaken in a Canal Zone Latin American community. And so, it was of

interest to the Zone public welfare organization. Now under consideration is a similar plan to construct a civic center.

Until a civic center becomes a reality, however, St. Simon's will attempt to fill the gap. One evening each week the parish hall is opened to all youth of the community for games and dancing. Forty to fifty young people usually show up.

Sewing classes are being organized for women and teen-age girls, and it is hoped that a tailoring class for boys can be established. Already in progress is a needlework class for young girls. A teacher is being sought for instruction in diet and cooking. In time, even a cake decorating class will meet in the parish hall.

Many young people thirst for knowledge on any subject and enthusiastically attend classes on anything from the Bible to discussions of teen-age problems. Because they see little promise in their own country, many young people hope to go to the United States someday. The Church, however, is encouraging them to remain in the Zone, finish their schooling and work at home with their own people.

Services being offered to the community are an "opening out" of the walls of St. Simon's so that anyone may enter and participate in the activities. This opening out also means that parishioners are unwilling to shut themselves inside the church walls and ignore the needs, problems, and desires of those who stand outside.

## **UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY No. 9**

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have made and will continue to make important  
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