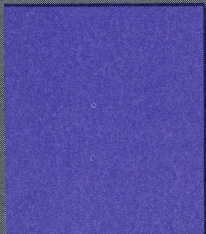
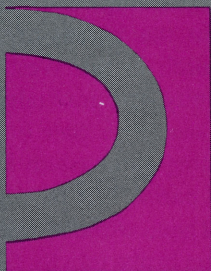
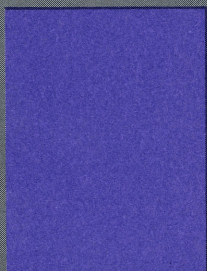


*A Christian
Choice:
indifference
or
involvement?*



A UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY

THE RESIDENTS of the West End of Louisville, Kentucky, eyed one another with uneasiness and hostility for some time. They were Negroes and whites living separated lives in a checkerboard of colored and white city blocks. That separation began to form a pattern toward violence. The community was becoming an overcrowded slum as, block by block, more Negroes were forced into it because housing restrictions in other, newer parts of town were discriminatory. Whites were being sold the idea of rapidly falling property values by unscrupulous realtors and panic selling began. Hostility rose.

In the parish of St. George's Episcopal Church in the West End, the church community had gradually dwindled from 250 to 20 members. Sale of the building and its adjoining gymnasium had been approved, and the parish had no regular clergyman.

Then, without warning, 150 Negro teenagers broke into St. George's gymnasium on a rampage of violence and vandalism, and wrecked the place. This outbreak at last pointed out to Louisville's city leaders the need for emergency measures in the West End. They began to understand the importance of beginning constructive programs there.

An interfaith Urban Mission Council, concerned with the growing problems brought about by the rapidly changing population in

Louisville, was formed. The racial imbalance in the West End and the changing character of the sector were of special concern to the council. Plans of action had not yet been formed but as one member of the group of laymen and priests said: "At a time when we were literally praying for direction and guidance in our mission this seemed to be a real call to service."

Geographically, as well as sociologically, the West End was almost an island. Bordered on the north and west by the Ohio River, it was also isolated from other residential areas by the bustling downtown section.

Could this area be regenerated? The Urban Mission Council went to work to help find out.

The first step was the formation of an independent citizens group of West End residents and members of other parish churches from all over Louisville. It was named the West End Community Council.

Clergy and lay members of the group would decide what could be done to help the situation. The residents themselves would be the major decision-makers. They went into action.

St. George's parish was the beginning of this mission of service. The gym and church were renovated. Plans were made to include everyone in the area in suitable programs. Where there had been violence, young men now play basketball; dances are held once a week. Attendance has soared so high that

fire laws have forced the church to limit the number of young people to 300. There is a boys' club in the basement with a membership of seventy boys from ages eight to fourteen who play ping-pong, pool, and work at handicrafts. Much of the furniture and games were donated by the Salvation Army. Upstairs in the Sunday school rooms story hours for young children are held on Saturdays.

The West End Community Council called on all available Federal and regional resources. A worker from VISTA, the domestic counterpart of the Peace Corps, now directs the new St. George's Community Center program in the church gymnasium building. The parish also turned over a floor in the building to offices for the community organizer of a Federal anti-poverty program. A director of Operation Head Start, a tutoring program, uses office space in the summer.

As for St. George's, church membership grew to sixty, thirty-five Negroes and twenty-five whites.

The diocese has given the parish a full-time minister, Rev. Charles B. Tachau. He was a Louisville attorney and a juvenile court judge before he studied for the ministry.

Today, interest continues to grow in St. George's. According to the Very Rev. Robert W. Estill, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Louisville: "Because of our interest in the people, they became interested in the Church.

When they found out that others from outside the West End were coming there to help them they began to show faith in us by confiding in us more, so that we found many needs which we tried to meet.

“The whole message of metropolis is interdependence. The people in the suburbs . . . are just as involved as the people in the inner city and often can do more because they belong to the power structure. They have a responsibility to come back in and do something about the problems in the interior of the city.”

But the problem had not been solved for the whole area, although the council had made an impressive beginning. The church helped in its parish but there were other sections that were not included. Government programs helped only those families in actual want. There were still many who did not fit these categories and who were not touched by the existing programs.

The Community Council decided to attack the problems of the entire 1000-block section with a carefully-planned crash program. The council's expanded program will work on such community concerns as school improvement, good zoning, and housing codes, police protection, juvenile problems, prevention of blight, beautification, and so forth.

West End leaders drew up a budget including salaries for trained leaders for the project. The churches were asked to help

finance the project. The United Thank Offering gave the project a grant of \$10,000. This grant put the council over the top of its minimum goal to get the program going in 1966. Other national churches have also given or pledged financial support.

Louisville's project is a dynamic testing ground. If the West End can prove that white and Negro can live together not only without violence, but with harmony and joint efforts at community action, it can help determine relationships throughout Louisville. If this mid-southern city can show that it is possible to work together on a problem of racial tension and transcend old prejudices, it may be the needed inspiration and guide to cities throughout the country where segregation is a fact of city life, but not always an admitted one.

UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY No. 12

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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