

MINISTRY IN THE CITY, POST-NEW ORLEANS -

Was the focus for the Annual Meeting of the Church and City Conference, held in January, 1983 at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Seventy Episcopal clergy and laity from throughout the continental United States attended this three-day Conference whose focus was the parish in its setting amidst the cities of the nation. The three principal speakers included The Rev. Philip Mernion, Director of the Catholic Bishops' "Parish Project," and a resident of New York City; The Right Reverend John Allin, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; and The Right Reverend Paul Moore, Bishop of the Diocese of New York.

The Church and City Conference will soon enter its fourth decade of concern for the special ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the cities of our nation. Its President is The Reverend Everett Franics, Rector of St. Luke's Church, Scranton, Pennsylvania, and its Program Chair is The Very Reverend Charles Carter, Canon Residentiary, The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York City. It has stimulated the recent formation of The Episcopal Urban Caucus, scheduled to meet in Washington, D.C. in February, as well as other efforts which attract the ministry of the Episcopal Church to the specific issues of human life as they are lived out in our cities. The Conference has traditionally met at The College of Preachers in Washington, D.C., but chose to meet in Atlanta because of the ministry of St. Luke's Church there, and also to celebrate the parish base of city ministry. Last year's meeting had focused on the unique ministry of St. Stephen's and The Incarnation in Washington, D.C.

The Conference theme this year was the General Convention's new program, "Jubilee Ministry," and what impact this might have on parishes. Father Mernion's address presented the shifts which are taking place in city parish ministries, as he understands them because of his leadership in the Roman Catholic Church regarding these issues. He stated that burnout level is high among urban clergy at present, although the demand for this kind of leadership has never been more urgent, due to the withdrawal of public support for human service work. In addition to this, the memberships of city churches are now making different demands on the church than they once did. There is growing impatience with the church's role

in public policy, and how decisions are made. New forms of ministry may not speak to real inner renewal of individuals. Three issues mark the life of the urban priest:

- 1) a shifting understanding of the "person of the priest" as he/she ministers in the city, calling for more personal involvement and total sharing of oneself, whereas urban ministry was once more depersonalized.
- 2) a new realization that one's ministry is not a "license for private practice," but a connective relationship, so that one's ministry is not one's own, but really the church's.
- 3) a growing sense of incompetence among city clergy often underlies "burnout," and pushes them to "fluff responses" such as fundamentalism and secularization, or quick prophetic judgments where sound strategic work might actually solve the problem.

The solution for the city church is no different than for other churches: an enlarged understanding of the Eucharist so that every evidence of ministry is sacramental, within the confines of the nave as well as in the city scape.

The Presiding Bishop addressed the Conference on the issue of the Jubilee Ministry and his hopes for it within the parishes of the nation's cities. The urban church stands between the mythical vision of the Garden of Eden and the vision of the New Jerusalem, pressed to move in both directions. The need for city churches to be the Lord's partners as agents of redemption is always urgent. The knowledge is in hand, and the pipelines are in place, for the Episcopal Church to take a new role and energize itself in our cities, but there is an urgent need for the church to cooperate, communicate, and coordinate so that this can happen. The newest technological advances may assist this even more than conferences, but the willingness to work together through existing structures is the essential (lacking) ingredient at present. "The new city will appear when we are all channels of the Holy Spirit," was his concluding comment.

Bishop Moore conducted three meditations for the Conference, focusing on the devotional life of the city clergy person. Drawing on the classical devotional texts of the Church, with special reference to Dante and St. Francis of Assisi, Bishop Moore presented engagement with issues of urban suffering as the source of spiritual renewal, rather than the battlefield from which tired parsons

withdraw into their cells for further devotional recharging. Seeing the creation as "a seamless cloth," he described how one might embrace the particular form of suffering one saw, and through this, be led into the darkest corners of hell, but with Christ at one's side return again, healed and at peace. The very act of suffering and destruction lies within the meaning of Eucharist when one realizes that bread and wine have themselves been milled and pressed, ground and squeezed, yet in them we find the Lord God of Hosts and our lives are reformed.

Accepting the incredible possibility that we are co-creators with a Loving Lord, he closed one of his meditations with the observation that "The Lord of Creation has given the people of this age the rare privilege which is to destroy the whole creation."

The Conference's continuing concern with the parish moved into very practical aspects, as the staff of St. Luke's Church presented its program. The Reverend Dan Matthews coordinated eight of his professional staff's presentations of unique aspects of their ministries. Conferees ate lunch in the St. Luke's soup kitchen and worshipped in the nave, from which television broadcasts take place each Sunday.

A brief business meeting was held towards the conclusion of the Conference, in which a resolution was passed asking that members be kept informed, by the Church and City officers, about the development of the Jubilee Ministry at the Executive Council. Plans for future conferences, perhaps in smaller United States cities, were discussed, before the closing Eucharist at which the hymn, "O Holy City, seen of John, where Christ the Lamb does reign" (#494) was sung.

The Reverend Stewart Pierson
Secretary

Rector, St Stephen's Church
Wilkes-Barre Pa 18701