

CALL FOR A PROGRAM TO RENEW THE PEOPLE
AND THEIR CITIES

The cities of our country have been in decline for more than thirty years. A combination of shifting income distribution, disadvantaged minorities, and the frightened disinterest of the affluent has left most cities with the curious appearance of bombed ruins. The familiar urban crisis of polarized and insecure neighborhood minorities is now faced with the new dimension of fundamental economic collapse. The bankruptcy which faces most older American cities now reveals a deep change in the nature of the crisis itself. Such basic economic problems may be expected to release shock waves with the same radiating and destructive impact to the suburbs as a thermonuclear bomb dropped at the center of a metropolis.

The fact is that the cities of one million people or more in the United States: Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and others, are not simply disadvantaged, but are now being exploited. In New York an official blue ribbon commission has announced that the cost of labor is competitive with the South. The cost of basic services such as clerks, waitresses, printers, sales people, etc. is below the going rate. The original labor intensive economies that created our cities are not only recklessly mobile--seeking workers at constantly cheaper levels of pay--but literally without need of workers as industry becomes technologically intensive. Not even the temporary affluence enjoyed by the satellite suburbs can be expected to survive this new urban crisis without great trauma.

The Church has been active in the struggle to save and redeem the life of our cities for a good many years. Its view of the growing threat to our basic structures of communal life is instructed by very practical and chastened experience born on streets that run from racial and ethnic ghettos to city hall and the government bureaucracies.

As we stand today to raise our voices once again on behalf of the city and the people of God who are its inhabitants we speak from a foundation of both our past experiences with inadequate solutions as well as our continuing vision of the possibilities of the city and our hopes for it.

We are calling upon the Church, gathered here in part at the 65th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, to renew, deepen and expand its commitment to the city and its metropolitan environment. We are asking the Church to make this urban focus--where two-thirds of Americans live and work--the primary domestic priority in the years ahead.

Acting upon such a priority requires programmatic emphasis in three broad, challenging and necessary areas of work:

First, the Church must support the effort to renew the life of its parishes and the empowerment of the people of the city by enlarging the Church's work in the area of public policy. This means adequate and increasing funds channeled into competent study and understanding of the difficult economic questions that must preoccupy government affairs today. It also means that the people of the city are to be the recipients of such competence in government so that they are empowered to participate in the political process of moulding and reshaping their cities to meet their own human needs.

Second, the Church must renew life at the level of its parishes by empowering people to draw upon and mould the intrinsic relationship between their religious commitment and the social, political and economic forces that shape our cities. The life of the Church cannot be defined to mean a place of security away from a society in process of disintegration. The wholeness of the Gospel must be felt and lived by aiding our people in the city--all people of the city-- to shape their own school systems, their own work places, their own government to serve that wholeness which is the vision of God for His people. This means new forms of training for parish life, new techniques, new forms, with the supporting financial support such innovation requires.

Third, the Church must enlarge its financial support of the mission and work of the Black church so that it, together with other ethnic-based churches, may provide real leadership toward the empowerment of people in redesigning the policies and life of their cities.

Our vision of the Church in the city is one that calls it to address, through its people and priests, the task of redesigning our communal life together in very practical terms so that we have cities with employment security, income security, complete health care for all, nutritional services for both children and the aging and a host of other policies that must be brought into reality in our society if disaster is to be avoided.

The crisis in the city has never been worse. But our opportunities and our experience give us the option to

respond with new vigor. We call upon the Church, today,
to begin to formulate that response.