



LOUISE GEHAN

*You never know
what's coming next*

CAN you remember back in your teens when you hero-worshipped a person and thought he was perfect? Can you imagine being confronted by this person who tells you bluntly: "We need you in the Church. We have a job for you; will you take it?"

My answer was "yes," but not immediately. It took many days for me to change from the idea of going into personnel work to go into full-time church work. Many things contributed to my decision.

It was due in part to the unforgettable experience of being a part of a junior choir whose director loved music and the Church and the children all at once, and was able to communicate this to us. The fact that much of my growing up came through the youth groups of St. John's parish in Tallahassee and the diocesan summer camp in Florida also increased my interest in the Church. The strength of the student program at the Episcopal Student Center in Tallahassee, Ruge Hall, influenced me greatly. My own family contributed to my decision. Yet all these factors might never have come together to point my way toward working for the Church had it not been for the person who asked me.

The thought of working for the Church scared me enough so that further training was a necessity. The year at St. Margaret's in Berkeley, Calif., began to show me why I

was going into professional work in the Church. The classes, the services in the small chapel, the endless "bull sessions," the many new personalities in the Church — all these contributed to my education.

It was exciting to go back home to start my first job as diocesan field worker in Florida. For three years the diocesan station wagon carried me over the highways and byways of north Florida. One week my hostess lived on a beautiful estate located on a high bluff overlooking a river; two weeks later I was entertained in a fisherman's home.

Life was never unhurried or dull these years what with working with high school groups, meeting with church school teachers, talking to Woman's Auxiliary branches and men's groups, organizing leadership training, and working in the summer camp. After spending the first year traveling from parish to parish, like any other traveling salesman, I asked for headquarters in a small town. To try to know the people and learn the needs of the community and understand how the Episcopal Church could contribute to the enrichment of the community was a task.

From this town comes an incident which is indelibly imprinted on my memory. On a day when the town was packed with people attending a lurid murder trial at the country court house, some church school children be-

came bored with the proceedings and came over to the church, bringing with them some children from the neighboring village. They played for a while and then one of the visitors looked up at the wall where there were some pictures.

"Donny, who's that in the picture?" he asked pointing to one in particular.

"Oh, that's Jesus."

"Who's Jesus?"

It shocked me; this could not happen here. Since then, others have told the same story.

The next year my headquarters were located in a rapidly-growing suburban area. The rector had gone to war and in his absence my job was to try to keep the chapel at the heart of this new community.

Next came a break in my church career. I was offered a position at the Woman's College in Tallahassee; at the same time a family situation arose which made it advisable for me to go home. For four years there it was good to be just another lay person in a parish; working with the high school group was my main contribution and it was fun.

Again, a person helped me to rethink my vocation. During one of Ellen Gammack's trips to Tallahassee, she talked of the places where women were needed in the Church; she asked when I was returning to it. This started my thinking again.

After this came two wonderful summer-school sessions at Windham House in New York City. My conviction grew that my job must make sense to me and must be the most important job I could be doing. No other position seemed to demand the same straining to the utmost of my capacity to give, and I could find no other institution which knew the direction in which it ought to be headed. Something else became obvious to me; it now appeared that my primary motivation in the first job was a desire to "do good"; the second time it dawned on me that the emphasis should lie on being more Christian and letting the "doing good" come after this.

Next came college work in Columbia, Mo. College work days go by in a hurry; you never know what the next hour will bring in a college community. It's almost a twenty-four-hour job in Columbia with about one thousand Episcopal students wandering in from Stephens College, the University of Missouri, and Christian College, all three in the town.

Students come to college workers with all kinds of problems. A married student recently came in to discuss his future if he had to leave college because of financial worries; a very attractive co-ed wanted a conference to talk about her realization that she was too prudish with boys. And then there was the most unchurchly of college boys who ever set foot

in the parish house who asked me a question which I never shall forget: "Louise," he demanded, "what are angels?"

Advising committees, and meetings of all sorts; counseling over a dishpan and planning programs of many kinds; on and on it goes in an attempt to meet students where they are and to confront them with the knowledge of and a faith in God.

To try to sum up a career in the work of the Church is difficult. Experience in college work, summer volunteer work, rural work, summer camping, diocesan work — it has been that in scope, but that tells nothing of any depths. But it is certain that the rewards are many: the feeling that this work is at the heart of the needs of all men; the hope that through you the Church may reach a few more people to help them understand more fully the need for faith and practice in Christianity; your constant need for help and strength to help meet the demands of others; the knowledge that there's no more important work that you could be doing. The satisfactions are many.

For further information write to



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