

Quintin Primo, New Black Suffragan Bishop, Heralds Change In Episcopal Diocese

In the 1890s, many of Chicago's elite families worshipped at Trinity Episcopal Church, 125 E. 26th St. Blacks, were unwelcome and they organized small, usually Baptist congregations of their own on the side streets nearby.

Today public housing like Dearborn Homes and Prairie Courts, the middle income South Commons development, Dunbar High School and Mercy Hospital's expanded plant occupy much of the land where Trinity's Who's Who once lived. And Trinity has changed too. Today, Trinity is a predominantly black congregation led by a black rector. Together, they are building a self-supporting church.

"We don't want people who died in the 1920s to have to support Trinity," they say.

New Black Influence

Trinity is an example of new black interest and influence in the Episcopal Church, a denomination critics once

The transition from black uneasiness to acceptance began in 1954 under the rectorship of the Rev. Iver Lawrence, who began social service programs for the community through the church.

By the time Stines became rector in 1971, Trinity had about 100 community people that the new rector felt he could count on. The predominantly black, unified congregation made Stines feel "optimistic about what the Episcopal Church can do in the inner city."

Episcopal interest in the inner city received new impetus at the 1967 Seattle Convention, which reaffirmed the church's ministry to others than wealthy whites.

An outgrowth of the convention, The General Convention Program, addressed itself to minorities, stressing the need to facilitate empowerment so they could help themselves.

A Minority View

However, Mattie Hopkins, member of the Union of Black Episcopalians does not consider the Church's minority programs unique saying: "They came at the end of the civil rights movement and the beginning of the black nationalist cause."

Nevertheless, Ms. Hopkins and her associates work within the Episcopal structure, helping to place more black clergy, "where they can influence what is going on." Through such work, Ms. Hopkins believes UBE is helping the Christian Church be the agent of change it was meant to be.

She adds, "It remains to be seen whether there is any place in the Episcopal Church for black people. Those of us who work within the structure hope so, though we really can't see any reason for our optimism."

Inner City Strategy

The Episcopal formula for its inner city ministry was summed up by the Rt. Rev. James W. Montgomery, bishop of Chicago as, "more concern and more personnel for the inner city."

The key man for making this formula work in Chicago is Bishop Primo.

Primo became the first black bishop of the Chicago Episcopal diocese in 1972. He is one of six black Episcopal Bishops in the nation, four are suffragan (assistant). Born in Georgia and a graduate of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Bishop Primo received his divinity degree from Bishop Payne Divinity School in 1941 and was ordained in 1942.

As suffragan bishop, he shares leadership responsibility for a diocese which includes the northern third of Illinois and has 70,000 members and 145 churches.

Bishop Primo is co-founder of the National Union of Black Episcopalians and the Ecumenical Committee of Black Churchmen. He is currently co-chairman

of the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race and chairman of the Chicago Episcopal Commission on Metropolitan Affairs.

"Not Healthy"

"Race relations in Chicago," he told *The Chicago Reporter* recently, "is no different from race relations in Detroit. We still see whites fleeing the city, leaving us an old city with depleting resources. It's not healthy."

Primo then spoke about his previous assignment.

"I was in Detroit for three years in the oldest and most established black Episcopal church, St. Matthew's. It was a middle class black church. On the other hand, we had St. Joseph's, a former white church which was in the heart of the black section of the city."

While leaders of both churches wanted St. Joseph's to continue, they realized that survival depended on members,



Henri A. Stines

called, "a middle class church with a ministry to white Anglo-Saxons."

For many this charge no longer carries weight in the Chicago Episcopal diocese. Black Episcopalians are no longer clustered in silent pockets. Dramatically, the diocese now has a black suffragan bishop, the Rt. Rev. Quintin E. Primo.

Trinity, the second oldest church in the Episcopal diocese, began receiving black neighbors after the "white exodus" of 1913-14. However, like other Episcopal churches erected during the mid nineteenth century, the deeds to Trinity's property contained provisions like the "restrictive covenant clause" which stated that the church property could not be "used, occupied or rented by non-whites."

"Not For Them"

Though the clause was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1948, the Rev. Henri A. Stines, rector of Trinity says, "for a long time black newcomers felt the church was not for them."



Quintin E. Primo

whom, it seemed, the surrounding community could not supply. Primo's own St. Matthew's began to take an active interest in St. Joseph's and social and religious interaction between the two parishes became more frequent. Eventually, the members of both parishes volunteered to merge congregations.

Voluntary Merger

Primo believes the voluntary nature of the merger is the key to its success and vitality. He adds, "We did not lose even 10 members in the process."

Voluntary mergers are unlikely in the Chicago Episcopal diocese, however, if the Episcopal churches in Evanston are barometers.

Evanston has four Episcopal churches: St. Mark's, St. Matthew's, St. Luke's and St. Andrew's. In the early 1920s, St. Andrew's was established as a black parish by black Episcopalians although the church has had white rectors and members.

Periodically, the possibility of St. Andrew's merging with another Evanston parish has been raised. But if St. An-

dev's has its way, the merger will never occur.

According to the Rev. Grosvenor Neham, rector of St. Andrew's, "We're still paying our bills. If that changes, maybe we'll consider a merger."

Primo favors an ecumenical team of community conscious churches which, "should be able to concentrate on the issues of the neighborhood. One church, for example, would concentrate on schools, another on mental health needs,

"I am appalled at the way some denominations have allowed church buildings to deteriorate—with few exceptions—before selling them to blacks and other minority groups. Fantastic prices are usually affixed to those buildings.

"My hope is that there will be an end to such sales at incredible profits. To me, this type of sale is extortionary and unconscionable. These are hard words to use, but it seems to me churches should not be in the real estate business. If they are serious about Christian ministry, they should make it easier, not more difficult for the inner city ministry to succeed."

In order to help the ministry succeed in aging neighborhoods, Primo will propose that old church buildings be torn down and replaced by buildings which are less expensive to operate and maintain. His plans for the inner city stress the quality not the quantity of the ministry. "We don't need a half million dollar plant of 'X' number of buildings to do the Lord's work. Many of the churches need to be replaced with multi-purpose buildings."

An 'Enabler'

Primo's plans and interest in the inner city are related to the way he views his function in the episcopacy. "I am here to lead, but at the same time I also must be an 'enabler.' I am a supporter of both prophetic and programmatic roles. If I have one criticism of the church, it is that she continues to drag her feet. If concerned Christians got together, I am certain we would make an impact on the social order."

However, even specialized churches and ecumenical cooperation might be inadequate means of reaching some individuals. Primo is convinced, "The people who really need the Church are not to be found in church buildings. If

Chicago Episcopal Churches

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| Cathedral of St. James | Wabash Avenue and Huron Street |
| Advent | 2900 Logan Boulevard |
| All Saints | 4550 N. Hermitage Avenue |
| Ascension | 1133 N. LaSalle Street |
| Atonement | 5749 N. Kenmore Avenue |
| † Epiphany* | 201 S. Ashland Boulevard |
| Grace | 33 W. Jackson Boulevard |
| † Holy Cross* | 1201 W. 111th Place |
| Holy Nativity | 9300 S. Pleasant Avenue |
| Mediator | 10961 S. Hoyne Avenue |
| † Messiah | 8255 S. Dante Avenue |
| Our Saviour | 530 W. Fullerton Parkway |
| St. Alban | 6240 N. Avondale Avenue |
| † St. Andrew* | 48 N. Hoyne Avenue |
| † St. Barnabas | 4241 W. Washington Boulevard |
| † St. Bartholomew | 6720 S. Stewart Avenue |
| St. Chrysostom | 1424 N. Dearborn Parkway |
| St. Cyprian* | 6501 W. Belmont Avenue |
| † St. Edmund | 6105 S. Michigan Avenue |
| St. Elizabeth | 6201 S. St. Louis Avenue |
| † St. Francis* | 2514 W. Thornshade Avenue |
| † St. George | 851 E. 76th Street |
| St. John | 3857 N. Kostner Avenue |
| St. Joseph | 12058 S. Eggleston Avenue |
| St. Luke | 741 S. Western Avenue |
| St. Margaret | 2555 E. 73rd Street |
| St. Martin | 5710 W. Midway Park |
| St. Mary (Korean)* | 3533 N. Albany Avenue |
| St. Matthias | 164 E. 111th Street |
| St. Paul and the Redeemer | 4945 S. Dorchester Avenue |
| St. Paul by the Lake | 7100 N. Ashland Avenue |
| St. Peter | 621 W. Belmont Avenue |
| St. Richard | 5101 W. Devon Avenue |
| St. Stephen* | 3533 N. Albany Avenue |
| † St. Thomas | 3800 S. Michigan Avenue |
| St. Timothy* | 3555 W. Huron Street |
| † Trinity | 125 E. 26th Street |

(Note: Churches marked * are organized missions receiving subsidies from the diocese. At present, the total subsidy is \$79,622.31. † represents a church membership at least 50 per cent black.) (Source: The Journal of the Diocese of Chicago, Volume 1, 1973)

Cooperation Possible

In his interview with the Reporter, Primo also spoke about ecumenical cooperation in Chicago. Some churchmen, in his view, feel policies on social issues must still be implemented within denominational lines, thus making inter-faith groups impotent.

However, Primo feels, "Ecumenical cooperation in Chicago is still possible although the ranks have been reduced."

Primo says there has been too much inter-denominational strife, but, "I have faith that Christian denominations though divided, need not be separated into opposing camps. I don't think God ever intended his church to be all Episcopal, all Baptist, or all Catholic. I think He established the basic tenets and left the rest up to whatever man decided."

According to the bishop, proselytizing must be de-emphasized in the Church of the 70s. He says, "We must strive to meet the needs of the people, without expecting to gain membership. If we do gain members, it should be a by-product of our efforts. The weakness of all denominations is that they ask, 'What is there in it for us?' before acting."

and so on. Churches should be specialized; you cannot be all things to all people."

Fantastic Prices

While Primo is optimistic about Chris-

Trinity Episcopal Church

tian ministry in the inner city, certain practices disturb him, including the real estate practices of some denominations.

necessary, religious leaders should be willing to carry the message into the streets," Michele Gaspar

