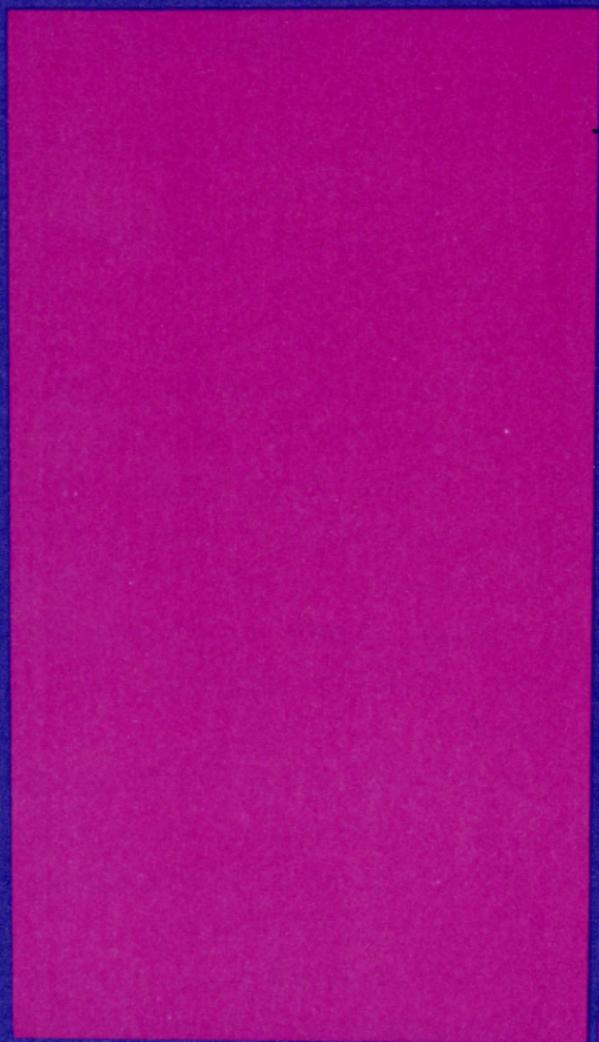


On the Action Edge!



A UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY

“EACH OF US has his own special calling” is an oft-used phrase. How truly this applies to the Church, where there are so many differences in talents. The clergy, for instance, are called to lead the Church’s sacramental life and are educated to give insight into the meaning of the Gospel.

Fulfillment of the clergy calling, however, in no way rules out the essential roles of the laity. Lay persons have special ministries in our society, for they have been called through their own talents to serve in the home, office, factory, shop, farm, government agency, legislature, school, communications media, or wherever else human relationships exist. Lay people stand on the action edge of the Church which is called to witness to God’s action within the world today. They work on the frontiers where faith in God’s triumphs is increasingly challenged.

Taking the Christian calling seriously, some lay people have tried to witness to the power of God’s action in society around them. Doing so, they have encountered harsh reality.

As mature adults, they have grown to meet the demands of their secular vocations and responsibilities. What shakes them when they try to relate their religious faith to life, however, is the sudden awareness that they know less about the meaning of the Christian Faith than about requirements for modern living.

In a sense, they are the Church's equivalent to the high school dropouts who are prevented by ignorance from doing their share of the nation's work. The majority of Church people stop preparing to carry out their Christian calling as soon as they have been confirmed; thereafter, their spiritual understanding rarely keeps pace with their growth in the world.

Many lay people are concerned about this situation. They want to witness to the Gospel effectively and maturely with all their talents. Their concern has caused new emphasis on adult education programs at all levels in the Church today.

ECUMENICAL REMEDY

An outstanding example of the effort by lay people to come to terms with the meaning of the Gospel is the Laymen's School of Religion in Berkeley, California. Founded in 1959, the school provides opportunities for the laity of many communions to study the biblical and theological heritage of the Church and to work out ways of relating it to daily life.

Since its founding, over 1200 adults from eleven communions with churches and parishes in the San Francisco area have attended classes. The school's courses are part of a carefully designed curriculum organized into three departments: Faith and the Bible (Biblical Studies); Faith and the Church (Theological and Historical Studies); and Faith in Action (Christianity and Culture Studies).

Classes are taught by a distinguished faculty drawn from five seminaries in the San

Francisco Bay Area. Students meet in community centers, seminary classrooms, and local churches in a number of Bay Area communities. During four six-week quarters each year, classes are held during the daytime and in the evening in different towns — whenever and wherever enrolled lay people are free to gather for instruction and discussion.

PROBLEM...

Budget has always been a problem for this school. Student fees cover one-third of its operating costs; the remainder is voluntarily offered by students or donated by local churches, communions, individual clergymen, and laymen. Instructors receive approximately one-half the remuneration they could expect for preparing lectures and comparable teaching at secular schools.

In 1963, the school's board of directors recognized and attempted to face an emerging problem. The school's program was clearly answering a need among the laity, answering it so well, in fact, that the number of requests from lay people for courses far exceeded the number of available professors. Success was forcing the dean, the Rev. Muriel James, to be a full-time administrator rather than the educator she was.

The growth of the school — and its continued existence — made the addition of another professional person essential. An administrative director was needed to interpret the aims of the school to the public, to work with students and potential students, and to

develop closer relations with the secular structures within which lay people live and work. Acting as the school's vice dean, this person could establish a sound base of financial support for the school's program.

A scarcity of operating funds had more than once raised the possibility of having to close, for the school simply could not afford an additional staff member. Where, then, could funds be found to permit the hiring of a person to help raise more money?

... AND SOLUTION

The president of the board of directors requested a United Thank Offering grant to enable hiring an administrative director. The Episcopal Bishop of California strongly endorsed this request, terming the school "a most important and deserving endeavor" and citing the active involvement of Episcopalians in its work since its inception.

In December 1964, the school was informed that it would receive an annual grant of \$9,000 for the triennium. Since then, an administrative director has been hired to interpret the school to the public and raise funds to support its program.

Lay people from the San Francisco Bay Area continue to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Laymen's School of Religion. What do they think of it? Here are some opinions:

"... my wife and I have found much substantial ground on which to build our faith

and help in being more effective in our Church work."

"... these classes have been like a thorn prodding me toward a full commitment to God."

"... everyone in the class was excited about it! As we learn more about the points of view of the biblical writers, we learn better how to deal with crises in our own lives and in the lives of others."

"... The Laymen's School of Religion offers theological education which is more than an intellectual exercise. . . . One becomes a more effective person."

"... one cannot study for long in the Laymen's School without a new and deepened sense of the Church, of what it is intended to be in and for the world."

Your offering of thanks through the United Thank Offering has made it possible for the important work of the Laymen's School of Religion to continue and grow.

UNITED THANK OFFERING STORY No. 7

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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