

The Presiding Bishop and the National Council

Gentlemen:

An expanding frontier of the Church's mission is demanding recognition by the Church at large. As urban life increases in its complex patterns of mobility and change, the metropolitan areas of this land emerge as the greatest missionary potential confronting the Church. The flight to suburbia has left the inner city denuded of its former occupants. Their places are being taken by greater numbers of people without any Church affiliation, but of a generally Protestant heritage.

In this "hurry-up" tempo of change formerly stable churches are facing increasing instability. Modern urban society needs to be recognized as the phenomenon it is. A total appraisal of this society and the place of the Church in it, calls for the spirit of the pioneer. The time of dreaming is past. The hour for realism is here. The dynamics of the city will not stop and must be met in the process of decay and new creation. The sprawling metropolitan complex can become a wasteland of spiritual bankruptcy. Let us face the crisis.

Everyone who is familiar with the life and administration of our Church at the diocesan level knows the following to be true:

1) Our bishops are burdened with so many responsibilities that they often are not free to give particular problems the time and thought which those problems demand;

2) Our experienced and able parochial leaders, both clerical and lay, who are willing to volunteer their services for diocesan tasks, are likewise over-burdened;

3) The complexity and magnitude of the problems facing the Church in our ever-growing urban and industrial society are shattering.

Nevertheless the actual mission moves forward at the diocesan level.

In the light of these facts, competent and adequate leadership at the national level is an urgent need. Such leadership could strengthen greatly our hard-pressed diocesan and local planning and program.

Moreover, the complexity of the urban-industrial scene defies creative analysis unless people well-informed in the disciplines involved make their contributions to the whole. It would be naive at the best and folly at the worst to expect one, or even two, national staff officers to carry this program forward.

Therefore we call upon our National Council carefully to assess the demands of the task before us. In so doing, we make the plea that adequate multiple staff be provided at this time of reorganization and recruitment in the Division of Urban-Industrial Work. Such staff should include clergy experienced in the urban and industrial ministry and others who would be informed in the several secular disciplines involved, such as sociology, demography, and social research.

This is also a call to the bishop of every diocese to establish a commission or division to determine strategy, program, and study resources which will relate the needed missionary thrust in the inner city to over-all diocesan policy.

Finally we call for accelerated recruitment of intelligent and concerned laity, aware of the divisive and depersonalizing influences of our time, and settled in the conviction that the Church, through Christ, has strength and the sense of direction to bring new life to the city. The ministry of the laity is nowhere more necessary to overcome and forestall jungle morality and to express the ways of Christian love.

The city church has a special call to demonstrate leadership in the arts of caring for the new crises of policy and personal decision, as well as the traditional crises of family life and personal trouble as they have been aggravated by contemporary pressures. We believe that in this decade the Episcopal Church may well be judged by its response to social and cultural change and to the precipitations of doubt, indecision, and need which are clinically most obvious in the city life of the nation.

To this issue we call for immediate and total consideration of the strategy at all levels of the Church's responsibility.

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