

Center City

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First Presbyterian Church

Serving employees and inhabitants of downtown Memphis



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MAY 15, 1974

On Thursday, May 16th, the First Presbyterian Church will host a 'Consultation of Downtown/Urban Ministry.' In attendance will be ministers and lay members of twenty Presbyterian churches from urban areas with populations of 100,000 or more.

Aiding the conference will be two resource persons: Dr. Tom Cutting of the Union Theological Seminary will discuss the 'Sociological/Psychological Nature of the City' and Dr. Don Shriver of Emory University will follow with the Church's response to the urban environment with the Theology of Involvement.'

Downtown Church

This conference, the first in the Memphis area, is part of a general reappraisal of the downtown/urban Church, where congregations are no longer drawn from the surrounding neighborhood. In the past, downtown churches have been discussed in terms of their 'plight' as historic islands in a sea of inner-city blight. But, today, this has changed. According to David Freeman, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, the conference is based upon

the assumption that there is a role for the church in the downtown area, a role going far beyond simply maintaining membership in the face of suburban flight.

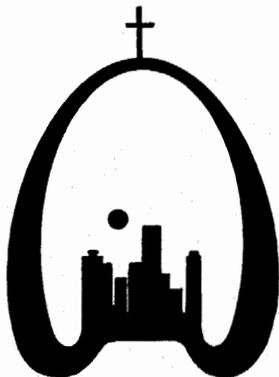
Urban Ministry

It is the purpose of this meeting to develop a realistic approach to both the modern city and community service. One alternative is a unique and distinctive style of urban ministry, concerning itself with the problems and needs not only of the congregation, but also those of the neighboring community of which the church is an integral, if often foreign part.

At First Presbyterian Church, for example, this idea of urban ministry has taken numerous forms: an Urban Outreach Commission which oversees a Day Care Center for the children of those who live and work in the civic center area; a daily luncheon; CENTER CITY; and currently being organized is a counselling service for those going through the Memphis court system.

Also, First Presbyterian houses many activities which are not church related: Project First Offender, Alcoholics Anonymous, the National Organization of Women, Senior Citizens Services, and many others.

Perhaps the words of Mr. Freeman most aptly sum up the new attitude of the downtown ministry, 'It can no longer be simply a matter of survival for any of us. It must be survival with a purpose.'



URBAN MINISTRY

art & POLITICS

Last week an isolated, some would say insignificant, event occurred at the City Hall plaza. Mayor Wyeth Chandler ordered the removal of two pieces of sculpture by local artist Harold Day. One cannot help but view this act by the mayor as extremely revealing of official attitudes toward political power and the idea of community in general.

I will not dwell on the fact that Mr. Day's work had been invited to be displayed on the City Hall plaza; or that they were removed from Brooks Art Gallery to be shown downtown.

I will not dwell on the obvious crudity of Mayor Chandler's remarks about the 'junk' which had apparently 'fallen off the building,' nor about the mentality of those who react so harshly to that which is beyond their comprehension.

I will not dwell on the Mayor's wholly unreasonable lack of consideration for Mr. Day and the problems of moving steel sculptures weighing hundreds of pounds each— and moving them at the personal whim of one man.

But what I would like to discuss is the idea of public office and political power revealed by the mayor's arbitrary removal of the two art works. The plaza of City Hall is a public plaza, paid for and maintained by public tax funds. It is not the private property of any single individual— be he mayor or citizen. Mayor Chandler's arbitrary order, based upon no other consideration than his own artistic tastes, reflects a profound shift in the idea of political power from that of stewardship for the general good to that of political office as personal ownership, an idea, by the way, at the source of the rather bizarre conduct of our national leadership.

Mayor Chandler's act also reveals the distorted sense of community of much of the downtown leadership. This leadership seems adept only at superficial sloganeering— 'Believe in Memphis'— or falling over itself in getting the NFL to Memphis. But what kind of community must we be if the local artists who give visual expression to our vision of life are discouraged and ostracized by the crudest sort of conduct at the highest level of local government? Is it not fair to ask that Memphis 'believe' in her people and in the free exchange of ideas and expression which are the marks of a real community?

It has been suggested that the plazas in the civic center area be organized for some constructive use— art shows, concerts, public speeches— for those living and working downtown. Hopefully one of the Downtown Task Forces will do so this summer.

Any alternative is preferable to the sad event of last week.

TRANSITION CEN. Link To Life

When he steps to the podium at one of his numerous speaking engagements, his audience may take note of his obvious youth and settle back for another bleeding-heart liberal, coddle-the-criminal spiel.

But Bob Walsh, 26 year old director of the Memphis Transitional Center, likes the hard-nose audiences best, because his message is realism, and his reform rationale centers on the pocket-book.

Financial Realities

The realities of reform are partially financial to Bob. He points out that his residents have paid over \$300 in taxes since the program began last year. Probationers and parolees are tax payers year. Probationers and parolees are tax payers, he

year. Probationers and parolees are tax payers, he likes to say, while convicts are tax burdens.

"Prisons are necessary," Bob tells his audiences, "but too many prisoners should be in diversion programs. Perhaps 15 per cent of the inmates really need to be in prison.

"Yes, a program like ours is expensive," he admits, "but not as expensive as locking a man up."



Pictured with Sgt. D.S. Newman of the Police Youth Activities Office are Darold Williams and Taylor McKinney. The young men are being presented trophies for their endeavors in the police boxing program held recently at the National Guard Armory. The Youth Activities office is located at the corner of Lauderdale and Alabama, and provides recreational and sports activities for youngsters throughout the year.

Purpose of Transitional Center

Transitional Center provides temporary housing and counselling for men who have run afoul of the law. Most of the residents are just coming off prison sentences and are trying to adjust to the outside world.

But many are admitted to Transitional Center as an alternative to incarceration.

Transitional Center is supported by public and private contributions. City and county governments provide almost two-thirds of its budget. The State of Tennessee owns the Center facility at 1242 Peabody.

Other Contributors

Episcopal Church Women this year provided \$25,000 and other local churches, civic organizations and individuals kicked in another \$11,000.

Bob feels his organization could do even more if additional funds were available. He wants community support for reform of the criminal justice system, whether or not it involves Transitional Center.

Additional plans awaiting funds or direction are a program for women offenders, which will be sponsored by Church Women United, and a day care service for children with one or more incarcerated parents.

Bob sees the day care service as part of a general program to assist families of prisoners. He feels, as do many other experts, that part of the crime cycle consists of the situation where one parent is in prison and the other must work to support children who thus have no supervision during most of the day.

Transitional Center has already organized a bus trip which carries family and friends of inmates to and from the Fort Pillow institution on the second Saturday of each month.

Need Professional Assistance

Another theme of Bob's message is the need for professional help in the Transitional Center. Members of the legal and medical community have been attracted to provide voluntary assistance to residents and their families.

The Center's four VISTA volunteers will begin organization of a volunteer program to expand possibilities for service and involve the community.

Back in his Boston college, Bob would never have believed he would wind up in Memphis running a service organization for criminal offenders.

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Former English Teacher

He was an English major and actually taught school in his New England hometown for a time after graduation.

But in between he had served as a VISTA volunteer assigned to Shelby County. And he developed a fascination with the criminal justice system that festered after his return to the academic life.

Bob began his reinvolvement by working with various social action projects while still teaching in Boston. Finally he gave up his career in education altogether to work at the Training Center for Youthful Offenders, where he spent a year before assuming the reins of the Transitional Center, which was just taking shape.

Mini-Prison

"If we tried to run things ourselves, we could find ourselves running a mini-prison."

One central purpose of the Transitional Center is to instill a sense of responsibility in its residents.

"The problem with prisons and most other social organizations is that the staff makes decisions," observes Bob. "Here, house residents make most of their own decisions."

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**First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38103**

**C: CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB
MENU FOR MAY 16-24**

Serving from 11:30 to 1:00

at Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

Price: \$1.25 per serving, including drink

THURSDAY, MAY 16

fried Chicken, rice and gravy, squash, rolls

FRIDAY, MAY 17

Roast beef, whipped potatoes, green beans, rolls

MONDAY, MAY 20

Country-fried steak, blackeyed peas, creamed corn, corn bread

TUESDAY, MAY 21

Pork steak, rice and gravy, green beans, rolls

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22

Spaghetti, cole slaw, French bread

THURSDAY, MAY 23

Oven-baked chicken, whipped potatoes, peas and carrots, rolls

FRIDAY, MAY 24

Beef stew, tossed salad, corn bread

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