

New Ministries of the Church

R. Edward Dowdy

There are no "new" ministries of the church. At least we have not found them at Woodruff Place Baptist Church in Indianapolis. Whenever we think we have hit on some new need or come up with some novel way to become involved in the lives of the people in our community, we are sure to find that it has been done before. A little search of church history, a deeper study of the New Testament invariably reveal that what we thought was new is not new at all, for "there is nothing new under the sun."

Several years ago Dr. Clarence Cranford said, "Whenever a new book comes out, I read an old one." We who are trying to minister in the inner city profit greatly by reading an old Book. It deals with the life and ministry of one "who went about doing good."

When we started the Mother's Club recently, we thought we were rising to a newly felt need in our community. There are young mothers almost too young to be mothers but who desperately need to know about rearing a family. Others are so disadvantaged educationally that they cannot read the labels in the supermarket to know which is the best buy in terms of size and price. They are forever misled by SPECIAL 10¢ OFF REGULAR PRICE and oversize boxes that say GIANT, ECONOMY, or FAMILY SIZE, but when the cost per ounce is calculated, it is a better buy to get the regular size.

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In order to get the mothers together some provision had to be made for child care during the meetings each Friday morning. Sponsored by ours and a neighbor church, the Mother's Club has been unusually popular and fruitful from its inception. We might claim a "first" if we neglected to remember the words of a certain man of Galilee who said to his disciples, "Let the children come unto me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." Their mothers had brought the children for Jesus to bless; he welcomed their concern for their children and took advantage of it. Parents today are anxious to do everything for their children; we simply capitalize on this natural desire.

When the women in a Sunday school class determined to do something for a family whose welfare check is used up paying the rent, they decided to provide supplemental food for the blind couple. This couple is not really "our responsibility," for after all, they are not even Baptist. Actually they are not "our kind of people," for they are "welfare folk," and we are an average middle-class church. Our women determined that the need was real, and they provided staple foods from their own pantries so that there is available at the church a supply of the basic necessities. They thought they had hit on something new until they recalled the words of Jesus, "I was hungry and you gave me food. . . . As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

I shall never forget the absolute joy which was expressed when we hit on the idea of sending out our visitors two by two to call in the apartments of people who had some tenuous connection with our church. One deacon reasoned, "It would be safer at night to go in pairs. If one person runs out of something to talk about, surely the other can think of something to say. It is harder to say 'No' to two people than it would be to say 'No' to a person alone."

Perhaps they had forgotten the example of Jesus as he sent

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his disciples out to visit two by two. We used the same technique of sending the callers to the home of the most likely prospects the first night. Having found some success, with renewed confidence, then they were ready for the less-willing-to-listen group. This technique was not invented by the modern evangelists; we simply followed Christ's example of good judgment.

The kids in our neighborhood have no place to play except the narrow, busy streets. Ten years ago we paved two city lots for a parking lot. The space was needed for Sunday and other times when cars of church members would be crowding the available street parking space. Although our immediate neighborhood is not exactly a high-income area, the people seem to have a lot of cars per family.

We determined that the parking lot would be used for a playground except when it was absolutely needed for church parking. We made a ten-foot-square sandbox and erected a jungle gym, made of scrap pipe. It seemed like a new idea at the time, but then I read that half a century ago, Walter Rauschenbusch was advocating a sandbox for each of the New York city playgrounds. This was long before the teachers of young children discovered the learning value of "mud therapy." Our kids were getting dirty enough, but the wet sand gave them a new opportunity to be creative in their play.

On that same concrete "playground" which is only eighty by one hundred feet, we have done many things. Last summer we staged neighborhood Olympic games with our Presbyterian neighbors. Discus throwing with paper plates and shot putting with a balloon would provide poor preparation for the real Olympics, but the Woodruff Place laurel crown was just as proudly worn.

One year, we took advantage of the best-known event in sporting, the Indianapolis "Five Hundred" which comes every Memorial Day. On our parking lot we painted an oval track

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and announced the coming of the Woodruff Place "Little Five Hundred." Competition was open to all ages. It was to be, as the real Five Hundred is, an endurance race. Speed did not count. The idea was to complete five hundred laps around the oval track. After a twenty-five-lap "qualifying" run, the laps could be done in multiples of twenty-five at the contestant's convenience. Judges and timers for the big event consisted of "anyone who can count up to twenty-five." A more conscientious group of six- and seven-year-old officials you never saw! The parking lot is lighted at night, so the track was in use from early morning till late at night.

The rules specified that any type of vehicle could be used in the Woodruff Place "Little Five Hundred." Contestants made their five hundred laps on bicycles, roller skates, pushing baby carriages, rolling an automobile tire, or just plain running. The official score cards were a bit grimy when they were turned in with very juvenile signatures, certifying that each twenty-five laps had been logged. Some barely held together in a sweaty hip pocket until the contest was completed. Watermelon for the winners in "victory lane" was promptly followed by enough watermelon for all who were standing by to cheer the winners.

We simply took advantage of a local interest in a five hundred mile race. The children loved it. We had a feeling it would not have been strange to the man of Galilee who had observed children in the streets playing wedding or funeral in typical imitation of their elders.

The census figures indicate a higher than usual number of older people in our neighborhood. What could be more natural than a "Golden Age" club? It took so little doing to get the group together that we wondered why we had not tried it earlier. We already had several Sunday school classes and women's circles for older women, and the Men's Bible Class. Our weekly Golden Age Fellowship fulfills quite a different

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need for people who spend most of their time alone or in the home of a relative. One of our octogenarians said that he felt "completely rejuvenated" by the afternoon spent with the Golden Age Fellowship. They have a wonderful time playing games like dominoes and scrabble. They have some favorite television programs to share. A group of ladies often spends the whole day working on a quilt and talking. We think the talking is just as important as the games and the quilting. Then there is refreshment time. A cake with candles occasionally helps the group to celebrate with one who might be passing another birthday alone. Even the diabetics are not forgotten, and there is always something tasty that contains no sugar.

Some may question whether or not this is a "religious" activity. We think it is in the best tradition of the one who said something about "a cup of cold water." Of course it is religious in a traditional way too when a retired minister thanks God for the food and the fellowship. The selection of movies includes some of religious content, but none are more religious, in fact, than the beautiful travel pictures that reveal God's wonders of creation. A trip to a farm, or to a state park when the autumnal beauty of colored leaves is at its peak—this too speaks of our God who cares.

The Golden Age Thanksgiving dinner is a real "event." The turkey is cooked by a retired construction contractor. He has been doing the family cooking since he terminated his building work at ninety. He tested several receipts for turkey dressing before he was satisfied he had found the best formula for the Golden Age version. No dinner at the White House gets more careful preparation than our Golden Age Thanksgiving.

We had an idea that our neighborhood mothers needed some home nursing training. We always have lots of kids with measles and mumps. There are grandparents who are bedfast.

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Scarcely a day goes by without a need for some first-aid experience.

Our first effort was a complete failure. The mothers did not come. We thought we had failed to convince them of the need, but it was really a matter of time. We had nearly perfect response when we scheduled the same course for the Girl Scouts and invited other teen-age girls to share. They are the baby-sitters' and it is this age group who are most involved in caring for grandma. Sponge baths, backrests made from cardboard boxes, and other home nursing techniques were teen-age concerns.

For four years our church has operated basketball leagues in our gym which was the first gymnasium in our part of town. Dr. L. C. Trent, who was pastor when the gym was built, called it the "evangelistic doorway to the church." He had a conviction that if the men could get boys into the building, he could teach them the way of Christ. We have been teaching a lot more than basketball across the years. Obviously, we have not made saints out of all who have come to play. Some never do more than just play the game. Others are enlisted in the other youth activities of the church. Some get only a chance to be related to a Christian coach who is concerned about each boy as a person. Somebody cares when a boy has a problem. When he goes to Juvenile Court, it says something of the love of Christ just to have someone from the church standing with him or sitting with his estranged parents.

We have convictions that a cooperative nursery school has real value for both children and parents. The public school kindergarten teachers have assured us that they can immediately spot a new pupil who has had the nursery school experience. They have already learned to share. They know better how to get along with other children. They have already been trained to leave parents and accept the teacher as friend and mentor.

Ours is not a day nursery but a cooperative one. It serves

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the needs of parents who must work all day and leave the children from early morning until the end of the workday. Our cooperative is specifically designed to involve each parent in the role of a "helping parent" on a shared basis and also provides for parent education in regular monthly sessions. From the employed, trained teacher, both child and parent learn. Within the parents' group, the sharing is itself very creative and comforting. Just to know that other parents are having the same kind of experiences in child rearing saves inexperienced parents from panic and discouragement.

We had not planned it this way, but an extra opportunity came to us from one of our local hospitals. A preschool child who was under psychiatric care was enrolled by the hospital. The doctors thought he would respond to being in a group of so-called normal children. A trained caseworker came with him each day, and both were quickly accepted in the nursery school group. We felt that everyone profited from the experience.

In other instances, welfare and community agencies have been sending young people and adults to us because they recognize the basic needs which the church is fulfilling. A teen-age girl who has spent many months in the hospital for corrective surgery came to us on such a recommendation. Our youth group immediately welcomed her. In a short time she started to share in the leadership of the group. After a few months she was as much at home as though she had grown up in the church. We remember the first night after a basketball game, when she said, "This is the first time in my life that I have had any fun."

A boy on probation from the Juvenile Court needed a friend. He had broken no law, but a series of unfortunate circumstances at home had put him into court. Because we had shown interest in some of our own boys who were before the court at the same time, the probation officer asked if we would be willing to add a new boy to our responsibility. Several years later, after

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finishing high school and a tour duty in the Marines, this "predelinquent" came by to say, "Thanks for keeping me off the streets."

Our study hall and tutoring sessions have not completely solved the dropout problem, but these have helped. A place to study with some books and a qualified teacher to help has proved its worth. When the high-school invitations for commencement came in last year, there was one from a near-dropout who was literally saved from suicide by an alert tutor who thought he detected evidences of too much medication.

Whatever "new ministries" we have been able to engage in are largely the results of church members' giving more of their time and talent to share in a work that belongs to the whole church and not to staff only. We have been aided by college and seminary interns, who worked many hours a week for a bare subsistence and the joy of working. Two summers we have had high-school young people whose home church paid their expenses so they could help us. The Indiana Baptist Youth Fellowship provided a summer scholarship for another. Actually the amount of money involved was small, but having a little extra help made the difference of doing or not doing some immediate project.

The American Baptist Home Mission Society helped by sending a staff person to aid in our training for the winter volunteers. Members from suburban churches served as helpers, taught piano lessons, and provided transportation for field trips. The Neighborhood Youth Corps has even asked us to provide employment for high-school young people who are working under the Economic Opportunity Act. We have been very fortunate in having an abundance of manpower available. Perhaps there is a contagion that grows out of work that is so rewarding, whether as volunteers, interns, or subsistence workers.

There is really nothing "new" about what we have been

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doing. It just seems appropriate to try to meet the needs of people, whatever those needs happen to be. This is our understanding of what Jesus did whenever he confronted a person in trouble.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." (John 14:12.)

Encounter—Adults and the Gospel

Paul R. Long, Jr.

The problem is a simple one; it has to do with effectively communicating the gospel, the "good news" that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. There are obviously many schools of thought about the effective communication of the gospel. At Third Church in Rochester we have embarked on a program that has to do with "dialogue." It is concerned with the dispersed church reaching out into the community for nurture and action. Through this program we are attempting to establish a community of searching Christians who need one another to witness to a living and relevant, yet historically sound, Christian faith. In order for the gospel to be authentically proclaimed, the listeners must become hearers; the listeners must be involved in the proclamation; the listeners must be able to ask questions and to press on toward deeper meanings and must be allowed to "get hold of" the proclaimers.

At Third Church this is an evolving and vital program. Basic to it is an exchange of ideas and concerns about some of the "basic words" of Christianity. The opportunity for this exchange is made available through the gathering together of *short-term, disciplined*, small groups meeting in the home of the minister of adult education. These are not koinonia groups but are merely the beginning attempt in communication of ideas that have always been a part of the Christian vocabulary. The groups