

The Making of a Black Bishop

First Edition—1998

Title: The Making of a Black Bishop

Author: The Right Reverend Quintin E. Primo, Jr.

Published by:

Cedar Tree Books, Ltd.
Nine Germay Drive
Wilmington, DE 19804

Editor: Cynthia Primo Martin

Photographs selected by the Primo family

Copyright: Winifred P. Primo, 1998

ISBN: 1-892142-02-3

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



BX
5995
.P953
A3x
1998

Chapter 9

St. Simon's Church

Rochester, New York 1947 - 1963

A call to pastor St. Simon's Mission in Rochester, New York, was an enormous challenge for a young priest. The Mission was larger than the average black congregation in the American Episcopal church today. Her founder, Father Frank Louis Brown, M.A., was a newly-ordained priest from the neighboring Diocese of Western New York. He was formerly a member of St. Philip's Church in Buffalo, New York, the Diocese's only black congregation. As is so often the case, even in today's Episcopal church, the bishop had no place in the diocese for a gifted, talented young black priest. I presume he was pleased and relieved that Father Brown answered the "Macedonian" cry of the 50 hopeful black Rochesterians, who urged him to come to their city and help start a mission congregation for blacks.

For several years, black Episcopalians were forced to join existing local black congregations, since no local white Episcopal church was willing to have them either as visitors or as members. Interestingly, the 50 charter members were all confirmed Episcopalians, having received the holy sacrament either in the small western New York villages and towns from which they had come, or in the different places in the West Indies where branches of the Anglican Church existed. Concerning the priest-founder, Jamaican-born Father Brown was educated in this country and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Bard College (formerly St. Stephen's-on-the-Hudson) and summa cum laude from the Philadelphia Divinity School. He received a masters degree from the University of Pennsylvania. A lifelong associate member of the Order of the Holy Cross (a religious Benedictine monastic order based in West Park, New York), he took the threefold vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. A celibate priest, Father Brown lived for the Church and the community he dearly loved and faithfully served. His ill health was the reason for my call.

From the outset, it was clear what my major foci as the vicar must be: (1) to continue building on the spiritual foundation Father Brown had begun; (2) to erect a new parish house/community center on the vacant land adjoining the church edifice; (3) to purchase a desirable rectory in an integrated residential neighborhood; (4) to lead the congregation from dependency on diocesan subsidy to be entirely self-supporting; and, (5) to expand the mission's strong social witness in the community, diocese, state and national

The Making of a Black Bishop

church. These will be treated in order.

First, there was an uneasiness and discomfort in being compared to saintly Father Brown. I did not mind hearing that "you celebrate high mass, preach, make house calls, visit sick people, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, and non-Episcopalians, as well as involve yourself in community affairs as Father Brown did". These comments were meant as compliments, but I knew it ended there. Father Brown was a spiritual giant and other-worldly; I was neither. As comedian/entertainer Sammy Davis, Jr., used to sing, I sang also "I just want to be me"... "I just wanted them to let me be Quintin Primo, not Father Brown. It took nearly six months to accomplish that, but when it was accorded, it lasted throughout my incumbency. I was able to make my own individual contribution to the Mission's present and future.

All doubts about my "worldliness" were removed the Sunday morning when, during announcements, I promoted a guild's annual community card party. Coming on strong, I said, "My wife and I thoroughly enjoy playing Pinochle. We intend to attend and participate!" The word spread like wild-fire in the community. "The new priest at St. Simon's plays cards." Thereupon, some puritanical black ministers, considering it a sin to play cards socially, covenanted to ban me from preaching in their pulpits. I was not upset by their action, because, in the late 40's and 50's, Episcopal church canons forbade pulpit exchanging with non-Episcopal ministers. However, two black pastors came to my defense with strong fraternal support. One was the pastor of liberal Trinity Presbyterian Church, the other, the senior pastor of Mount Olivet Baptist Church, dubbed "high Baptist" because a majority of black professionals comprised its membership.

Continuing the Anglo-Catholic tradition established by Father Brown, sung and said masses and choral evensong were offered on Sundays; weekday masses were held; major feast days were observed with a celebration of Holy Eucharist, and opportunities to make regular private confessions were scheduled for Saturday afternoon. Also, the very popular annual Easter Day community sunrise service was continued. It attracted nearly 500 worshippers from local Episcopal and non-Episcopal congregations. We conducted the Easter morning service for years until some jealous pastors, concluding we were cutting both into their Easter Day attendance and revenue, decided to schedule their own thus competing with us. Interestingly, before my departure, several black pastors were holding regular Sunday 8 a.m. services rivaling our 7:30 a.m. low masses.

With the blessing and encouragement of Masonic members of St. Simon's, an annual Masonic/Eastern Star pre-Thanksgiving Day choral evensong was begun—another stroke of good fortune, as it brought hundreds of black Christians to our church. While never intending it so, the services proved to be an evangelistic tool, as several persons and families became Episcopalians as a result. I was never a Mason myself, although my father was. He tried many times to persuade me to join. I believe I would have done so had I not witnessed the unbrotherliness of two mortician members during the funeral arrangements and burial services for Father Brown. The family's request that both handle the remains and services, dividing the profit, was flatly turned down by one mortician. It was a great joy and pleasure for me to welcome the Masons and Eastern Star members year after year to St. Simon's Church. Incidentally, we were never ungenerous with the use of incense nor failed to have our superb choirs render their best music.

Thinking of novel ways to serve the diocese besides saying "yes" to committee appointments and accepting synodical elections, on behalf of St. Simon's Young People's Fellowship, we sponsored an annual diocesan-wide choral evensong service for Episcopal young people. The attendance grew from less than 100 the first year to more than 500. The event was designed to accomplish two purposes: to revive the beautiful and once popular sung evening prayer worship service held in many Episcopal churches during the 30's and 40's (at St. Agnes' Church in Miami, Florida, it was their best-attended Sunday service, sometimes with over 1500 worshippers participating!); and, to provide safe, congenial and non-threatening surroundings for black and white urban and suburban, small town and rural, middle-class and under-class, and sometimes "no class" young people to socialize, discuss racial and social problems, and proffer practical solutions for them. Participating clergy persons, youth advisers, parents and the young people themselves benefited enormously from the services, open discussions and shared experiences.

For example, one morning in Chicago, a young white priest came to my office and asked my secretary to see me "for two minutes." The thought-to-be stranger identified himself by saying, "Bishop Primo, as a high-schooler and teenager, I participated in your yearly choral evensong services for young people at St. Simon's in Rochester, New York. I was so inspired by them and you, that I, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, decided to become a priest and professional counselor. I want to thank you again, and to let you know that I am available to serve as weekend supply priest should you need me." My visitor had just returned from studying abroad where he earned a Ph.D.

The Making of a Black Bishop

in Jungian Psychology and Spiritual Counseling and he was about to open an office in the "Windy City."

The visit lasted almost an hour, ending with my taking him to lunch. In a diocese with 147 parishes and mission congregations, his offer was greatly appreciated. I had a place to send him the following Sunday. Indeed, the visitor left me feeling that, perhaps, I may have done some good while in Rochester!

A few weeks later, the incident was repeated. This time, it was a U.S. Marine Chaplain from Virginia, who was in Chicago on business. Entering my office, he said, "I have little time as a taxi is outside waiting to take me to O'Hare Airport. However, I felt I could not leave Chicago without seeing you and telling you that I was a teenager when you were at St. Simon's in Rochester, New York. Father Dan Bennett, now deceased, brought me up twice to your annual choral evensong service for young people. I learned a lot about racial understanding and tolerance, and now I am a champion of human rights for all. Frankly, I owe my response to God's call to the priesthood to you and Father Dan." He hugged me, we prayed together, and then he hurriedly departed. I was deeply touched by the Chaplain's surprise visit and testimony of what those evening prayer services, discussions and socializing had meant to him.

Secondly, erecting a new parish house, instead of a new church as planned long before my arrival in Rochester, posed a tremendous challenge. Carver House, St. Simon's present social hall and community center named for Dr. George Washington Carver, black scientist and educator, was inconveniently located ...three blocks away from the Oregon Street church facility. The oblong, one story basement-less church contained no classroom space and kitchen facilities—only a small multi-purpose room called "the choir room."

However, classroom space and kitchen facilities were at the Carver House. We chose not to hold church school classes there but at the church. The distance between buildings also prevented us from having well-attended coffee hours following the services. The bishop's committee and I, with the approval of the bishop and trustees of the diocese, altered the original building plans and decided to build a parish house because: (1) we believed the temporary church building was adequate for worship services; (2) our expressed hope and desire to name a building in memory of Father Brown...The Father Frank L. Brown Memorial Hall; and, (3) the strong belief

that the community would give to a social type hall building campaign in his memory rather than help us pay for a new church edifice.

During World War II, the Carver House, a former Jewish library (purchased by the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester for St. Simon's Mission) housed Rochester's only USO for black servicemen stationed at the U.S. Military Base in Geneva, 40 miles away. Because of racial prejudice and discrimination, the servicemen were unwelcome at Rochester's white USO facilities. Thereupon, Father Brown, the Diocese of Rochester and the City of Rochester collaborated to fill the void that racism and injustice had caused.

Also, during the late '30's and '40's, Carver House provided space for Rochester's first integrated day care and nursery programs. In 1947, against my strong objection as the new vicar-elect, the bishop's committee failed to renew the nursery's lease. They said the space was needed for the mission and different kinds of community activities, as well as a temporary residence for the new vicar and his family. We occupied the entire second floor of Carver House, which had been beautifully remodeled and redecorated for us. We were forced to live over the parish house for more than three years, primarily because of racial discrimination and open housing bias against minorities.

It was later disclosed that some members of the bishop's committee were happy that I did not find a house. The reason? The Committee would now have full control of the Carver House facility, something they had never before enjoyed. On the one hand, the Mission paid a high price for control—they lost sorely needed operational income from the community nursery's tenancy. But on the other hand, gaining full control of the building meant being able to schedule parish events at our convenience, accommodate the young people's popular and growing Friday night Teen Canteen, the parish guilds' normal functions, the annual community pre-Thanksgiving Day turkey dinner as well as rent space to community groups and responsible individuals for community events. The Carver House's location, the only non-segregated block of Ormond Street a few yards away from the bus stop, enhanced its attractiveness and desirability as a fitting meeting-place for civic groups.

After receiving approval to build from Bishop Dudley Stark and trustee-members of the diocese, we consulted and retained the services of a well-known local architect, a leading Episcopalian. He showed us architectural drawings of the new parish house/community center—a two story building with classrooms, bowling alleys, regulation basketball court, shower rooms

The Making of a Black Bishop

and kitchen. After he showed us the drawings, we learned that they were his personal gift to the overdue project. The cinder block building was to cost \$65,000 excluding furnishings and equipment. At the advice of a good clergy friend, Canon Arthur Cowdery, we hired Whites Associates, Inc., a professional fundraising firm, to guarantee a successful fundraising effort. We were correct to expect financial and moral support from Father Brown's many friends. We were also confident that our own members would extend themselves making it possible for the construction to go on as planned.

After conducting a feasibility study, a decision was reached to reduce the building's size and cost by eliminating both gym and bowling alleys. With a new target of \$45,000 and good organization by Whites, Inc., the six-week campaign began. After that period, it was announced at the VICTORY DINNER to the joy and delight of all, that our goal was reached in cash contributions and three-year pledge commitments.

The Frank L. Brown Memorial Hall was immediately built on tree-lined, residential Oregon Street, the vacated site of the old Wagner Lutheran College which had moved to Staten Island, New York. The first donor to the memorial building was Ms. Helen Fish, a Quaker, activist and longtime friend of Father Frank Brown. Her gift of \$100 was followed by several other contributions from people who loved and respected Father Brown. A woman on welfare, who dearly loved Father Brown, gave a dollar to the campaign and asked not to be identified. I remembered the biblical story in the New Testament of the poor widow who gave a mite (all that she had), and asked, "Why not? Why not let it be known, if that is all you can afford to give?" She feared repercussions from welfare authorities.

Thirdly, I experienced the existing housing bias in Rochester when I went to look at housing before moving there. On that particular occasion, the archdeacon (a member of the bishop's staff) and I looked at one house for sale in a "crummy" neighborhood. After touring the house, the seller inquired of the archdeacon, not of me, "If you buy, when do you intend to occupy it?" When he replied that, "Father Primo and his family would be the occupants," she informed him that "we cannot sell to Negroes." As much as I tried to exercise restraint, the words popped out, "Madam, even if you would sell to Negroes, I would not buy your house."

Breaking the color barrier in getting the "promised" rectory project started was a hassle. Some older members of the bishop's committee conveniently forgot my agreement to live in Carver House for a space of three years. The

younger members were unaware of the agreement. When I saw there was no movement on the part of the bishop's committee in that direction, I decided to bring it to their attention. Some were offended because I did so. One angry person said, "Let the bishop find you a house if he wants you to have one." It was clear to me that the bishop's committee did not desire to spend money for a rectory. I read to them the letter from their former bishop in which the terms of my 1947 call to St. Simon's were clearly stated and sent a copy of it to Bishop Stark, the present diocesan. Bishop Stark phoned immediately. Disgusted with the bishop's committee, he said: "Quintin, pick me up tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock and we will go looking for a house. I want you and your family to live in a rectory on par with any of my white mission priests."

As directed, I picked him up the next afternoon at his office. The bishop had never learned to drive a car. The search was deliberately restricted to white middle class neighborhoods. It did not take long for the Bishop to see the pervasiveness of housing bias in Rochester. At one point, the bishop quipped, "You and your family might have to share the Bishop's house with us!" It made no difference that we both were wearing clericals, he in bishop's purple and I in black. The fact that I was a black man was enough, especially when discovering that my family and I would occupy the dwelling. Every house we toured, the seller's emphatic response was the same, "We will not sell to colored people." Finally, we got an East Irondequoit housewife to agree to ask her absent spouse whether he would sell to us when he came home in the evening. The Bishop gave her his personal calling card with his name, address, and telephone number printed thereon, and asked that she or he call him the following day with the answer.

Early the next day, her husband, an executive with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, called to say, "I will gladly sell to Father Primo. Although I do not know him personally, all that I hear and read about him is positive. I am sure he and his family will not move here to destroy our good neighborhood." At that time I was carrying a small 80-year endowment policy of \$400 with his company, the best my parents could purchase for me from a white insurance company in the deep South in those days. If the man had decided not to sell to me, I was prepared to drop the insurance right then, which I did later...concluding that I would never live to collect. At the moment, I have passed the eighty-four year old mark. Thanks be to God!

While diocesan officials were negotiating to purchase the Empire Boulevard dwelling for St. Simon's Mission (we were not yet self-support-

The Making of a Black Bishop

ing), word leaked out that the buyers were Negroes. Meanwhile, a female neighbor, who lived in the community directly across a wide, heavily-traveled boulevard from the sellers, organized the white, largely ethnic neighborhood to protest our moving there. First, they co-opted a disinterested white buyer, who offered the sellers more than they were asking for the dwelling. Next, a petition was prepared and circulated throughout the neighborhood protesting the sale to Negroes. The petition contained an awful-looking picture of me, one taken from a local newspaper. It was one of the worst photos I ever took. I looked every bit like "a most wanted criminal"!

Also on the petition was such inflammatory and untrue information, "He intends to start a colored Protestant church in our neighborhood and drive us out of our homes. His children are unruly and uncontrollable; the Primos plan to throw all-night, weekend drinking parties; our neighborhood and properties will be destroyed!" When the pastor of the 8,000 member St. Ambrose Roman Catholic Church up the street from the sellers was approached by petitioners and asked to sign it the petition, he reportedly countered with, "If you do not want Father Primo to live next door to you, he and his family are welcome to live next door to me. I do not object to good Christian people, and people of their standing, moving into our neighborhood." Nevertheless, the petition bore more than 100 signatures.

Determined to block both the house's sale to us and our move to the neighborhood, a well-known Rochester attorney was hired to represent them. They did not know that he was an active and influential Episcopal layman. While meetings between attorneys from both sides and the bishop were in progress, the angry protesters harassed the sellers and their children were heckled by their schoolmates until they finally moved away. We were asked repeatedly, "Why do you want to live in a white neighborhood where there are no Negroes and you are not wanted?" My reply to them was, "Mrs. Primo and I are not lonely people. We have been many places where we were not wanted, except to invitational weddings and private parties, and we survived."

What struck us strangely was the fact that the protesters seemed to be unaware that two black families were already living in East Irondequoit as homeowners, taxpayers and voters. No way the dark-skinned, middle-aged couple could successfully hide their racial identity! That, however, was not the case with the other black family; being light complexioned, they could easily pass for white without trying. I learned that the white neighbors mistakenly thought the dark-skinned middle-aged couple to be sleep-in employees, servants of a recluse white family who also occupied the ranch dwelling.

The couple was non-Roman Catholic unlike most of the neighbors—the wife was active and headed up the altar guild in my church, the husband was active in a west side black Baptist church. When it was discovered that they owned the property, one man quipped, “Well, the way that property is maintained, you could never tell it is owned by colored people!”

During the 40's and 50's, a few black families were able to purchase homes themselves in white neighborhoods. Generally, it was done with the help of empathetic and courageous whites fronting for them. The scenario went this way: (1) the black family secretly chose the house and neighborhood; (2) they then contacted the white family willing to buy it, providing the address and required down payment for deposit in the buyer's bank account; (3) the buyer meets the seller, tours the dwelling, makes an offer, and leaves a small check as earnest money to seal the deal; (4) the white buyers inform the black family of closing date, mortgage costs, monthly payment mortgage notes and possible occupancy date; and, (5) the white buyer keeps the house vacant for 60-90 days, then transfers deeds to the rightful black property owners. Interestingly, a good number of the deeds contained “restrictive covenant” clauses, i.e., binding agreements among homeowners not to sell to blacks, Jews and other minorities. This illegal practice was subsequently outlawed nationally.

Two close white friends of mine bought houses for two outstanding black families, one a member of my congregation, the other a charming Roman Catholic couple. My presidency of New York State's second largest NAACP branch put me in a position to know about other undercover transactions, as most of the white intermediaries were members of the local branch and often members of our housing committee. I do not recall a single case reported of renegeing or mind-changing on the part of white intermediaries. After touring and purchasing a house for a black middle class family, a purchaser exclaimed, “Gosh, I wish I could afford a house like that!” Thank God, I stayed in Rochester long enough to witness some changes in racial attitudes! It was wonderful to see minorities buy freely in some white neighborhoods previously closed to them, obtain mortgage loans on their own and move into dwellings of their choosing during the broad daylight hours instead of being forced to wait to do it secretly at nighttime to avoid attracting attention. Gone were some fears that hired arsonists would strike any moment, or homeowners would wake up in the morning to find a burning cross in the front yard, or face the reality of “redlining” and “blockbusting” tactics initiated by greedy, unprincipled realtors and supported by cooper-

• The Making of a Black Bishop

ating banks and other mortgage-lending institutions resulting in panic selling and white flight.

In some sense, the mission congregation and I were fortunate that the Bishop and Trustees, acting on our behalf, purchased the property. They used as partial down payment a \$5,000 legacy, which we were unaware that a white friend had left to the mission, then added \$2,800 of diocesan funds as the mortgagee, Bowery Savings Bank of New York, required. The mission congregation assumed the small monthly mortgage payments on the remaining \$14,000 balance, plus costs involved in maintaining the property. We expected to assume some responsibility for mortgage payments since we were striving to become an independent congregation.

Two days before moving, a provoking phone call came from one of our next door neighbors-to-be. It was late Saturday night, and I was concluding the last point of my sermon entitled, "Be Not Afraid." In a crude manner, the neighbor asked, "Father Primo, are you still planning to move out here on Monday?" "Yes," I forcefully replied. He snapped, "Didn't your bishop tell you that the neighbors don't want you here? I don't want you living next door to me!" I retorted, "No, the bishop did not tell me that. Frankly, even if he had done so, we would move there anyway, as we intend to do. By the way, Sir,

from the way you sound and your foreign accent, I believe I have more of a right to live on Empire Boulevard than you. I am an American by birth." At that, he emitted a few unprintable expletives, and slammed down the telephone receiver in disgust. We moved as planned, ready to do verbal battle with anyone, if necessary. A few days in the new rectory, I perchanced to look outside and saw my neighbor struggling to lift up a fence that had fallen between his property and ours. The fence was down long before our moving there. Going outdoors immediately, I deliberately walked near the spot where he was working. As I did, I was greatly tempted to ask, "Sir, may I help you?" Instead, I blurted out (loud enough for him to hear me), "I believe Robert Frost wrote, 'good fences make good neighbors.'"

Our neighbor's younger daughter, Marianne, and our same-age son, Quintin, III, soon became bosom friends, visiting each other's home or playing in each other's back yard almost daily. The twosome played by themselves for long hours at a time, frequently swapping toys and entertaining each other gloriously. Then suddenly, like overnight, the entire fencing was removed, for reasons we never sought to know but concluded it was due to

the two children's enjoyable friendship. Marianne's father had little if anything to say to Winifred or me the many years we were neighbors, but other members of his family did. My wife enjoyed a good relationship with the wife. The friendship of our son and daughter was important to both mothers.

Next to these neighbors lived an Episcopal family of four—two grown children and their parents. The parents left the church when we moved to the neighborhood, giving as their reason for doing so, "the role the bishop and diocese played in changing their neighborhood." Against the strong opposition of their children, the parents had endorsed and signed the petition to keep us out. We learned this from their parish priest to whom they had protested and from whom they solicited assistance (which they did not receive). As fate would have it, their permanently wheel-chaired daughter and son, an engineer, became our very good friends. When I left my wife and three children behind in December 1963 to begin a new ministry in Delaware, without asking, the son kept our long driveway cleared of ice and snow, so that Winifred could get in and out with the car daily to drive the children to school.

We never return to Rochester without visiting the invalid sister, the lone surviving member of the family, and spending a little time with Mrs. Gravino, a good neighbor and friend, who continues to live in the same block. The Gravinos did not sign the petition, and warmly welcomed us to the neighborhood. Their son, Tommy, played with Quintin, III, when Marianne was not around. For some reason, the three never played together.

During the thirteen years we lived in the community, two of our school-aged children were the only blacks to attend the neighborhood's elementary school. Having an extremely good academic record, Cynthia, our older daughter, enrolled in the district's only high school. In the 10th grade, she was chosen piano accompanist for her high school concert chorus and also piano accompanist for a reputable male chorus composed of employees from local corporations which her popular director of music had assembled. Cynthia attended Eastman Preparatory School of Music for several years and during that time was awarded a scholarship to study piano there.

Attitudes of most neighbors had changed by the time we decided to leave Rochester and Empire Boulevard. Many signers of the petition, who still lived in the community, bade us farewell with tearful eyes, expressing keen regrets at our departure. Contrary to the petitioners' prediction, "a colored Protestant church was not started; property values had not declined; the neigh-

The Making of a Black Bishop

borhood had not become a slum; our children had not been uncontrollable and vandalistic; we had not thrown weekend drinking parties," etc., to mention a few of the excuses they gave in attempting to block the sale of the house to us.

I must relate an incident involving my wife and young son. There was no black barber shop in East Irondequoit, so she took him to the white barber shop located one-half mile from our home. When she entered the barber shop with her brown faced child, one of the barbers said loudly for everyone to hear, "Madam, we don't know how to cut colored people's hair." Determined to get his hair trimmed there, she replied, "Well, Sir, you can surely learn today." They cut his hair that day and our son continued to have his hair cut at that barber shop. However, when I saw his haircuts, I believed the barber had been telling the truth; I never went to that barber to have my own hair trimmed. We were prepared to file a discrimination suit against the barbers with the Rochester Council of the New York State Human Relations Commission, of which I was a member, had they refused to cut our son's hair.

Fourth, according to the 10-year timetable that the bishop's committee, congregation and I projected, attaining full parish or full self-supporting status was next in order of priority. We had the numbers of people, the buildings, resources and the impetus to move forward in that direction. Furthermore, Christian stewardship and racial pride demanded that we do so, thereby freeing up diocesan funds to aid needy Mission congregations.

While some of our members failed to see the connection, I firmly believed the sweeping civil rights movement at the time which demanded justice, freedom and equality, was a catalyst for our congregation as well. Astonishingly, some vocal members, concerned about my future because of my deep involvement in local civil rights activities, feared that remaining a mission would put my job in jeopardy, as both white and black activist priests were discovering. Many of them knew already that editor Paul Miller of the Rochester Times Union, a prominent but conservative Episcopalian, had requested the bishop to silence my tongue, accusing me, as NAACP president, and the organization of "moving too fast!" He preferred and offered the gradualistic approach to blacks for achieving justice, freedom and equality, as if we had not pursued that approach for years. I wish I could count the number of times we were told, "Be patient! You are moving too fast. Your equal rights will come." And how many times I responded, "Blacks want their rights now, not given to them posthumously!"

Editor Miller received neither cooperation nor comfort from the bishop. Instead, the bishop strongly supported me, saying to him, "I sanction the leadership Father Primo provides for his people and the community." The bishop never suggested to me that I should be less aggressive. In fact, he encouraged and blessed me, giving both material and moral support. Also, it was no secret that support came from Warden Herman Brown, Father Brown's brother, the Vestry and St. Simon's congregation. I was fortunate to have such support.

The following example which occurred years later comes to mind. In Birmingham, Alabama, the

vicar of St. Mark's Church, a black Mission congregation, received a request, as all other black congregations did, from the newly created clergy ad hoc committee which I chaired, to give \$100 towards the \$3,000 being raised to underwrite the cost of publishing, "A Black Protest," in three leading Episcopal organs, *The Living Church*, *The Episcopalian* and *The Witness*. The written protest was concerning job discrimination against blacks and other minorities at the National Church Center in New York City, as well as their lack of appointment to General Convention's standing commissions and committees. The published letter was addressed to Presiding Bishop John Hines and sent to all members of the House of Bishops and dioceses within the Episcopal church family.

When the vicar of St. Mark's attempted to persuade local church officials to comply with the request, he was opposed by a majority of the members of his bishop's committee, who promptly shared it with their bishop. The bishop responded by forbidding the vicar to take money from the mission's treasury or to raise it from the congregation, to support an allegedly "subversive and divisive" group (they dubbed us at the time) like ours. Furthermore, the vicar was threatened with firing should he disobey the bishop's edict. Left no other rational choice to make, he dug into his pocket and gave \$50, half the amount we sought, just to have his church represented in the first national effort of the kind. It would appear that St. Mark's people feared losing financial support of the diocese if they contributed \$100 as asked.

Contrasted with St. Mark's, was St. Philip's Mission, Jacksonville, Florida. Led by an undaunted and inspired priest, the Reverend Father Austin R. Cooper, Sr., the Episcopal Church Women's organization rallied to the cause by sponsoring turkey dinners, Sunday morning breakfasts, and other special fund-raising events. Instead of giving \$100, the amount raised

The Making of a Black Bishop

and sent to me exceeded \$300, marking it the largest single contribution the project received from any black congregation. Hooray! The \$3,000 goal was exceeded. The letter was published without editing in the three aforementioned well-known Episcopal organs, with tangible results.

After 35 years of receiving diocesan assistance, St. Simon's Mission, the diocese's only black congregation, finally and proudly attained parish status. Now we could make decisions and abide by them without the threat of losing diocesan support. I was chosen to be her first rector and pastor, an honor I will forever cherish. Bishop Stark was the preacher and officiant at the joint occasion of our admission to parish status and my institution. I can never forget the text he used, "And he said to me, 'Son of Man, stand upon your feet.'" (Ezekiel 2:1 RSV) It was a proud, glorious occasion and one of great thanksgiving.

Fifth, securing non-traditional employment for blacks was a priority. We all knew that changing the mindset of both blacks and whites, that black men and women should be restricted to the more menial kinds of jobs, would be difficult to accomplish. But we were determined and committed to try to effect the change, regardless of long-existing racial prejudice and discrimination. First, we attacked downtown department stores where there were no black salespersons. Sibley's responded favorably, by hiring black women. A member of our congregation, Mrs. Elsie Egling, was first in order. Her performance was exemplary. She served there until she decided to enroll in a nearby teacher's college to become a public school teacher. McCurdy's, another downtown department store, was tardy in coming aboard, but its management had already hired black women as elevator operators. With much pressure from Loftus Carson, executive director of Monroe County Human Relations Commission, and black and white local leaders, Sears Roebuck's Monroe Street branch employed its first black salesperson, Mrs. Barbara Harding, also a member of my congregation. Mrs. Harding rose to become a buyer for Sears. Like Mrs. Egling, she helped open doors and created job opportunities for black women other than cleaning.

Opportunities came for black nurses but we had none simply because blacks were not trained by any Rochester hospital or university. Black women who were interested in nursing were normally steered to black schools such as Harlem Hospital in New York City, Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, and Grady Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. Following one of my emotional speeches on the issue, a Ms. Hudson, director of nursing at The General Hospital in Rochester, invited me to her West Main Street office to discuss

the matter further. She became an immediate ally of ours and a courageous protagonist for the cause. Before leaving her office, she promised to accept one black student at first (it's usually two to keep the other's company), and to give me the opportunity to recruit and recommend the hospital's first black student for training. I accidentally met a Ms. Gibson who, after spending two years in a southern college, expressed an interest in nursing. She was anxious to apply for admission. Ms. Gibson, however, was not a local product. She was the oldest daughter of migrant parents, who yearly came to harvest the crops near Sodus, New York. She was up with them that summer and looking for summer work in Rochester. Serious questions were raised about Ms. Gibson's abilities and background at first, but her fine academic and clinical performances, as well as her ability to mix well with the white students, earned her high distinction and editorship of her nursing school's popular monthly newspaper. Because of her success, qualified black women were deliberately sought to enter nurse training programs in nearly every other local hospital, including Strong Memorial Hospital, of the famed University of Rochester.

No black female tellers were in any of the local banks, although banks were all anxious to do business with black people and black institutions. I approached a young white Episcopalian friend of mine, Dr. Thomas Hawks, the president and CEO of The Rochester Savings Bank and son of its founder, and asked him to hire a black teller at his bank. I really did not expect him to act as quickly as he did. He said, "Quintin, I will start the process." First, Tom prepared his administrative staff for the change, convincing each one where he stood and why it was good business and legal to act at once. Then his assistants proceeded to get the rest of the employees ready for the possible change. When they were ready to act, Tom called and asked me to find the right woman for the breakthrough. I had Ms. Dorothy Snellings, a member of my congregation, in mind before even approaching him. He hired Ms. Snellings who became Rochester's first black bank teller. A year or so later, other local banks elected to follow suit, with marvelous success. In a short time, Ms. Snellings had demonstrated her capability and suitability, while winning the respect and love of all. Dorothy never forgot the connection between performing her job well and creating opportunities for other black women at her bank.

Our area's public elementary school, Number Nine, was getting more and more black children, but no black teachers. There were only two of them in the entire system. Encouraged by Irving Kriegsfeld, Baden Street Settlement

The Making of a Black Bishop

House's new executive director, and some local leaders, I conferred with Mr. James Spinning, superintendent of Rochester's public school system, about hiring some black teachers. Expecting an enemy, I surprisingly found in him both a friend and an advocate. Mr. Spinning said, "I know of no qualified black teachers who are available and willing to brave Rochester's frigid weather." At that, I offered to do some recruiting for him, knowing I had a qualified teacher already in my congregation who was a homemaker. I saw my job as one of convincing her, and her spouse, to allow me to recommend her to the superintendent. Eliciting their hearty approval, Mrs. Alice Young was recommended to him, and was immediately hired. A Bennett college graduate, Mrs. Young had begun working on a master's degree in education at Cornell University when she married and came to live in Rochester. It was no surprise that she worked her way up to become a principal and later, the director of elementary education for the Rochester Board of Education. Mrs. Young earned a Doctor of Education degree at the University of Rochester.

Mrs. Young's appointment by Superintendent Spinning engendered enormous interest in pursuing teaching as a career on the part of a surprising number of black males and females, college graduates with degrees in elementary education, who were already settled in the Rochester community but employed in non-teaching jobs. Most had previously been rejected by a racist school board. One prospect who contacted me for help became a recruiter herself. After her appointment, she enticed a couple, both teachers in North Carolina, to come to Rochester, the wife an elementary school teacher, the husband, a high school mathematics teacher. Both were experienced teachers and were instantly employed by the Board of Education.

Before the couple's appointment, however, the superintendent hired a single parent, a former streetwoman. She had been rejected by the school board on what some felt was racial prejudice as her school credentials were not examined as those of white applicants. It appeared that race had determined her rejection since she was a straight A student in college. Sadly, when rejected, she, an attractive young woman, became a waitress at a local tavern, then a busy prostitute, rather than accept a low-paying job as a domestic, which was about all even a college graduate could get in racist Rochester.

Financially, she did quite well, earning far more than a teaching post would have produced. But, as she told her minister and me, she desired a more respectable life, and feared that her mother, a deeply religious woman, would kill her if she knew what she was doing in Rochester. The woman's

name is withheld for obvious reasons; but her Methodist pastor, who first brought her to my attention, and I held back nothing of her shady past when we recommended her to the superintendent. Our hearts were gladdened when he dealt pastorally with her, as we were doing.

Prostitution was big business in the Baden-Ormond Street and Joseph-Central Avenue corridor. It was supported mostly by white male customers. I used to watch the harlots being picked up in luxury cars, night after night when we lived at The Carver House. I occasionally engaged them in conversation and eventually got some to ply their trade elsewhere. Believe me, I learned a lot about them—each had earned a high school diploma. I offered to find some respectable jobs, which I did. Most of them knew me by name and reputation and welcomed the intervention I made. Truly, I found none of the street ladies wanting to earn a livelihood that way.

Another previously rejected elementary-trained teacher and single parent opted for domestic work to support herself and young son, after being turned down by the same Rochester school board. She also was later hired. As a domestic, however, she had worked and managed to educate her son, now a reputable Boston, Massachusetts ophthalmologist. Our optometrist daughter, Susan, a former instructor at New England College of Optometry in Boston, assisted him on weekends. One thing we tried to make clear to Superintendent Spinning, as well as to members of the Rochester Board of Education, was that we expected to see black teachers placed in all public schools, regardless of the school's ethnic make-up or population.

It did not take much vision to see that the local police department, like the public schools, needed to be racially integrated as well, thereby creating and expanding new job opportunities for blacks and other minorities. We did some recruiting in this area as well, receiving abundant help from both white and black community leaders. Mrs. Kathryn Hawkins, a mother of three children and two stepchildren, was drawn from our congregation. She scored highest on the civil service test taken. She became the second black female added to the Women's Division of the Rochester Police Department, rising quickly to captain's rank and supervisor of an all-white division. Captain Hawkins, a native of New Jersey, was active in church work. She and her cousin, Mrs. Kathryn Jordan-Micheaux, a Rochester social worker, assisted my wife with a large group of Girls' Friendly Society members. I loved to see this attractive policewoman appear at church in captain's regalia. She was indeed a model for young girls to emulate, although her three daughters chose other vocations, one a psychiatrist, the second a TV anchor-

The Making of a Black Bishop

woman and the third a high school teacher.

I had numerous unsought opportunities to answer over the telephone the question, "What do Negroes want?" I give one example of this. One day I received a phone call from the head custodian at Kodak. He asked me to find him four janitors of color with a minimum of two years in college. He said, "The starting salary is good and fringe benefits fantastic." While he spoke I was tempted to ask him, "Would you mind sending me an application form?" When the caller was ready to hang up, I said, "Please wait a second. If I come across any young black men with two years of college, I am going to try my best to get them back into college to complete the last two years. Furthermore, I will call on you and Kodak to provide whatever scholarship aid is required." While we did not find many janitors for Kodak, we helped them out with other auxiliary positions. We could have opened a non-profit employment agency and counseling center at the church. While offering that needed service to the community, I always kept before me the main reason for being at St. Simon's Church, "to lead, to empower, to administer the sacraments, and to be as Christ-like as humanly possible."

During my long pastorate, I was truly blessed to have two extraordinary priest assistants, Father Ernest Spencer, a retired white Canadian priest from the Diocese of Connecticut, and Father Austin R. Cooper, Sr., D.D., now the distinguished rector of St. Andrew's Church, Cleveland, Ohio, and national Episcopal Church leader. Another part-time member of our staff was Loftus Carson, a social worker at Baden Street Settlement House, who served as program-developer for our short-lived bilingual community center. I dubbed him "moonlighting" Loftus Carson. I thank the late Dudley Stark, Bishop of Rochester, who generously provided funds for both part-time assistants, and contributed substantially to the operating expenses of the community center.

St. Simon's members and I will remember and forever be thankful to the Very Rev. Theodore Baxter, M.A., St. Paul's Church rector and archdeacon of the Diocese, and to St. Paul's vestry and parishioners who provided funding for our joint three-year mission project for west side Rochester. The project was to result in establishing a second Episcopal church for blacks in that densely populated area. The project was dropped when I left Rochester. In my judgment, the parish passed up an unusual mission-opportunity, both for themselves and the Rochester diocese, by discontinuing an Episcopal presence there. This opportunity was provided when a white Episcopal congregation abandoned the area for suburbia, calling the move an expediency for

“congregational survival.” As is often the case, the facilities they left behind were sold to a black Pentecostal congregation which, I understand, flourishes and continues to provide needful social and educational ministries.

I mentioned at one point offering free counseling and oftentimes little-known ministries to the community. For example, a few well-known members of the Judiciary—judges from both Family and Municipal Courts often called on me to counsel estranged couples, parolees, troubled teenagers, and persons committing minor offenses, either before, during, or after sentencing. The judges were often influenced or guided by my recommendations. Many offenders, especially teen-agers who were placed in my custody, were given “a second chance” as a result of my recommendations.

After a long pastorate, I was succeeded by the Rev. Canon St. Julian Simpkins, a seminary classmate, who led the parish to even greater accomplishments. Years later, this marvelous parish, under the wise direction of the Rev. Father Gregory Smith, merged with St. Luke’s Church, the mother church of the diocese, which housed the mission of St. Simon’s during the first ten years of her existence, until the members were able to build their own church facility on Rochester’s east side. The merger continues to thrive under the gifted and dedicated leadership of the Rev. Gale Harris.

The merger appears to be a blessing for the two congregations. Survival is guaranteed, a strong, integrated downtown presence is assured. I am certain the Rev. Dr. Fred Winnie is exulting in heaven, recalling that we first suggested a marriage of the same two congregations in the 50’s when he was St. Luke’s rector.

There were many great supporters at St. Simon’s. I realized how unwise it is to call names, but I believe that the congregation would agree with my mentioning Mrs. Pauline Moore who contributed so much to her church. She was organist, church school teacher, a member of Daughters of the King, altar guild and parish visitor. Mrs. Moore could always be counted on for attendance at the masses, especially during the week. She supported the church’s programs—such a dependable worker. I remember how she used her lunch period to visit the sick and shut-in. What an example she set for her family and others!

My family and I are deeply grateful to the loving people of St. Simon’s Parish, the diocesan family and the citizens of Rochester, who gave me the opportunity to exercise a full and rich ministry, which prepared me for any success I subsequently enjoyed, parochially and Episcopally.