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John M. Ring

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A University Parish

REVEREND JOHN M. RING

St. John of God Newman Center, serving the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, was recently established as a University parish by Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken. We feel that this is newsworthy because it is another indication of the importance of the Newman apostolate in bringing the Church to secular campuses. The territory of the parish is the same as the campus of the medical center itself. In other words, it has not interfered with the parochial boundaries of the neighboring parishes. It is more realistically a "personal" parish and this is what makes it so unique and so interesting.

There are many dimensions to this Newman parish: it serves a hospital with close to 700 beds; it is a Newman Center serving the various schools on campus: nursing, dentistry, pharmacy and medicine; it is a family parish with its own community of married couples and their children—i.e. the residents, the interns and students who are married; it includes members of the faculty and their families; it is a center for the Catholic nurses who work in the two hospitals on campus; it also serves the Langley-Porter Psychiatric Institute. It is truly a "people" parish with a great variety of parishioners who represent the various activities of a large medical center.

This new parochial plan began to take shape in the summer of 1966 when a Lutheran Church, situated only three blocks from the U.C. Medical Center, went up for sale; fortunately, the Archdiocese was able to purchase the property. This included a chapel which seats some 200 people, a rectory and a well equipped parish hall. Very few changes were necessary.

The chapel with its beautiful stained-glass windows and wood-paneled interior and pews, which had been the place of worship for devout Christians before, now became the religious setting for Catholics of the U. C. Medical Center. We added the special liturgical signs and symbols of our worship. An altar facing the people fit nicely into the sanctuary. A tabernacle was placed on the old altar. A confessional, stations of the cross, holy water fonts and sanctuary lamps were added and Christ Lutheran Church was transformed (or should I say "converted") into the St. John of God Catholic Chapel for the U. C. Medical Center.

The popular Mass for young and old on our Sunday schedule is our Mass with guitar accompaniment. A dental student and nurse with their guitars lead the assembly in the new folk-hymns: *Here We Are . . .*, *Take Our Bread We Ask You, Sons of God*, etc. There is no rushing home after Mass.

Most of the people go to the hall for coffee and pastries. It is an excellent way for the members of the parish to get acquainted.

Another Sunday morning feature is operation "play-pen" a baby-sitting service. The parish hall on Sunday mornings becomes a nursery where parents can safely leave their tots while they attend Mass. A dental assistant and some nurses provide the tender - loving - care while the parents are at Mass.

The University parish not only provides the setting where members of the Medical Center can experience the meaning of Christian community religiously, liturgically and socially, it must also speak to the minds and consciences of its people on serious issues of the times. It must provide through lectures, courses, discussions and library service the means to develop a deeper awareness of the current religious and social problems, to express a Christian point of view about them and to achieve a greater Christian maturity.

One of our programs that seeks to analyze and discuss the provoking issues of the times is a Sunday evening lecture series. In October we considered the summer riots that befell the major cities of our country. The topic for discussion was: "Race, Riot and Reconciliation." In November the subject for discussion was: "When Does Human Life End?" In December Rob-

ert McAfee Brown spoke on the Vietnam issue: "Vietnam, Is the Price Too High"? The program will extend into May 1968 and will consider a variety of issues: the ethical problems of medicine, the social problems of our cities and the psychological problems of people.

Our University parish is just a year old. It is an exciting project which is a reflection of the new spirit of renewal that is alive in the Church today. People may be critical about the changes within the Church—too rapid for some, too slow for others, but the life of the Holy Spirit is manifesting itself in many ways quietly, humbly, definitely. One great reflection of this is in the way the Newman Apostolate throughout the country has developed and matured since Vatican II in its mission to the secular campus. We hear too much these days about far-out happenings, about the oddities, the weird sports, i.e. the peculiar variations from type that shoot up here and there, the odd mutations in the life of the Christian Community. But there is a wonderful new spirit alive in the Catholic centers at the many colleges and universities throughout the country. We feel that such a spirit exists at our University parish serving the U.C. Medical Center in San Francisco.

[Father Ring is Pastor of University Parish serving the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center.]