



“No Room”—in Lancaster?

by A. Grace Wenger

Introduction

Deep personal concern that developed from attempts to help Negro friends to find respectable housing moved Grace Wenger to speak out on the issue of racial equality. Miss Wenger is Assistant Professor of English at Millersville State College, writer of missionary education materials, and an active lay Christian.

Although the presentation is addressed to the constituency of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in terms of the specific situation in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the biblical principles and human concerns on which the appeal is built are valid in every time and place.

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That something can be done is now being demonstrated by concerned groups in the Lancaster County area. One group of laymen decided that they would buy a house and do what they had asked others to do—rent to Negroes. They brought together some funds, formed a corporation, and located a property. Neighbors were contacted and assured that the project is an attempt to improve the neighborhood. The three families chosen have proved to be good tenants, and they have been well received in the community.

The project has demonstrated that renting to Negroes can be a good business investment and that integration can be quietly effected at the grass roots level. Members of the group are experiencing personal growth through learning to receive members of minority groups as friends. Two additional housing units have now been established by the group. Their example has inspired three other groups to undertake similar projects.

—Mahlon M. Hess, Editor, Missionary Messenger

"No Room" for Christ — in Lancaster

The King shall say unto them on His left hand: "Depart from Me. For I was denied admittance to your neighborhood and you gave Me no help. I answered your ad and you refused to rent an apartment to Me. I tried to buy a house on your street and was told, 'People wouldn't like having you here.'"

Then shall they say: "Lord, when did we refuse to rent an apartment to Thee, or deny Thee a house on our street? When did we see Thee turned away from our neighborhood and fail to help Thee?"

And He shall answer them saying, "Verily I say unto you: Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it not to Me."

The familiar parable, if it has any meaning at all for Mennonites in Lancaster County, must be telling us that to help enforce racial segregation in our community is our way of saying "no room in the inn" to Jesus.

Enforced segregation? In Lancaster? You mean there are people among us who refuse to rent or sell to Negroes?

Many of my Mennonite friends can hardly believe that this is true. Seeing the problems two Christian families from the Congo faced in finding decent housing has made me wonder just how Christlike our "Christian community" is. There was the apartment owner in Lancaster who pleasantly assured me (when I called in my unmistakably Pennsylvania Dutch voice) that the apartment he advertised was available immediately, that the listed price included utilities, and that there was no one ahead of me. Experience teaches one to check such details first and to leave no loopholes that an evasive advertiser could wriggle through. This time, as soon as I said, "The family happens to be Negro—does that make any difference?" the owner suddenly became deaf.

"Sorry, I can't hear what you're saying," he hedged.

"Will you rent to a Negro family?" I asked more distinctly.

"Really, I'm sorry, but I just can't understand you. There's so much noise in the office, and my hearing isn't what it used to be." (Indeed it had deteriorated noticeably in less than a minute.)

"They're Negroes, colored, black," I shouted. (That wasn't quite accurate, but you can't be finicky about details when talking to a deaf man.) "Will you rent to them?"

"No. Sorry. Can't do that." And the receiver clicked.

Happily, both of the families I was concerned about found housing—a Christian realtor sold a house to one family, and a Christian farmer rented half of his farmhouse to the other. A

few other friends would have sold or rented properties, but at locations too far away to be practical. However, the large number of evasions or direct refusals I met sent me out to do a little checking and I learned that my deaf friend is not a rare creature. He is a normal representative of those who advertise houses and apartments through the columns of the Lancaster newspapers.

Take, for instance, a case history reported by the Lancaster Fair Housing Committee:

Family A, man and wife, both employed, with no children or pets, wanted a one- or two-bedroom apartment in the price range of \$60 to \$75. In one month the couple looked at 19 apartments, usually accompanied by a volunteer. Seven others were screened by the office staff for consideration, but they were eliminated by the couple without looking or were rented before an appointment could be made. Of the 19, approximately one third were seriously considered by the couple. They were rejected for each apartment they considered for one or more of the following "reasons":

- owner imposed restrictions, after the visit; no entertaining, smoking, or drinking
- owner decided to do more repairing before renting the property
- husband (or wife) of owner had rented the night before without telling spouse
- owner required six months' rent in advance—a fact not divulged when the appointment was made
- owner checked homeseeker's credit with his present landlord who, wanting to retain his renter, gave misleading information
- owner feared losing other tenants and consequent rental income (reason most frequently cited)

- owner feared others' (tenants, neighbors, friends) opinions (I won't be the first in my block . . .)
- owner rented to someone else before completing credit check on Negro applicants

While volunteers' time is not spent in checking up on reasons, duplicate work on the part of volunteers at home revealed that many times the apartment was still available the next day, usually with some cautious reservations detectable in the owner's attitude.

Those are isolated cases, aren't they?
What do two examples prove?

Statistics suggest that cases like these are the rule, not the exception. The Fair Housing Listing Service keeps records of its contacts with landlords and homesellers. This service is offered by a committee organized in 1962 by people concerned about injustice in housing. The service maintains two lists: one which shows properties for rent or sale outside the "ghetto" of southeast Lancaster which are available to minority groups; a second which contains names of persons who want to move out, what type of housing they prefer, and what they can afford to pay.

Fair Housing Listing Service is just what its name implies. It makes no sales or rentals, collects no fees, and does not become involved in legal matters; it simply tries to help minority families find realtors or owners who will treat them fairly, basing decision to rent or sell on the character and credit rating of the homeseeker rather than on his color or race. Volunteers make contact by telephone in answer to advertisements placed in local newspapers. They ask whether the advertiser is willing to rent or sell on an open occupancy basis.

The following analysis of 409 contacts represents calls to persons who advertised houses or apartments for rent at less than \$75 and houses for sale at prices less than \$10,000:

- 45% (183) said an emphatic NO. They would not consider renting or selling to a minority family
- 18% (72) said no. They wanted to handle their affairs in their own way.
- 18% (72) gave evasive answers, for example, "I must discuss it with my wife, or husband, or the neighbors" or "The place is probably rented by now."
- 4% (15) were realtors or agents who, according to the report, gave the caller a "very confusing run-around."
- 1½% (6) were real estate agents who said they could not rent to Negroes.
- ¼% (one lone case) was the realtor who said he would.
- 2% (9) of the calls were to owners who said they would not rent because they lived in the dwelling. This is the only group whose refusal is not a violation of the Pennsylvania Fair Housing Law.
- 12% (51) of the owners said that they were willing to list their properties with the service. (Of course, any of these 51 owners might, if a Negro family came to see the property, practice the evasions that Family A met.)

The Listing Service points out that this study of 409 cases represents only a fraction of the thousands of calls made during the first year that the service was in operation. Most of the volunteers making calls estimated that one favorable response out of twenty was the average.

That was several years ago. Now realtors are more willing to discuss the problem and to sell to minority groups. Yet the fact remains that, without outside help, few Negro families are able to buy or rent houses outside of Lancaster's Seventh Ward, even when they have the money to pay. Even with help they have difficulty.

But the situation is getting better.
Everybody says so.

The Housing Study published in 1966 by the Redevelopment Authority of Lancaster doesn't say so. It says that in the southeastern quadrant of the city, which has traditionally been the residential area of the nonwhite community, the concentration of nonwhite population has never been so high as it is at present. According to the 1960 census, 88.1 percent of all nonwhite households were in the Seventh Ward. Twenty years earlier, the percentage was 84. If one block of the Third Ward is included with the Seventh Ward, the figures are even more disturbing. This larger area contained 83 percent of the nonwhite population in 1950. In ten years the figure has risen to nearly 94 percent. Clearly, the problem of segregation has intensified during the past twenty years. No figures are available for 1966, but in August only 39 Negro and 55 Puerto Rican families were known to be living in Lancaster outside of the southeast section. With an estimated 3,200 Negroes and 750 Puerto Ricans in the city, the figures suggest much more discrimination against Negroes than against Puerto Ricans. If these estimates are valid, the segregation problem, in spite of greater evidence of popular concern and increasing willingness of realtors to cooperate, is not decreasing. Certainly the trend has not been reversed.

At the present, the renewal program, while promising long-range improvement, has intensified the immediate problem. Low-cost houses are being destroyed faster than new units can be rebuilt. As a result, substandard housing is becoming more expensive. The situation is harder on the Negro, who can't get out of the section. Of the 112 white families displaced by renewal, 80 families (nearly 75 percent have been able to relocate outside of the renewal area. But of the 142 minority group families who had to move, only 21 families (or about 15

percent) have found housing in other areas. These figures contradict the realtor who assures me, "The problem is not discrimination, but poverty and a housing shortage. If a Negro has the money, he can buy or rent wherever he chooses." Of the low-income families displaced by renewal, why must 85 percent of the nonwhites stay in the renewal area when all but 25 percent of the whites are able to move out?

But why should they want to move out? Aren't people happiest with people like themselves?

Would you be happy, even with people like yourself, if you had to live in a deteriorating house with a leaky roof, exposed electric wires protruding dangerously from the walls, or a root-clogged sewer which your landlord neglected to open? Yet, although the housing study shows that housing is much poorer in the Seventh Ward, rents are only slightly lower. In some cases families in this area were found to be paying more for rent than the residents of better neighborhoods. Comparing housing costs of whites and nonwhites, the housing study discovered that the nonwhite pays about as much as the white, but receives much poorer housing for his money. What the Negro or Puerto Rican wants is not the experience of living next door to a white family. He is not asking for charity nor for any special privileges, only for the right any human being should have—to move into any house he can afford on the same basis as any other person, credit recommendation and character reference. This is what you and I take for granted—he cannot. He would like, also, freedom from exploitation by landlords who take advantage of a tenant's inability to find housing in another area. "If you don't like it as it is, I can get another tenant," is a serious threat to a family that has no place to go.

But getting out of a segregated area is hard. It takes perseverance to keep

trying when it is difficult even to get inside a house to inspect it. It takes determination to call again, when a would-be buyer finds no salesman around when he goes into a real estate office. It takes courage to come back after waiting several hours for an appointment that an agent never keeps. And if the appointment is kept and the client gets to see the house, the chances are high that the salesman will try to persuade him to look at a "better bargain" on the fringes of the ghetto. Even so, at this point the listing service has the names of 36 families who are seeking help in getting out of the blighted area. There is no way of knowing how many others may be trying on their own. In the three months from November 1, 1966, to February 1, 1967, the service succeeded in placing three families.

Increased segregation, crowded conditions, deteriorating housing—these are the conditions that have caused larger cities to become centers of chaos. Lancaster is headed in the same direction.

That's the problem of the city. I live in the country. There's no trouble here.

Don't be too sure. Walk up and down the streets of your neat little town and look hard at the faces of the children playing in the yards. And if you wonder why they're all white, try testing the people who advertise apartments or houses to rent in your community. This is what most of them will say: "I'll have to discuss it with my son. He does my business for me." "I'll think it over and call you back." (He doesn't.) "Well, several people have called already, so I really can't promise anything." "I'm afraid I shouldn't. People are so opposed to having them in the schools." "I'd be glad to sell to anyone, but I must think of the neighbors. I know it's wrong for people to be so prejudiced—everyone's as good as we are." "Since your last call, very good friends of ours

said they'd like the place, and we don't like to turn them down."

It would be a good experience for everybody who calls himself a Christian to help a Negro family go house-hunting. Something strange happens inside of you when a perfectly congenial voice suddenly goes cold when you say Negro. You begin to wonder about the Christian profession of a good person whose kind eyes get hard when he learns that a Negro wants to move near him. You see the sweet-faced Mennonite mother, the courteous businessman, even the Sunday-school superintendent, the song leader, and the preacher in the pulpit, in a new way. How would that person react, you wonder, if you walked up to him and said, "I'm looking for a house for a reliable Negro family. Can you help me?"

***"God
treats
all men
alike."***

Acts 10:34

*"When you get to know a person as a person who has thoughts and feelings
you forget to*

I'll admit that the housing situation in Lancaster isn't what it ought to be. But why pick on the Mennonites? We're not responsible for conditions.

Don't say that too loudly. No matter how much we protest that we love everybody and don't even notice color, the fact remains that in a region known for its Mennonite and Amish population, segregation is the accepted pattern. Right now, in a village where there are enough Mennonites of my own congregation to be "salt" and in a time when a pre-revival effort has made church members conscious of spiritual responsibility in the neighborhood, people are protesting the sale of a house to a Negro executive employed by a local industry. Neighbors are heckling the owner who had the courage to make the sale. It is a reflection on our influence in the community that such things can happen.

Worse than that, some Mennonites themselves have been guilty of refusing to rent or sell to Negroes. The Fair Housing Committee member who asked one owner (somewhere in Lancaster County), "Would you be willing to rent to a minority family?" received the shocking answer, "No, I couldn't rent to Negroes. I'm a Mennonite." A sociologist told a group of Lancaster citizens who were concerned about discrimination in housing, "You'll not be able to accomplish anything here because the plain people have the money that controls the power structure." Fair or not, that's our image in the community.

Christians of other denominations have a right to be skeptical about the sincerity of our peace witness when our indifference lends support to injustice and oppression. By saying and doing nothing, we support the status

quo. And when the status quo is evil, our silence and inactivity must be evil. As a non-Mennonite minister said to a group of Mennonites during a discussion of war and peace, "After all, there's more than one way of killing people." Though he was too polite to say so, I gathered that to him our non-resistance looks like an easy way out of letting our clean-cut young men get killed, rather than an expression of sincere concern for human life. If we are unconcerned when we know that others are being forced to live in conditions dangerous to physical, mental, and spiritual health, can we blame those who refuse to believe us when we profess sacrificial love for all?

True, we try to meet human needs in the slums of Hong Kong and Calcutta, but we close our eyes to the slums in Lancaster. We support workers in the blighted areas of New York and Atlanta, and neglect the problems of Seventh Ward. We send teams of reconciliation to Chicago and Watts after violence has erupted, but we do nothing at home to prevent development of the conditions that breed violence.

Our business is to save souls, not to get mixed up in community affairs.

Indeed, our business is to save souls. But what is to happen when the bodies which contain those souls brush against us? What shall we say when young Christians from India or Tanzania or Honduras or Atlanta or Harlem or the Seventh Ward come to share in the fellowship of a parent church? "You are welcome to visit us. Please prepare to give a short talk in the Sunday morning service. You may attend our church college for a few terms. But please don't try to live here.

Oneness in Christ is a fine thing, but I can't expect my neighbors to understand that. You really didn't think, did you, that being called a brother in Christ meant you could rent a house and bring up your family in my neighborhood?"

Anyone who thinks the only responsibility of Christians is to speak God's message should restudy the life and teachings of Christ. The parable of the sheep and the goats is only one of His many comments on the importance of meeting the needs of the total person. "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you," He told His followers. To find out what that means, we must examine the record of Jesus' earthly life. His acts were a demonstration of what God's love is like. Jesus fed, healed, and comforted. The Gospels of Mark and Luke would be thin indeed, if we kept only the preaching part and ruled out the record of the deeds by which Christ proved the Father's love; and the teachings recorded by John are in the context of action.

Of course, it is much easier to talk about the love of God than to demonstrate it in action. It is far more demanding to become truly involved in people's lives than to preach to them on street corners, to sing to them in hospitals, to broadcast sermons to them, to make up packets of literature to mail to them, or even to roll up tracts to throw at them. How much value is there in all our witness activities when we don't care for people as persons? A South Lancaster mother, after her child had attended the day-care center staffed by Mennonite volunteers said, "Now I'd like to come to your church. I've often been invited to church, but I never felt like going." Knowing the multiplicity of our evangelistic activities, I'm sure that woman

hopes and fears, likes and dislikes much like your own, notice whether his skin is lighter or darker than yours."



must have had tracts and Ways and invitations to church without number stuck into her doorway for years. Yet it took love demonstrated in action to convince her that Christians may have something to say that is worth listening to.

Hubert Schwartzenruber, pastor of Bethesda Mennonite Church in a blighted area of St. Louis, Missouri, writes:

It is safe and easy to preach from behind the pulpit that Jesus' love heals the brokenhearted, looses the prisoners from their bonds, and prepares the soul for its eternal reward. After the sermon the benediction is pronounced and people are divinely commissioned to go back home to their rat-infested homes with leaky plumbing and falling plaster and empty refrigerators. If the sermon I preach on Sunday will be remembered on Monday, then I must be out in the streets working, walking, listening, talking, marching, crying with the people—finding a way out of the prisons that enslave men and have enslaved them for many generations.

If the gospel concerns itself with the whole man, then it is not a "social" gospel, but the gospel. . . . James is still relevant today when he says: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith have him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food [or lives in rat-infested housing and has become a victim of unscrupulous landlords and greedy merchants, and has been robbed of jobs and education, and has all his pride and dignity destroyed], and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled [or get yourself a job and fix your house and get rid of the rats and break out of your depression that we have inflicted upon you],' without giving him the

things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

Our church shouldn't be involved in a movement that is stirred up by communists and spearheaded by groups that aren't doctrinally sound.

If communism frightens us, we should busy ourselves correcting the conditions in which it flourishes. Communism does not make any headway unless people feel cheated of what they see other people enjoy freely. When a man sees his family hungry, cold, poorly housed, or oppressed, he gets desperate enough to grasp at any promise of betterment. A person who feels that conditions could not become any worse is ready to take all risks. The surest way to promote communism is to ignore the suffering that causes unrest. If we suspect that the civil rights movement may be inspired by the communists, we must do something to make such movements unnecessary.

While we search for doctrinal notes in the eyes of Christians who work for equal opportunity for minority groups, we fail to notice the beams of disobedience that obstruct our own vision. We profess to be Bible-believing Christians; yet we glibly explain away most of what Jesus said about possessions, investments, and sensitivity to those in need. An honest study of all of Jesus' teachings as recorded in the Gospels should precede any declaration that we are a church that keeps the "all things" He commanded. And before condemning the theology of groups that are meeting the needs we have deigned not to notice, we should remember that Jesus com-

mended the heretical Samaritan who helped a hurt stranger and condemned the theologically correct priest and Levite who passed him by.

Our hesitation to work with other Christians for the relief of the needy in our community must look shabby to those who see us in easy alliance with people of all creeds, or no creeds at all, on boards of directors of banks, business firms, factories, and farm organizations. Some Mennonites will team with non-Mennonites in any kind of financial plan, but cry "unequal yoke" as soon as someone suggests co-operation for any cause other than making money. The tenderness of such a conscience seems doubtful. Even officially the position of our church is ambiguous. We have made an issue of the "unequal yoke" but have done nothing to discourage members from working for firms which instruct employees to practice discrimination against minority groups. For those who profess to be children of the God of love, an alliance with those who hate must be the most unequal yoke of all.

I believe in treating people of other races kindly. Only I don't think Christians ought to stir up any trouble.

If the early church had gone by the motto that we parrot whenever racial injustice is mentioned, the Book of Acts would never have been written. First-century Christians were known as those who turned the world upside down. Jesus openly defied the racial discrimination of His day. Remember His meeting with the Samaritan woman. What impressed His disciples then was the sight of their Master in friendly discussion with one of a despised

race, not the "seven easy steps of soul-winning" that His conversation has often been used to demonstrate.

Furthermore, trouble—the kind nobody wants—needs no stirring. It's already fermenting. Demonstrations are staged when conditions become so bad and when good people show themselves so indifferent that nothing but radical measures will produce results. Violence erupts when somebody gets desperate. Injustice invites rebellion. Anyone who fears rioting or distrusts sit-ins, marches, and picketing should get to work changing the conditions that lead to protest. To do nothing is to ask for demonstration, for protest, for violence. Concerned action is the way to avoid trouble; indifference is the most certain way of stirring it up. Already, according to the New York Times, the leaders of a national fair housing organization have warned that there is the possibility of unprecedented explosions in 1967. In a study of forty-one United States cities they have found among ghetto residents the attitude of "We need two and a half more riots to get us out of here." By human standards alone, it's unfair to call people who feel like that "hoodlums" when we have forced them into a situation where they think that nothing constructive can be done. It is brazen hypocrisy for us Christians to pretend to pray, "Father, forgive them . . ." when we ought to say, "Father, forgive us, for we know only too well what we have done to them."

I'd be glad to live next door to Negroes. But I don't want to force my neighbors into living in a situation they don't like. After all, I must consider them.

Let's consider our neighbors, by all means, not forgetting to ask, "But who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered the question by telling a story which showed that neighborliness recognizes no bounds of race or distance. If we accept the lesson of the parable, the unknown stranger whom we have opportunity to help has as great a claim on us as the people next door—greater, if his need is greater. By the New Testament definition, our neighbors are those whose families lack decent houses, adequate public services, and safe places for children to play. The white family next door already has these advantages, but we are denying the same necessities to the people whom we do not permit to move into our neighborhoods.

While we give help to the neighbors in need of housing, we are also doing service to the people who live next door. Crime breeds in the slum conditions which prejudice forces on minority groups. Ghettos are expensive—for those who suffer in them, and also for every taxpayer who helps to bear the financial burden of crime. Increased police protection, court proceedings, prison maintenance—all of these cost money. A center of chaos

in a city takes cash out of the pocket of every citizen. It is not only those who live, own property, or do business in the troubled area that suffer economic losses. The welfare of the surrounding country is closely linked to the prosperity of the city. If we let conditions in Lancaster go on, if our apathy allows the situation to develop to the point of destructive rioting, both we and the people next door will have something real to worry about. To assist the cause of peaceful integration in each neighborhood is the greatest consideration we can show to our white neighbors.

Even if all of this were not true, should fear of our neighbors' disapproval drive us to say, "No room, Christ, for You"?

Perhaps Mennonites ought to be concerned about fair housing in Lancaster County. But please don't begin in my neighborhood. I've worked hard all my life. This house is all I have. I can't afford to have it decline in value.

Now we're starting to be honest. What will happen to me and mine? That's the question that is really bothering us, but most of us hate to admit that we're thinking primarily about self.

According to research reported in the August 19, 1966 Time (and no one can accuse Time of being left wing) integration does not cause property values to decline. A study of 1,810 neighborhoods in 47 United States cities showed that in the 1950's, when the Negro middle class was growing rapidly, property values increased by 61 percent in Negro areas and by 45 percent in integrated areas, as compared to 35 percent in white neighborhoods. The Time article further cited the example of Baldwin, Long Island, where the first Negro family moved eight years ago. Houses then worth \$9,000 are selling now for \$17,000. This confirms the results of a study reported in Fairness in Housing,

*No race is inferior or superior to any other.
From the one man God created all races—
All men have turned away from God—
Through Christ all of us are able to come
into the presence of the Father.
—New Testament*

a pamphlet published by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. According to this report, a study of 10,000 real-estate sales in seven cities over a twelve-year period showed that when Negroes moved in, 41 percent of the houses did not change in price, 15 percent dropped in price by margins from 5 to 9 percent, and 44 percent increased in price by margins ranging from 5 to 26 percent.

When houses decrease in price after Negroes enter a community, it's the prejudice of the whites rather than the presence of the Negroes that is to blame. Putting up a "For Sale" sign is the most certain way to cause prices to fall. If the market is flooded with houses for sale, somebody has to sell at a loss. When a nonwhite moves into a district, unethical real-estate salesmen are likely to cash in on the situation. They frighten white owners into selling at low prices and then resell at high prices to Negroes. The result of such panic selling will indeed be a decline in property values and a new segregated area. To agree to sell when an agent tries to scare you with talk of declining values is to do an injustice to your present neighbors. Your staying is a way of insuring that prices will not decline. They are more likely to rise in the future, for when a block has been integrated peacefully a wise prospective owner will recognize that he need not fear costly demonstrations here.

Furthermore, moving is an expensive way out of a situation people do not like. It's a very uncertain escape, too. For what proof is there that a minority family will not move into the new neighborhood?

That sounds all right. But the fact is that minority groups mean slums. Wherever they go, property begins to deteriorate and crime rates rise.

Minority groups are not to be blamed for the slums in which they live. Often a deteriorating house in, or at the edge of, a blighted area is the only house anyone will sell or rent

to a Negro family. The Negro's presence has not created the condition; he lives there because our prejudice has forced him into the slums. Furthermore, unscrupulous owners are more likely to let deteriorate houses in which Negroes live, since inability to get a house elsewhere makes the Negro vulnerable. If an irresponsible landlord knows that he can continue to rent without making repairs, his property will deteriorate, through no fault of the tenant. Anybody will do his best to get out of such a house. White people can move into better communities; nonwhites are caught. Deeds recorded in Lancaster show that a large number of the depreciated properties in Southeast Lancaster are owned by a small number of absentee landlords.

Slum conditions and crime do not automatically enter an area when Negroes move in. Census Tract 6 in Northwest Lancaster is one of the districts pointed out by the Housing Study as being noticeable for its lack of depreciated housing. At least four houses in the section are now occupied by Negroes. Their presence has not caused slum conditions nor an increase in crime.

Continued segregation, not integration, will bring an increase in crime, for crime breeds in the slums. According to President Johnson's 19-man Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, the incidence of crime is higher among Negroes than among whites because crime develops in the ghettos of the inner city into which embittered, underprivileged nonwhites are crammed. However, the Commission's study shows that with economic equality the difference between crime rates of whites and nonwhites disappears. The Commission concludes that "a community's most enduring protection against crime is to right the wrongs and cure the illnesses that tempt men to harm their neighbors." (See *Time*, March 24, 1967, pp. 20, 21.) Instead of increasing crime, successful integration, by giving people a chance to move out of crowded slums, will help

to make our communities safer.

But the nonwhite family that moved into a house close to my friend's house can't or won't keep house properly. The children are dirty and the yard isn't mowed.

At the same time, a Negro friend of mine is complaining about her white next-door neighbor, whose lawn is unmowed. Some Negroes and Puerto Ricans are poor housekeepers, but I have also seen unbelievable filth in the houses and yards of some white people. It's unfair to judge all members of any group by the practices of one person. I once knew a blond, blue-eyed woman who was extremely careless about the appearance of her person, her house, her children, and her front yard. But I don't think, "Oh, she must be a poor housekeeper" every time I meet a blue-eyed blonde.

If the examples of poor housekeeping seem to occur more frequently among minority groups, remember where we force them to live. High standards are nearly impossible to maintain in deteriorated houses. Also, we have given low-paying jobs, or no jobs at all, to many minority-group fathers so that mothers have been forced to work full time, caring for their houses and families on marginal time. It's not quite fair to accuse of poor habits the people for whom we have made it extremely difficult to live decently. That would be like sending children to play in a muddy field and then spanking them for getting dirty.

Suppose a Negro family moves into my neighborhood? Someday their son may marry my daughter!

Are there no white families in your neighborhood whose son you would not want your daughter to marry? Yet you didn't forbid them to move into your community. And what makes you think that your daughter would choose

to marry the Negro boy next door? Or why are you so sure the Negro boy would be attracted to your daughter? After all, how many people do you know who married girls next door? In the horse-and-buggy days, this sort of thing sometimes happened. In the jet age a person is more likely to marry someone half a continent away. The chances of your daughter's marrying a Negro will be much higher if you send her to college where she'll meet Negroes with whom she has common intellectual interests than if a Negro family moves into your block.

What about the missionary children who grow up surrounded by children of other races? To be perfectly consistent, any person who uses the possibility of intermarriage as an argument against integration should also disapprove of sending missionary families to foreign countries.

Furthermore, the idea of intermarriage is not very disturbing to those who have worked and lived with persons of other races, cultures, or national backgrounds, whether in a foreign country, on a campus, or in a Christian church. When you get to know a person as a person who has thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, likes and dislikes much like your own, you forget to notice whether his skin is lighter or darker than yours. The fact that he does not resemble her own relatives need not keep a black-haired girl from marrying a redhead nor a freckle-faced fellow from being happy with an ivory-skinned beauty. And if you want to argue from the Bible, Miriam, who objected to Moses' interracial marriage, was appropriately smitten by leprosy which made her white as snow.

What will people say if I get involved in fair housing?

One of the joys of being Christian is to be set free forever from the fear of "what people say." Most of what people say against integration is hear-

say, quoted in support of bigotry or fear. An acquaintance who entertains interracially in an all-white neighborhood says, "The nearest thing to a face-to-face protest I met was the remark of the neighbor who told me that Mr. Smith, the businessman down the street, doesn't like it when Mrs. King, the Mennonite across the street, gets 'them colored kids from the city' every summer. I replied that I really didn't care what Mr. Smith thought and that I planned to keep on entertaining my friends. And to my surprise the neighbor agreed that this was the right thing to do."

Like the lady who quoted Mr. Smith's opinion as a feeler, many prejudiced people are so insecure that they need to quote an important community figure to bolster confidence in their own biased cause. Usually the quotation comes in the form of "Miss Sally said that Mrs. Greenberger said that her nephew Vance said that Mr. Artman said. . . ." By such devious routes the news reached me a few years ago that a Negro had been looking at a house in our town and that Mr. Artman, whose home and place of business was next door to the house for sale, had said, "If that family moves next door I'll sell out and move." For a day I nursed hard feelings against the Artmans, who are active members of a denomination that has taken a more courageous stand against discrimination than we have. Then I decided to call up Mrs. Artman, find out whether the rumor was true, and express my disappointment if that was indeed her husband's attitude. Mrs. Artman was distressed by the report. "We'd count it a privilege to have Negroes next door," she assured me sincerely. At the time she and her husband were renting an apartment on their own property to a family from Puerto Rico. With great satisfaction I informed Miss Sally next day that I myself had talked with Mrs. Artman, that the Artmans would welcome the new neighbor, and that Miss Sally had better tell Mrs. Greenberger that her nephew Vance was mistaken about the Artmans. Miss Sally didn't

take my advice because she "didn't want to make no trouble." But I had learned a valuable lesson in how to handle the grapevine's who-said-what-in-support-of-discrimination.

But what can I do? I don't have a house to rent or sell. I'm not in the real-estate business. Talk to somebody else.

Ordinary people like you and me may be the ones who can do the most. Civil rights laws are necessary and good, but love can't be legislated. The homeowners in your neighborhood are afraid to rent or sell to minority groups for fear neighbors (people like you and me) won't like it. The real-estate salesman, too, may be afraid to take a stand. When a friend asked an agent, "Why don't you do something?" the man (employed by a local realty company) said, "Do you want me to chop off my own head?" It may have been a coincidence, but not many years ago one Lancaster salesman did lose his job the day after he showed a house to a Negro. So that leaves the ordinary person to do what needs to be done.

All of us can let it be known clearly that we would welcome minority groups in our neighborhoods, next door if possible. Unless we are vocal, owners and realtors will continue to assume that we would object. By forming friendships with Negroes and Puerto Ricans, visiting in their homes, and inviting them to dinner—as friend to friend—we can announce clearly to every neighbor that we disapprove of discrimination. We can make it clear by writing letters to realtors and owners who have properties to rent or sell in our communities that we would like them to give consideration to prospective buyers from minority groups and that we would welcome the new families to our neighborhoods.

As opportunity develops, let your friends and neighbors know the facts about the housing situation and how discrimination hurts everybody in the area. The Pennsylvania Human Re-

lations Commission, 301 Muench Street, Harrisburg, publishes excellent free pamphlets. Such material will answer the questions that many uninformed people are asking honestly. Prejudice thrives on ignorance and fear. Above all, get the situation on the conscience of your brothers and sisters in Christ. As a church, we are too prone to argue about trifles, straining at gnats and swallowing this camel. If we are to accept the teaching of Mt. 25 with any degree of literalness, indifference to human suffering—not differences in worship practices—is the sin which sends people to hell.

If a minority group family moves into your neighborhood, be a good neighbor. We Mennonites need no instruction in this art. Be as friendly and helpful as you would be to anybody else. Refuse to take part in any effort to dissuade any such family from moving into your community and warn your friends not to participate. An attempt to prevent a minority-group family from getting a house or moving into it is a violation of the Fair Housing Law and is punishable by fines up to five hundred dollars or jail terms up to thirty days.

If a real-estate agent comes with an offer to sell your house for you because Negroes have bought in your neighborhood, let him know clearly that you know he is violating the law. He can have his license revoked or suspended by the Pennsylvania Real Estate Commission. If he persists in your neigh-

borhood, a letter to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, giving his name and address with the date and circumstances of his trying to cause panic selling, will bring about a prompt, and quietly conducted, investigation of his practices. This man is as guilty a criminal as the burglar you see breaking into your neighbor's house and should not be permitted to continue in his crime. Otherwise, he may succeed in frightening your neighbors into selling and so lower property values. In one community where a panic peddler scared a few people into putting up "For Sale" signs, other neighbors made clear their stand by putting up signs which said "This house is not for sale" and so stopped a mass exodus.

When you have a property to rent or sell, instruct your agent to practice no discrimination. Otherwise he may assume you wish to sell only to whites. Let the Fair Housing Service, 407 Howard Avenue, Lancaster, know your house is being made available and that you have instructed your realtor not to discriminate. In one unfortunate situation an owner who himself would have rented on an open-occupancy basis was investigated by the Human Relations Commission when an agent, not aware of the owner's wishes, refused to rent to a Negro. Also, as Christians, we should give our real-estate business to those firms which are not evasive in their dealings with Negroes and Puerto Ricans.

Support every effort of your church and its organizations to help people caught by unfair discriminatory practices. And do something to get involved personally. If your conscience keeps you from getting involved through voting, correspondence with legislators, or letters to editors and community leaders, you have an obligation to find something that you can conscientiously do. Several truly committed couples (there should be no effort to enlist halfhearted Christians in this) might ask Fair Housing Listing Service for the name of a family that wants a house, find out whether they want to rent or buy, where they would like to live, and what they can afford to pay. The next step would be to start reading ads, making telephone calls to advertisers, and going with your new friends to look at houses. It would be a good experience for everyone who bears the name of Christian to discover by firsthand experience what happens when a Negro tries to buy a house.

At any rate, stand up and be counted. It's a rich experience. Christians commend you. Cowards write unsigned letters and make anonymous phone calls. The cautious wait to see which way the wind is blowing and join you when sufficient support from influential people makes your opinion seem safe to hold. Christ invites, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

"And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."—Jesus



Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities
Salunga, Pennsylvania

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