

## Has the Dam Broken?

### A Workshop on the Reduction of Racism

Early arrivals at Emmanuel United Methodist on July 21 were confronted with an empty circle of 20-25 chairs. Indeed, EEAC organizers had warned the two guest speakers from Clergy and Laity Concerned that the turnout could be extremely modest. But by the time the meeting began, it was clear that its planners had underestimated turnout by over 100 persons. More reshuffling of chairs was in the offing: small-group discussions and a video filled a major part of the evening.

Speaker Susan O'Halloran, a lively Evanston-based writer and storyteller, assured the audience that "there are smoke-screens in society to keep us from looking at what is not working." Because whites are not excluded, they assume that no one is. "We don't see the privilege," Ms. O'Halloran concluded. American society was created on a discriminatory basis, and that inequality has perpetuated itself in its institutions. "America is different for different people."

Charles E. Jones, Executive Director of Clergy and Laity Concerned's Chicago office, added that racism goes far beyond personal bias: he defined racism as

"prejudice plus power." The coupling of bias with power has resulted in long-term, racist institutions.

Ms. O'Halloran concluded the evening by insisting that "helping" the disadvantaged is a white concept. We assume it is "good and fine to bring people over to where we are standing. But maybe where we are standing is not good and fine. The systems are set up wrong. It is our job to change it, for it is a system of privilege."

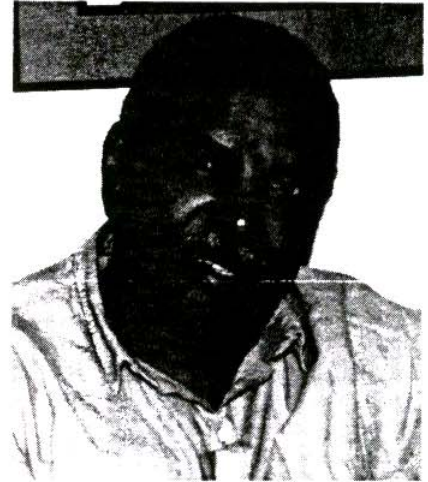
Afterward, Mike Johnson described the evening in culinary terms: "The salad course was excellent. Shall we now move on to the entree? If it turns out to be light cuisine, then the evening will have been counterproductive." According to Johnson, follow-up is essential. The initial response was gratifying, but such one-time successes are "pregnant with danger."

Teresa Forman, Co-Chair of EEAC's Social Action Committee, was more optimistic. "Our committee has been like standing water," she maintained. "But with the meeting on that Tuesday evening, the dam may have broken."

Rev. Kermit Krueger of Hemenway United Methodist deserves a special "thank you" from EEAC. He was responsible for instigating and initially planning this highly successful event.

## Introducing: Jim Offutt

It is highly appropriate to interview Rev. James Offutt for Peace Awareness Month. Active in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's, he has devoted much of his life to building bridges between black and white Christians. Raised in Springfield, he has pastored churches in Peoria and Champaign-Urbana. He moved to Evanston seven months ago at the invitation of Reba Place Church, which hopes through Offutt's efforts to become more involved in the surrounding African-American community. Rev. Offutt has made little acquaintance with ivory towers: During his 17 years in Peoria, he was frequently active on a vocational basis, working as a teamster, truck driver and lumberyard employee.



Rev. James Offutt

*OurSource:* Jim, we know you have plans for your work here which go beyond the strictly spiritual realm.

*Offutt:* Yes, I have always felt an ingredient missing in the Civil Rights Movement was the lack of emphasis on entrepreneurial development. I have had the desire to see entrepreneurial development in the black community, so I started my own company in Peoria. It is called Rim Ball Marketing, and we manufacture products for a game which is a derivative of basketball. The objective is to create jobs for unemployed people.

Reba Place Church has begun a program called the South Evanston Oasis Project. It consists of five parts, one of them is a jobs program, and another one is an apprenticeship program. A machine shop and a building firm want to provide opportunities for young people to develop their skills. I've also organized a broom brigade to clean the alleys. Our objective is to make the alley as slick and neat as the street in front. These are guys about nine to 14 years of age. They get paid \$3 per hour.

*OurSource:* How do you plan to foster racial reconciliation here in Evanston?

*Offutt:* A lot is already going on in this community which excites me. An ad hoc

*Continued on page 2, column 1.*



Susan O'Halloran