

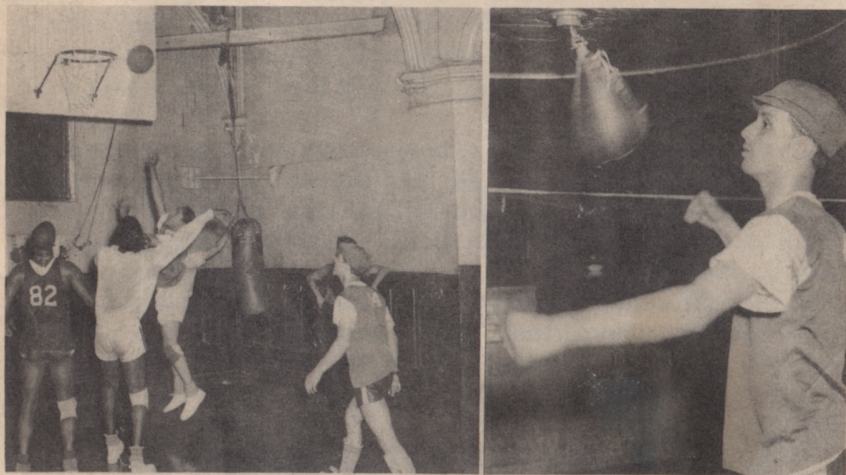
In the spring of 1956, three of their members became involved with the police. For legal aid they turned to Mrs. Mary Jane Melish at Holy Trinity Church. There they and their older brothers and sisters had attended dances run by the parishioners for neighborhood teenagers. Since 1950, these community dances--alternating square and social dancing--had been open to all teenagers. They had always been welcome. In their desperation they knew no place else to go. Mrs. Melish visited their families and finally went into Court.

Inquiry disclosed that two agencies had worked with the Pharaohs and given them up as impossible. A well-established Settlement House, with the aid of a Youth Board worker, had tried to deal with them. Unfortunately, the group worker was assigned to work within the Settlement House and only fifteen of the approximately forty members of the gang had been admitted. These were known as the "Inside" Pharaohs. The "Outside" Pharaohs were excluded. They were hungry to break in. They did. Result---all the Pharaohs were excluded!

The Brooklyn War Memorial Recreation Center, under Park Department supervision, also was aware of the Pharaohs. That they needed help was apparent but the long-term program required to rehabilitate these teenagers was beyond what the Park Department felt was its function. The Youth Board put a street worker on the tail, first, of the older and later the "Little" Pharaohs, the younger members of the gang, but for the majority of the members the net result remained--a vacuum. Into this flowed the death rhythm of gang wars and the search for "kicks" in their frantic desperation to defy time. With sitting, standing, howling, card playing, drinking and the use of drugs they sought to break the boredom.

Recognizing that the root of the problem was the emptiness in the lives of these teenagers, a committee of parishioners of Holy Trinity Church along with some of their neighbors, under the chairmanship of John Burke, undertook a series of activities in the summer months of 1957 that might woo the Pharaohs off the streets. A part-time worker, William K. Wolfe, was hired. With the aid of volunteers a parish program was started. The Pharaohs, though aware of its existence, preferred their old ways of killing time. The first weeks of that summer were spent by Bill Wolfe in sitting with the boys and girls in the War Me-

morial Park. Persistently he talked with them, trying to persuade them to come to the Holy Trinity gym. With a few he succeeded. Once inside the building, there remained the problem of keeping them interested. A gym program two nights a week with boxing, fencing, handball and dancing,



and an outing to Riis Park Beach every Saturday drew an increasingly large number. The youngsters felt welcome. Here they did not have to fight to be heard. They were no longer outsiders. To Mr. Wolfe and Mrs. Melish they began to bring their personal as well as their gang problems.

The pressure from the youngsters themselves to continue the program was insistent. During the autumn and winter months of 1957-58 the gym program was continued on Monday and Wednesday nights. Every other Saturday dances were held. A new activity was begun—a jewelry



workshop—where the teenagers could work side by side with adult parishioners under the trained supervision of a professional instructor, Karl Uretsky. These activities, though few in number, were basic in appeal. They jelled. It was a good winter. The total registration reached 319 teenagers, predominantly from downtown Brooklyn but drawing also from other parts of the city, even including the Bronx and Queens.

As the summer of 1958 approached, the committee felt that to make real progress in developing the capacities of these young people a full-time program was indispensable. The parishioners of Holy Trinity and a group calling themselves "Friends of the Trinity Square Dance Club" raised the necessary funds. Martin Greenbaum, who had worked with some of the Pharaohs in a Settlement House, was hired as a full-time worker, succeeding Mr. Wolfe who had resigned after a year of devoted service to continue his professional social work studies. Frank Bonanno stayed on to assist Mr. Greenbaum, and a professional dancer volunteered to teach the girls dancing, modeling and social deportment.



A weekly program of documentary films was added. At first the youngsters, who had seen little but westerns and murder stories on TV, were restless. Before long they were soberly watching "Nanook of the North," "The Quiet One," "The Neighbors," and "The Day Manelotte Died." There were trips to jazz concerts, the opera, a boat ride, two outings to Camp Midvale in New Jersey, softball games, bongo sessions, chess, checkers, dominoes, billiards and just plain bull sessions. By the end of the summer 348 boys and girls had registered. The paid staff was no longer alone.

Volunteers from the parish and the neighborhood helped with the Saturday outings, the jewelry workshop, the remedial reading lessons and week night trips to jazz concerts and Greenwich Village. Mr. Harris and Mr. Austin of the church custodial staff pitched in. As the boys and girls put it, "the joint was jumping every night."

Acceptance at Holy Trinity, regardless of background or color, built up these teenagers' self-respect and as a result their respect for others. In some cases a dramatic change in attitude took place. For example, there was the boy—whom we shall call Sam.

Sam was a 19-year-old with problems. He described himself as "off-white" and winced when he said it. He lived with his mother. His father had deserted them to live with another woman. Sam was deeply disturbed by this and by the fact that he and his family were not, as he interpreted it, "Americanized," even though he had been born and bred in Brooklyn. During the winter Sam had "sat" in Trade School. For him it had been a big farce. He could anticipate no future except the Army, which he did not relish.

Sam was hard to reach at first. By accident, in the course of a casual conversation, the group worker learned that he loved music. He invited him up to his apartment to listen to jazz records. Sam was enthralled. One day he shyly asked Mr. Greenbaum if he could bring his bongo drums some time, as he "played music by ear."



A few weeks later Mrs. Melish took Sam and some other teenagers to a rehearsal of "The Marriage of Figaro." They enjoyed it so much that they went to the performance the following week. Sam began to change noticeably. He became less restless and more cheerful. Among the boys he began to organize an Afro-Cuban band.

Sam enjoyed all the Trinity week-end outings. He had never been out of New York City before. But it was two trips to an interracial Camp—Midvale—that really jarred him and shattered his preconceptions. For the first time he saw white and colored people camping together, playing, swimming, having fun and dancing in a relaxed, unselfconscious atmosphere. It was almost too much for Sam. Total acceptance of people like himself was something he did not believe could happen in this world.

By the end of the summer Sam had confided in Mr. Greenbaum that he did not know how to read and would like to learn. Mr. Greenbaum, who lives in the neighborhood, invited Sam to his apartment where lessons in reading were begun. For the first time in his life Sam began hesitantly to study.

Sam is only one of many. Others soon asked if they could get help with reading. A skilled worker in remedial reading, who had come on a bus outing to help, volunteered to do what she could. Several of the boys who had quit school decided to take up their education where they had left off.

Not only have the youngsters been attracted to Holy Trinity but their parents have volunteered their services. Mothers, older brothers, sisters, and even grandmothers have formed a group. They have started a cooking and sewing club for the girls.

The Pharaohs no longer flex their muscles. They no longer feel they are up against a wall. They've come around



to relaxing and enjoying what they find at Holy Trinity. They can now laugh when they talk about the "good, old days." The tradition of violence is still to some degree there and it is this tradition that must be tempered and finally broken.

Perhaps then the new generation of Pharaohs who are on the sidelines and have already begun to ape their elders and are seeking to capture a place in the sun, will ape them in a constructive manner.

This competition in violence must go. It will, if we help. We now have a group of boys and girls who, although they are still troubled, have become a warm, responsive group. They are beginning to realize that even though the pressures of their physical environment cannot always be surmounted, there is much that they can do for themselves. They have begun to sense that the world can offer them ---even them--- a chance to gain the acceptance they so long for, through creative and constructive efforts.

In the spring of 1956 the problems of three teenagers became the introduction to the Pharaohs. It is no longer just the Pharaohs with whom we are concerned but the more than 350 members who today are benefiting from the Holy Trinity Teenage Program. Not only these but their friends and their friends' friends. The periphery has extended out and beyond the original boundaries.

The existing facilities do not suffice to satisfy their needs. We have the physical plant, thanks to the generous use of the parish house made available by the parishioners and vestry of Holy Trinity Church. We have the core of an efficient staff. But staff means money. This summer the program cost \$104.50 a week. If we are to continue this during the coming winter, expanding our activities to include drama, weaving, wood-working and leather-working, the minimum required is \$200 a week.

Unless we raise this small amount, our downtown Brooklyn community will have 350 teenagers back on the street corners. If we fail to invest in these future citizens the end result will be a greater burden on the city's budget for police, courts, social workers and detention homes.

Won't you make your contribution? Then all of us together can say, "Once upon a time there was a street gang called the 'Pharaohs'!"

JOHN BURKE, Chairman
Trinity Teenage Program

Please make your checks payable to:

FRIENDS OF THE TRINITY SQUARE DANCE CLUB
157 Montague Street, Brooklyn 1, New York