

THE "FLU" EPIDEMIC AND CHURCHLESS SUNDAYS

Christians Must Take Such Action as Will Put the Church
More Definitely on the Map.

In common with other cities, Bay City, Michigan, experienced a month of churchless Sundays during the epidemic of influenza. But Bay City probably handled the situation better than any other city in the country. In order to meet the religious situation so far as possible, practically all of the non-Roman communions united in paying for a half-page advertisement in the Saturday afternoon papers. The Rev. J. A. Schaad, Rector of Trinity Church, took the initiative in the matter and wrote a large part of the "ads." One of the half page "ads" written by Mr. Schaad was sent by the Secretary of the State Board of Health to the leading papers of Michigan for publication.

Coterminous with this action was another bearing directly upon the epidemic situation. The local application of the state ban affected only churches and theatres. Assuming that the "flu" germ is deadly, Mr. Schaad took the position that it was just as deadly on a dollar as on a prayer, and in order to force the issue, drafted a petition and secured the signatures of the eight pastors of Roman congregations, together with almost all of the Protestant ministers in the city. This was sent to the Governor, as well as to the local Health Board. He did not expect to secure the opening of the churches, but he felt that the preventative measures contemplated by the State Board of Health should receive a level application to all supposed-to-be danger spots in the city. After a rather spirited session with the Mayor and Board of Health, the Presbyterian minister and Mr. Schaad succeeded in securing the desired official action. The Mayor appointed a committee of fifteen citizens, including besides laymen, three Protestant ministers, two Roman priests and Mr. Schaad, and gave them full control of the Board of Health office, with full power to make such regulations as seemed necessary for preventative and relief purposes. A Churchman was the chairman of this group, which was then divided into three sections, namely: Residential investigation and Relief, Business Investigation and Control, and Public Information. As chairman of the latter, Mr. Schaad wrote daily articles of an educational nature and also the half page "ad" referred to.

"Our purpose in bringing the 'flu' situation into the church advertisement," writes Mr. Schaad, "is one which I think needs state and nationwide consideration and action. Gradually the Church has come to be looked upon as a 'non-essential industry.' Consequently, the State felt quite at liberty, in Michigan, to allow all the churches only six hours a week last Winter during the fuel famine, while the saloons were given nine hours a day! In the present epidemic the State also felt quite free to close the churches first. I believe the time has come when Christians must take such action as will put the church more definitely on the map."

One of the advertisements for a churchless Sunday presented suggestions for a devotional hour, including hymns, Scripture readings, and an appropriate prayer, and a statement as follows:

The Position of the Churches in the Present Epidemic.

The orthodox Christian Churches of all ages, following the plain teachings and acts of Christ, have accepted disease and death as physical facts.

These Churches also accept the discovery of Science that certain diseases are communicable from one person to others, either by contagion or infection.

The local Churches therefore did not object to the recent closing order, in itself, as a means of preventing the spread of the influenza, but because it did not go far enough to furnish real protection.

The Christian Church also believes in the use of material agents to effect a cure of disease. We affirm that the use of these is entirely consistent with faith in the power of God, and prayer for His divine blessing upon all human curative measures.

Believing this, the Christian Church has always encouraged the practice of medicine, from the days of St. Luke, the physician; and has maintained hospitals almost from the time of Christ; while, all the time reinforcing its scientific efforts by powerful recourse to the healing power of the Creator. Thus faith and works go hand in hand, according to the teachings of Christ.

The co-operation of divine forces with human agencies is recognized even by our greatest military leaders. For example: Lord Roberts, speaking of the perfection of England's preparation for war, said: "We have the men and the money and the munitions. What we need now is a nation upon its knees before God." When the news came of the unexpected success in the first battle of the Marne, he said to the late Lord Kitchener, "Only God Almighty could have done this," to which Kitchener replied, "Somebody must have been praying."

Surely if God may be supposed to be able to bless human effort in defeating the Hun, it is also reasonable to assume that He will add His divine power to human skill and effort to overcome the present plague.

The local Churches, therefore, appealed from the action of civil authority, because it cut off all organized spiritual forces from co-operation with human effort in staying the ravages of this epidemic, and deprived them of the opportunity to serve our community in its present distress.

There was also another reason for our appeal.

No scientist will deny that a microbe is as deadly in a commercial or social group of people as it is in a religious gathering.

And yet, the churches, with their unselfish and curative agencies, were closed for the avowed purpose of preventing the spread of the "flu" while business, which operates largely for personal profit, and which has no curative powers, was left undisturbed!

Since the Church is a corporation, doing business under the same laws of the State of Michigan as are commercial houses, this Church-closing order was a flagrant (even if unintentional) case of unfair discrimination which could have no standing in a Court of Equity.

Also since the danger of infection

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was greater in the daily operation of the many business places than from the weekly services of the few Churches, the Church-closing order was largely a farce as far as really safeguarding the health and lives of our people is concerned. It looked, moreover, as if a higher value was being placed upon the dollar than upon human life.

The Churches, therefore, had the right to protest this unfair discrimination against their helpful work, and they owed a duty to their constituents to use all proper means to secure more effective safety measures. We asked no special privileges, but we did want, and were entitled to, a "square deal."

An appeal was therefore courteously made to the civil authorities, on the ground that if they were as afraid of the "flu" germ as they professed to be, they would curtail its freedom as drastically in the market place as in the churches. And our confidence was well founded, as recent developments have shown.

Believing that the proper official action is now in process of being taken to safeguard the vital interests of the community, we cheerfully bend every effort to the fullest co-operation with the civil authorities in their difficult task.

The Churches, therefore, as law-abiding institutions, will remain closed so long as such restrictions are necessary in all other places of our community life. And we appreciate the whole-hearted way in which commercial interests have responded since the public danger has been laid before them.

Moreover, the several Churches, Catholic and Protestant, desire to be advised of any ways in which they can be of direct service to families who are affected by the epidemic. A telephone call to the clergy is all that is needed.