



Prescher power: At right, the Revs. (from left) Budge Gere, Suzanne Paul, Mark Sommers and pastoral assistant Fran Perrett share their experiences. Above, Joyce Kaplan asks the panel how to reach others that need the message, not just those who agree.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMKE

Clergy adapt to changing ethnic, cultural mix

BY BILL COULTANT
STAFF WRITER

There is one group in the Farmington area that has learned about racial and cultural diversity in recent years, it is the clergy.

Four members of the Farmington-area clergy recently shared their thoughts on those changes and how they have affected their missions and the people they serve at a presentation on diversity.

The Rev. Browster "Budge" Gere, of the First Presbyterian Church, said the 130 years of immigration to this country changed its makeup from a primarily northern European

protestant Christian nation into a mixed religious nation.

"There were some unexamined assumptions (about religion) that were no longer necessarily so," he said.

The Rev. Suzanne Paul, minister of the Universalist Unitarian Church, said that because of immigration law changes in 1924 that lasted until 1965, Asians and many of the Jewish and Islamic faiths were kept from immigrating to the United States and to this area.

"When I came here 45 years ago, it was still basically Christian," Paul said, adding that the change in 1965 has mani-

fested itself in the influx of new ethnic groups, religious affiliations and views of society. There are now 64 different languages represented in the Farmington schools.

That ethnic diversity has meant enormous changes in the past five years, and those changes have been felt in the Farmington/Farmington Hills Ministerial Association.

"We (clergy) used to meet in a restaurant, but found that was not very intimate," Paul said. "We then started visiting churches and temples."

The visitations, coupled with guest speakers, fostered understanding, not only of differ-

ences, but more importantly, of common ground, she said.

The ministerial association now has a good understanding of various needs and services in the area and sponsors events such as the Crop Walk, which promotes unity and community service.

For the Rev. Mark Sommers of the First Community Church, the idea of cultural and racial diversity was welcome. Sommers, a Flint native, said his father served as police chief during the 1950s and 1960s, a time when changes in perceptions, and resistance to those changes, were playing themselves out.

"My father had a big heart," Sommers said. "He met with Malcolm X and others. He brought people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds home to dinner, as friends."

Sommers said his experiences in schools — where, as a white, he was in the minority — prepared him for the diversity that now exists within his congregation. That experience squares with the tolerance of Jesus Christ.

For Fran Perrett, pastoral associate at St. Coleman's Church, personal contact with a family from Ghana while she was associated with a church in Redford changed her percep-

tions about race and culture.

The Europe-educated parents were political refugees, trying to get their three children to this country.

"I expected to be the one to help them the most, and they taught me the most," she said.

Joyce Kaplan said the presentation, at the April 11 Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council, was "marvelous," but was being delivered to people who already have the same values and goals.

"It happens one-to-one," Sommers said, adding that as people from diverse cultures and races meet, barriers break down.

Farmington City Council gets SMART talk tonight

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington City Council will hear from SMART officials and Oakland County commissioners tonight about a plan to save the financially strapped bus system.

The Farmington Hills City Council heard a similar presentation April 10. The Hills council is expected to decide April 24 whether to take the issue to the voters in a June 6.

Novi and West Bloomfield are two Oakland County communities that have opted out of the election. Farmington's council has to make a similar decision.

SMART officials contend a .33-mill property tax is needed to continue and improve service. For a person who owns a \$100,000 home, that's an additional \$16.50 a year.

Farmington council members briefly discussed SMART at its April 3 meeting. Some were critical of the last-minute way the issue has been handled.

"I just feel you can't leave people hanging," Farmington Councilwoman JoAnne McShane said. "It's terribly unfair."

SMART's presentation at the Hills council didn't instill confidence. The authority's improvement plans were not available.

McShane said she wants to hear the presentation first. The area needs a regional transportation system, she added, noting several people depend on the bus to get to work in Farmington.

"As far as I'm concerned, I don't think it should be taken off the ballot," Councilman Dick Tupper said. "However, I certainly would like to have seen it voted on in November when there would be a better turnout."

SMART's presentation at the Hills council didn't instill confidence. The authority's improvement plans were not available. Also, County Commissioners Don Wolf and David Moffitt said they have not seen an audit from SMART since June 1993.

If Farmington and Farmington Hills agree to go along with the election — and the proposal passes countywide — nearly \$1 million will be raised locally for SMART.

If the proposal fails locally

but passes countywide, Farmington Hills would still have to pay \$864,448 annually for at least three years. Farmington would have to pay \$91,376.

The bus system is running at a \$4 million deficit and a \$21 million debt, according to reports.

With several communities dropping out, SMART won't raise the \$12 million it had projected if the measure passes, Wolf said.

SMART has threatened to cut municipal credits — a portion of state gas and weight taxes — to communities who opt out of the election. That's \$7,800 for Farmington and \$57,000 for Farmington Hills.

Those credits help pay for senior transportation service.

"That's where the argument is," Wolf said. "We feel we paid those taxes for our senior citizens, and they (SMART) don't have the right to take it."

Knollenberg says he's not running for Senate

Ending any speculation almost as soon as it had begun, U.S. Rep. Joseph Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township, said he definitely would not be running for the U.S. Senate in 1996.

The two-term Congressman, whose 11th Congressional District includes Farmington and Farmington Hills, had been mentioned as a potential challenger to incumbent Sen. Carl Levin, D-Detroit.

While he didn't name a Sen-

ate favorite, Knollenberg did endorse Kansas Sen. Robert Dole's presidential bid.

"He is a man whose time has come," Knollenberg said of the Senate majority leader, "and unlike Bill Clinton, he understands that American families need to get big government in Washington."

Knollenberg said he would be "working hard" to nominate Dole. As for Knollenberg's other 1996 plans, stay tuned.



U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg

Experience the
Luxury of Leather!

ONLY
\$2299.00
for 2-piece sectional

- Solid rubber, live edge
- Solid hardwood frame
- Many Styles and Colors Available
- Made in the U.S.A.
- Genuine Leather Match

THE
LEATHER
FURNITURE OUTLET

Clawson
30 N. Main
(N. of I-4 Mile)
1-810-525-3390

Open Mon.-Thurs.
Thurs.-Sat. 10-7
Sun. 12-5
Closed Wednesday

Garfield, MI
26701 (at I-496)
between I-496 & I-675
1-313-522-0007