

AN EVIL SYSTEM

Between December 16 and January 24 eight Christian priests and laymen walked from Grahamstown to Cape Town on a pilgrimage of penitance for the evils of the migrant labour system.

The Bishop of Grahamstown, the Rt. Reverend B. B. Burnett, addressed them at a service before they set out.

"Migrant labour is a social evil we have lived with for many years. One may reluctantly accept the necessity for some breadwinners to be absent from their homes for prolonged periods, but it is something quite different to build migrant labour into the normal structures of our social life. Of this we all need to repent."

The pilgrims stated:

- That the economy will always need large numbers of Africans to work in the already established industrial areas of South African cities;
- that such workers must be allowed, if they wish, to set up permanent homes with their families in those areas.

They made six suggestions for action:

- The Urban Areas Act must be amended to state unambiguously that any person who qualifies to be in town in terms of Section 10(1) has the right to have his family with him and remain permanently there with his family, even when he is too ill to work, or is unemployed, or retired.
- The 1968 Bantu Labour Regulations must be repealed so that migrant workers are not compelled to return to their homeland every year. This prevents them from qualifying to live in town in terms of Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act. They must also be repealed so that if the migrant worker does return from leave he will not be disqualified from acquiring rights to remain in town.
- Freehold tenure must be provided in at least the established African townships, so that anyone who qualifies to be in town and wishes to buy land may do so.
- Firms must be free to house their workers on a family basis.
- A target date must be set for the Urban Areas Act to be amended in such a way that it will be possible for an orderly and rapid transition to take place from the

present situation and the current method of implementing the Act. The rate of change would depend on the speed with which houses and amenities could be provided.

- A crash programme for building family accommodation, both houses and flats, must be launched once the target date has been set and the country firmly committed to a policy of phasing out the migrant system.

The pilgrims suggested that the Urban Areas Act be amended with effect from 1975 to stipulate that, each successive year, the length of urban residence which is required in order to qualify for permanent residence in town be reduced by one year.

At present men must live lawfully in one area for 15 years or work continuously for one employer for 10 years. If the pilgrim's plan were adopted the requirement would be 14 and 9 years respectively in 1975, 13 and 8 years in 1976, until in 1984 those coming to town to work would automatically be able to stay.

The Witwatersrand Council of Churches asked people who felt able to do so sincerely, to dedicate themselves with the following pledge.

"I pledge myself to pray daily for the victims of the migratory labour system and for the restoration of a full family life to all in South Africa.

"I pledge myself to work for the phasing out of the migratory labour system especially in the situations where I exercise control or influence."