

# Parents Planning Interfaith Center For Willowbrook

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

An optimistic and dedicated group of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish parents—concerned by the lack of a suitable house of worship for children at Willowbrook State School—expects to establish a \$750,000 interfaith center at the school within five years.

The group, incorporated as the Interfaith Center for Retarded Children, was founded two years ago, when parents deemed the school's auditorium (where services are currently held) as lacking the proper atmosphere for worship.

Last August, the state gave its blessing to the venture, with the provision that the group raise every dollar of the necessary funds before groundbreaking begins.

Such a clause might have shattered the confidence of the hardest of fund raisers, but people like Jackie Bright, the group's president, vow to "stay with it" until the center is realized.

Encouragement and inspiration have also come from the school's four chaplains. In a message contained in a fund-raising journal, the chaplains' determination is summed up in the statement: "It is not a small project that we are undertaking, but neither is ours a small God."

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**THE REV.** Edward J. Banks, one of the school's two Catholic chaplains, says the center will be the first of its kind ever built at a school for the mentally retarded in this country.

In addition to separate chapels for the three major faiths, he adds, the center will have a community hall, offices, a library and possibly living quarters for chaplains.

Money is not the only prot-

lem the group must contend with. The need for the center must be conveyed to the majority of the parents of the school's 6,000 children if the facility is to be realized. The group's membership amounts to 200 at present.

**The group is anxious to receive outside support from Staten Islanders, as well as assistance from religious groups and philanthropic organizations.**

Irving Redler of Queens, a vice president of the organization, says a number of offers of free labor have been received from the building trades industry. Redler is a business representative for Local 1727 of the Paperhangers Union.

To date, the group's most successful fund-raising event occurred in 1964, when it sponsored a testimonial dinner for Al Kelly, the celebrated comedian and master of double-talk.

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**THIS YEAR,** members expect a fall fashion show in Countess Moore High School, Graniteville, to add significantly to the \$15,000 already collected for the project.

It is ironic, however, that when the building becomes a reality, it will be deeded to the state.