

Religion Today

Students Rove National Parks With Ministry

By GEORGE W. CORNELL
AP Religion Writer

An unusual corps of ministers is deploying today across the rugged regions of the United States.

They've got a peculiar territory to tend.

It has few residents, but it can turn up congregations of thousands. No fine churches exist there, yet no architect could match its majestic spires. It can induce reverence, but some say it also can deceive the heart.

Such are the paradoxes and prospects of the National Parks Ministry in which 125 young men and women are now taking over their assignments for the summer.

Seminary Students
Most are seminary students. They'll do double duty. They'll work as bellhops, maids, waitresses, clerks and garbage truck drivers, but they'll also conduct worship services, organize Sunday schools, preach, teach and lead hymns around the campfires.

"Our job," said Ronald Trank, 26, Buffalo, N. Y., who'll be a handyman and also student minister at Big Bend National Park, Texas, "is to present a Christian witness. You don't need a formal church for that."

"It can be done anywhere," he added, "outdoors or in, wherever you can meet people, and place you can reach them, put a question in their minds and make them search."

Under the program, sponsored by the National Council of Churches, the summertime ministers are being stationed at inns and lodges in 26 national parks—uninhabited realms of woodlands, mountains and game.

Roving Vacationers
Roving vacationers and seasonal employees make up the religious attendance—which is large. As for the popular idea that awe-inspiring natural settings draw men nearer to God, however, Trank said there are two sides to the matter, both helpful and misleading.

Nature's splendors, he said, may stir a keener "awareness of God's creations and supremacy" which often are sensed in cities jammed with man's creations—but "there also is a danger" of over-glorifying scenery.

"It can become a sort of pantheism—a worship of nature rather than God," he said. "Some people get so carried away by the flowers, mountains and setting sun that they lose the essence of worship."

Place Doesn't Matter
"Actually, it's never the place that matters—it's the purpose." The students, from 30 different seminaries and 50 colleges, represent a cross-section of denominations, 23 of them. They come from nearly every state in the country.

Besides the student workers, there'll also be 85 guest pastors used in the program this year under expanded activities being developed through a \$50,000 grant from John D. Rockefeller Jr.

Services also are being extended into two additional parks this year — Devil's Tower National Monument, Wyo., and Devil's Postpile National Monument, Calif. — whose names, at least, suggest the preaching is needed.

Strangely enough, Trank said, a lot of people turn up for the religious services in the parks that don't do so back home.

"When people are in an unaccustomed environment, they often do things they don't customarily do, like trying religion for the first time," he said. "We reach many new people that way."

Over-all attendance, he said, is surprisingly large. Last year, the park ministry served a quarter million people. It may beat that this year. Under expansion plans, it expects to be serving a million a summer by 1966.

Just a Homebody
INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Mrs. C. R. Snyder can't help feeling the bugler who broke into her house was not entirely an unfeeling brute. In addition to nearly \$900 worth of other loot, he wiped Mrs. Snyder's favorite four pots of African violets.

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June 15

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Oregon Statesman

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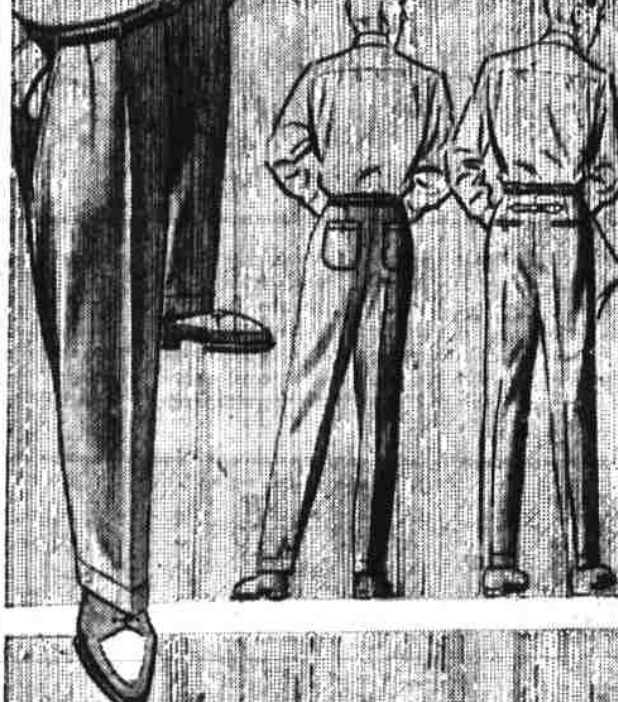


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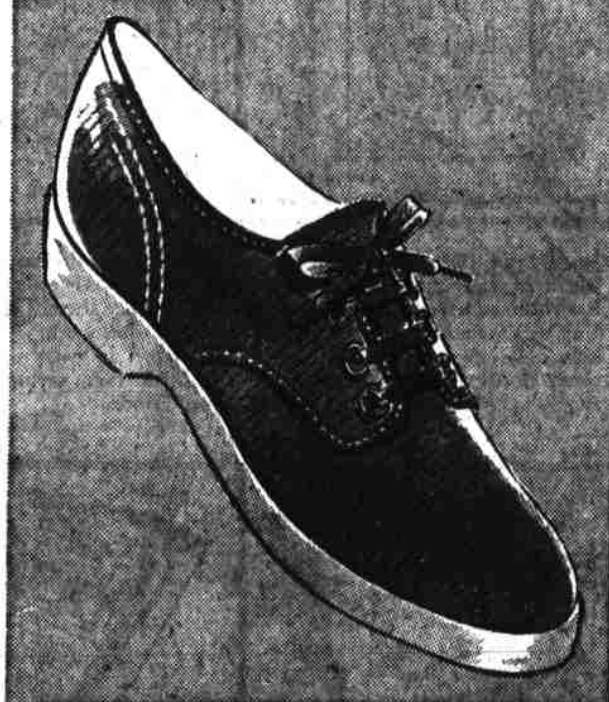


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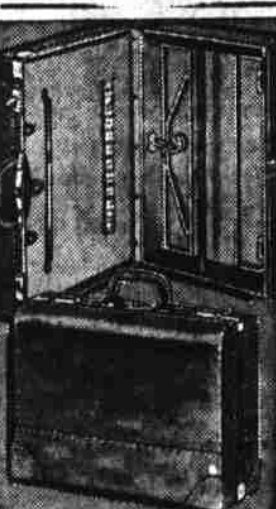
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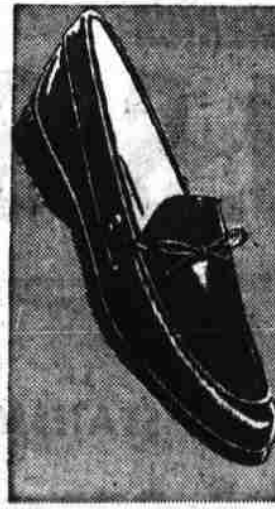


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