

# 'Infirmaries are like garbage heaps'

The Reverend Phillip Hart has expressed disgust at the condition of many of the Island's infirmaries and almshouses which he described as virtual 'garbage heaps' of 'unwanted' humanity and he said "garbage heaps attract rats and rats attack people".

He was addressing the 38th Annual Island Council Meeting of the Jamaica Federation of Women at the New Kingston Hotel (Thursday, in his capacity of the vice-chairman of the National Council for the Aged.

Rev. Hart said that we must now look to building proper homes (not almshouses) where the elderly can receive the care and attention and love to which they are entitled as this was the right of everyone.

He also said that everyone over the age of 60 (for women) and 65 (for men) should be entitled to a basic pension regardless of whether they had contributed to the national pension scheme, and should not have to rely on poor relief. Pension should also be adjusted periodically in relation to the increase

in the cost of living.

Rev. Hart said that legislation should be passed providing for definite standards for private nursing homes for the elderly as well, as these were also greatly neglected.

Rev. Hart said that for years he and others had been greatly concerned about the aged and had been visiting and reporting on the deplorable conditions existing in these institutions. He said that several reports and pleas to the government had been shelved and nothing done about them.

When the tragedy occurred at Eventide Home two years ago (with the fire and death of over 150 inmates), everyone went into deep mourning. Since then nothing has been done about it, Rev. Hart said, until recently when the appalling situation there was exposed.

He congratulated the government for the bold move they were making in this matter, but said that Health care in Jamaica was an indictment against the system as not one ward in the hospitals was devoted completely to Geriatrics; not one fully trained and

qualified Geriatrician nor a nurse properly trained in geriatrics at any of these institutions.

"The number of elderly persons in Jamaica is growing yearly, he said, because of the increase in the population and people were living longer due to more modern health care and proper nutrition, yet we are not making any real provisions or planning for the aged."

Elderly persons still had much to contribute to the society, Rev. Hart said, in knowledge and skill and no one had the right to decide when they were no longer useful to society and to be thrown on the garbage heap.

Federation President Lady Edris Allan also addressed the meeting and said that there did not seem to be so much love and caring for each other anymore as there were increasing reports of incidents of cruelty in the society. She urged social organisations to try to mold the character of the youth, to instil in them high ideals and respect for parents and other older people.

25 MAY 1982