Oldsters Invited To Forum Here

If everyone over 65 in Lafayette could attend next Thursday afternoon's Forum on Aging, 7,300 persons would be seen trooping into the First Assembly of God Church on South College Rd., at 2 o'clock, to ponder for two hours on problems of seniors in nine needs areas.

The Forum's three sponsoring agencies, the Rural Development Committee, which is rounding up persons concerned in seniors' needs to moderate nine panel-discussions, and the Lafayette Council on Aging, Inc., which is busy publicizing the event, want all the forum guests to speak out at the panels which interest them most. Their views will be recorded and sent to the White House Conference on Aging next year.

Every tenth American is over 65. As Lafayette's population has just been determined as 73,000, simple arithmetic shows our area with 7,300 senior citizens. A recent survey here told us much about these persons. One quarter of them is Black, 62 per cent of the rest are women and nearly 5 per cent of the men are still employed full-time.

There will not be 7,300 persons at next Thursday's Forum on Aging, however. Many of our oldsters are bedridden; about 1,300 of them are in nursing homes, although many of them are alone there. There are many facts we do not know about them.

How many of these seniors speak only French? The survey showed 27 per cent of the White seniors and 65 per cent of the Black seniors have had no schooling. How many of them suffer from mental illness, arthritis, high blood-pressure, partial blindness or deafness? How many neglect medical care because of its cost? Some of the Forum's discussion can tell us some of these answers.

Last week, County Agent A. J. Brackin secured Dr. Ben Kaplan to serve as chairman and moderator of the forum on Aging. Brackin's Rural Development Committee members announced volunteers who had promised to help them on the panels discussing Income, Health, and Employment Needs.

Today Brackin's committee heads announce their discussion leaders for the other five fields.

Ministers Named

Robert Mouton, on the Evangeline Economic Development District, turned to the Lafayette Ministerial Association for the Protestant members of his spiritual well-being panel. The Rev. Robert S. King, pastor of the First Assembly of God Church where the forum will be held, and a past-president of the ministerial association, will serve with the association's treasurer, the Rev. Luther Minor, who is pastor of the Trinity CME Church, on the panel.

The two Catholic panel members will be Msgr. Jude Speyrer, pastor of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Church, and past president of the Clergy Association of the Diocese of Lafayette. Recording for this panel will be Miss Anne T. Foley, who has served as consultant for the Lafayette Parish Council on Aging, Inc., since its beginning.

Murphy Langlinais, Soil Conservation Service, has asked Chester Baudouin, supervisor of transportation for the school transportation system, to serve on his transportation panel. His other volunteer on this panel will be Felix Fremin, manager of the Lafayette Municipal Transit System.

The committee for roles and activities, headed by Earl Chris of the Lafayette Playground and Parks Commission, has asked Curtis Landry, assistant superintendent of the New Iberia Recreation Department, to serve on this panel. Chris has also secured the services of Mrs. Vesta Bourgeois, former physical education for women instructor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, for this committee.

Mrs. Bourgeois, among her many other retirement activities, conducts regular exercises for patients in our nursing homes. Sidney J. Bowles Sr., who recently retired as county agent after over 40 years of service, has also been asked to serve.

Education Committee

James Bourque, vocational agriculture teacher at Ovey Comeaux High School, has secured the services of Dr. James Oliver and Claude Hebert for their education committee. Dr. Oliver is the dean of the graduate school of USL and Mr. Hebert is a former vocational agriculture teacher in Scott.

The housing needs panel, headed by Gaston LeBlanc of the Farmers' Home Administration, will have Chester Romero Jr., Federal Housing Authority Director for Lafayette; a local realtor, Preston J. Babineaux; and Mrs. Ray Theaux, former home demonstration agent to guide the discussion. Mrs. Theaux, on the board of directors of the Lafayette Council on Aging, Inc., will record the panel's findings.

Realistic Policy

When President Nixon issued his call for the White House Conference on Aging to be held the week of Nov. 28, 1971, he hoped to bring into being a more realistic and comprehensive national policy for older Americans. This conference will be the second such conference. The first one, held in 1961, was attended by our area Forum's moderator, Dr. Ben Kaplan.

This year, 1970, is known as the year when "Older Americans Speak to the Nation." The second year, 1971, will be the "Year of Conference" when each state confers in May, and the White House Conference takes place in November. The third phase will be the "Post-Conference Year, 1972," when the follow-through begins: -- A plan of action for the '70's Action by Federal, State and local governments, by national organizations now serving older people, and more involvement in their own behalf by older people themselves.

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