The Rev. Albert J. McKnight is a very busy man on the national level these days, since his forced departure from the pastorate of the Holy Ghost Catholic Church in Opelousas. "It's the best thing that could have happened," he says. "The last two years have been the happiest years of my life."

The nationally known civil rights activist stirred up much controversy during his six years in the Holy Ghost pulpit before being pulled from the church two years ago. Among other incidents, he was convicted and served a few days in jail for his part in protest that blocked access to the St. Landry Parish School Board offices in 1987.

McKnight still lives in Opelousas. If anything, his activism has increased. In January, McKnight became the executive director of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, an organization of black Catholic priests that has been in existence since 1968.

He's also been organizing B.U.S.T., Black Unity and Spiritual Togetherness, which now has members in 11 states. B.U.S.T. consists of small groups with three goals: to act as support groups for religious study and spiritual reflection; to further economic development in black communities; and "to look at the problems of the community and start doing something about them." For example, a group of teachers would primarily address educational needs.

Each B.U.S.T. member is asked to start saving, even if it's only $5 at a time, and to invest in a national economic co-op whenever they accumulate $100, McKnight says. The concept is "trying to do on a national level what's been done at the Southern Consumers Co-op," he says. "Christ only needed 12 apostles, so it's small groups coming together."

McKnight returned from Africa a few weeks ago, where he worked with the Holy Ghost Order in arranging for a couple of priests from East Africa to spend some time in the South in 1991. The fastest growing provinces of the order are in East Africa, McKnight says. He visited Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

McKnight was also trying to arrange what he calls a "spiritual safari" of Africa for visitors from the United States. "There are such wild understandings of Africa that we need a lot of education," he says.