

Church Federation Exec Praises La. Crime War

By HERMAN DREZINSKI

The present concern over allegations of organized crime in Louisiana may lead to a better day for the state, the Rev. George H. Wilson, executive secretary of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, told a public meeting today.

The Rev. Mr. Wilson addressed the Federation Key Men, an affiliate of the church federation, at its weekly meeting at Holsum Inc. Cafeteria.

"Out of the present situation and discussion of organized crime has come one of Gov. John J. McKeithen's finest statements," said the Rev. Mr. Wilson.

"THIS IS HIS announcement that he will not leave law enforcement in the hands of local officials if these officials fail to act.

"Nearly every governor has said it is up to local officials, and has added that he would not interfere, which has been interpreted, at least by some, to mean that the governors have been willing to let gambling and other crimes operate without interference."

The Rev. Mr. Wilson made public a letter which he has sent the governor in behalf of the board of the church federation.

In the letter the executive secretary of the church federation spoke for the board in declaring:

"WE WERE HAPPY to read that you have no intention of resigning, but will remain in office to do what no other elected official could do so well. It may be that you will go down in history as the governor who brought Louisiana into a new era, not alone in economics, but also in morality. We believe you are the right man for that job!"

The letter to the governor was prompted by the desire to let him know that the board had approved the action of the church federation's civic affairs department in the controversy revolving around Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara of Criminal District Court. The civic affairs department had asked the governor to seek a hearing before the State Supreme Court at which it would be decided whether Judge O'Hara should be removed from office.

THE ACTION OF THE civic affairs department was based on the fact that Judge O'Hara has testified in court that he

had acted as a "messenger boy" in an attempt to get Baton Rouge Teamster official Edward Grady Partin to change testimony which had been instrumental in convicting James Hoffa, Teamster union head, on charges of jury tampering.

O'Hara admitted that he had acted as intermediary for New Orleans builder Zachary "Red" Strate.

In the letter to the governor, the Rev. Mr. Wilson said the board of the church federation has asked him to write to the governor "in their behalf, asking that this (O'Hara) matter be pursued to a conscionable conclusion.

The letter in behalf of the board then added, "Since this action was taken (requesting steps by the governor in the O'Hara controversy), we have been made aware of your meeting with Life magazine editors and of your decision to work toward the elimination of organized crime in Louisiana.

"You may rest assured that the religious leadership of the state rejoices in your declaration and will support you in every way possible as you work to bring to our state a more wholesome condition."