

To: Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
Six Raymond Street N.W.
Atlanta 14, Georgia

From: Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Project
504 South Madison Street
Albany, Georgia

Submitted by: Faith Holsaert

First! Mass meeting in Sumter County! November 8, 1962:

Held in Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, near Desoto. Mr. [redacted] and Mr. [redacted], both of Sumter, who have been attending Terrell and Lee meetings, told us the doors of their church were open to us at the Lee meeting of October 31. We, Jack, Larry, Chico, Penny and myself gladly accepted and set the date. Sherrod was out of town. When he returned, he told us that we should have waited until we had workers living in the community who could have absorbed and handled any violence or harassment that might have occurred as a result of the meeting. None of us fully realized the extent of the responsibility we had assumed in setting up such a meeting. Our fingers are crossed.

The brave and reliable of Dougherty, Lee, and Terrell were there:
Rev. [redacted], the [redacted], James [redacted], Joanne [redacted], Agnew [redacted], et al.

We have a list of twenty-three from Sumter who attended, and there were about six children in addition. None are registered. Mr. Bobby [redacted], told me that he had applied to register. He was unable to answer one question, and failed the test--when was God born. No wonder. Mr. [redacted] is willing to return.

The SNCC staff arrived late; we had trouble finding Pleasant Grove. Sherrod took the floor, and in fact the whole church, as soon as we arrived. First he took it in silence, absorbing the sight of the gathering. Then he spoke of each group of people from Sumter, who was there. They happened to have seated themselves in four pews, each pew holding one group. We have the young men back there, that is our pew of strength. Our older men back there, I'm glad to see them; that is our pew of wisdom. And here, here sit the women, in the pew of knowledge. Lastly, but most important, we have here in the front, our children; they represent the future.--Sherrod gathered each one in and made each one important and self-conscious but pleasurably so.

He spoke of the sit-ins, teaching ourselves to say no. He made Jack stand, and shook hands with him, talking all the time of what he was doing. Talking about Jack. Giving people a chance to see Jack. Sherrod spoke of coordination, the strength of people who are together and the fact that many Negroes believe they shouldn't stick together because they are told not to stick together. He told of the protection available to those who stick together, of the Federal Investigators, the ministers who came South, the people who raised money for Mama Dollie. The strength of those who act in God.

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The Pastor, Rev. , who has been at Mass Meetings in Albany, asked those who wished meetings in Sumter to continue to stand. The pew of wisdom, the older men, stood immediately, followed by the others. We won't get nowhere til we lose some of that 'fraid he said.

Sherrod returned, and started the group into "Woke up this morning."

He brought eleven year old Marion up front, stood her on a chair, and with his arm around her waist said, This is Albany. It was Marion, standing on the chair so we could see her, who led the group in "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round." By now the Sumter County children were singing too.

Hands were clasped across the pews, and everyone was singing "We Shall Overcome."

Notes

James said that the Voter's League of Americus, Sumter County, had stopped meeting. The company that insured the church in which they met had cancelled their policy. James will contact their former President.

Conrad (of Coinonia) told Jack that Sheriff Chapell of Sumter County, had told the masons of Americus that they could hold Voter Registration meetings, but that the meetings had better not be integrated. It was Sheriff Chapell who appeared at the July 28 meeting in Sasser (covered by Sitton), with a ciagarette. He is reputed to be difficult at best.

On November 9, the night following the meeting, we received two calls between 1:20 and 1:30 AM (really the morning of Nov. 10), in the Albany House. I picked up the phone the first time, and heard nothing but mumbling. I signalled Jack to pick up the extension, and as he was doing so, heard the man on the phone mumble "Gonna blow the sons a bitches up." Each time Jack or I asked for the caller's name, we got this as a reply.

Almost immediately a second call was made; we assume by the same man. This time the blow the sons a bitches up theme was elaborated upon. The gist of the matter was that "God damn integrationists Sons a bitches I'm gonna kill you." You come to Sumter, I'm gonna kill you. I'm gonna kill you." (notes taken as soon as phone was hung up). Jack and Larry picked up the phone the second time. Larry felt the implication was not IF you come to Sumter I'll kill you, but, NOW THAT YOU HAVE come to Sumter, etc.

Sherrod was right. If meetings are held, SNCC is considered in residence. We will probably have visitors at the next meeting. Lets hope the residents of Sumter County don't have visitors before we return next Saturday. Whoever called, incidentally, knew exactly who held the meeting, where we lived, and our phone number. The phone is listed under Charlie's name, not SNCC's. More people are coordinating than SNCC.