

## MINISTERS PROJECT ORIENTATION

### I. Significance of the Project

A strategy was worked out in Hattiesburg that has promise of a civil rights breakthrough in Mississippi. January 22nd, Freedom Day, was the first time a civil rights demonstration has lasted more than fifteen minutes in Mississippi without mass arrests. For the Negro and white people of Mississippi to witness peaceable assembly for civil rights without all out suppression was a step forward in itself.

The picket line at the Forrest County Court House in Hattiesburg has had even greater import: it has given "protection," a sense of security, to the hundreds of Negroes who have climbed the "white man's courthouse" steps to register. Before January 22nd there were less than a hundred Negroes on the rolls, around 40 of which had been forced on by federal court order. The number of applicants since Freedom Day now numbers something over 300. The fear and intimidation walling off the Hattiesburg Negro community is thus breaking down more and more every day.

What is the basic strategy that shows potential for the rest of Mississippi? It has the following elements:

- 1) Activities are centered on voter registration.
- 2) Federal statutes, federal courts and the Department of Justice are therefore able to give assistance and protection.
- 3) COFO, made up of NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC, gives aggressive local leadership.
- 4) Churchmen from outside the area are invited to participate in the demonstrations, canvassing, and mass meetings.
- 5) Local civil leadership is given every encouragement to take a "moderate" line, i.e. give protection to orderly and peaceable demonstrations, and to follow federal law in registering voters.

"I am filled with a great deal of admiration at the dedication and courage of the SNCC students. I know that there are many justifiable criticisms that could be made about their judgment and conduct at times, and I feel that the ministers must constantly review their own strategy plans in the light of what the students are doing and maintain a certain independence of action where sound judgment would seem to dictate. However, I am proud to have had some small part in bolstering the work of the students and, unless there is some unforeseen change of direction on their part, I feel that we should continue to stand by them."

"I believe that there is an urgency about our staying with the SNCC students. Not only is it quite apparent that our presence has some

physical protection for them, but also a spiritual resource to front line troupes whose urgent need for moral and spiritual resources will drive them toward Marxism if the only experience they have with the church is with a decadent and conforming church."

The Rev. Graddon E. McClellan  
February 13, 1964

#### IF YOU ARE ARRESTED:

If a policeman says "come along", ask if you are under arrest. If he says "yes", you must go...if not, you are still free and do not have to obey him except insofar as he is ordering you to obey the law. In jail, as soon as possible, ask for your right to make a phone call. Contact one of the co-directors, Bob Beech or John Cameron if possible at 4-7720. They will contact lawyers and your contact persons. WRITE a list of events leading up to your arrest and following. Use the affidavit form...copying it if more than one are needed...to record all significant facts and events. Use your time in jail constructively. Get to know other prisoners. Be a good listener...And be of good courage.

#### CANVASSING:

This is done mostly in conjunction with COFO workers, and college volunteers, "buddy system" style. You will be assigned a specific area to canvass. Ours should be a canvass in depth. Get to know the people. Don't be in a rush. One good visit is better than five superficial ones. Be sure your COFO co-workers has 1. The registration form, 2. The Constitutional sections, 3. The Interpretation of them. Use the canvass record sheet in your packet to record your visits. The better your record sheet is, the better our follow-up can be. Be sure to record something about each house... contacted and what happened, or not contacted. Keep telling those who have registered to get others to do so.

The COFO workers will be very interested in freedom registration (ie. unofficial registration). The ministers are urged to give their efforts primarily to actual voters' registration. Urge the people to go down to the courthouse and register. If you find a person who wants to go register, and you have or can get transportation, go with that person immediately to the court house. Take them to the door of the registration office and wait outside that office for them. If they are willing to register at a future time, record that time, and whether they need transportation or wish someone from COFO or Ministers Project to accompany them.

#### RELATIONS WITH COFO:

During the first two weeks relations with COFO workers were much closer because we lived in COFO headquarters. We danced and ate and drank together. It has been decided since that such activity might leave us open for arrest and needlessly complicate matters. However, you are urged to spend much time with the COFO people and develop a close working relationship with them. The COFO workers have a unique relationship to the community. They are completely dedicated to "Freedom Now." They will do things that seem to you to be hasty, foolhardy, and not "decently and in order." But remember, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The COFO leadership works

full time on a subsistence level salary..about \$10 per week, when funds permit. The younger workers are high school students who work after school and during vacations. Many of these people, while southerners, are not local residents. Some are. The COFO people (SNCC people particularly) are often disenchanted with the Church and God. What we are and do will say more than a million sermons.

#### THE MATTER OF DISCIPLINE:

While recognizing that God alone is Lord of the conscience, we find in this very tense situation that a certain amount of organization and close adherence to the guidance of the co-directors is crucial to success. Mistakes can be costly...and the consequences are borne by the on-going leadership and those we all are trying to help. Your leaders, while you are in Hattiesburg, are John Cameron and Bob Beech. We cooperate closely with COFO and other groups and our staff has joint strategy meetings with their staffs. But decisions affecting you come through Ministers Project leadership.

It is important that you be at the talk-it-ober session in the evening. Here is where plans for the next day will be finalized.

Worship is important. Ministers in past weeks have found various procedures meaningful. Some had daily morning devotions. At least one group went with the Catholic priests in the group to the local Catholic Church and joined with them in Mass. Private devotions are meaningful. There is the possibility of some sort of outdoor worship which would carry a witnessing factor with it. Our suggestion is that the group determine their own course of action at the beginning of each week.

#### CONTACTS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY:

NEGRO: Many of the ministers are cooperating. Get to know them in the course of your canvassing activities. Also, we have begun to make contact with the most stable element in the Negro community...the merchants, businessmen and professional people. These are of great significance. Before you move "on your own" in developing such contacts, find out from Bob or John what has already been done. Without meaning to, we can appear to be pestering or badgering if we see the same people too often or at the wrong time.

#### THE WHITE COMMUNITY:

While we live in and associate mostly with the Negro community, it is important to remember that we have come here to bring about reconciliation... not division. This means that any contact we have in the white community is extremely valuable and important. For this reason, we insist that you not pursue activities in the white community without letting Bob and John know what you are planning to do. This does not mean "no contact with whites." On the contrary, we are eager for you to build on the contact that have already been made and make more yourself. But because of the explosive nature of the times, please keep Bob and John closely informed of what you do in this area.

Concretely: There is a file of the white churches and their ministers and others. On the cards there, you can get a sketchy picture of the progress made in our relationships with the white community. It is good to know that

there are many in the white community who are not in favor of segregation and discrimination. But it is equally important to see their position... the pressures they face. Do not assume immediately that absence of activity in behalf of Negroes means lack of support of our cause. Once again. Check with Bob or John before moving in on the white community.

NOTE: See file of personel at University. If you are a Rotarian, Lion, etc. find out when the meetings are and go to them. Let us know what you find out.

#### THE LAW:

You will find the police and the courts tend to be against you. Note the article from the newspaper on the office wall which outlines some of the legal ammunition the city has redied to defend itself against us. Obey all laws except the ones we as a group decide to test. Realize that the reaction of the authoirties is a tentative, changing thing. They are as unsure of you as you are of them. In general, ignore them and go about your business.

#### ON CARS:

Keep them locked at all times. Try and limit your driving to Voter Registration Business and W.C. contact. However, if some other need for a car arrises, either among the ministers or COFO people, please let Bob or John know before you "take off." Cars are at a premium and we need to know where they are at all times.

#### THE BUSINESS OF LIVING:

Work out among the group daily assignments for cleaning the John and sweeping the dormitory and office. This should be done daily. Then, at the end of each week, before you leave, swab down the floors with Soilex and water, etc. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. The local critics accuse us of a lack of godliness, so at least let's be clean! Suggestion: Appoint one in the group to keep a daily log which can be kept and passed on to the next group. All resturants on Mobile are o.k. Everything necessary for life is available nearby. The cleaners across the street is reliable...talk to the woman, not the older man. The drug store is in the block to our north, groceries are available many places. If you need some help, go next door and ask Mr. Fairley, the proprietor of the TV shop. He is our proprietor and president of the local NAACP.