

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES'
COMMISSION ON RELIGION AND RACE**





The Letter to the Ephesians

"For He is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing walls of hostility."



Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D. C., August 28, 1963.

"We come—late we come—but we come to present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be 'a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service' . . . We come in prayer that we, in our time, may be more worthy to bear the name our tongues so fluently profess."

The Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake
Chairman
Commission on Religion and Race

In the 1950's, a woman who refused to sit in the back of a bus asked by her action a single, simple question of churchmen across the nation: "Where are you?" The question was an old one. It was taken up later by those who sat at lunch counters, who rode on buses, who, in fear but with hope, faced dogs and firehoses. "Where are you?" It was, as it has been for generations, the query of a suffering people. It was also a warning: "Our fate is your fate."

Though "late we come," the National Council of Churches made answer when it formed the Commission on Religion and Race that summer of 1963. It was created under one imperative: if the Christian church was to make itself felt as well as heard, if it was to have any spiritual or moral significance in a torn nation, it would have to join the struggle for equal opportunity. Though late, it was time to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them."

The Commission on Religion and Race was created June 7, 1963, in an action which declared that the "church of Jesus Christ is called upon to put aside every lesser engagement."

The commission was established by the National Council of Churches' General Board, which is comprised of official representatives of the 31 member Protestant and Orthodox communions in the council. The commission's mandate was broad, calling for "costly action that may jeopardize the organizational goals and institutional structures of the church and may disrupt any fellowship that is less than fully obedient to the Lord of the church." The commission was to:

—Focus the concern, the conviction, the resources and the action of the member communions in issues of religion and race;

—Provide a national, interdenominational liaison with interfaith and other concerted efforts;

—Focus and mobilize the resources of the units of the National Council of Churches and

—Assist the nation to see this crisis in its moral dimension.

The commission is responsible—and reports regularly—to the council's General Board. Its funds are drawn from the council's member communions and from other sources. It is composed of 35 members, clergymen and laymen.

The commission's first chairman was the Right Rev. Arthur Lichtenberger, former Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church. He was succeeded as chairman by the Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk (chief administrative officer) of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The commission vice chairmen are Bishop B. Julian Smith, of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and Bishop Richard C. Raines, of the Indiana Area of the Methodist Church.



WASHINGTON—MAY, 1964

even as President Kennedy sent the long-awaited civil rights message to Congress.

On August 28, tens of thousands of clergymen—prelate and priest, white and black, together—participated with laymen in the historic March on Washington. One of the organizers of that vast witness to equality and justice was the Commission on Religion and Race.

The 1964 Civil Rights Bill had a determined advocate in the commission, which joined the other faiths in a unique show of strength by the religious community. Dr. Blake testified on the bill's behalf before the House and Senate Judiciary committees. In the first week in December, 1963, during the National Council's General Assembly in Philadelphia, delegates in a commission-organized pilgrimage visited their Congressmen in Washington.

The bill was released from committee finally, and the Senate's longest filibuster began. With Catholic and Jewish leaders, the commission co-sponsored the huge convocation at Georgetown University that brought together 8,000 representatives of the whole religious spectrum in late April, 1964. Daily services at which leading churchmen preached were held at a church near the Capitol in Washington. Around-the-clock vigils went on in hundreds of local churches throughout the country. And laymen and churchmen together poured a torrent of mail demanding passage of the bill onto Capitol Hill.

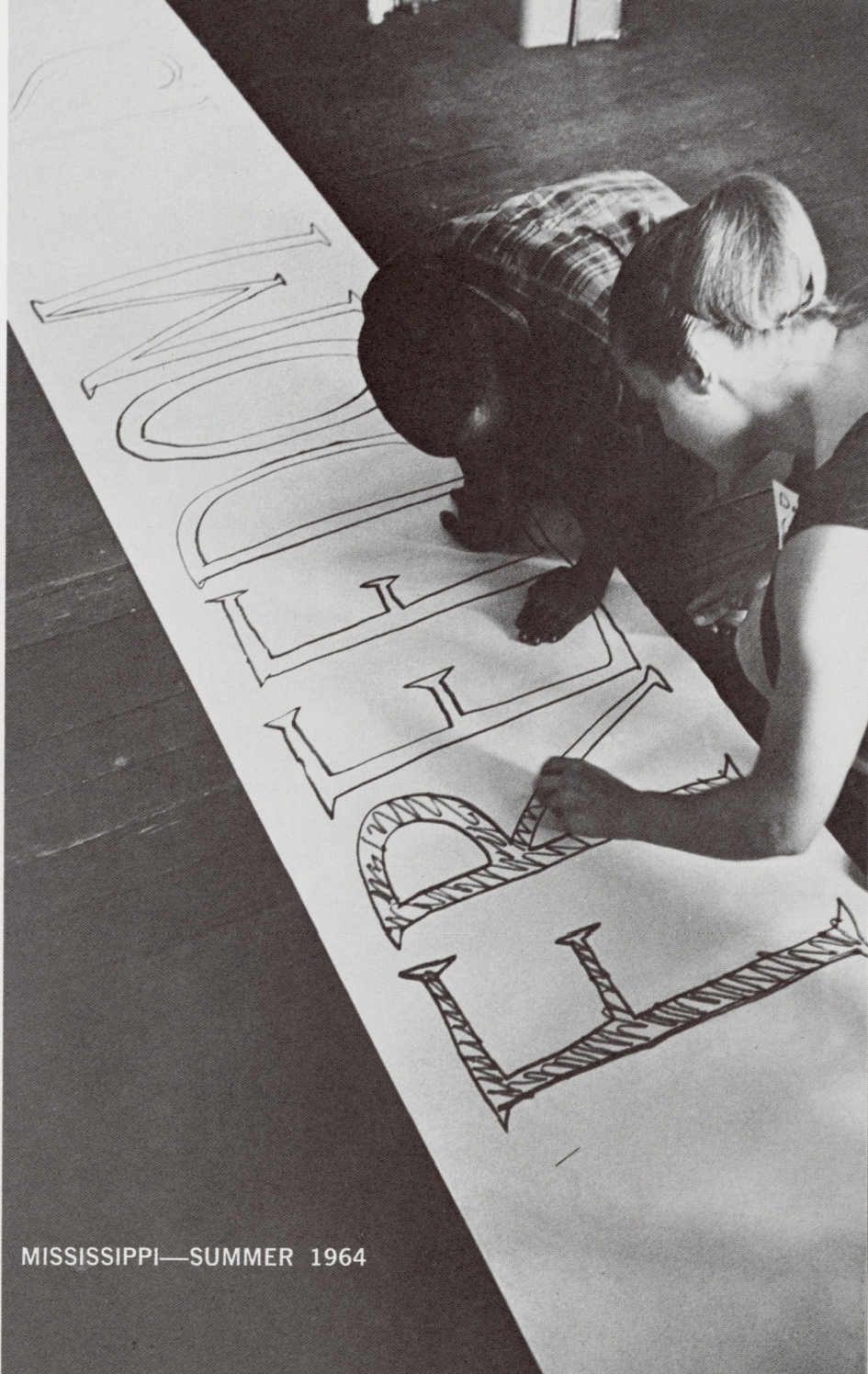
The bill was passed and became law July 2, 1964. Some mourned, many more rejoiced in the source of the greatest support for the new law: the nation's churches.

Even while action on the legislation was completed, the commission was busy on another front. In June, the commission converted Western College for Women, at Oxford, Ohio, into an orientation center for the volunteers headed for Mississippi. The program, in which the volunteers prepared for a passive confrontation with racism on a massive scale for the first time in this country's history, was organized by the commission in response to the civil rights groups' request for training for the summer projects. Eight hundred students were at Oxford before they went south. Several hundred ministers went with them as minister-counselors. They took part in the Freedom schools and voter registration and made repeated attempts to establish communications with the white community. The commission also helped create the organization which sent 125 lawyers to the support of the volunteers, cooperated in the formation of a medical committee and maintained a small staff in Mississippi during the summer.

The summer of 1964 was only half over when the frustrations of hundreds of thousands of humans trapped in slum life combined with the heat and the police shooting of a boy to touch off violence in New York. Those same frustrations exploded in a half-dozen other northern cities as well. In New York, in Rochester and in Philadelphia, the commission was at work. From Harlem, a group of ministers sought a civilian police review board. Commission contacts brought experienced civil rights workers from the South to the steaming streets of Rochester and Philadelphia, where they turned the angered and the embittered from violence to constructive activity, such as registering voters.



OXFORD, OHIO—JUNE, 1964



MISSISSIPPI—SUMMER 1964



SELMA—APRIL, 1965

In mid-summer, commission staff members appeared before the national political conventions, pleading the case for equal opportunity. And during the campaign, the commission demanded of both parties that the issues of equal rights be debated and discussed openly, when the candidates shied away from the issues or treated them by innuendo.

Legislative action continued as part of the commission's program. The brutal events of Selma in the spring of 1965, during which the commission helped coordinate the vast protest by clergymen, focused attention on the need for a voting rights law. The commission urged the strongest possible legislation.

Throughout its concerns in the South and on the legislative front has threaded the awareness that churches have an immediate responsibility in action to promote human rights in their own communities, to focus the minds and wills of white Americans on the crises right where they live. Cooperating with officials from the various denominations, active study was undertaken in late 1964 of a number of urban situations in the North. Out of consultations with local leaders came the pilot projects now going on in Cleveland and Detroit. From the experience gained in these communities, the commission is gathering knowledge which can be used in a variety of situations.

The work has only just begun.





The staff of the Commission on Religion and Race is interdenominational and interracial and is made up of men and women with wide experience in the cause of justice and equal opportunity and deep commitment to the achievement of those Christian goals:

Executive Director: The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Spike. A minister in the United Church of Christ, Dr. Spike formerly served as pastor of Judson Memorial Church in New York City and as general secretary for program of the UCC Board for Homeland Ministries. He also worked on summer service projects at Harlem's Baptist Educational Center. He is the author of "Safe in Bondage," "To Be a Man" and "The Freedom Revolution and the Churches."

Associate Executive Director: The Rev. Dr. J. Oscar Lee, a Presbyterian minister who also serves as director of the National Council's Commission on Cultural and Racial Relations. Dr. Lee was one of the organizers of the National Conference on Religion and Race in 1963. He has served as consultant on racial and ethnic relations in many parts of the world and has written articles for many magazines and newspapers.

Assistant Executive Director: The Rev. James P. Breeden, an Episcopalian. Canon Breeden formerly was special race relations consultant to the Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts. He served on a number of race relations committees in Massachusetts and is vice president of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity.

Special Assistant to the Executive Director: The Rev. Bruce Hanson, of the United Church of Christ. Mr. Hanson formerly was assistant pastor of the First Congregational Church in

Washington, D.C. He spent a year working with students and teaching at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. During 1964, he was summer projects director for the commission and was director of the orientation program at Oxford, Ohio.

Director of Community Action: The Rev. James C. Moore, a Methodist. Mr. Moore was a Navy chaplain during the Korean War and later became director of religious programming for the Voice of America. He was with the National Council's Office of Information before being assigned to the commission, where he shares responsibility for the northern cities program.

Coordinator of Special Events: Dr. Anna Arnold Hedgeman. Dr. Hedgeman, a Methodist, helped coordinate the August, 1963, March on Washington and had a key role in mobilizing support for the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. Dr. Hedgeman formerly was a consultant to the United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries and is a veteran leader in the struggle for civil rights. She is the author of "The Trumpet Sounds."

Counsel for the Commission: John M. Pratt, who has represented ministers, students and others in the civil rights struggle in state and federal courts in the South since he joined the commission in July, 1963. An Episcopalian, he holds a divinity as well as a law degree. He helped organize and is a vice president of the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee, Inc.

Washington Representative: James A. Hamilton, a Methodist and lawyer. A member of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, he helped coordinate the religious support given recent civil rights legislation. He has been associated with the National Council since 1958.



Interpretation of the continuing need for all men to enroll in the still-staggering efforts required to fulfill the Gospel injunction, "love one another." Community action. Legislative action. Desegregation of the churches and all their institutions. These are the functions of the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches.

Will the churches give real support to increasing Negro pleas for recognition of their proper place in governmental affairs? Will they help secure open education and open housing and open economic opportunity? Are Christians mature enough, in plain New Testament language, to accept a man as a man?

These are the crucial questions for which the Commission on Religion and Race is trying to find answers—in the East and in the West, in the North as in the South.

The nation's churches, confronted by a simple Biblical command, have no alternative to an irrevocable commitment to the war on injustice. We cannot stand apart and live. Let us, therefore, "run with perseverance the race that is set before us."



WRITER—ERIC D. BLANCHARD
PHOTOGRAPHER-DESIGNER—KEN THOMPSON

**COMMISSION ON RELIGION AND RACE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
475 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10027
EUGENE CARSON BLAKE, CHAIRMAN
ROBERT W. SPIKE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**