

National Council of Churches Delta Ministry
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DELTA MINISTRY FACT SHEET

WHAT IT IS: The Delta Ministry is a Mississippi project of the National Council of Churches and is an interdenominational commitment in mission unprecedented in the nation's history. The project is a long-term effort to end the low economic, health and social conditions of Mississippi's poor. It has been characterized as "one of the most critical forms of church renewal" and is regarded as such a significant action that the World Council of Churches is participating for the first time in this country in a major program.

The Delta Ministry is an ecumenical response to the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, through recognition that human need transcends simple questions of political equality. The project is related in some places with the civil rights forces, through staff and facilities, but it is wholly independent--financing, administration, planning and program development.

The field work is headed by a 33-year-old Methodist minister, the Rev. Arthur C. Thomas, who helped organize an integrated congregation in Durham, North Carolina, in 1960. He has an interdenominational, interracial staff, which will be augmented by a volunteer Freedom Corps of limited numbers of native Mississippi young people and college graduates and others from outside the state who are to work in specific phases of the program. No limit is set on the duration of the Delta Ministry; it is hoped that eventually direction of the work will be taken over by Mississippians themselves.

The Delta Ministry is the coordinating agency of the National Council's activities in Mississippi and is administered by the Commission on the Delta Ministry, headed by the Right Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Suffragan Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D. C. There are some two dozen members. Bishop Moore has described the needs of Mississippi's poor as of "overwhelming importance:

"The work is urgent because the Negro revolution is urgent, and we have all waited far, far too long to take a real part in it. It is urgent because God is working through this movement, and it would be blasphemy for the church to stand outside of it. It is urgent because every day that goes by is one more day of hunger, one more day of degradation, one more day of fear and violence thrust upon the Negro, and one more day of anxiety, anger, hatred and fear for the white."

HOW IT GOT STARTED: The National Council has been associated with the civil rights movement in Mississippi since the summer of 1963, following the murder of Medgar Evers. The Commission on Religion and Race was responsible for most of the National Council's work in Mississippi during 1964--the orientation school at Oxford, Ohio, and provision of minister-counselors, but it was recognized that an on-going, deep-rooted operation was needed to deal with problem causes rather than just crisis situations, and the Delta Ministry was established. Specific planning was undertaken at the request of Mississippians themselves. The World Council joined the plan, and it got under way formally on September 1, 1964.

FUNDING: The 1965 budget of the Delta Ministry is \$260,000, with the World Council providing two dollars for every three provided by the constituent denominations of the National Council. Projected needs for the year, for which there are as yet no funds, amount to another \$158,000.

PROGRAM: Pilot programs have been launched in Greenville, in Mississippi's Delta region, and in McComb and Hattiesburg, the latter sites in the southern part of the state. The Hattiesburg operation developed out of the Ministers Project in voter registration which started in January, 1964, as a Presbyterian program. The McComb work started as an operation of the Council of Federated Organizations primarily but was given emergency impetus by the rash of bombings and burnings in that area in the early fall, 1964, when numbers of ministers volunteered their support. The Greenville program is the newest and is the only current one in the Delta area, along the northwest Mississippi river line.

The programmed activities of the Delta Ministry are listed below. Related activities which grow out of immediate situations are described in Appendix C.

The health program is currently staffed by two nurses, one in Hattiesburg and one in Holmes County, in the Delta region. Plans are being made to add the services of four nurses and a medical director, to tackle the medical needs of a state which has only 50 Negro doctors. The health education, hygiene, nutrition and basic first-aid program will be conducted with the aid of a \$4,700 mobile unit equipped with stretcher and medical supplies. Local doctors are cooperating with the nurse in Holmes County. A prime program goal will be the development of local community health committees to work on specific projects.

The relief program is a major one. Some \$10,000 worth of food and clothing was collected for distribution from Kansas, Ohio and Pennsylvania in a special drive last November. In addition, some 50,000 pounds of unsolicited clothes are in storage. In the Delta alone, some 300 families have been assisted, on a case-need basis. The foodstuffs included dried foods, canned goods, baby food and other staples. Toys and turkeys were distributed during the recent holidays. Plans are being developed to expand the urgently-needed operation: of Mississippi's 82 counties, 18 have neither Federally-administered public assistance nor commodity programs, according to 1964 year-end statistics.

The literacy program will be based on a unique plan devised by a former Hamilton College dean at the request of one of his students who later became a leader of the Mississippi civil rights drive. The educational system, which has come to the attention of the Federal government, teaches functional reading ability through the use of "helpers" who can read themselves and who

live in the same environment as the students.

Community center work is already going on in McComb and Hattiesburg, where the Delta Ministry shares facilities with civil rights groups. In addition, a new community center is planned in McComb, and money is being raised to build one in Greenville.

Citizenship education classes and related programs are being designed to enable those who are eligible to register to vote.

Mount Beulah Christian Center is being leased by the Delta Ministry as a literacy and job training site, orientation center and conference ground. The center, leased from the Disciples of Christ, is in Edwards, west of Jackson, the state capital, and will be under the direction of a United Church of Christ minister.

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APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA--DELTA MINISTRY STAFF

Reverend Arthur C. Thomas, 33, Director of the Delta Ministry, native of Williamsport, Pa., BA, Colgate University, where he majored in economics and spent six months in field work in the economics of the new South in the Tennessee River valley region; BD, Duke Divinity School; one of first to combine economics and ethics curricula during study at Duke University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences; organized the Covenant Community Church, Durham, N. C., in 1960, as one of the first integrated congregations in the South; formerly was Associate Director of Community Action for the N.C.C.'s Commission on Religion and Race and had full-time responsibility for that Commission's field work in Mississippi during 1964. Methodist.

Reverend Warren H. McKenna, 46, administrative assistant to Delta Ministry director and director of Greenville Project; native of Providence, R. I.; BA, Connecticut Wesleyan; BD, Episcopal Theological School; social work study at Simmons School of Social Work; pastorates in the Boston area, most recently, St. John's Church, Holbrook, which ended in September, 1964, after six years' service; served as curate of an Anglican church in London's East End in 1956-57, and for a year as a case worker for a family agency in Haverhill, Mass., traveled extensively throughout the world; 20-year association with the equal rights movement; went to Florida in the spring, 1964, on Boston Area SCIC trip with Mrs. Peabody; met Mr. Thomas while in jail in Williamston, N.C., in November, 1963, during freedom crisis there; was resident director of the N.C.C. minister orientation program in Mississippi during the summer, 1964, and was closely associated then with Mr. Thomas. Married, with a teenaged son and daughter. Episcopalian.

Reverend Harry J. Bowie, 29, director of Delta Ministry project in McComb; native of Long Branch, N. J.; BA, Hobart College; St.B., General Theological Seminary, N.Y.C., ordained in Trenton, in 1961; served as pastor of the Chapel of the Annunciation, Lawnside, N. J. for three years; in July, 1964, went to Mississippi as a volunteer for the Council of Federated Organizations in voter registration work but was used as minister-counselor in McComb by the N.C.C.; after month's absence in late summer, 1964, he returned to Mississippi during the bombings and burnings in McComb during September and stayed on. Single. Negro. Episcopalian.

Reverend Robert L. Beech, 29, director of Delta Ministry project in Hattiesburg; native of St. Paul, Minn.; BA, University of Minnesota and Carlton College; BD, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago; for three years, served two Presbyterian churches in Illinois; first Mississippi experience was during Holy Week, 1964, during voter registration and Freedom Day activities in Greenwood; left the state but returned and was made co-director of the N.C.C.'s Hattiesburg ministers project May 15, 1964; moved his wife and four sons (youngest was born December 29, 1964) to Mississippi when he joined Delta Ministry staff. Presbyterian.

Reverend Laurice M. Walker, 35, staff member of the project in Greenville; native of Thomasville, Ga.; BA, Mercer University; BD, Andover-Newton Theological School; studied theology and philosophy of religion two and one-half years at Harvard; first, served four years at First Baptist Church, Framingham, Mass., and went to N.Y.C. for six years to the Intercollegiate Y.M.C.A. as chaplain to New York University students; long-time concern in the civil rights field, organizing, with three others, the first interracial meetings at Mercer University, at Macon, Ga. Single. American Baptist.

Reverend Alfred R. Winham, 55, with wife Margery, administrators of Mount Beulah ecumenical conference and training center, Edwards, Miss. (project in development stage); resigned as pastor of Grace Congregational Church, Holyoke, Mass., after seven years for "indefinite" period in Mississippi. Mrs. Winham formerly was executive director of the Holyoke Y.W.C.A.; during summer, 1964, spent a month at Moss Point-Pascagoula as minister-counselors under N.C.C., was one of three such couples in Mississippi; worked largely with white communities there; participated in United Church of Christ Mission on Understanding survey of race relations in North and South in 1963; confronted by "crying problems" among Negroes in Holyoke, helped organize community's tri-faith Council for Human Relations in 1960. Two married sons and a granddaughter. United Church of Christ.

Josephine Disparti, 27, nurse, native of Niagara Falls, N. Y.; BS, nursing, Niagara University; worked first for Niagara Falls Health Department, and later for the Washtenaw County Health Department, in Ann Arbor, Mich.; a registered public health nurse, she went to work in Mississippi in September, 1964, for the Medical Committee for Human Rights (a non-N.C.C. agency) in COFO health programs; (The committee receives support from the N.C.C.) She has been working in Jackson, will begin organizing health education, in conjunction with volunteer doctors and by using the Delta Ministry's medical mobile unit, in Mileston, Holmes County.

M. Phyllis Cunningham, 26, nurse, native of Winona, Minn., BS, College of St. Teresa, Winona, has been in Mississippi since July 9, 1964, first as Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee volunteer in Hattiesburg; now a member of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, like Miss Disparti, working on contract basis for Delta Ministry; has been involved in developing nursing and health courses and community health committees.

Reverend Herbert O. Edwards, 35, staff member, native of Winona, W. Va.; degrees from Morgan State College and Harvard Divinity School; on leave of absence from Trinity Baptist Church, Baltimore, until May, 1965; he worked as a minister-counselor in Canton, Madison County, and Harmony, Leake County, during summer project, 1964; was asked to return under Delta Ministry; he and Helen, his wife, joined staff in November, 1964, as consultants; Mr. Edwards has been working in Greenville, developing leadership and establishing liaison with ministers in the Negro community in Greenville, while Mrs. Edwards, a case worker in Baltimore, was engaged in the relief program of food and clothing distribution in Issaquena County primarily. Three young children. Negro. Baptist.

APPENDIX B
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APPENDIX C

SPECIAL DELTA MINISTRY ACTIVITIES

Beyond the specific program of the Delta Ministry, there are related areas in which the staff will be at work as need arises. Two such instances are in Greenville: the employment situation and the school desegregation issue.

In the early 1950's, a New York City based carpet firm planned a plant in Greenville. It needed financing, and to get it, approaches were made to the Negro community for support--with the stipulation that Negroes would have equal hiring opportunities. The Negro support for a bond issue was obtained, the bond issue passed and Greenville Mills opened in 1953. The plant employs about 1,100 persons; between 200 and 250 are Negro men, in menial jobs for the most part. Six Negro women have been hired as a result of pressure.

The staff has compiled data revealing discriminatory practices, assisted in the filing of job applications, brought local businessmen into the effort to drop the job barriers, sought the aid of the Federal Government and appealed to the plant's parent firm. It is hoped that a committee will be established on a permanent basis in Greenville, to open job opportunities throughout the entire community.

The Delta Ministry staff was also related to the school situation in Greenville. The school board, facing the possibility of a cut-off of Federal funds, about a quarter-million dollars, announced January 15, 1965, that it would desegregate its schools. (One of five systems throughout the state to take the step, it was the first to do so without Federal order.)

One week before the school board announced its decision, persons in the Negro community decided, at a church rally sponsored by the Delta Ministry, to petition the board to open the schools. Whether the school board knew of the petition is not certain. It is significant that more than 100 persons, the largest response to a school opening question in the state, signed the petition before it was taken to the school board.

Efforts are being made in Hattiesburg to end discriminatory welfare distribution practices. In McComb, Delta Ministry-civil rights group interest helped get six Negroes jobs at the McComb Manufacturing Company.

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APPENDIX D

BASIC LITERACY PROGRAM

Potentially one of the most dramatic features of the Delta Ministry is a functional reading ability training program. The technique needs only simple materials, students, and helpers who can read, who do not necessarily have special teaching skills and who come from the same milieu as the students. Basic to the program is stimulation of the student-helper relationship and the learning process developing with specific purpose, such as a job opening.

Student and helper have a loose-leaf book. On a page is a picture, for example, of a man and beneath, the word "man." The system assumes that the student already has a certain verbal ability and that he will recognize the picture. To make sure that the student responds to the written word as well as to the picture, he is required to underline the word. The following page is the answer page; on it, there are the picture and the word, and the word is underscored.

With the development of the response to words, and to sounds, the system progresses to phrases--"the big man" to simple sentences--"the man is big," with accompanying pictures.

Dr. John W. Blyth of the Diebold Group, Inc., a New York data processing research organization, is the developer of the plan. Formerly professor of philosophy and dean at Hamilton College for 26 years, he first began work in program instruction in 1958. Robert Moses, a philosophy major at Hamilton, who later became a leader of the civil rights movement in Mississippi, asked Dr. Blyth to develop a literacy program for the work there. Dr. Blyth, a Haverford College alumnus, joined Diebold in 1962. An anonymous donor has funded the development of the system through a grant to Tougaloo College, near Jackson.

The system has been tested in Harlem and in Philadelphia, Pa. Its simplicity, designed for use by anybody in any environment as long as there is one person who can read, and its minimal aim at a working vocabulary recommend the program to U.S. government officials as a tool which could be widely used.

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APPENDIX E

SKETCHES OF DELTA MINISTRY PROJECT SITES

GREENVILLE is a community of 47,000, 40 per cent of which is Negro. There is, in addition, a small Chinese and Syrian population. Textiles, river shipping, gypsum and other industries are the major economic backbone. An ante-bellum town rebuilt after the Civil War, it is the home of a strong cultural community and the Delta Democrat Times, among the most liberal of the state's newspapers. Despite this, segregation prevails for the most part, with some signs of change. Negroes are allowed to vote. The schools are to be desegregated. There are at least four Negroes on the police force, and there is some openness with respect to public accommodations (one restaurant will serve Negroes, for example, but not mixed groups.) Some Negroes are employed in other municipal jobs. Greenville Mill, a subsidiary of a northern firm, employs Negroes, with the prospect of more being hired. Observers, however, suggest that these are surface responses, designed to preserve Greenville's "image." It should be noted that the Delta Ministry initially opened an office several doors from a motel in the center of town but was evicted when the real estate agent discovered a Negro secretary was employed there. The Times, known locally as the "DDT", responded with an editorial decrying the action.

McCOMB has a population of 12,000, 42 per cent of which is Negro. Garment work, aluminum and the Illinois Central Railroad are principal industries. The community is at the hub of an area in southwest Mississippi which has been riddled by violence during the civil rights movement. Only some 250 Negroes in the entire county--Pike--are registered to vote. In November, 1964, some 650 white citizens, revolted by the violence of bombings and burnings, petitioned for law and order. Several restaurants have been desegregated. Responsible elements within the community were driven out during the summer, 1964.

HATTIESBURG has a population of 45,000. A third of it is Negro. Founded in 1884, it is the home of Mississippi Southern University, the state's largest, and William Carey College, a Baptist institution. Hercules Powder Company, Inland Container Corporation and Reliance Manufacturing Company ("Big Yank" work clothes) are the major employers. Of the 9,000 Negroes eligible to vote in Forrest County (named both for the Civil War hero and the area's lumber industry), about 400 are registered. Some Negroes work in low-level city jobs, but none are on the police force. There is limited desegregation of public accommodations.

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