

## MISSISSIPPI: TWO WORLDS

It is frequently stated that volunteers, of any breed, are not wanted in Mississippi. One often hears the allegation that "outsiders", "agitators", "invaders", "civil rights workers" are uninvited, that Mississippians do not want them in the state. It is also possible to hear the contention that Mississippians can solve their own problems, if the foreigners would leave. The question that must be asked, if we are to understand these charges and place them in some sort of rational context, is, "Who are Mississippians?"

It is obvious that there are two Mississippi and two kinds of Mississippian. On the one hand there is white Mississippi which certainly looks upon outsiders as unwelcome agitators and "race mixers". The white community is unable to recognize the fact that they alone do not constitute all of Mississippi. When they hurl accusations at the "invaders", they believe that no one in Mississippi wants them because they do not. Because the white community is unable to see Negroes as full human beings they are <sup>un</sup>able to accept the fact that Negroes can unilaterally decide and act for themselves.

It is nevertheless true that Mississippians, black and some "free" whites, have called and welcomed outsiders into their state. These Mississippians recognize the sheer and obvious fact that change will come in Mississippi when they and the "outsiders" join hands in their common goal, that of freedom and equality for all people in Mississippi. They are open to the support from white moderates, but are suspicious that their efforts will be used to slow up and impede the accelerating changes which are being effected in their state.

It must clearly be understood that changes are being made in Mississippi, the most radical of which is the Negroes' sense of dignity and ability to control the destiny of their own lives. Negroes who have lived in Mississippi all of their lives are leading the forces for radical and exciting changes which are revamping the "Southern way of life". The relationship of the Delta Ministry to these indigenous leaders is one of partnership. We will and do work with the Negro people who called us to Mississippi as co-workers. The programs which we hope to institute are discussed with these people, who are most directly affected by them. The Delta Ministry does not attempt to impose programs and ideas upon the people, but rather, after consultation and refinement within the context of local conditions, initiates programs in conjunction with the people who will live in Mississippi when we are gone.

The fact that we have worked primarily with the Negro community is both an effect and a cause of the attitudes which are prevalent in the white community. Because the Delta Ministry is concerned ultimately with reconciliation of the "Broken Body" it has sought to minister in the white as well as the Negro community. Due to the fear, hostility, inability to communicate, and alienation of (and within) white Mississippi, our progress has been slow. In spite of the difficulty of reaching our white brethren the efforts continue and many breaches are beginning to appear in the once solid wall of partition. It is necessary to note, however, that when we seek to involve the white community, it is always at the level of equal participation. It is no longer possible to think about the "white people" of Mississippi voluntarily freeing the Negro. The problem that is before the white community in Mississippi is whether they are willing to join hands with their Negro brethren in an effort to free themselves.