

A STATEMENT FROM MINISTERS OUTSIDE THE HATTIESBURG JAIL  
April 13, 1964

Eight ministers of the churches of Jesus Christ, four Presbyterians, three Methodists, and one Baptist, were arrested outside the Forrest County Court House last Friday. They have been held in the county jail and farm over the weekend, and the prosecutor has announced that he expects to require \$1,000.00 bail for each of them when the cases are brought to court. This moment seems an appropriate one for the ten ministers who remain outside the jail to speak to the citizens of this city and county.

We appeal to the citizens of Hattiesburg, and especially to Christian people, to undertake responsibly to ensure that the rights of American citizens are protected, that order is maintained and justice upheld, and that a civic righteousness in which all may take pride is established. As a group of ministers of the churches of Jesus Christ, we have come here at the invitation and request of a substantial number of the citizens of this city, and all our experience and observation here has borne out their contention that it is impossible for Negro citizens to exercise their civil rights and to live peaceably as responsible citizens.

The Ministers' Project is guided by the Commission on Religion and Race of the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., an official agency of the General Assembly of that Church, but the participants have been drawn from several denominations and religious communities. We are determined to continue this witness until we have assurance that all citizens who meet the legal requirements for voter registration may do so without discrimination or fear of coercion or reprisal. To that end, the project will continue, and we expect that we will be re-inforced this week by at least two ministers for each one



who has been jailed.

This climate of fear and repression, it seems to us, would yield quickly to determined and intelligent action by the citizens of this city and county; We urge therefore that programs be developed to relieve the present tensions and the climate of mutual suspicion. In particular it seems to us that the Registrar of voters must be required to act with fairness and courtesy, the police to relax the atmosphere of harassment and repression in the Negro sections of the city. Employers who value prosperity and civic order must come to see the importance of permitting and urging employees to register as voters and to participate actively in the government of the community. We can hardly be accused of ignorance of the mood and ability of the Negro community in this city, and it seems clear to us that the present tragedy cannot be expected to end until all the people of this city enter freely and fully into its government and prosperity.

We have attempted to talk with responsible citizens and groups, and we continue to be eager to do so. We welcome invitations to meet with civic clubs, church groups, young peoples' societies, and the like, to discuss with them and with leaders of the local civil rights movement the aims of this movement and the methods by which full civic participation may be encouraged.

We question the wisdom of the newly passed state law limiting picketing and assembly on civic property, and we question also the constitutionality of its application at the County Court House last Friday and Saturday. This is a matter which must now be resolved in the courts. It seems clear, however, that such continued harassment can only add increased bitterness and resentment to the relationships of peoples and communities in this city and county.

This year, on the occasion of the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the founding of this city, the Mayor and City Commissioners addressed to the community "A Report to the Citizens of Hattiesburg." That Report, in its preface, quoted the following words of Henry David Thoreau: "The measure of civic pride is not in monuments, but in minds. Vacant coliseums and cathedrals are its shadow; its substance is the will of a man to be better." When we are satisfied that this is in fact the will of Hattiesburg for all its citizens, we and our colleagues will gratefully return to our homes.