



COMMISSION ON RELIGION AND RACE

JUN 11 1964

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# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST in the U.S.A.

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ROBERT W. SPIKE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 9, 1964

TO: All churchmen who have participated in Canton, Mississippi

FROM: Arthur C. Thomas, Associate Director, Community Action

This letter is being sent to inform you of recent developments in Canton and to encourage you to help us in continuing the work in that city.

Our interest there began with a Freedom Day late in February. We visited leaders of the white community and the Negro community and observed the attempts of local citizens to become registered. Two weeks later, we followed the same procedure. Beginning in April, the decision was made to support the voter registration work in Canton in depth. Since that time, Rev. Grady Poulard of our staff has worked closely with Rev. James McRee of Canton in directing the continuing teams of churchmen working there. The highlight of the effort was a Freedom Day on May 29.

On this last Freedom Day the city officials stiffened their attitudes and prevented residents from leaving a church in order to go to town to register. During this day, 55 people were arrested, allegedly for parading without a permit and obstructing sidewalks. Four clergymen were arrested. Two were released during the day after Dr. Robert Spike, Executive Director of our Commission, personally called Governor Johnson of Mississippi. The other two clergymen, together with the local residents, were held incommunicado for more than two days. Police brutally clubbed a worker that day. The next day they shot at and chased into the woods another. Two days ago a bomb was thrown at Freedom House. All of these incidents vividly portray the attitude which the local police indicated to a local resident as they held him in custody, "We're going to drive those people out of town!"

It is essential that voter registration work be continued in Canton. Several legal devices are now in process which may restrain these local officials. Whatever the climate may be, however, our church people must continue the work we have begun. I appeal to you to secure persons from your area who can give at least one week of their time to work in Canton. Since you have been there yourself, and know first hand what it means to bear this witness, you can encourage others to share in this ministry.

When you find people who can volunteer for this work, please contact my secretary, Miss Sandy Lloyd, (Area Code 212) 870-2435, to receive instructions for where to report.