

Report from Hattiesburg
June 3-12, 1964

My friends, I've got a problem. For the rest of June, there seems to be no assurance that our work-force here at Hattiesburg will be recruited. The reasons are complicated. Included in them is a misunderstanding at the level of denominational heads which led them to believe that we were closing down the Project as of June 1. Also, problems in finding a center for operation and orientation have arisen. Mt. Bula, which would have been perfect, is not available now. Finally we have secured Le Moyne College in Memphis, Tenn. for orientation and office space as of the end of June. But all of this means that we need your help. We need people who are interested in the program to come to Hattiesburg. Laymen are encouraged to come. Women are as much needed as men.

With the impending passage of the Civil Rights Bill, there is more need than ever. We will be busy. We can use 12 each week. Contact me personally, or check through the NCC Commission on Religion and Race office in New York. Those here the week of June 1, were Paul Dotson, Michigan; Joe McCord, Ogdensburg, N.J.; Dr. Clinton Marsh, Chicago; Richard Sigler, Thatcher Schwartz, and Bob Grier, Pittsburg. This week Don Crosby and Gordon Winsor, both on the Dept. of Religion faculty at Centre College, Danville, Ky., were our whole team. All of these are Presbyterians. Despite what may seem to be small numbers, both of these teams accomplished wonders. Through the work of Clint Marsh, we now have many connections with the Negro business and professional people in Hattiesburg. Our relations with these people continue to be good and to have this channel of communication working is of the highest importance now that the C.R. bill seems sure of passage. Through the others on these teams, we have developed a strong channel of communication with faculty and administration at University of Southern Mississippi. Two elements in the community that are virtually unapproached as yet are the white ministers of the more conservative churches in town and the white business and professional people. Much remains to be done among the Negro clergy still. All these channels of communication are real possibilities. What we need is workers ready to make the contacts necessary.

Now, several scattered observations. Last Friday, I attended a meeting of the Miss., Human Relations Council. This is NOT a state supported group, as you might guess! Represented were interested clergy and laity from the Jackson area, NCC, COFO, the Society of Friends, AFL-CIO, and others. The meeting was held at Tougaloo College. The purpose of the meeting was the sharing of summer plans so that a broad perspective of Freedom Movement activities in Mississippi could be had by all concerned. This was a very moving experience for me. Many fine speeches were made. And when one knows the speakers as I have come to know them, it is clear that these were not just words spoken into the wind. Suffice it to say that Freedom activities in Mississippi this summer are being carefully planned, well organized and competently staffed. An

example is the orientation program being carried on in two, one-week sessions at Western College for Women, Oxford, Ohio, for all the college students who will work in Miss., this summer. The faculty for this orientation include men and women universally recognized for competence. The curriculum for the Freedom Schools has been painstakingly prepared. The college students will be under the leadership of mature adults all summer. And there is a clear understanding that no students who have not attended an orientation session will be allowed to work in Miss., this summer. Any who appear on the scene will be sent back up to La Moyne College, Memphis, for orientation.

Rumors you may have read concerning the thousands of outsiders being poured into Mississippi are overblown. Here are the facts: About 800 college students will be involved in the program at one time or another. They will all go thru the process outlined above. In addition, the NCC has recruited about 50 adults, clergy and laymen, to act as advisor-counselors to the college students. They will accompany the students and oversee their activities. Further, various associations of attorneys across the nation have banded together to provide a task force of some 50 attorneys in Mississippi this summer. This group, augmented still further by some law students who will serve as clerks to the attorneys, will be in charge of overseeing the legal aspects of the summer program. They will represent any summer workers or COFO or NCC workers who get arrested, they will investigate abridgement of rights wherever they take place, and will initiate legal action wherever necessary. Beyond all this, the NCC will continue its programs at Hattiesburg & Canton AND initiate new programs on the Gulf and at Batesville in Pinola County. This last position is strategic. The Justice Department has ruled against the long and complicated voters registration test administered all over the state. But the ruling applies only to Pinola County, and extends for only one year. Consequently, much effort will be made to show that under the fairer conditions expected to exist in Pinola County, Negroes can indeed achieve their rights.

What are the activities which all these people will engage in? Voters Registration, staffing the Freedom Schools, running Community Centers, work in the white community, and political activity. This last needs explanation. There is a move to challenge the right of Mississippi Democratic Party to sit at the National Convention at Atlantic, City, N.J. This is being done thru the Freedom Democratic Party. This party will engage in all the activities of any party in preparation for the National Convention. There will be precinct meetings, county meetings, district meetings and a state meeting. The effort is being made to involve all registered voters in the workings of the regular Democratic party--attending precinct meetings, etc. Then, all others who should be registered voters but who have been rejected or intimidated by the state will work in the Freedom Democratic Party. Also any registered voters who are ignored by the regular party. A freedom registration is in process as well. By November, it is hoped that some 400,000 freedom registrations will have been signed. All of this is to dramatize the fact that Negroes want to take their rightful place in the democratic process and are able to if they were just given the chance. Those who come down for the summer will be involved in canvassing for freedom registrations, etc. Thus, the designation of "Political Activity" as one of the prongs of this summer's attack.

Many other wonderful things have happened. Our ministers this week went to a large revival meeting in a Negro church and were asked to speak at the end of the meeting. Two of the men preached in Negro pulpits last Sunday and were well received. One fellow had a tape recorder and went about taping reactions to the Ministers' Project, statements of Negro attitude toward all that is happening, etc., and then these tapes were taken to some of the professors at University of Southern Mississippi where they had a stunning effect. These men who have lived in Miss. all their lives had never heard Negroes speak in this fashion. We are beginning to have contact with the leading youth in the community now that school is out. There is need for people who like to work with youth to come and help us lead seminars for them and work in the Community Centers with them.

Suggestion: All you ministers who have been in Hattiesburg--have you given talks or preached sermons on your experiences here? If so, send us a copy. We will then compile them into a pamphlet and sell them back to you for whatever we need to cover the cost of producing them. Another Suggestion: If you have a portable tape recorder, lend it to anyone who comes from your area. This is a most useful gadget here!

Temperature here yesterday, 105 degrees in the shade. Come to beautiful Hattiesburg.

Bob Beech, Co-Director with
John Cameron

Hattiesburg Ministers' Project