Report to Warren McKenna from George H. Phelps on work as minister-counselor in the project at Shaw, Mississippi. July 23, 1964.

I arrived in Shaw late afternoon of July 14 for a stay of ten days. At that time this project itself was only ten days old and I the first M-C in its experience. This is not to say, however, that some of the workers having been in other projects had not known a M-C. In fact, there seemed from the first to be a good-natured acceptance of my presence by all the volunteers - I was at least a friend of the cause. No one questioned why I was present, although I doubt that any of them had any notion as to why I was there. It was evident, however, that the last thing in the minds of these young volunteers was that I was in their midst to minister in any way to their own needs. At the first mass meeting on Wednesday night I was asked to give an opening and closing prayer, which is more obviously the function of a minister.

It has been hard to avoid the feeling that I am a fifth-wheel in the various functions of the project. This is understandable inasmuch as each of the volunteers has his own assignments and is busy going about performing them. It is natural that the leadership should feel reluctant ever to ask me specifically to do anything. When they scheduled the kids (volunteers) to clean up the center, I insisted that my name be included, and it was. I also have attended all staff meetings, but my counsel at these is assiduously avoided, which also is understandable. However, the few times I have contributed a point or a question I have been received and dealt with respectfully. My personal contacts with the workers have been constant and most rewarding. In fact, my personal conception of my job as M-C has been to concentrate my efforts on being a pastor (in whatever sense) to these young college people. Some of them are loyal to the church and understand its shortcomings, most of them are rebelling from the church and Christian faith as they understand it, and a few are outright atheists confessing to be so. In one instance I was able to perform a natural pastoral function with one of the Jewish girls who was sick simply by helping her to diagnose her condition and supporting her in her distress by showing empathy and giving comfort.

It should be pointed out here that when I arrived the project was in the throes of some confusion for lack of clearly defined leadership. There were sixteen volunteers, seven being girls. On the morning of July 15 a long staff meeting was held with Stoughton Lynd present. In the course of this long discussion much of the hostility and egocentric concerns of the young people were revealed. This surprised me to discover that these people who had dedicated their summer lives to this kind of a cause could be so caught up in their own feelings. Leadership was a problem simply because some of the kids couldn't stand the sense of personal respect which would be lost if certain persons (anybody actually) were to be given authority over them. Then I saw these kids as the 18,19,20 year olds that they are with all the problems and tensions we expect in adolescents of this age. As a result of this meeting three boys were given leadership subject to the authority of John Bradford, project leader who was spending much time organizing the work in Mound Bayou. Also the Freedom School curriculum was re-adjusted to make it less academic and more practical in terms of political action and ideology. The air was cleared for the time being and there seemed to be a better spirit at work. Wally Hoberg, who had written Stoughton Lynd such a depressed letter the
day I left Jackson and we read in your office, read his letter to the

group at this meeting and the kids made their comments. It helped him
greatly and by the end of the day when I asked how he felt now about
things he smiled and said that he felt much better and thanked me for
asking. He has been fine ever since with no more question of his
leaving.

On Saturday and Sunday I went, at Bradford's request, to Mount Bayou.
He was sure my presence there and my going to church there would help
the cause. I did this glad to feel that I could be of help. I went
to the Bethel Methodist church, was invited by pastor Jones to be on
the platform with him, to read the Scripture lesson and, at the very
end of the service (after two offerings and a strong appeal for an
air conditioner) to speak. I urged the people to support the new
project in every way they could including financially. Before I
left I gave Bradford $30 for use in the project as a gift from people
in my own church, Delmar Presbyterian, Delmar, New York.

This week John Bradford came into Shaw for the purpose of holding a
staff meeting to handle some of the complaints he'd been getting from
the volunteers about the leadership and program here. He also decided
that a number of people from this project must be transferred to
Cleveland. All this was handled with much tension, but with final
acceptance by all and, again, a good spirit to follow. It was at
this meeting that much talk of hostilities came out and people talked
freely and directly to each other. I took this occasion to suggest
that as K-C I would be more than available as a liaison between leader-
ship and volunteers and/or as a listener to hostilities. This pro-
posal was rejected nicely. One girl I noticed was shaking her head
negatively as I made the suggestion. One of the fellas indicated that,
at least for him, he had to know someone a long time before he could
talk confidentially to anyone. Of course, I understand the dynamics
of counselling and what he said is true of all of us. It is interesting,
however, that right after this meeting, a group of five or six of the
boys gathered with me at a place where we ate and we got into a good
discussion on a number of subjects not related to the project. What
I noticed about this was the obvious interest of the boys to engage
in talk with me. I am impressed with the sensitivity of these kids
and with their ultimate willingness to cooperate in spite of their
personal outlooks.

For want of a car I have not made any effort to contact the white
community or the white ministers. However, part of my reluctance at
this point derives from a lack of conviction that contact with the
white community is significant or particularly helpful to the work here.
I have asked few and received some helpful ideas from the volunteers.
And now that Henry Bird is here with a car, we may be able to catch a
few of the white ministers. At any rate, Henry may see this as part
of what he would like to do.

I thoroughly believe in the K-C idea even though I myself do not feel
that in 10 days I have been very effective. However, I do feel that
just my friendship, getting the kids to call me George, and just being
here is more helpful to all than can easily be seen. I'm sure that
my presence helps in keeping up the general morale of the group.