

Report of Minister Counsellor of Columbus  
Philip M. Kelsey August 3-20

I arrived in Columbus on Wednesday, August 5th a.m.

and will be remaining until August 20. Columbus is the center of an operation that has subsidiary units in Tupelo, 60 miles to the north, Aberdeen 30 miles north, West Point 20 miles north west, and Starkville, 15 miles west. Since as a minister-counsellor my primary concern is not the statistics of voter registration but rather the morale of the workers and the relationship between groups, these are the areas in which I will make report.

The Columbus group is the one I know best because I lived in Freedom House there. Here I found a fine group of young people leading a Freedom School each morning in a nearby church, and in other ways doing group work with children. A dozen or so children hover around Freedom House from morning to night. It is often annoying to have them so constantly around. However the young people have not responded on the basis of their annoyance but on the basis of the demonstrated need. As a result they have done work in recreation, basic reading, and have had story hours and parties. This work has been aided by the adequacy of the building, a ranch style house, in which the work is located and the fact that the young people, some college students, and others graduates are mature and serious in their purpose.

Although only 4 of us sleep regularly at Freedom House, there are nearly a dozen who eat there. The presence of Mrs Davison, a retired school teacher, to cook at least one meal a day may contribute to the high morale of the unit.

She comes in each day bringing food which she has solicited from the community and prepares the main meal of the day. This means that the workers get a well balanced diet. For the rest of the meals the people who eat here chip in \$5 per week and eat quite well on it.

Life in the unit is never dull. Being the center of five Freedom Houses, and the residence of the attorney, all calls regarding skirmishes with the police come in here and have to be processed either by relay to Jackson or tracking down the attorney wherever he may be. There is a great deal of reading and hospitality. In general, life in the unit is unstructured outside of the work of freedom registration, voter education and registration, and the children's work.

In Aberdeen the building itself is very primitive with no conveniences except an overhead bulb for light. People from the community bring in food as it is needed. Two live in the house at night while the rest live in homes around. There is a very loyal negro community surrounding the house which is on the outskirts of town with fields around. The police have harrassed the workers somewhat which is enervating, but the morale of the group has been in general high and they have done some effective work. With one exception they have the maturity to endure police harrassment. The one exception to my knowledge is a young negro man who refuses to be civil to the police since they treat him with the usual contempt with which white police treat negroes who don't "know their place". Aberdeen has since ruled a office in the community but

Tupelo has AN adequate Freedom House much like the Columbus one. Here the pattern has been a much more aggressive

assailing of the white community than in the other units. This is accomplished by an attitude of rebellion carried out by reckless driving and other means of demonstrating their non conformity to community standards. There is much partying late into the night. Meals are irregular and unplanned. There seems to be a group of twenty to forty who have become converts and use the Freedom House for Integrationist Meetings. There are only three members ~~resident~~ at the unit, and since the white person is the least stable emotionally, it is an explosive situation. Apparently the police of Tupelo are determined to make no incidents, since there have been no skirmishes. The members keep expecting trouble which doesn't come. One gets the impression that they feel they deserve trouble and are frustrated by the fact that it doesn't come.

West Point has a unit which lives at Mary Holmes Jr. College and gets its meals along with the rest of the summer campus community. They have founded a Freedom School at one of the churches and have done voter registration work. They seem to have morale of a high order considering the fact that ~~only~~ one in the unit is over college age. They have a Freedom School for adults which meets 3 evenings a week <sup>they</sup> and have been rather active in voter registration. There is there a Catholic seminary student. There are also two or more young negroes who are veterans already of the Mississippi freedom movement. Police have been restrained in making arrests although ever vigilant and active in taking pictures whenever there is a group meeting.

Starkville has had most trouble with the police probably because the chief of police is determined to stamp out the

group. There have been numerous annoyance arrests.

This is the town where the attorney was charged with reckless driving when a truck rammed his stationary car. It was found that a knife had been planted in the car and the charge was added to by including the carrying of weapons. Another worker got a parking ticket which he went to city hall to pay. They told him they wanted to mug ~~him~~ and finger print him. When he refused he was charged with contempt of court and jailed with a \$50 fine. The next day he was released but fined and jailed again for again refusing to be mugged and finger-printed.

This case ~~is~~ is being continued. The men in the unit are mostly natives of Starkville. Although their facilities are extremely primitive, there is a high order of morale which I hope will carry them through the continuing ~~of~~ harrassment.

So much for the individual units. I spent much of my time interviewing members of the white community, chiefly cleggymen. My impressions are that Mississippi is a state which has more things in common with the Germany of Hitler than one would believe who has not been here. The white community is so overwhelmingly sold on the philosophy of the Citizens Council that even the clergy have been taken in and sold on the system of being good to negroes as long as they are docile and make no trouble. I, along with the other two ministers and a teacher in the West Point unit, had set as a goal the opening of avenues of communication between the ~~white~~ <sup>negro & white</sup> communities. In Columbus we failed to uncover a white man who even had the will to communicate <sup>with the</sup> ~~with the~~ negro community.

In Aberdeen we found a hostile community too. West Point presented us with the phenomenon of a group of ministers who did not try to defend the system but said simply that they had no power to do anything about it and no one was going to be part of any movement to establish lines of communication. Starkville, strangely enough for a city in which the police are at all out war with the workers, has evidences of containing such a community. The Catholic priest there is completely reconstructed ~~is~~ and he tells us that the late Presbyterian minister was <sup>also,</sup> as is the present Methodist minister. He accounts for the presence of such men as due to the influence of the college faculty on the churches. Many of the faculty come from outside Mississippi and make up a significant group in the local churches.

Unfortunately others were on vacation and so we were not able to locate them. The priest was frank to say that he saw no hope for <sup>Mississippi</sup> the state except through the instrumentality of outside groups such as have come in this summer. It need not be mentioned that most people we talked with were of the opposite opinion. We learned early that there was no need of interviewing pastors of churches which are indigenous to the south only.

I also would like to make some observations regarding the presence of professional men on the scene. Needless to say the attorneys are absolutely essential. The work would not have survived the summer without their constant presence.

I did not see much of the doctors, but I am sure their work has been of importance in many areas which will be reported on by the people who saw them at work. Our doctor was here

one day and made contact with white doctors to determine who were willing to be called in case of need. He also supplied us with every day drugs and diet supplements.

Three weeks on the job lead me to certain conclusions regarding the place of the ministry in this work. I feel that in this unit the car was absolutely essential. With scattered communities, I couldn't have serviced the area by waiting for rides when cars were going. I was used for a chauffeur, but on the two long trips which they asked, I suggested that Cofo buy the gas. This tended to reduce the requests for transportation while letting them know that if other sources could not be found, the National Council Car was available.

For best results, I feel the Council might secure carefully screened ministers to get leaves of absence from their churches for the entire summer. I am sure the depth of the ministry would be greatly increased if the length were increased. I could envision the possibility of establishing some beachheads in the white community if one were around long enough to meet in various settings. The young people would not have to try out every new minister to see what kind of a guy he was. The pastor could bring his own car, register it in Mississippi, and get paid the same amount per mile ~~will~~ the rental ~~cost~~ put into salaries to replace the salary his church had been paying him.

The foregoing does not mean the present arrangement is not of value. It is. The two areas which I see as involved in the job could be done more effectively with longer tenure.

The pastor could be a better pastor to Cofo workers and the white community could learn to know him as a trusted colleague,