

Report to Jesse Harris, COFO director, McComb, Miss.
from the Rev. S. Michael Y. sutaka, Sept. 13, 1964

In response to request by Jesse Harris, the Rev. Everett Sinson and I went to see church ministers and some of their lay leaders about the use of church for COFO programs in the Negro community.

Rev. Gilchrist of St. Paul's church was called on, after speaking to one of his deacons in McComb. Rev. Gilchrist seemed to be in favor of letting the COFO staff use his church, but he wanted us to check with his deacons, which we did. He also insisted that other churches in the community should open their doors and that we should speak to them about this.

On Sunday, September 6th, we attended St. Paul's church Sunday school. Although we were introduced we did not speak; the pastor, Gilchrist, was not there. A meeting of deacons was apparently held after Sunday school. Mr. McGee, one of the deacons, came to Freedom House to inform us that St. Paul's would not open its doors unless some other churches would share in making their buildings available.

We went to see Rev. I C. Harper who resides in McComb. We requested likewise the use of his church. He did not think that his congregation (vote by the congregation must be taken, according to him) would allow this. We did not speak to any of his church leaders.

After calling on Rev. Ned Taylor one afternoon, (he was not home) Jesse Harris, and few others attended a ~~meeting~~ business meeting of deacons on Friday, Sept. 11th. Jesse presented the request for the use of church and explained the programs of the Freedom House. Deacons did not speak, the minister ~~did~~ pointed out that his people's jobs were put in jeopardy by their close association with civil rights movement. He said that he would have to let the congregation vote on the matter of the use of the church building for educational and mass meetings. We were invited to the Sunday services on Sept. 13.

Ev. Simson and I attended two revival meetings at Rev. Dickie's church. Mr. Simson spoke briefly at the first night that we attended, identifying our presence as from the Freedom House.

Jesse Harris, the Rev. Ev. Simson and others and I attended a revival meeting at the church of Rev. Daniel Walker. At the end of the revival Jesse Harris asked for permission to make an announcement and this was granted. Jesse gave a brief and effective talk on the community's concern for bombing and its need to do something about it. He described briefly the program at the Freedom House and asked of the congregation to allow the church building to be used for civil rights purposes. Rev. Walker asked after the revival meeting that we come and speak to him the following morning, but he was not present when some of us went to see him.

Ev. Simson and I suggest that Jesse Harris and Cephas Hughes continue to see church groups to spread the good news about the Freedom House programs and plans. Negro church members can be supported with continual reassurances that their participation in the civil rights would not endanger them more than the restricted predicaments that they find themselves in now. Negroes are already intimidated by the whites, and whatever can be done to encourage them to struggle for their rights would be helpful. Church ministers tend to generalize and evade the urgent facts at hand. The Civil Rights messages are most effective where they are factual, such as the facts of bombing, specific instances of intimidation, etc., rather than moral (such as we should be responsible citizens, etc.). The weaknesses of the church ministers are in their tendency to moralize, and ~~fail to deal~~ to deal with individual moralities (mostly concerning sex, drinking, lying, etc.) and not face the facts of evil in society; they evade confronting the white community which is the source of much of their individual problems.

Some impressions concerning Freedom House, staff, programs:

1. Physical maintenance of the Freedom House buildings and equipment is not being realistically dealt with. The present house will not last should it continue to be used as it is now and nothing done to maintain it.

2. The bombed out wall from last Spring is still left essentially in the original bombed out state. From the standpoint of security this is highly inadvisable. Repairs were something that had to be done whatever the cost.

3.

3. I found the staff meeting quite helpful; two such meetings were held while I was here.

A closer communication between staff members can probably result from more regularly scheduled staff meetings.

It would then be possible to review together what is being done or what is being neglected.

4. I was impressed with the kinds of people who were present when the meeting was held to discuss ~~the~~ money raising for a community center. Would it be possible to organize a small group of adult advisory group for the Freedom House staff? If the staff, made up mostly of young people, is to make any impact upon the Negro community, run by older adult people, some kind of more direct support may be advisable. This would possibly mean a modification in the habits of life at the Freedom House, a more direct concern to create mature image of the staff to the community, etc.

The advisory group must be more than what may be compared to a church deacons' board, where everyone agrees with the minister on critical issues. Freedom House staff also needs encouragement as well as stiff and frank criticism from time to time, like anybody else.

Some impressions, cont.

5. Possibly as COFO staff try to work together with interested community leaders to establish a Negro community center for educational, recreational programs, a greater understanding of COFO objectives will emerge, and more community supporters can be found.

Working cooperatively with the community Negro leaders may not come easily to the COFO leaders, having worked so long alone for obvious and good reasons. However, the continuation of the COFO work would depend upon how much responsible community backing its projects will receive. This means that eventually the community leaders will have to take part on the level of policy making and planning.

6. Suggestions for volunteer minister-counselors:

a. Engage in the ongoing activities of regular volunteers. In this way the church minister will be an integral part of the COFO team.

b. Plan to stay for two weeks or more. It takes about a week to get acquainted with the order or disorder of the Freedom House schedule and programs.

c. Some kind of screening and preparation system should be devised by the National Council of Churches.

d. Ministers would generally need financial assistant (transportation, expenses, insurance) in order to make COFO projects possible for them.

e. A definitely more close cooperation is necessary between all civil rights groups, including SNCC, National Council of Churches, Episcopal National Council, lawyers' and doctors' groups, etc. Plans should be made jointly from the very beginning. "Get on the ground floor

of the planning"

f. Some kind of speaker's program may be instituted, whereby staff and students, who are articulate, would be invited to various parts of the country to speaking engagements. The problem is how this could be made possible when there is already a shortage of staff.

7. Finance

From day to day it was not known how much money we had available for food and incidental expenses. A sound fiscal system is sorely needed. It needless to say the staff is inadequately compensated for their labor, and this does not speak well for future recruitment of competent nature staff ~~staff~~ members.

Church contacts (cont.)

The key people in Rev. Ned Taylor's church, Society Hill Church, were listed for us: Mr. Marshall (already a friend of COFO, and whom Rev. Taylor is an "aggressive man"), Earl Tobias, Mr. Mingo, C.C. Bryant, Mrs. Alice Anderson (a friend of Cofo), Julia Robinson, and Dr. Kelly.

The key people in the church of Rev. Daniel Walker St. Mary No. 2 was reported to us as, Miss Trevis, Percy Martin, Jerome Carroll, Siss Spears, Mr. Harold.

The key people of Flower Mt. Baptist Church of Rev. Harper were given to us as being Peter, Leeds, 621 Warren St., Stamford Isaac, 926 ~~744~~ Summit St., Jerry Gibson, 302 Marguette, Kelley Anderson, 103 Lynn Ave., McCobb.

The key deacons of St. Paul's Methodist of Rev. Gilchrist were given to us by the minister as being Mr. Morgan, Chairman, Mr. Morgan, Jr., Chairman of Trustees, Hower McGee, Secretary of Trustees (we saw him), and Dave Huston.

On Sunday, Sept. 13, Rev. Ev. Simpson, Jesse Harris, and I attended Sunday School class and worship at Society Hill Church. All three of us spoke at the announcement time, urging members to open the doors of the church there for Freedom House programs. Rev. Taylor in response urged the congregation to vote in favor of cooperating with COFO. He called a meeting of the congregation to vote on the matter on Monday evening, Sept. 14. Jesse said that if Society Hill Church open its doors then St. Paul's Church, McCobb, will open its doors again for COFO programs. St. Paul had allowed Freedom School to be held there this summer, but it was the only church that did so.