

Jake
To: Edgar Stoen, Director of MGC-VS

From: Jake Friesen

Date: September 24, 1965

Subject: Delta Visit, September 21-23, 1965

1 Titus Bender, Harold Baglar and I spent a few days in the Delta to study a few communities for an MGC project. This report states my observations and biases. Copies are being sent to Titus and Harold. They have agreed to supplement, criticize or correct my comments. You will probably receive their reactions in a few days. Paragraphs are numbered to make reference easier.

2 The following communities were chosen as possible locations (listed alphabetically):

- 3 a) Canton, Madison County at the recommendation of Larry Scott and Dr. W. P. Davis. Earlier Scott said "hold off," but recently changed his mind. Did his earlier plans for Canton not materialize or has he changed his mind about me after a few contacts?
- 4 b) Cleveland, Bolivar County. Because of previous MGC contacts with the area and specifically with Annie Moore, I thought it should be considered.
- 5 c) Greenwood, Leflore County at Scott's suggestion. "Two congregations may be joining to worship in the new church being completed by Committee of Concern finances, leaving one building vacant for a center."
- 6 d) Yazoo City, Yazoo County at Scott's suggestion to MGC while he was in Akron. However, you recall that he has spent some time in the community since his Akron visit and states that the Negroes are afraid and would need to be persuaded to accept us.

GREENWOOD, LEFLORE COUNTY

7 This was the first place on our "itinerary." Total Leflore County population is 47,000. Of this number, 31,000 are Negroes. Nine thousand of the Negroes are illiterate (4th grade or less). The Federal Registrar has already registered 5,000 Negroes. The County has only one 25-bed hospital for Negroes. (Nurses for Negro patients must be provided by relatives or friends.) This means the greater majority of babies are born in the home. The Roman Catholics have an RN midwife in Leflore County.

8 The Committee of Concern has financed the rebuilding of the Pleasant Plain Baptist Church. The Morning Star Church across the street from it apparently considered joining Pleasant Plain. This probably will not happen until a few older folks pass away. (Which might take a while considering that there is a 124-year-old Negro man in Mississippi. He recalls being sold as a slave to a Mississippi man in 1858.)

1 Rev. J. A. Rouse (413 Magee) is the Pleasant Plain pastor. He is a very old man. His assistant, Willie McCaskill (Rt. 1, Box 306) is a young and very intelligent man. We met with Willie and Isaac Nash (453-3664), a deacon. These men are most eager to have us live in their midst. They would like to see us help build a center and pool next to the new church. There is a tremendous need and eagerness to have MOC in the community. However, there are no facilities, and there is little money in the community to build facilities for a program. Almost any type of work could be done because everything would need to begin from the grass roots. A house would probably be expensive because MOC may need to build it. Facilities are lacking and would, to a large extent, need to be financed by MOC. If MOC has this kind of money, a needier community cannot be found. It would be a rural program, four miles east of Greenwood.

2 The St. Francis Mission, School and Youth Center, carry on a tremendously large program in Leflore County. They run the County Credit Union, a large center, medical program (which includes visiting nurses, dispensary work and midwifery), newspaper (which competes with the local paper), and clubs. Their program is service-oriented like MOC rather than a proselytizing or mission program. As a result of the service program and dedicated workers, Negroes have asked to join the Roman Catholic faith, so a mission (church) has also been started. This work began in the early 30s. (It would be a tremendous experience for Kauffmanns or Regiers to spend a week at St. Francis in Greenwood.) This is a fantastic program. The contact people are Father Nathaniel and Father Daniel.

CLEVELAND, BOLIVAR COUNTY

3 Our second stop was Cleveland. Total county population is 35,000. If interested in further data, check my December, 1964 report.

4 Amzie has completed his center. It is a small center with five to eight small rooms that can be used as offices or small classrooms. It was used for a Head Start program this past summer.

5 Amzie is very eager to have MOC use part of the center. He will occasionally say, "We built it with MOC in mind, the smaller rooms for offices and clubs and one larger room in which to teach sewing, quilt work, etc."

6 The center was wired by a licensed electrician, yet the city refuses to hook them up. First they must make a few hundred dollar changes. Gas also is not connected.

7 This center could serve as a good base for numerous activities such as health, sewing and cooking classes. A Delta Ministry man is living in Cleveland to work in Bolivar County. He is different from most of his associates in that he feels MOC and MOC would not run into conflict because "the need is great enough for all kinds of people." The Delta Ministry man is Mr. Brooks, a Negro from Massachusetts.

- 1 In Greenwood the program would be in cooperation with a few Negro Baptist churches. In Canton it would be in cooperation with Baptist and Methodist churches. In Cleveland, no church is directly supporting Amzie's program. (He does have some kind of board for his center.) This would mean that some kind of fellowship could, and probably should, be started. I am convinced that Amzie would support such a move because he has lost most of his faith in present Negro churches and ministers, yet is a spiritual man. Of course, the house fellowships are not necessarily ruled out in the other locations, but would not be an urgent need. In Cleveland this would almost need to be part of the MOC program because, as a rule, the individuals are unrelated.

- 2 Amzie also is holding a two-bedroom house for us across the street from his center. We did not look at the house because I used it as a storage place for the MOC goods last year. It is a poor house which would need changes and furniture. Amzie can't get insurance for the building because someone apparently "knows what we have in mind." With Amzie's help, almost any house for personnel could be secured. But we would probably have to go outside of the city limits.

CANTON, MADISON COUNTY

- 3 Madison County is just north of Jackson, bordering Yazoo County. Yazoo County is considered as partly Delta. This means Madison is just next to the Delta. Can MOC locate next to the Delta?

- 4 The county has a population of 33,000, of which 70 percent is Negro. Before the presence of a Federal Registrar, only 2-300 Negroes were on the books. Now, 3500 Negroes are registered to vote and the number is continually climbing.

- 5 Approximately 10 miles north-northeast of Canton is the rural community of Valley View. The Philadelphia Yearly Friends are putting the finishing touches on a center here - Valley View Center.

- 6 The center is modern architecturally. It has one large meeting auditorium with a stage, a library, two offices, washrooms, a kitchen, and a laundrea-mat. It was built under the direction of Larry Scott with finances from the Philadelphia Yearly Friends. When Scott was in Akron last spring, he mentioned that the Friends would probably be having a project in Mississippi, just outside the Delta. This is the project he was speaking about. The Philadelphia Yearly Friends are not planning to support a project director. Scott feels the Friends shouldn't give it up this quickly, so wants to give them two months to rethink their earlier decision. In the meantime, he would like MOC to staff the center for two months and continue indefinitely if the Friends stick to their earlier decision.

- 7 If the Friends would take the project after two months, MOC would need to move. Moving to another location in the Delta could be done very easily from this location. Yazoo City, Greenwood, and Cleveland are in close proximity.

- 8 During the first few months MOC would need to assist in numerous projects. I shall only list a few specifically mentioned by Scott.

- 9 a) Assist in organizing a fall Head Start program at the center. Should MOC continue beyond the two months, they would then be put

on the Head Start payroll.

- 1 b) Painting, landscaping, etc. at the center and personnel house.
- 2 c) Organizing clubs, recreation programs, at the center in cooperation with the Board.
- 3 d) Assist local Negroes in overcoming some specific injustices, such as:
 - 4 - requesting phones for the community. There is only one eight-party line, which is very inadequate. Scott had to make a \$200 deposit before he could be hooked up.
 - 5 - Mississippi has a year old law which states that children must be living with their parents or else they must pay a few hundred dollars tuition each year. We met one high school student who hasn't attended school since last year. His mother is dead, his father is in jail, and the boy stays with his grandmother. In fact, this is where he has lived all his life. Yet he can't attend school now because he isn't living with his parents. Scott feels this fellow and his sisters could be enrolled if a white would interpret the situation to the school officials.
 - 6 - there are other equally ridiculous discriminatory cases.

7 Scott has organized an eleven-member board which has the charter for the center. There is also a five-member advisory committee. The board consists of skilled and unskilled, landowners and poor, educated and uneducated.

8 Chairman of the board is Otho Williams. He is a local farmer, active in civil rights work, chairman of a Farmers Cooperative (the county does not have a credit union). At one time he was very militant. He even fought the sheriff and deputy who were going to kill him. After a ten-minute struggle, he disarmed the sheriff and the two law officers said "Let's get out of here" and ran. As a result of working with Scott, he testifies that most of the bitterness and hate are gone. He doesn't carry a concealed weapon anymore.

9 Across the road from the center is a three-bedroom house. It is owned by a local Negro. Scott has been renting it for the center builders. He has paid the rent until June, 1966. Larry has put some beds, a stove, a refrigerator, running water, and some other items into the house. It is a good house but needs paint, cabinets, clothes closets, tables, and the floors need finishing. However, it would be possible for someone to move in today.

10 Larry will be leaving his items in the house. It is vacant and will remain thus until MGC or some other workers are permitted, with his consent, to move into it. Scott is giving us first chance, holding it for MGC until notified one way or the other.

1 If MCC moves into the house, the use of the present furnishings would be free. The rent is \$10 per month, payable to Larry Scott, Apt. 2-F, 3502 Powelton Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

2 I would recommend that MCC should pay about \$60 each month for at least the first year. Ten dollars should be paid to Larry and the remainder to be spent for furniture, paint, cabinets, floor finishing, etc. The MCC personnel would make the necessary improvements while living in the building.

3 Scott purchased a pickup (approximately \$600) while in Mississippi. This truck goes with the house. MCC can buy or simply rent the truck. Six cents per mile minus gas, oil, repairs, tires, etc. would be payable to the center. In other words, Larry will give the truck to the center if MCC doesn't want to buy or rent it. I imagine whoever will work at the center will be in charge of the truck.

4 The address for the house is: Quaker Project (this can be changed), Rt. 1, Box 203A, Canton, Mississippi.

5 We also met Rev. McCree, Methodist minister in Canton. He is Negro with seminary training. MCC is trying to get him to be Art Thomas' assistant. He is a brilliant man.

YAZOO CITY, YAZOO COUNTY

6 Scott recommended this community to MCC as a possible location this spring. Since that time he has spent some time in the community and wasn't able to get an invitation from the Negro community. He believes it still is a possibility, but it would take hard work. He doesn't rule it out as a possibility, but simply said he "didn't have time" to spend too many days preparing the people.

7 In the light of the above, we did not visit Yazoo City. This town is about 30 to 40 miles from Canton.

SUMMARY

8 The needs are great at all three locations. The three also have the welcome mat out. There is absolutely no organization and no facilities at Greenwood. Perhaps this means it is the most needy. Cleveland has some facilities for a program. Canton has the facilities and organization in which to work. In other words, the machine has just been built by Larry, but hasn't been put to work yet. If finances are available, a summer work camp or summer volunteer program could be arranged.

9 The one uncertainty about beginning at the Valley View Center is that it may only be for two months. They would be valuable months since there is much to do. It would be a tremendous experience to build upon the foundation laid by Scott.

10 What do you think?

FROM HERE?

1 How are your October 6 plans materializing? Jane and I would be willing to move to Canton upon hearing from you. Perhaps you have further questions or would like to call Scott in Philadelphia. You will want to wait until receiving reactions to this report from Harold and Titus.

2 The move could be made before October 6, in which case you could be met at Jackson. If on your visit you decide that the move to Canton was unwise, a transfer to some other community could be made immediately without any extra costs.

3 If you feel Jane and I should remain in Gulfport (this was the agreement) until your visit here, where do you want to be met?

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

a) Peace Section. Titus heard from Ed Metzler regarding his association with NSC. Details were not outlined, since Metzler only sent a handwritten note from Chicago.

b) Finances. Titus has a record of his expenses on the trip and will deduct this from his Peace budget unless you request that it be submitted to you. Harold's travel expenses were paid by my VS Imprest Fund. A bill for Jane's and my stay (room and board) in Gulfport will be submitted to you after the move north is made, unless Harold is in a financial pinch now.

c) William Snyder. Thank him for his encouraging letter of September 21, 1965. A short letter like this from the Executive Secretary is very meaningful.

d) Lawrence Scott can be reached at Apt. 2-F, 3502 Powelton Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104. The Canton (Valley View) address is: Quaker Project, Rt. 1, Box 203A, Canton, Mississippi.

e) Burning of Churches. Some buildings are still going up in smoke. Last week a church just outside Meridian was burned to the ground. It was a moving experience for me to stand and look at the ashes for about ten minutes with some others.

f) North Gulfport. A former CC-VS couple who have served two years at Camp Landon returned this week with their belongings, bought a house trailer which they will set up in the Negro community of North Gulfport, and hopefully will find a job in the area, and assist in the Camp Landon program.

g) Larry's Future. He has returned to Pennsylvania to work in the area of war and peace. Some villages in Viet Nam are being burned to the ground because one sniper bullet was fired at the Americans. Since the sniper will not identify himself or come out of hiding, the whole thatched roof village has been set on fire. James Cousins, editor of Saturday Review is collecting money to rebuild some of these hamlets. Scott will probably be heading up this project. I encouraged him to get in touch with Delmar Stahly and Ed Matsler. He doesn't know if the US Government will permit this, but thinks it will be a powerful witness, especially in light of his rebuilding in Mississippi. Cousins headed up a fund-raising campaign to pay the bill for all those who needed plastic surgery as a result of the Hiroshima bomb.

h) Names. Alfred Winham, Jackson - head of NCC federal poverty program.
Fr. Larry Watts, Jackson - head of the Star program, first federally approved organization (Roman Catholic) to receive federal poverty money.

i) Integrated Meetings. I have attended a few of these but haven't recorded my observations thus far. Will send them at a later date.

cc: Harold Ragler
Titus Bender
Fred Unruh