

. . . Delta Ministry looks ahead. . .

true meaning of ecumenical ministry in depth to the total man was considered, the more it became evident that both approaches were necessary. Indeed, they became merely different aspects of one ministry.

Perhaps the key to our philosophy is a ministry WITH, as against a ministry TO or a ministry FOR.

1. It is a ministry WITH the poor of Mississippi -- at this point, mostly the Negro poor.
 2. We believe that if this ministry is to be God's ministry, its direction must be as much in the hands of the suffering people as in the hands of the Commission or Staff.
 3. We attempt to minister to immediate needs, e.g., clothes and food distribution.
 4. We attempt to minister to underlying needs -- equal justice, education, political power, economic development. This often is an invisible ministry, carried on by secular groups set up through the initiative of our work -- like Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), and the Delta Opportunities Association -- to develop opportunities in housing, business and education.
 5. We engage in a ministry of reconciliation by helping the poor to gain enough self-confidence, articulateness, and power to negotiate on a basis of equality of person with the powers that be. We feel true reconciliation between unequal and alienated groups is not possible without justice (crying peace, peace, when there is no peace).
- Despite heavy criticism that we are agitators, because of our unwillingness to go along with some of the compromises of interracial committees in certain communities, we continue to feel that the above understanding of reconciliation is truly biblical.
6. New theological insights are being explained and shown forth in the Delta Ministry: secular concerns, acting out the Love of God, existential involvement as a means of showing the Gospel, the shape of the Church as ecumenical and inclusive community outside parochial structure -- to name a few.
 7. Many young people, disillusioned with the Church, are rediscovering the reality of Christ and Christian witness through participation in our work and exposure to the courage and compassion of our people.
 8. The fast changing times develop radically different communities separated by deepening

divisions. Delta Ministry ministers within one of these communities. This means that it is not able AT THE SAME TIME to minister directly to the white community or even to the educated Negro community. The established Mississippi Churches seek to perform the latter task. Nevertheless, this work with the poor and deprived is, we believe, a necessary indirect ministry to the more privileged communities; and until deeper communication between these two parallel ministries is opened up, ultimate reconciliation between the two communities will not be possible.

9. We have spent a great deal of time attempting to interpret our work to the white community. We have met little understanding, and some suggestions for a closer relationship have not been adopted. For instance, we suggested a liaison person representing the various denominations who would keep the local judicatories informed. This person was never appointed.

Is this a Christian ministry, or a social service, or a Civil Rights movement? We feel that it is an ecumenical and total ministry, within a particularly needful community, embracing as instruments of the ministry whatever skills and institutions appear appropriate.

These would include social service, community organization, indirect political activity, direct social action, industrial development, education, channeling of government programs, etc.

Is it Christian? All we can say is that it is done in the name of Christ, in the fellowship of the enlarged Church, by Christians who are risking their lives daily for His sake. The critical events which occur are continually interpreted by the people in scriptural terms. "He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bruised. . ."

What does the future hold? I would think an increased emphasis on education, economic development, and indirect political activity (like voter registration) in cooperation with whatever groups are active and sympathetic in the various communities.

A permanent presence, like the Delta Ministry, is indicated in Mississippi for the foreseeable future. Our work offers a necessary stability and flexibility not found in other institutions there. Such a steady-going presence will need outside help for many years to come.

...2... to growing self-respect and so

As other states look at Mississippi, so Mississippi looks at the Delta," said a writer in the official White Citizens' Council magazine recently.

With a population that is two-thirds Negro, the rich Delta farm land is divided into huge cotton plantations. The Negroes live rent-free in sagging plantation shacks in return for their availability to work for \$6 a day.

The median annual income for Negroes in the Delta is \$456.

But "Delta plantations increasingly utilize machinery," the Citizens' Council writer says, "which accounts in large measure for the present race problem in Chicago."

Despite his slanted pen, the segregationist writer summed it up. Nowhere in Mississippi is life so destructive to human dignity as in the Delta.

Here, more than anywhere else, is where people have fled to Northern ghettos. Here, more than anywhere else, joblessness and homelessness go hand in hand.

Here are most clearly seen examples of that growing nationwide problem, the "permanently unemployables."

Here, more than anywhere else, is needed the Gospel of the wholeness of life.

Here the Delta Ministry has committed itself to

stand as a witness to what the healing power of God can do, attempting to bring wholeness to fragmented and disintegrating lives.

We have had to learn a lot. The obvious needs -- food and clothing and medicine -- we saw, and tried to meet.

And as people began to form their own system of distributing the relief goods that were provided, we shared with them the joy of new-found skills, of realized potential.

It was these local people, even before President Johnson announced establishment of the Head Start program, who expressed concern about the future of their children and proposed a pre-school program.

Head Start became more than a school program; families worked together for the first time, and developed a program which dealt with children in the wholeness of life. It became a testing ground for a new community of shared concern.

Just how deep a concern is illustrated by what happened in Bolivar County.

Because of politics and the white leaders' desire to control any money coming into the county, Head Start in that county wasn't funded for a second term. But the parents went ahead anyway!

For months, the concerned Negro people of that county kept a program going, with volunteer teachers working all day, and with money for the children's



f-determination among delta Negroes. . .

lunches often coming out of the teachers' pockets.

Now money is coming for a program, but a far more important thing happened: a nucleus of "fighting dreamers" has been developed in each town and village.

They have a sense of community that is not tied to one program, and a new awareness that "the system" can be fought -- and beaten.

More recently, the people in Bolivar have organized a massive voter registration campaign. In three weeks in May, they registered 1,500 people. It is likely that soon there will be a majority of Negro voters.

In all this, the role of Delta Ministry staff members is hard to define.

In Sunflower city, for example, where DM went on the invitation of local people, staffers went door to door along with the local workers, urging residents to register.

Sometimes DM provided money for gas, or a meal for a volunteer whose support hadn't come. More often, DM people were just there -- giving advice when asked, but mostly being a "presence" and a reminder of the backing of others around the nation.

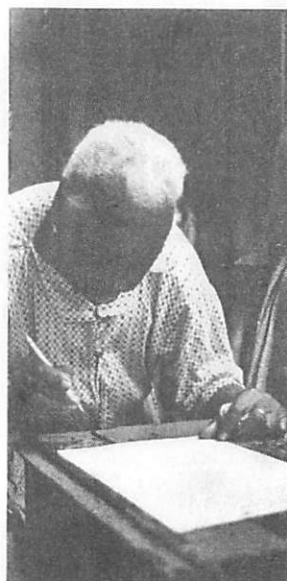
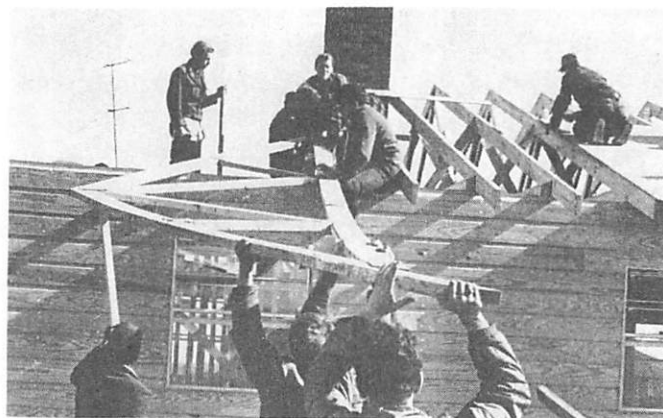
In Sunflower, when Negroes came to hold a majority of the votes, a DM staffer held informal weekly discussions with the Negro candidates -- talking about how to avoid the mistakes and cruelties of the white city politicians when they get into office.

A staff member may spend one week on the rough rural roads, visiting one isolated plantation shack a dozen times before the trip to the court house -- and the next week in Jackson or Washington, helping a local group get government programs for self-help.

Many times DM staff have been forced off plantations at gunpoint. Planters keep pressure on their tenants to keep from registering, and often post "No Trespassing" signs to keep any visitor away from the shacks.

It may cost as much as \$500 a week to run a voter drive in a rural delta county -- but it pays off in self-respect and dignity.

Delta Ministry staffers will continue to do two things: (1) to stand by the courageous people of Mississippi in their efforts to change the state for good, and (2) keep probing for every weak spot in the cocoon of bad education, race politics, poor health, lack of job opportunity and intimidation which envelops Delta Negroes.



...3... to a bold new start for some. .

The idea of helping Delta Negroes by starting a new community is risky business.

There is the danger that human greed, pettiness and jealousy will wreck the group.

There is the possibility that a new town started by Negroes will become a permanent ghetto.

There is the danger that, instead of an example of full citizen participation, the new community will become just like many other towns -- run by a powerful handful of people.

But there is another possibility which makes the risks worth taking:

We believe that the hopeless, frightened, under-educated Negro people of the Delta can grow in hope and self-determination -- if they can get away from the repressive atmosphere of the plantation or the "Negro side" of a small Mississippi town.

Thus, while Delta Ministry plans to continue its support of community organization by Negroes in the Delta, it will also spend a major part of its effort on the "new community" concept.

Basically, the idea is this:

To assist groups of people to form brand new towns, as a creative alternative to the wretched living conditions of the Delta -- and to the terrible fact of being unwanted.

Such a new community can also be a political base for people whose vote, under present conditions, can be watered down or discounted.

To start a new town implies, for Delta Ministry, assistance in seeking out the industry and businesses needed to create jobs. It means finding ways in which the people not only can have decent homes, but can share in building them.

The challenge of a fresh start, by the way, is not limited to Mississippi. David S. Schuller, in Concepts For Action, published this year by the NCC's Division of Christian Life and Mission, says:

"It is now apparent that the task of designing whole new cities on formerly unoccupied land will be one of our great challenges in the next decades."

No Ghetto

It should be clear that this approach is not an attempt at protective isolation (new ghettos) or an alternative to political reality (utopias).

It is a base for the practice of democracy and the development of full citizenship sufficient to contri-

bute to a new Mississippi.

We are not proposing some perfect city, but a community of men, women and children engaged in the process of becoming free -- socially, educationally, economically, politically, and spiritually.

Whether there is one such community or a dozen, the idea as it is carried out will provide examples -- and hope -- for Negro people determined to change their lives in established communities.

It is a cruel fact that many Delta Negroes have come to believe what the "boss man" believes -- that they really are incapable of full human intelligence and initiative.

Seeing a town take shape -- a town in which the few white men present are co-equals and partners, not bosses -- could help them see the lie for what it is.

A Political Base

Another factor makes the new community worth trying.

Despite the new federal laws and the newly-exerted voting power, Negroes are still very much at the mercy of whites in Mississippi.

The banks, the law enforcement agencies, the city and county governments are white-controlled.

Thus, when Negroes began to approach a majority of the voting strength in the Delta, the state legislature re-districted the state so every Congressional district has a white majority.

When it looked as though Negroes in Jefferson and Issaquena counties might get a voting majority, a law was introduced giving the legislature power to merge counties without the counties' permission.

White men have used the power to hire and fire, the power to lend, the power to legislate and the power to frighten in keeping Negroes in "their place."

A new community, with outside help but completely self-determining, could avoid these traps.

The Pioneers

One group of people, with DM's help, is already on its way to the new community.

"We is like the children of Israel marching through the desert for the Promised Land," says one of the 150 people staying at DM's Mount Beulah Center.

"If we makes it, it'd be a miracle. I don't know which way this here thing is going to turn out, but I'm sticking with the people. Me and my family's