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The worst judgment and insult for white Mississippi was the designation of the state as the "mission field" in late 1963. The church arrests ~~were~~ <sup>bad publicity about</sup> ~~was~~ humiliating enough but most people tried to dismiss the presence of the northern ministers at their doors as typical Yankee hypocrisy and meddling in Southern affairs. But it was very hard for Mississippi, the home of missionaries to the ~~heathen~~ <sup>heathen</sup> world, source of light to send into darkness, could be considered as a place that needed Christian missionaries. But such was the recommendation of a special World Council of Churches meeting on World Mission and Evangelism held in Mexico City. There church leaders from all parts of the world agreed that the old concept of mission being something sent from Western Christians to the rest of the world was no longer ~~relevant~~ <sup>relevant;</sup> that the time had come for Christian churches anywhere to join ~~in~~ in missionary work wherever there was need. Thus it was said that even America was in need of help from other peoples and other churches. The state of Mississippi was suggested as the place with the most extreme racism and the most extreme poverty and with a worldwide reputation for this. Also mentioned was the poverty of the ghetto areas of some

American cities. But Mississippi was singled out. American church representatives at the session agreed that their nation and church did need to receive as well as send missionaries.

Civil rights leaders of Mississippi, especially in SNCC, had asked Dr. Robert Spike, director of the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches for any possible help for the Movement in the state. SNCC already had pilot literacy projects under way and, for over a year, had been involved directly in relief work in the Delta, distributing food and clothing to local Blacks who had been cut off from normal state welfare programs (which were never adequate even prior to this) because of the voter registration campaigns. SNCC hoped the Church could begin to do some of this work, freeing SNCC for work in politics and community organizing. It was assumed that the Church and the Movement could work closely together and that the Church would continue to support the direct action campaigns and demonstrations organized by the Movement.

The Commission on Religion and Race sought help from another agency of the National Council of Churches, the Division of Home Missions, to organize and sponsor a new agency to be called the Delta Ministry or the Mississippi Delta Project.

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The Division of Home Missions (which had once sponsored a small program of rural development in Mississippi in the 1950's and now had programs in Appalachia, among ~~the~~ migrant farm workers, and ~~similar~~ others) agreed to the Mississippi plan.

At a meeting in Baltimore in February of 1964 the <sup>gen</sup>eral Board of the National Council of Churches approved the plan for the Delta Ministry and for the participation of Christian churches in other parts of the world in this first missionary campaign to America. The World Council of Churches was to provide forty per cent of the budget funds. With the emphasis on the poverty as well as the racial discrimination in the Delta of Mississippi this became the first relief program of the World Council to America.

The original plan called for a task force of some fifteen persons to ~~o~~ work full time in Mississippi, starting some

As announced by the National Council, work time late in 1964. -Work would be developed in three main lines:

"1. A ministry of services of direct relief developed to relieve suffering." This also included "the development of remedial self-help programs."

"2. A ministry of reconciliation and the securing of human dignity.

(a) By assisting in the establishing of communication~~s~~ between the White and Negro communities.

- (b) By helping the people in drawing potential leadership from their midst, and aiding such leaders to acquire the knowledge and skills for competent and responsible leadership within the democratic setting of an American community.
  - (c) By aiding the people to identify their common problems, needs, and concerns--especially those relating to their life and status as residents of the Mississippi Delta, such as employment, welfare, housing, education, legal matters.
  - (d) By developing indigenous centers in each county which would assist in the process of literacy and fundamental education, manpower retraining, communications, and planning. Such ~~of~~ centers can become the focal point of the Ministry in each county.
3. A ministry of community development... which will mobilize technical skills, scientific knowledge, economic resources, and public opinion to the end of developing an adequate base for livelihood..."<sup>23</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi supported all these goals and welcomed the National Council of Churches as an ally. As we understood the church proposal and the problems of Mississippi this meant the Church organization would work with the Movement in fighting segregation and encouraging voting and political organization as necessary for community

development. Over the next several years the white church leaders of Mississippi would scream that they had been deceived by the assurance that the Delta Ministry would work only in the areas of "relief of suffering, reconciliation, and community development." To the white church leaders this meant no agitation against segregation, no connection with the civil rights movement, and no encouragement of voter registration or other political activity.

Most of white Mississippi was angry at the idea of being a mission field and openly hostile to the Delta Ministry from the day the news was first published. For many years the National Council of Churches had been condemned as a Communist front. Now, for most people, there was no longer any doubt.

Florence Sillers Ogden (sometimes called the "Delta Queen" by her fans in the Movement) lived in Rosedale, on the banks of the levee in Bolivar County, the middle of the Delta. She wrote a fantastic and delightful weekly column for the Jackson papers. In April she ~~was~~ "exposed" the Communist influences and denounced that she called the church plan to "invade" the state. "...the National Council of Churches," she wrote, "is moving in on the Delta to reform us to their philosophy of life..."<sup>24</sup> The old time religion was still good enough for her.

Some local churches of the Methodist and other denominations announced that they were withholding funds from the National Council of Churches. But there was not much of this once it was understood that no regular funds from the N.C.C. would go to the Delta Ministry but only specially designated donations.

A much more ominous--and more typically Mississippi--response was made by the Central Mississippi Presbytery. ~~of~~ They pointed out that Mississippi needed no assistance or spokesmen from the outside in racial matters. Part of their April, 1964, statement announced:

"/... we do not recognize the National or World Council of Churches as our spokesman in this area and request that they desist from any further plans to come ~~ix~~ into the South for purposes that could only cause unrest and hatred among men of all races.

The preaching of the word of God would be seriously hindered, and relations between the races would be disrupted...

(We protest)... all those agencies co-operating with them in this project which will promote lawlessness and the flagrant violation of the inherent right of all citizens of the state of Mississippi.

We insist that such action will certainly result in violence, bloodshed, and possible death.<sup>25</sup>

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In Mississippi such words were not ~~idel~~ threats. But,

despite the ~~o~~ rather ~~sr~~ serious intention of the Presbyterians who made this statement, there was still cause fo~~r~~ humor in its presentation. The Jackson Daily News, famous for its errors and misprints, left room for important questions in their reporting of the Presbyterian action. At one place the newspaper ~~sizd~~ said the Presbytery would "protect" all programs of the Delta Ministry. Most probably they meant "protest"--although the threat of violence did indicate some need for protection. Less clear was the statement, as printed, about "the inherent right" of all Mississippi ~~cty~~ (white) citizens. Perhaps the plural was intended and the "rights" of citizens was the concern; but, as printed, the truth was told of how Mississippi<sup>ns</sup> saw themselves, possessors and guardians of "the inherent right," morally and politically. Something there seems ~~look~~ good Presbyterian

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doctrine.