

MESSAGE TO THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH'S 60TH GENERAL CONVENTION, SEPTEMBER 17-29,
FROM THE CLERGY ON THE PILGRIMAGE TO CONVENTION FROM NEW ORLEANS TO DETROIT:

In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. As priests of the Church, we have prepared this statement that it might accompany the message we bear to the General Convention by our pilgrimage and through the placard we shall unveil at the Convention. While we speak only for ourselves, in a deeper sense, we represent the concern of many more Churchmen: those who have given of their substance to make the journey possible and of their prayers to sustain us, and the more innumerable body of faithful persons who serve that the Church might be more truly itself in its struggle for inner integrity.

Believing that the Church is one, even as the nation is one, indivisible in essence, we rejoice that our number includes clergy from one ocean to the other, and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf. As members one of another, in Christ Jesus, we recognize our responsibility for the health of His Church wherever the Gospel is planted; and, as citizens of one country, we reject sectionalism that would limit the active expression of love for oppressed brothers anywhere. At neither our starting point or our destination, nor in the larger areas they symbolize, have we any reason for complacency over the quality of Church life or its effect in the general community. Obedient to the commandment of Christ to go into all the world, we are acting, in this instance, upon our involvement in the needs of His children everywhere.

Our chief message to the Church is set forth through our placard in the lobby of the Convention Hall. It presents, in symbolic form, alternatives for the life of the Church. There is the crucified Christ with His Body pierced through by barbed wire and the words: Segregation and Separation. On either side of the awful fence a figure kneels, one black and the other white. The implicit question has been asked before: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" The placard also shows Our Lord in resurrected form, blessing two men who kneel before Him. Because they recognize one another as brothers, we may say with the Psalmist: "Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

This is a message for Churchmen everywhere, and, for all, the imperative is the same: The Church must become, in every phase of its life, that which by nature it is - a holy fellowship where race is of no account. None may rest until every trace of racial segregation and separation is expunged from the Body of Christ in all places. In the implementation of absolute principles, we recognize that responsibility for immediate and direct steps is related to individual circumstances, but there should be no hindrance anywhere to a complete uncovering of the principles and a foreshadowing of the steps to follow. Each is accountable for decisions that fall short of the perfect Will of God.

At the beginning of our pilgrimage, we will look at segregation in the Body of Christ as found at some of the educational facilities we are to visit. There are other institutions where the policy is the same. We believe it to be a tragedy that Church schools and colleges ever should have been closed to some, and a tragedy of immense proportions that they have lagged behind others in the removal of

racial restrictions. Before the courts ruled on legal questions at state-operated facilities, the Church had a theological and moral imperative to clean its house. Now the law has instructed us for seven years in what is just, right, and necessary; and still there are Church schools that are segregated. We share in the failure and are justifiably chided by the irreligious for the ineffectiveness of our pronouncements. As members of the Body of Christ, concerned for the welfare of all its parts, we should have made our visits earlier. We pray that our coming may help the Church to view this matter with renewed urgency, so that previously closed doors may be opened, and a penitent and beckoning hand extended to those who could not have entered before.

At the end of our journey, we shall consider the more subtle and difficult question of separation, both within the Church and the community. At a suburb of Detroit, we will confer with local clergy on the role of the churches in overcoming discriminatory housing practices. This is the critical need in areas that have discarded the more blatant forms of segregation. With the old barriers gone, men meet as equals before the law, but they are strangers to each other. They are forced to live in separate areas and they go to separate churches. Our "separate-but-equal" parish system, as it is largely observed, is partly a result of the housing pattern, but also a contributor to it. Perpetuating the system in our attitudes and in our approach to clerical appointments, we have made parish life an adjunct to racial separation in the community, as it is often a sustaining influence for cultural or economic divisions among men. Let those who were first set apart by the old barriers, and then separated by customs and covenants, become brothers now before parish altars! Let their diversity testify to their unity in Christ Jesus! It is our prayer that the General Convention will lead the Church into a new understanding of what it must do about these matters.

Whether with the dying forms of segregation or the elusive, but equally fragmenting devices for the separation of Christ's Body and the community, Churchmen everywhere have work to do. We are making our journey that the Church might focus on the needs, and gain renewed understanding of its task. In places where our coming may be regretted by some, we will seek opportunities to confer with the clergy so that greater understanding may be had by all. We sincerely hope to conclude our pilgrimage without interruption, but we cannot enjoy the luxury of being exempted from consequences born out of our conviction that the Church is one and that we, as priests of the Church, cannot be divided according to the ways of the world. It is in His Name that we go forth, and to Him we offer our selves, our souls and bodies for what we pray may be used for the spread of His Kingdom. In these days of world crisis, with darkening signs on all sides, may His Church, at least, be found faithful. Amen.