

“What good is the
**GENERAL
CONVENTION
SPECIAL
PROGRAM?”**”



THE NEED

Never before has the soul of this nation been faced with a challenge like the current Crisis in American Life.

Men of conscience and compassion in all walks of life can no longer either accept or ignore the structured injustice of our society.

American productivity booms at an all-time high. Yet unemployment in our cities produces growing numbers of restless urban dwellers, and unemployment among black citizens is double that of whites. Our relief rolls are higher than ever before and they continue to grow. The violence and destruction which has swept in an angry wave through urban slums indicates the deep frustration and resentment surging in our land. In depressed rural areas of the nation, children of the poor suffer malnutrition. Some quite literally starve to death. And this in a nation that boasts of a surplus food supply. So hopeless is the future which awaits teen-agers on Indian reservations that an alarming number commit suicide.

Something is terribly wrong.

It is a curious paradox that those who suffer most in our society have the least to say about their own future. The fundamental issue is that of powerlessness; the pride-destroying powerlessness of the "have-nots," the helpless poor, and especially the black poor. Such people deeply resent handouts from people in power. There has been no way in our society for poor people to have a hand in shaping their own destiny. Their voices are not heard by the privileged white majority except through the fires of violence. The need therefore is to admit the structured injustice of our society and to do something about it.

THE RESPONSE

The Episcopal Church has launched a special program to attack the basic problems of poverty and racism. This concerted effort, proposed by the Presiding Bishop and wholeheartedly adopted by the General Convention in 1967, is known as the General Convention Special Program (GCSP). It is a top priority project within the General Church Program, that is, the national program of the Church. The total investment of Episcopal Church funds is \$9,000,000—approximately \$3,000,000 per year for the 1968-70 triennium.

The GCSP is an attempt to answer and act upon such basic questions as:

“How can the resources of our Church, both human and financial, be intelligently and humbly enlisted in the service of the people of our cities?”

“By what criteria can the Church enter into partnership with self-organized groups in slum areas which are trying to deal with the conditions that are destroying them?”

The response of the GCSP, both in policy and financial commitment, has been to state openly and candidly that *only* when power, wealth and decision-making ability are *shared* can men live together as equals. People who are powerless are the victims of those who hold power. Without a base of power, the poor of this nation cannot enter the mainstream of American life.

THE DIFFERENCE

The GCSP differs from other Church programs in that it is totally committed to the development of self-determination among poor people. GCSP resources, both human and financial, are provided to organized groups of poor people to assist programs *designed* and *controlled* by the people themselves to meet their own needs as *they* see them.

Funds granted to organizations of the poor are *completely* at the disposal of the poor. It is a violation of the GCSP's guidelines for any outside control to be exercised over the funds appropriated.

THE CRITERIA

The GCSP is open to any and all requests for funds to assist programs which are attempting to achieve one or more of the following goals:

- Community organization on a national, metropolitan or neighborhood level (can be urban, suburban or rural); the basic purpose of which is to gain social, political or economic power.
- Service to the poor based on programs designed and controlled by the poor themselves. These would include training in the skills necessary to assure the effective conduct of such programs.
- Community leadership training and experience in specific areas of need identified by the applying organization.

All programs must be carried out without regard to race, creed or ethnic origin. All programs must show clear and reasonable evidence that, given funding assistance, they will be able to carry out their stated purpose. **No funds received can be used in connection with any individual or group which advocates violence.**

THE CHALLENGE

The GCSP is predicated upon the conviction that people in communities, when able to obtain the necessary financial and political resources, will evidence their divine right and human potential to return America to her moral senses. Though the federal government has designated sizable sums of money for work in poverty areas, government funds for community organization and the development of poor people's power are continually being cut back. The GCSP is determined to do all it can to fill this power vacuum. Organized poor people with a clear goal and vision before them are better able to utilize all available resources, whether public or private.

Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., outbursts of violence erupted in the nation. The cities which were spared major destruction were those in which well-defined, disciplined and independent ghetto organizations refused to allow the spread of purposeless chaos. Many such groups had already received the support of the GCSP and demonstrated anew the value and strength of community organization.

THE PROCEDURE

All requests for GCSP funds are carefully scrutinized by a fourteen-member Screening and Review Committee, whose membership is broadly representative of the hard-core poor, including American Indians and residents of Appalachia. It is the intention of the GCSP to provide funds and technical assistance only and to encourage complete self-determination. Once funding approval has been granted, an individual group or organization is required to exercise freedom and independence in conducting its own program.

The GCSP is a nationwide effort. It seeks to serve poor people in every area, in rural regions and in the cities, whether the poor be white or black or members of any minority group.

Eligible groups who desire the assistance of the General Convention Special Program are *urged* to contact:

Mr. Leon Modeste, GCSP Director
Episcopal Church Center
815 Second Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
Phone: 212-867-8400

A more detailed question-and-answer probe concerning the GCSP is available from the same office.



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