



## NATIONAL COUNCIL/EPISCOPAL CHURCH

NOT FOR RELEASE BEFORE SUNDAY, MAY 26

DOUGLAS A. BUSHY, PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER • PHONE: TN 7-8400

### FULL TEXT OF STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE U.S.A.

Recent events in a number of American communities---Birmingham, Chicago, Nashville, New York, and Raleigh, to mention only the most prominent--underscore the fact that countless citizens have lost patience with the slow pace of response to their legitimate cry for human rights. Pleas of moderation or caution about timing on the part of white leaders are seen increasingly as an unwillingness to face the truth about the appalling injustice which more than a tenth of our citizens suffer daily. While we are thankful for the progress that has been made, this is not enough.

Our Church's position on racial inclusiveness within its own body and its responsibility for racial justice in society has been made clear on many occasions by the General Convention. But there is urgent need to demonstrate by specific actions what God has laid on us. Such actions must move beyond expressions of corporate penitence for our failures to an unmistakable identification of the Church, at all levels of its life, with those who are victims of oppression.

I think of the words we sing as we hail the ascended Christ, "Lord and the ruler of all men", and of our prayers at Whitsuntide as we ask God to work His will in us through his Holy Spirit. And then in contrast to our praises and our prayers our failure to put ourselves at the disposal of the Holy Spirit becomes painfully clear. Only as we take every step possible to join with each other across lines of racial separation in a common struggle for justice will our unity in the Spirit become a present reality.

It is not enough for the Church to exhort men to be good. Men, women and children are today risking their livelihood and their lives in protesting for their rights. We must support and strengthen their protest in every way possible, rather than give support to the forces of resistance by our silence. It should be a cause of rejoicing to the Christian community that Negro Americans and oppressed peoples everywhere are displaying a heightened sense of human dignity in their refusal to accept second class citizenship any longer.

-more-

The right to vote, to eat a hamburger where you want, to have a decent job, to live in a house fit for habitation: these are not rights to be litigated or negotiated. It is our shame that demonstrations must be carried out to win them. These constitutional rights belong to the Negro as to the white, because we are all men and we are all citizens. The white man needs to recognize this if he is to preserve his own humanity. It is a mark of the inversion of values in our society that those who today struggle to make the American experiment a reality through their protest are accused of disturbing the peace -- and that more often than not the Church remains silent on this, our greatest domestic moral crisis.

I commend these specific measures to your attention: 1) I would ask you to involve yourselves. The crisis in communities North and South in such matters as housing, employment, public accommodations, and schools is steadily mounting. It is the duty of every Christian citizen to know fully what is happening in his own community, and actively to support efforts to meet the problems he encounters.

2) I would also ask you to give money as an expression of our unity and as a sign of our support for the end of racial injustice in this land. The struggle of Negro Americans for their rights is costly, both in terms of personal sacrifice and of money, and they need help.

3) I would ask you to take action. Discrimination within the Body of the Church itself is an intolerable scandal. Every congregation has a continuing need to examine its own life and to renew those efforts necessary to insure its inclusiveness fully. Diocesan and church-related agencies, schools and other institutions also have a considerable distance to go in bringing their practices up to the standard of the clear position of the Church on race. I call attention to the firm action of the recent Convention of the Diocese of Washington which directed all diocesan-related institutions to eliminate any discriminatory practices within six months. It further requested the Bishop and Executive Council to take steps necessary to disassociate such diocesan and parish-related institutions from moral or financial support if these practices are not eliminated in the specified time. I believe we must make known where we stand unmistakably.

So I write with a deep sense of the urgency of the racial crisis in our country and the necessity for the Church to act. Present events reveal the possible imminence of catastrophe. The entire Christian community must pray and act.

Arthur Lichtenberger  
Presiding Bishop