

Two Statements from:

*The  
Prayer Pilgrimage  
to the  
60th General Convention  
of the  
Episcopal Church*



**September, 1961**

▲ *On September 11, 1961, twenty-eight clergymen of the Episcopal Church met in New Orleans to begin a pilgrimage of prayer to the 60th General Convention of the Church opening in Detroit on September 17th. They prepared the following message to the Convention and the Church at large.*

**A**s priests of the Church, we have prepared this statement to interpret the message we bear to the General Convention by our journey from New Orleans. While we speak only for ourselves, 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 all others concerned that the Church be more truly itself.

**Our message is** that the Church must become, in every phase of its life, that which by the grace of God it is—one Holy Fellowship where racial barriers have been done away.

**We recognize and share** in the Church's appalling failure to express this in its life. We are justifiably chided by the irreligious for the emptiness of our pronouncements. We are also aware that individual circumstances determine the immediate and direct steps to be taken by Christians in a particular place, but nothing can be allowed to blur for us what the perfect Will of God is. We seek by our journey to express our common repentance and witness to His Will.

**Since the Church is one**, even as the nation is one, 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 Jesus Christ, 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 in the South, or our destination in the North, or in the larger areas they represent, have we any reason for complacency over the quality of Church life in which we all are involved, or its effect in the general community.

**At the beginning** of our journey, we shall see *segregation* in the Body of Christ as found in some of the educational facilities we are to visit. 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 the state in the removal of racial restrictions.

At the end of the pilgrimage 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. Men are forced to live in separate areas and they go to separate churches. Our "separate but equal" parish system, as it exists in the North as well as the South, is partly a result of the housing pattern but also a contributor to it.

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 so that the Church might focus on its 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 Christians, cannot be divided according to the ways of the world. It is in His Name that we go forth, and to Him we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies. In these days of world crisis, with darkening signs on all sides, may His Church, at least, be found faithful. Amen.

- ▲ *On September 12th two Church schools were visited. Housed that night at a college in Tougaloo, Mississippi, the pilgrimage participants conferred with local citizens and Episcopal clergy from a neighboring diocese.*
- ▲ *On September 13th fifteen of the pilgrims were arrested in a Jackson, Mississippi, bus terminal as they sought to eat before departing for Sewanee, Tennessee. Seven others, who were to have met with Jackson clergy and civic leaders, went on to Sewanee and then to Dearborn, Michigan, completing the original itinerary with the unveiling of a placard at the convention hall in Detroit.*

▲ *Five priests maintained a vigil in Jackson, ministering to the needs of their brother clergy in jail and seeking funds for their release on bond so that the conviction might be appealed.*

▲ *On September 20th all but two of the pilgrims were reunited at Detroit at the dinner addressed by the Archbishop of Capetown. At this occasion the following statement was read in behalf of the entire group.*

**A**lmighty God in His mercy having brought us safely to the end of our journey, we who have made this pilgrimage together desire to return public thanks for the multitude of graces which He has bestowed upon us.

Among the chief of these has been the support of countless faithful people through prayer, public testimony, and material assistance offered in many cases in the face of deeply hostile community sentiment. To our admiration for the Christian courage of those who supported us in such situations we add our humble recognition that they have participated in our pilgrimage even more truly than we who have actually made it.

We thank God also for the extraordinary consciousness of His presence and protection which we have enjoyed throughout our days together. We lay our now completed pilgrimage at His feet to make use of us as He will.

• We wish to record our admiration for the clergy of the South whom we have met along our way and for many, many more we did not meet, who are ministering faithfully under an almost unbearable tension between what the Gospel says and what their people will hear. We call upon the Church in other parts of the land to be generous with its prayers for priests laboring in such circumstances, to be forbearing in judgment, and to be diligent in seeking means of practical assistance.

At the same time we affirm that the Gospel must be preached even when the Word of God is sharp and cutting. We remind the laity of the South of their duty to love and support those who are their pastors in Christ and of the fact that no loyalty to the secular community in which they live or its traditional way of life can rightfully oppose the just claims of their brothers in Christ to be treated as such, to receive full personal, social, and political acceptance within the Church and in the larger community.

**For part of our group** the journey we had planned was interrupted by action of civil authorities, an action which we protest on grounds both legal and moral and which we are appealing. As a result we were prevented from devoting as much attention to the Church's situation in the North as we had hoped. A part of our group, however, was able to keep our appointment with the Ministers' Association of Dearborn, Michigan. The problems apparent there are problems familiar to most of our group in the areas from which they come, and we believe ourselves both competent to speak to them and compelled to do so.

**In the degree** to which community feeling in the North is less obdurately set against racial integration than in the South, to that degree the Church is more culpable in its failure to purify its own life of all traces of racial separation and to exert vigorous leadership against this deformity in the life of society at large. We may expect little mercy from our Heavenly Judge if out of willful blindness, indifference, or fear of inconvenient consequences Churchmen in the North tolerate in comfort the evil which is crucifying brave Churchmen in the South.

**We call upon laymen** in the North to remember that in every action of theirs the Church is acting. In their actions as land owners, tenants, mortgage brokers, realtors, and bankers the Church can and must act against the pattern of segregated housing. In their actions as corporate managers, union leaders, personnel directors, shareholders, and legislators laymen can and must act as the Church to secure equality of employment for all, regardless of race. As school administrators, P.T.A. members, civic officials, and voters laymen can and must act for the Church against the Northern pattern of inequality and de facto segregation in schooling.

**We call upon the clergy** in the North to educate and encourage the laity in this task and not to neglect their own urgent responsibility to be sure that their own parish churches seek out and welcome people of all races and admit them warmly to all activities of the parish family.

**We respectfully urge** our bishops, our chief pastors and the unique symbols of the Church's wholeness, to lay seriously to heart the dangers in which we stand by reason of our unhappy divisions and to be brave and imaginative leaders in resolving them. In particular we call to their attention the lamentable pattern of clergy

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placement along racial lines and the existence of institutions which claim the name of the Church yet which refuse to serve its members without respect to race.

**Time is short.** Let Christ's Body be rent no more. God save us all. Amen.

- ▲ *Two of the pilgrim priests remained in the Jackson City Jail until the close of Convention on September 29th. There they continued the daily Celebrations of the Eucharist and the discipline of prayer maintained by all of the pilgrims in behalf of the Convention and the cleansing of Christ's Body of segregation and separation.*
- ▲ *Further trials for the fifteen clergy are scheduled in May of 1962. Funds are needed for the travel and legal expenses involved in the appeals procedure and for the anticipated increase in the amount of appeal bonds while the cases remain in Mississippi courts.*
- ▲ *Checks made payable to the Prayer Pilgrimage Appeal Fund may be sent to the Atlanta office of the Episcopal Society at the address below.*

**NOTE:** On April 9 it was announced that the Hinds County Court was dismissing charges against the clergy "...out of respect for the Episcopal Church..." Nine of the Pilgrim clergy went to Jackson on April 10 to intercede for others similiarly arrested, whereupon it was announced the clergy would be tried as originally scheduled.

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