

1EK40.04

The Tougaloo homecoming of the twelve prisoners was a celebration, a time for ~~the~~ joy, although all of us knew that these twelve ~~and~~ might well return to prison to serve their sentences if we lost the appeals. In reality there was little to celebrate in the Movement in Mississippi in the fall of 1963. Ole Miss had been resegregated, ~~and there~~ ^{several} ~~was~~ ~~no~~ white churches had been resegregated; Medgar Evers was dead; the Federal government offered little help at any point; voter registration work by SNCC was a massive failure because of the ~~illegal~~ power of the white registrars. At no place could the Movement really show success; but the success that we did understand was that the Movement was expanding rapidly into new communities and receiving the support of thousands of formerly quiet Black citizens. The Movement was moving on many fronts. We were attacked but we had not been destroyed--despite growing white violence and the expanding powers of the police-state. Momentary victories, ~~like~~ like the release of the twelve on ~~by~~ bail, were celebrated as portents of ~~the~~ future change. But that future was so distant that we used any event as a cause for celebration; and any celebration as an act of worship to ~~give~~ ^{show our} ~~us~~ fellowship and build our strength for

the struggle and defeat of the next day--and for the unknown terror of every night.

In contrast to our mood of celebration and joy was the anger, bitterness, frustration, and confusion within the closed white churches with the nicely dressed usher-guards, and the uniformed, helmeted, armed police guards. In churches of several denominations there were people who found they just could no longer worship in such an atmosphere, knowing what the guards and police might do, waiting to hear the siren of the police car taking men to jail wailing above the soft organ tones. Some people stayed with their church as long as they could, trying to persuade other church members that morally the church was obligated to ~~o~~ open the doors, and that the only way to get the police to leave was to let everyone know this was an open church. But the time for most moderates to be effective was prior to the police take over. Some of these moderate and liberal Christians found that they did need worship in their own lives. In several denominations a kind of "house-church" was set up. In ^{an} almost New Testament sense several church members would gather in someone's home and, in almost a secret atmosphere, have a short worship service.

We in the Tougaloo Movement kept up with these developments in the white churches through concerned and sympathetic churchmen such as Millsaps faculty members, like Lee and Jerry Reiff out of ~~the~~ Capitol St. Church and Bob and Carol Bergmark out of Galloway Church. We had always thought we would need the help of these people; now we found that they sometimes needed encouragement from us, reassurance that things were not as desperate or hopeless as the pessimism they felt. ~~by these people who had tried so hard~~

The most beautiful and most courageous act by these concerned white churchmen was the response of Francis Stevens, a prominent lawyer and in Jackson and an active ~~lay~~ member member of the Methodist church whose Christian faith was the foundation and guide for ~~his~~ his life. When an integrated group of visitors was arrested at his own church he came to the City Jail to visit them, especially to talk to a fellow Methodist layman from Ohio who had knowingly risked arrest at the church. Stevens was risking his own job and the reputation and ~~every~~ security of his family and children who attended local schools. Francis Stevens ~~contacted~~ contacted me and even offered to help raise the bail bond money, and was

willing to allow his own home to be used as security on the bonds. In awe and humility, as well as with gratitude, I said we would continue to raise the money in the north, that we could not let him risk his home, that his work and witness (like that of Lee Reiff who was willing to join the visits ~~and~~ be arrested at his own church if ~~that~~ that would help) was important and should not be ~~destroyed~~ destroyed by this act. (And again I wondered whether I let "strategy" get in the way of Christian witness.)