

A STATEMENT BY THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

The statement below was adopted and issued by the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, meeting in Detroit, Michigan, November 13, 1963. Following the statement is the response made to the Bishops by a group of concerned persons who had gone to Detroit to express concern for the cause of racial justice and church renewal, plus a critique of the statement, and a concrete recommendation by one of the members of the Behold editorial board.

The Methodist Church stands for the equal rights of all racial, cultural, and religious groups. We confess with deep penitence that our performance as a church has not kept pace with our profession. The right to choose a place of residence, to enter a school, to secure employment, to vote or to join a church, should in no way be limited by a person's race or culture.

The Methodist Church must build and demonstrate within its own organization and program a fellowship without racial barriers. The church must also work to change those community patterns in which racial segregation appears, including education, housing, voting, employment and the use of public facilities. To insist that restaurants, schools, business establishments, and hotels provide equal accommodations for all peoples without regard to race or color, but to exempt the church from the same requirements is to be guilty of absurdity as well as sin.

We urge our pastors upon whom rests the responsibility of receiving persons into the church, to receive all who are qualified and who desire to be received without regard to race, color, or national origin, and we individually and collectively pledge them our support as they do so. The Methodist Church is an inclusive church.

We decry, on legal as well as Christian grounds, the denial to any person of any color or race the right of membership or the right to worship in any Methodist Church. Further, to move to arrest any persons attempting to worship is to us an outrage.

We call upon all Methodist institutions, where such has not been done, to bring their racial policies and practices in line with the Christian principles of racial inclusiveness to which we are committed.

We affirm the legality and right of those minorities who are oppressed anywhere in the world, to protest, to assemble in public, and to agitate "for the redress

of grievances," provided this is done in an orderly way. A public march as a vast petition for attention and justice is in line with the principles on which this nation was founded. The recent march in Washington provided a spectacular and well-directed move of this kind.

We note with satisfaction the increasing appreciation in our land and over the world of a growing spirit of justice and good will which in time will enable our people, both as churchmen and as citizens, to resolve unbrotherly tensions. Much has been accomplished and much more will be accomplished as the months go by. Constructive, if unnoticed, work has been going on over our whole land and our church has been among the foremost in calling for brotherhood and justice, and for an end to long entrenched evil. We rejoice that in community after community, city after city, state after state, good will and good laws have moved ahead with men and women of good intent working well together.

We call upon all of our pastors and members, and the people of our land and of all lands, to so speak and so live as to deepen by word and deed the brotherhood of man and make this a reality instead of a hope.

TO THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS
Brethren in Christ:

1EK56.44f

We wish to express to you our appreciation and support of the statement which you have issued, for where there is effective and forthright moral leadership at the top, those who work for an inclusive church and an open society are greatly strengthened, the undecided or timid are encouraged to take a positive position, and those who support a segregated church and society are impeded in their efforts to threaten, intimidate and inflame their fellow Christians. It is precisely this quality of forthright and unequivocal leadership which only the Council of bishops can supply, and which until now has not been forthcom-

ing. This leadership vacuum in the Methodist Church has helped to produce the present crisis in which we find the precepts of Jesus flouted, the Church silent on crucial issues, and a situation in which we have expressed more concern for unity as an institution than for unity in Christ.

We applaud your forthright statement that "The Methodist Church must build and demonstrate within its organization and program a Fellowship without racial barriers." To that end we ask your active leadership, and we can commend for your consideration the following specific steps:

That the Council of Bishops

(1) Call upon the Methodist Churches of Jackson, Mississippi to immediately open their doors to all who come;

(2) Affirm the actions of ministers, laymen and students who have attempted to worship at Jackson, Mississippi in support of the Gospel and the Discipline;

(3) State your support of the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction and full integration of the Central Jurisdiction Churches and ministers into the geographic annual conferences in which they are located;

(4) State your support of the assignment of Bishops by the General Conference;

(5) State your endorsement of a General Conference program of Methodist support of the struggle for human rights by:

(a) Assignment of staff and funds to assist in economic rehabilitation, literacy training, and voter registration;

(b) Assignment of funds to assist in civil rights bail bond and legal defense costs;

(c) Assignment of staff and funds to participation in direct action for human rights;

(6) Urge every Bishop to call upon each pastor and church in his area to immediately and deliberately move toward an open and integrated membership and to support those pastors and churches who so act with the power of their office and annual conference funds;

(7) To communicate to every local church the full text of your statement of November 13th, 1963.

Methodists for Church Renewal
James H. Laird, chairman

(In addition to that of Dr. Laird, the statement bears the signatures of thirteen committee members representing seven cities or areas, and of thirty-four Detroit Methodist ministers.)

A CRITIQUE AND A PROPOSAL

The *Christian Advocate* (Dec. 5) characterizes the recent Bishops' statement as "strong." When laid against the racial crisis of our day, the statement appears to one reader as less than adequate. We may give thanks for its basic direction. Yet theological, ecclesiastical, and strategic questions need to be raised.

(1) *Theological.* One looks in vain in the statement for the foundations of Christian thought and action. This is no plea for pious recitation of Christian symbols. But to set forth a statement which reflects worldly wisdom on justice, more than it does the Source of all truth, undercuts the *raison d'être* of the church. Is justice the will of God, or of the Methodist Church?

Further, there is a lack of urgency in the tone and content of the message. The priority of the racial question in the life of today's church is not spelled out. There is little reflection on the "repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" posture of the New Testament. "Freedom now" is not an empty phrase to prod recalcitrants into civil rights militancy—it should be burning on the lips of every Christian. The pace of the past or the present in race relations is nothing to "note with satisfaction." Justice for all is "at hand" but we will be a church with too little, too late, if there is no more sense of urgency among us than is conveyed by the Bishops' statement.

(2) *Ecclesiastical.* Strange is the statement's silence on the problem of the Central Jurisdiction. To say that "the Methodist Church must build and demonstrate within its own organization and program a Fellowship without racial barriers," and not to confess the tragic separations within the church institutionalized by the existence of the Central Jurisdiction indicates spiritual blindness.

(3) *Strategy.* Proposals for action are notably lacking. It is one matter to call for deeds as well as words. It is another thing to spell out deeds which the Council itself might undertake. Can we take seriously the pledge of the bishops "collectively" to support Methodist ministers who speak out unequivocally regarding race and then are dismissed from their charges? What do the bishops propose to do "collectively" when the next sixteen pastors in Mississippi