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A M E R I C A N F R I E N D S S E R V I C E C O M M I T T E E

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PROGRAM

HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA

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Report of School Desegregation Program Activities During 1958-58

As the second year of the American Friends Service Committee's school desegregation program comes to an end staff see the program meeting a pressing need for the resources of experience, imagination, and courage which are so necessary if progress is to be made toward genuine compliance with the school desegregation decision of the Supreme Court.

The first year of the work was characterized by the excitement of inaugurating a program within what seemed to be a framework of compliance to the Supreme Court's decision in the only Southeastern state not committed to massive resistance.

During this first year the AFSC program received splendid cooperation from school officials in several communities. It conducted a successful seminar for 40 teachers in the Greensboro school system, served as convenor for several planning and strategy groups throughout the state, established personal contact with policy makers, and disseminated information on school desegregation to key persons and groups.

The first year of the program ended on a very positive note with the pattern of complete segregation in the Southeast being broken for the first time by three major school systems in North Carolina. Eleven Negro students in Charlotte, Greensboro and Winston-Salem were accepted into seven previously all-white schools.

In contrast, the second year of the program has been strongly influenced by the overall atmosphere of increased resistance and tension throughout the South, emphasized by the violence of Little Rock and Nashville and the legal battles of Virginia. At the end of the second year of the program, with schools again open for the fall term, there are still only 11 Negro students in five desegregated schools in Charlotte, Greensboro and Winston-Salem. Five of the new group are in desegregated schools for the first time, a similar number from the year before having graduated or been transferred back to all-Negro schools. Another 96 transfer applicants in these three cities and in other parts of the state were rejected this fall.

Problems Due to Increased Tensions

The growing acceptance of the idea throughout the South that resistance to desegregation can be successful and is even honorable has undoubtedly influenced the scene in North Carolina by helping to create an atmosphere of caution and

resistance on the part of school officials, state and community leaders, Negro parents and the public-at-large to increased desegregation efforts.

These factors have caused or emphasized such difficulties as:

1. The reluctance of school boards and superintendents to initiate further changes in school patterns by increasing desegregation or by making preparation of students and personnel for further changes in the future. There has been an apparent feeling of need by these officials for support from other community leaders and agencies in making community preparation before further school desegregation can be attempted.
2. The increased reluctance of state and community leaders to make plans for desegregation, or, in many instances, to even discuss the issue. When discussion was possible many leaders expressed desire for "a cooling off period", a "breathing spell", a time for evaluating the situation before moving ahead with desegregation efforts.
3. The increased reluctance of Negroes to become desegregation pioneers. Fears, real and unreal, of economic and physical and social reprisals for themselves and their children have caused many to shy away from becoming pioneers. The publicity given to harrowing experiences of Negro children in other desegregation situations has increased unwillingness of many Negro parents in North Carolina to expose their children to the possibilities of such experiences.

There was some harrassment of Negro students in North Carolina, the worst being in Charlotte (case of Dorothy Counts) but all such cases were exaggerated by over-emphasis in mass media and the minds of many people.

Some actual job losses by Negroes engaging in desegregation activities, other economic pressures, threats of violence by klan groups and some actual violence by such groups have caused many Negroes to be overly-cautious and inhibited about becoming desegregation pioneers.

#### Long Range Problems

Other long range difficulties facing the A.F.S.C. program during the past year included:

1. The natural resistance of people, white and Negro, to social change. This involves the reluctance of parents and children to venture out of a life-long segregated environment, the fear of being unable to cope successfully with new situations which might arise in a desegregated situation, and the influence of peers and leaders guided by sterotype beliefs.
2. The lack of sufficient leadership in the field of school desegregation. Not only has there been no leadership at the policy-making levels seeking constructive

ways of eliminating segregation and discrimination in the public schools, but there has been no human relations agency in North Carolina other than A.F.S.C. with an organized school program to which citizens and parents could turn for help with school desegregation problems.

Accomplishments During the Past Year

Despite these difficulties AFSC worked actively in several communities, emphasis being given to Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Raleigh. Some work was done also in Durham and High Point.

Activities included:

1. Maintaining continuous personal contact with school officials and reassignees in desegregated situations in Greensboro and Winston-Salem and encouraging each to work toward making the desegregation situation successful.

The program was particularly successful in counseling school officials in Greensboro and Winston-Salem on how to assist students of both races to accommodate themselves to school desegregation. Staff kept in touch with and counseled pioneers continuously. Work with white students was handled indirectly through a few religious leaders, parents, and school personnel.

Individual conferences were held by staff with officials of school systems of Chapel Hill, Durham, Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh, and Winston-Salem to challenge them to accept their responsibilities as educators in a day of changing social patterns and to recognize their obligations to students and parents in providing not only the most adequate physical and technical facilities for learning, but to insure the emotional conditions most conducive for children to grow and develop normally. Officials were encouraged to plan for adequate understanding and preparation by their teaching staffs to deal with human relations problems which would become more clearly focused in desegregated school situations, the availability of A.F.S.C. services in setting up human relations seminars, workshops, etc. being explained.

In Greensboro, the school superintendent cooperated by giving approval for A.F.S.C. to conduct a one day workshop for the city's public school teachers. The workshop, planned by a steering committee of teachers for May 3, 1958, had to be cancelled because of insufficient registration. Factors contributing to failure of the workshop were a) poor timing - scheduled at season when there were too many conflicts with normal school activities, b) public sentiment - there was an increase in racial tensions in community about this time because of efforts to integrate public recreational facilities, c) lack of sufficient support from school administration, d) indifference on part of teachers.

2. Conferring with religious leaders and groups in Chapel Hill, Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh and Winston-Salem to help clarify the role and responsibilities of leaders and churches in working to eliminate racial segregation in schools. Such groups and individuals were encouraged and assisted by staff in making plans to work with individual families in desegregated schools to encourage the practice of religious principles in crisis situations, to challenge the church at large to be guided by religious principles in adjusting to basic changes in school patterns, to develop race relations educational programs within local churches, to promote better understanding of other racial and religious groups by exchange of programs on adult and youth levels and to promote the conditions for and acceptance of the role of pioneers, both white and Negro, for changing racial patterns in schools.

Examples of activities by religious leaders and groups which were encouraged and supported by A.F.S.C. staff included discussions with church youth groups in Greensboro on the application of religious and democratic principles to school citizenship, an interracial picnic for family groups sponsored by Greensboro YWCA religious emphasis committee, parent education meetings on school desegregation in Negro churches in Chapel Hill, Greensboro and Raleigh, and an integrated Vacation Bible School sponsored by a group of churches in Chapel Hill.

A special project which A.F.S.C. co-sponsored was a workshop on the Role of the Negro Church in School Integration for Negro ministers from Greensboro, High Point and Reidsville. The other sponsor for the one-day workshop was the Greensboro Ministers Forum, an all-Negro organization. The workshop, led by a prominent minister from Nashville, Tennessee, was attended by 28 ministers. Staff was largely responsible for motivating interest in workshop, planning program and obtaining services of leader.

3. Counseling Negro parents and children has been a project of special significance. House meetings with small groups of parents were held in Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Carrboro. At such meetings staff counseled parents who faced the problem of continuing voluntary participation in school segregation. These meetings provided technical knowledge of school procedures and of the school law to some parents who did not know their rights, gave moral support to those who planned to bring test cases and challenged others to work to eliminate racial segregation in the schools. At several meetings student pioneers from the year before were used as resource persons and these meetings helped parents to understand the role they must play if a desegregated school system in North Carolina is to result under present legal conditions, and they helped prepare such parents mentally and emotionally to accept this role.

Statistically, 101 applications for transfer of Negro children to desegregated schools were made this year throughout the state. Staff worked directly with 34 of these and indirectly with another 43. The other 24 cases were in the eastern part of the state (Craven County) in an area unexplored by staff up to this time.

4. Serving as coordinator on special projects for individuals and organized groups seeking to eliminate segregation and discrimination in Greensboro public schools. These included the Greensboro Interracial Commission and the Commission's Parent Forum, Ministers' Forum, NAACP, Alpha Kappa Alpha (graduate chapter of Negro sorority), Parent's Education Commission, and selected religious leaders.

Projects included giving encouragement to individual Negro pioneers and their families, particularly those being harrassed; providing tutoring service for Negro pioneers who needed such, giving financial aid to students and families where physical needs existed; sponsoring trip for several students to Southwide Highlander Folk School Conference for school desegregation pioneers.

5. Assisting in making local plans regarding school desegregation with interested racial and interracial organizations and groups in Chapel Hill, Durham, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and with the N. C. Council of Human Relations in Charlotte. Efforts were made to get such groups and organizations to take greater responsibility for action in school desegregation and to serve as local coordinators for such action.

6. Disseminating information on school desegregation to key persons and groups. A.F.S.C. services during the past year were expanded to include a monthly newsletter, giving up-to-date information on school desegregation developments in North Carolina, selected facts about nation-wide desegregation, and pertinent quotes, reprints and suggested readings from current speeches, articles, or books, relating to desegregation and human relations.

The Newsletter is mailed each month to about 500 persons and groups in North Carolina, including selected school officials and teachers, groups interested in school desegregation and human relations, religious leaders, public officials and other interested citizens.

#### Things Learned During Past Year

Experiences during the past year with the school desegregation program have pointed up certain rather distinct factors which need to be considered carefully in making plans for the future.

1. One of the most important reasons for continuing the A.F.S.C. school program is to insure that a state of movement will be continued in North Carolina, not

allowing ideas of status quo or slowing down or stopping for a breathing spell to permeate the state and its people. State and local leaders and the public-at-large needs to be continually challenged and prodded and reminded of the need for plans and actions regarding present and potential school desegregation in the state.

2. The nature of the Pearsall Plan and the apparent unwillingness or inability of school and state officials to move in good faith even within the framework of the Plan creates a greater need than ever for a positive, constructive, and imaginative AFSC program which would promote a climate of public opinion enabling school boards to implement the Supreme Court's decision with good faith through the Pearsall Plan or to find other ways in which the Supreme Court's ruling can be carried out in North Carolina.

The Plan is set up to place the entire obligation for action on the shoulders of individual Negro parents, but at present the uncertain results of such action, the long and complicated and possibly legally expensive problems involved make it necessary for other approaches to be found for action within or beyond the plan itself. If the Plan is to work more successfully for desegregation than it does at present, other community leaders and agencies must be influenced to share responsibilities for it with school officials.

3. Most state and community leaders appear willing to defend law and order and the preservation of the public school system but willing for various reasons to take a positive stand defending or calling for more than token desegregation. There is need for seeking out and encouraging strong leadership in this area.

4. Staff has a growing feeling that increased pressure from Negroes, if wisely applied, would bring about further desegregation in North Carolina public schools. This appears likely in a number of communities including the three which now have limited desegregation.

5. There is mounting evidence that the number of parents seeking reassignment for their children would be considerably increased if fear of job reprisals could be removed. During the past year at least 60 families with whom staff worked would have sought reassignment for their children except for this factor. Fears of other types of reprisals - social and physical - have been largely overcome among many parents.

6. There are many potentialities for action by religious leaders and groups in North Carolina opposing segregation and racial discrimination.

There has been a growing interest in and discussion of such matters by ministers groups, church conferences, youth groups and conferences, and individual religious leaders representing various religious groups in the state.

7. Some research indicates that the majority of people in the state are neither strong pro-segregationists nor strong pro-integrationists. A recent University of North Carolina survey in the Winston-Salem area indicated presence of small percentages of each of above groups with about 60 per cent of people being willing to be swayed either way.

8. In contrast to other Southern states where massive resistance to desegregation is defended by extensive legal systems, the North Carolina Pearsall Plan, if applied in good faith, permits legal desegregation. This means that there is at least a framework in North Carolina within which desegregation can be carried out legally.

#### Plans for the Coming year

The above factors plus recent national developments will greatly influence the A.F.S.C. school program for the coming year.

Among the national factors are the Supreme Court's recent ruling regarding Little Rock and other federal action indicating that present programs of resistance to desegregation will not be tolerated indefinitely.

Therefore, at the beginning of this third year of the A.F.S.C. school program we would like to accept the goal of an all out effort to exploit the potentialities of this situation. This may result in major shifts in program emphasis, working in new communities, using different techniques, and making use of the resources of the state and leading universities in the state in a much more significant way than in the past.

Specifically this would involve:

1. Extensive state-wide explorations to:
  - a. Discover the potentialities of new communities in which at least a start toward integration might be made. This will involve considerable travel, visits to superintendents, state officials, religious leaders, sympathetic contacts of A.F.S.C. and other known liberals.
  - b. Discover resources of the universities for help in desegregation. Such resources could help locate communities with the social structure with the greatest potentiality for change, and could provide insight on how to affect changes in racial patterns in the state.
  - c. Gain new insights into leadership patterns, Negro and white, to be sure we are using best potential for change and to involve those leaders best able to motivate others in the community.
  - d. Discover best potential for working with and coordinating the efforts of other organizations in community.

- e. Visit religious leaders, educational associations, PTA groups, etc., to ascertain thinking of constituency and to get names of potentially interested persons and groups.
- f. Involve persons of stature in the desegregation effort.

## 2. Projects

- a. University of North Carolina seminar on the impact of the Supreme Court's latest decision on the North Carolina situation; to assess desegregation in the state and point out possibilities and potentialities for the future.
- b. Projects involving Negro colleges to get them to do research on several communities in the state to determine leadership patterns.
- c. Several Negro leadership institutes involving ministers and other leaders on how to make moves toward school desegregation.
- d. Mass media efforts to affect climate of receptivity to desegregation.
- e. Work with youth groups, white and Negro, in activities which would increase their self-confidence in interracial situations.
- f. Work with school boards by cultivating working relationship with individual members where ever possible and by providing consultative service or visits to desegregated areas for school boards.

## 3. General Activities

- a. Encourage discussion of the Pearsall Plan in white and Negro and interracial groups in the light of the Supreme Court decision.
- b. Encourage more cooperation in Negro community on school desegregation activities.
- c. In general, work within the framework of the Pearsall Plan in new communities and where this seems to be the only possibility for change.
- d. Assist Negroes to present in a strong and dignified manner their objection to the Plan and seek to find ways - especially where there seems to be an impasse - of working for desegregation outside the Plan or in ways which challenge the Plan.

### Activities for Immediate Future: October - December:

- 1. Follow up on new and former reassignees and on all who have been denied reassignment.
- 2. Conversations at colleges, white and Negro, to encourage surveys, etc., which would be helpful in determining community attitudes and potentialities in area of desegregation.
- 3. Investigate and develop plans for University of North Carolina seminar.

4. Begin discussion groups in white, Negro, and interracial groups on desegregation and the Pearsall Plan.
5. Promote and co-sponsor Negro leadership institutes in selected cities.
6. Investigate ways of involving public school teachers and PTA's across racial lines.
7. Contact mass media leaders and explore possibilities of gaining their support in creating a public opinion favorable to further desegregation.
8. Travel to assess situation in state and to locate new communities where we might begin work on desegregation. This would involve visits to the key individuals and policy makers in a number of areas.
9. Involve persons of stature in desegregation activities.
10. Work with church and education organizations, especially youth groups in selected cities.

By the end of December we should know about:

1. Potentialities in new communities.
2. New sources for help in organizations, especially religious, educational or human relations organizations.
3. Result of discussions on the Supreme Court ruling as it applies to the Pearsall Plan and desegregation process in North Carolina.
4. Potentiality for new vigor in Negro communities.
5. Temper of state officialdom in light of recent Supreme Court decision.