

STUDENTS REPORT FROM THE SUMMER OF 1963

Contained in the following excerpts are reflections and insights from some of the participating students this past summer. The selections are aimed at giving a broad base of observations and reactions.

It was dusk when I neared the mountain, and at its base I perceived what appeared to be a beast. But as I drew nearer, I saw that it was a man. When I reached him, I found he was my brother.

(Anthony Campbell)

We were afraid of the unknown, afraid that there would be differences. We were identifying these differences with their being Negroes. We were prejudiced, for we were worried that "they" worshipped differently, had a different food diet, kept their homes in a different way, and subscribed to a different behavior pattern because they were Negroes. We were in a position of allowing these expectations to separate us. We had failed to confront our prejudices, bring them under control, and always to act remembering that we are all children of God.

(Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Klement)

...At Stratmoor Hills Methodist Church, I came to know men and women on a personal basis. A strong conviction of mine is that men don't like each other many times, because they don't know each other. Often they fail to know each other because prejudices prohibit such an encounter.

(Thomas Hoyt, Jr.)

I found in many of my parishioners a deep ability to love and understand life. On three different occasions a deep feeling was expressed to me for those white people who could not love others, because they know that those who hate certainly deprive themselves of much of life's happiness.

Another observation was the respect that Negroes have for white people. One man told me that he wished they could have a white pastor. This made me feel very uneasy.

(Sherwin Weener)

...I began to realize about two weeks before we terminated our services that I was still aware of why my parishioners thought of my race in general. They had been very kind to us, but I felt that there was a whole world of their feelings which they did not trust me enough to share with me. I was gratified that a couple of our people were willing to come to me in those last days and admit that in a few respects we had fit into their stereotypes of whites. We had seemed a little pushy and bent on having our own way...

I have never had cause to hate any man, but have often wondered if I could forgive him who gave me a reason to hate him. I still don't know how I would react, but I know if Christ is truly in control, we can forgive far beyond what the world would expect of us.

(Mr. & Mrs. Charles Boyer)

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...Maybe due to their relationship to me, some of these boys and girls will look with less prejudice on people of other races. If this can or did happen, then this is the primary contribution which the SIM as such can make.

(John Bethune)

...Now we are more able to understand what it means that reconciliation can take place only through the Christian faith. We have come to understand a great deal of what it must be like to be a man who is a Negro and have certain limitations made upon one's life. We leave determined to make known to others what conditions are like as we know them and what as Christians we must do to bring an end to this night of wrongs as we have come to know it. We leave, I think, with a genuine concern for our brother man.

(Daniel Klement)

Barriers were overcome as I got to know people. I felt completely at home with members of the community and with my summer family -- particularly with Larry, my five year old roommate, who used to lie awake at night waiting to pepper me with questions when I came into the room. By getting to know and love these people, the horrors of segregation reached my conscience. However, I could not identify with my friends to the extent of feeling the psychological burden of living under the shadow that a "white only" sign places on a person. I received flashes of what it must be like, but this is not sharing the frustration and the sense of rebellion which Negro youths must feel when they come to the realization that society does not treat them as equals.

(Bill Polk)

What bothered me most throughout the summer is the fact that I was on a one-way street. I was accepted in a Negro community as a neighbor, but how could I return this hospitality and love in my home community which is segregated. I guess this is a problem many white people have to struggle with...

(Bill Polk)

...By what criteria can one say his summer with SIM has been successful? By what standards can one say that his mission was accomplished? Of course, there are no objective criteria that can completely measure the impact of the work of any SIM student, but there might be some guidelines. Indeed, the good effect and results of working with SIM must go beyond the individual participant. Certainly, one cannot justify the activities this summer by simply saying: "It was an enriching experience for me." If the activities of the summer did not lead to some concrete and specific accomplishment in terms of desegregation, if there were no bridges of communication between the white and Negro communities, if there were no reasonably permanent friendships made and some deeply personal conversations with Negroes and whites, if there was no exchange of ideas between the white and Negro communities, then one might seriously question the effectiveness of his summer with SIM.

(Jim Watson)

It is too easy to hate those whites that hurl insults and spit on you as you walk along the streets of Charleston with fellow picketeers; too easy to condemn those who would try to kick or strike you at a sit-in demonstration; too easy to write off the white churches that bar their sanctuaries to Negroes Sunday after Sunday---to abhor those in authority who pervert justice and reincarnate the Auschwitzs' of another day via bestial penal institutions. Hate and condemnation come easily -- but effect no cures. Love and understanding test the depths of man's soul, but to learn and apply this ideology is to learn the true meaning of brotherhood and reconciliation.

(Doug Parks)

...Yet in the midst of a society thus wrent asunder, a kind of eschatological vision compels certain people to work courageously even in the darkest hours for its transformation and healing. How else could the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights have met weekly to sing songs of freedom and preach love toward the white man throughout seven years of Bull Connor's reign of terror? A genuinely Christian vision of an open society ruled by love nourishes "the Movement," whose president is Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. The verses of the well-known hymn of the Movement spell out this compelling vision: "We shall overcome someday...Black and white together...We'll walk hand in hand... Deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome someday." Experiences like that of singing this hymn while clasping the hand of the distinguished NAACP attorney, Mrs. Constance Baker Motley, somehow keep this vision alive when one inspects the blasted home of Atty. Arthur Shores the morning after it had been bombed the second time in two weeks. When we feared whether the Linseys' home might not be next, another verse of the hymn rose to meet our fear: "The Lord will see us through..."

(George McClain -
ALABAMA PROJECT)

Something died in me as I approached the mountain. Something died and was reborn in the dying of that day; something spoke from beastly, manlike, dim fear, saying, "Lo, I am with you even till the ends of the earth." "As I reached him I found he was my brother."

(Anthony Campbell)