

M. E. White

A SUMMARY OF RACE RELATIONS QUESTIONNAIRES - sent to 700 Friends Meetings.

The following summarizes the first 190 questionnaires returned by Meetings in response to a request of the Friends World Committee. The questions were designed as much to stimulate discussion as to gain precise information, so the responses do not give an exact picture of Friends attitudes and practices. They seem to give some indication of the way in which a sizeable portion of Friends in the U.S. regard race relations. The questions are summarized, not stated exactly as on the questionnaire.

FIRST--do Friends consider the broad problem of ending racial discrimination to be of primary importance or give it a lower rank?

Sixty-four per cent either believe the question is of primary importance and is, or should be, one of our primary concerns. OTHERS give it a lower rank or say that it is disregarded by their meeting. A LARGE GROUP of these said there is no local problem, or that they do not face the problem or that no Negroes live locally. MANY who saw the problem as a primary one, related it to other Friends beliefs, especially our peace testimony. "We cannot conceive how such inequalities as exist can be possibly construed as consistent with that of God in every man." (Conn)

SECOND--does the meeting agree that racial prejudice and discrimination should be ended, and, if so, what methods should be used?

THE GREAT MAJORITY said the meeting agrees, such discrimination should be ended. 41% of the replies indicate Friends should refuse, personally and corporately, to participate in any pattern of racial discrimination and segregation. OTHERS believe, in our segregated society, it is impossible to avoid participation in such patterns. OVER HALF of the meetings would persuade individuals to change. The same proportion believed that meetings and individuals should participate in organizations designed to bring changes in human relations and that legislation should be sought opposing discrimination and segregation. There was much less agreement on approval of direct-action, such as sit-ins. Only 45% would back such projects, while 26% said there were differences of opinion or that the meeting was uncertain. "The division seems to rest on whether or not such direct action as sit-ins contradicts Friends' beliefs in peaceful settlement of controversy." (Pa.)

THIRD--what are meetings doing to end discrimination in employment, education, housing and political opportunity? In other words, what of our corporate rather than our personal action, attitude and belief?

A FEW meetings are taking creative and pioneering action in these fields; individual members of many meetings have been quite active. MOST respondents indicated little or nothing as a meeting is being done in these areas. OF ACTIVE MEETINGS, some have surveyed local employment discrimination and have worked with employers on behalf of employment on merit. "Our meeting has used persuasion against discrimination at the local commercial swimming pool and against the lack of School Board interest in hiring Negro teachers." (Ohio) A North Carolina meeting presented a detailed plan to a local school board suggesting a practical method of achieving an integrated student body. A NUMBER of meetings, such as one in Wisconsin, collaborated with other groups in circulating a fair housing statement which could be signed to "indicate their readiness to accept members of minority groups as neighbors." But there was little indication of a willingness to take the necessary step of renting or selling property without discrimination. "Much reluctance is showing in willingness to accept the Negro as a next-door neighbor." (Kans.)

FOURTH--does your meeting have Negroes who are members or attenders?

EIGHTY PERCENT said they have no Negro members. Twenty-seven meetings said they do have Negro members. "In our small meeting, membership is equally divided between whites and Negroes. We feel this has strengthened our fellowship far beyond the numbers of people involved." (Md.) 79 meetings said they have no Negro attenders; 43 do have such visitors who come occasionally. Only 3 indicated they would not accept Negro applications for membership; the majority said that Negroes would be welcomed. "We would be as pleased to have Negro applicants as any other and membership would be, not on the basis of race, but commitment to the religious life." (Calif.)

Summarized by Dick Taylor (Condensed)

(Over)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Finally some 250 replies were received, but some 60 too late to be included on the other side. The fact that only 35% of the meetings replied seems to indicate less concern for race relations than one would expect from the Society of Friends. Both the failure to reply and the reported difficulty of some meetings in finding those who would attend the Third Conference on Race are sources of concern regarding this testimony and the importance attached to it. It seems more meetings rate race as a primary concern than treat it as such. Many meetings reveal lack of awareness of the problem which is a universal one, not limited to proximity of changing neighborhoods.

On the positive side, some Monthly Meetings have been deeply involved, working corporately, as a group or through committees, to support needed legislation, the matters of discrimination in public schools, employment, recreation, housing and other areas. Some meetings are concerned and working creatively to know Negroes as friends and to draw them into their meetings.

In almost all meetings individual Friends are encouraged to pursue their individual concerns in many areas, including sit-ins. A few meetings felt they did not dare discuss these problems because differences of viewpoint were so deep and strongly felt.

Often meetings actually working hardest on solutions were more critical of themselves than were others doing much less. On the whole, the statement of one Maryland meeting seems to reflect the feeling of most meetings and Friends: "Our consciences are troubled and we are concerned that our action achieve more nearly the depth of our persuasion."