

Statement by Clergy¹ in Response to Birmingham Demonstrations

In response to the protests in Birmingham in the spring of 1963, eight Alabama clergy leaders issued the following public declaration:

"We the undersigned clergymen are among those who, in January, issued "An Appeal for Law and in Order and Common Sense", dealing with racial problems in Alabama. We expressed understanding that honest convictions in racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts, but urged that decisions of those courts should in the meantime be peacefully obeyed. "Since that time there had been some evidence of increased forbearance and a willingness to face facts. Responsible citizens have undertaken to work on various problems which cause racial friction and unrest. In Birmingham, recent public events have given indication that we all have opportunity for a new constructive and realistic approach to racial problems.

"However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.

"We agree rather with certain local Negro leadership which has called for honest and open negotiations of racial issues in our area. And we believe this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our town metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experience of the local situation. All of us need to face that responsibility and find proper channels for its accomplishment.

"Just as we formerly pointed out that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions," we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.

"We commend the community as a whole, and the local news media and law enforcement officials in particular, on the calm manner in which these demonstrations have been handled. We urge the public to continue to show restraint should the demonstrations continue, and the law enforcement officials to remain calm and continue to protect our city from violence.

"We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders."

- C. C. J. Carpenter, D. D., LL.D., Episcopal bishop of Alabama
- Joseph A. Durick, D. D., auxiliary bishop, diocese of Mobile-Birmingham
- Rabbi Milton L. Grafman, Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham
- Bishop Paul Hardin, the Alabama-West Florida conference of the Methodist Church
- Bishop Nolan B. Harmon, bishop of the North Alabama conference of the Methodist Church
- George M. Murray, D. LL bishop coadjutor, Episcopal diocese of Alabama
- Edward V. Ramage, moderator, synod of the Alabama Presbyterian Church in the United States
- Earl Stallings, pastor, First Baptist Church, Birmingham.

¹ As published in the Birmingham Post Herald, April 13, 1963.