

LET THE CHURCH ORGANIZE THE UNEMPLOYED!!!

I. The Proposal in a Nutshell

The United Church of Christ is being asked to undertake a new and imaginative ministry to an almost forgotten people, the victims of "hard-core" or persistent unemployment. Up to now, the unemployed have not been articulate about their concerns, hopes, and fears. As a people they are not, and belong not. Their alienation increases, their status becomes more tarnished, their economic utility less clear, and their humanity denied. In a nutshell the proposal calls for this denomination to organize the unemployed on a pilot basis. A natural beginning is with the Negro unemployed who are doubly-affected in terms of their alienation. Five major metropolises with large Negro populations and appallingly high rates of unemployment are to be selected as pilot areas. Later, an area of high white unemployment concentration such as Pittsburgh may be selected for the sixth pilot spot.

One prime person is to be placed in a neighborhood with high unemployment in each of the pilot metropolises.

His goals:

(1) To organize the unemployed so that they are able to spell out concretely what they are to do and how if their present plight is to be improved and transformed.

(2) To make visible the invisible poor in order to get all elements of the metropolises to understand, reflect upon, identify with, and plunge into the life situations of the poor.

(3) To draw the churches into a ministry that will help to make manifest to the whole metropolis, the living relationship between Word and World and serve to clarify the churches' theology, posture, and action on the basis of direct involvement in particular situations with flesh-and-blood people rather than upon that of adherence to vague ethical principles.

Qualifications for this organizer include some evidence of bold and innovating leadership, a thorough acquaintance with labor organizational techniques, the ability to relate to people at the bottom of the economic ladder, and a proven ability to reflect theologically on bread-and-butter issues. In addition he must understand the mystique of the Negro community,

know how to find his way within it, and how to mobilize and utilize it so that people so clearly understand his mission that they respond viscerally as well as intellectually.

Estimated cost of organizing the unemployed is \$20,500 a year or \$41,000 over a two-year period in each pilot area. The total comes to \$205,000 if five pilot areas are selected. If a sixth area (ministering mainly to the white unemployed) is considered, total costs would be \$246,000. This sum would pay salaries of five or six full-time organizers, five or six full-time office secretaries, office rent and materials, program and research expenses. A formal request is to be made to the Committee for Racial Justice Now for funds to finance the operation. It is suggested that the Department of Urban Church, BHM, be assigned over-all responsibility for projecting, initiating, developing, and supervising the pilot program.

II. Why Organize the Unemployed?

A. No one else is doing it. Little chance that anyone else will do it. Several union leaders have said that organization of the unemployed is necessary before their problem is dealt with immediately, adequately, in depth, and over the long haul. Unions which have thought seriously about it, have given up on the idea, because they could not see how it would produce funds, a necessary weapon in their armor.

B. Victims of "hard-core" unemployment constitute the one group remaining in American society with needs and problems so deep and pervasive that most knowledgeable and sensitive people have lost hope as to the solution of these problems as well as to the reconciliation of this group with American society.

C. The total number of victims in this category is being added to every day by newcomers to the job market and a contrasting attrition in the nation's growth rate. In an address in New York City, Monday, September 25, 1963, Eli Ginsberg, Chairman of the National Manpower Advisory Committee said that "not one net job has been added to American manufacturing in the last 15 years." To the four million who are in the persistently-unemployed category, two million more are expected to be added in the next two or three years as a result of automation.

D. Most in the persistently-unemployed category are there because they lack either marketable skills or a basic education.

E. The make-up of this group is further complicated by the racial problem. Many in this category are there because of the overt and subtle effects of racial segregation. The fact that other Negroes of greater training are working at low-level jobs far beneath their competence and training helps to freeze many of the jobless out of the job level at which they could normally perform.

F. The church is set in the world to carry out the twin ministry of reconciliation and transformation begun by Jesus Christ. It discerns where Christ is standing in the world and ministering to human need and rushes to where he is so that it can stand and minister in his name. This means that the church cannot escape the particularities of human history. Its general assignment in the world "can be fulfilled only through an ardent and informed engagement in the special needs and contingencies and social trends of each historical period" (Guy E. Swanson, The Vocation of a Church in America, page 7.).

G. The major need of our time is to make visible the condition--spiritual and material--of the invisible poor. The growing numbers of the chronically unemployed are becoming a scandal in this affluent society. We tend to see the millions and millions of the affluent but lose sight of the millions and millions of the poor. With the exception of distressed states like West Virginia, the majority of the unemployed are concentrated within the inner-city areas of this nation's twelve largest metropolises.

H. Given the aforementioned facts, why take the drastic step of organizing the unemployed in order to know and understand their situation and to participate with them in transformation of their estate?

The unemployed, rightly or wrongly, feel that they are not, have not, and belong not. These are situations to which the Good News is traditionally addressed. But the unemployed are neither in parish churches nor affected by the concerns and activities of the normal congregation. Their situation is a drastic one and requires drastic measures. The form of ministry to this group should be the one that most nearly meets the needs of their situation.

III. Why Organize the Negro Unemployed?

A. This year of our Lord, 1963, is correctly portrayed as that of "the Great American Revolution." One of its faces, the "passionate" revolution or the Negro revolt, is dramatic and moving, seething and unforgettable. The Negro's collective temper has reached fever height in the resolution to overcome the incongruity between what America professes and what she actually does vis-a-vis her treatment of minority groups. His voice range "clear and determined from every corner" as he used non-violent means to impress upon this land that every aspect of equality barring none, must be achieved here and now. He took to the streets in order to prove his willingness to "go-for-broke" in effecting a redemptive change in the fabric of democratic society. America is reeling and rocking as never before from the impact of his demonstrations; sit-ins, kneel-ins, wade-ins, dwell-ins, and stand-ins.

The coming great revolution of 1973 may well be the breaking out of those consigned to the economic dump-heap. The hard core group may still continue to exist even when racial restrictions disappear unless fundamental and structural changes are made. The situation is ripe for the

church to plunge into the situation and begin to know it in the guts so that America may learn to understand these fundamental situations. The only place to start in 1963 for what may happen in 1973 is within the Negro revolutionary structure.

B. The basic issue for the Negro is achievement of the right to work. If he can make "the bread," to the degree and in the proportion that the white man makes it, the primary obstacle to his equality-in-fact will be removed. Once the bread is secured, the cake will come, and even the frosting on the cake.

The one point on which most Americans agree is that non-whites constitute the largest bulk of the unemployed in nearly every large metropolis in this country. For example, in New York City, there are 90 neighborhoods where 10 to 26% of male workers have been in the unemployed category for a number of years. This is a percentage that is two to five times more than the city-wide rate of "chronic" unemployment. The nation-wide Negro unemployment rate is 13% compared with 5.9% for whites.

Unlike the South, the problem of racial justice in the North is more and more being recognized as fundamentally an economic one. Negroes are concentrated in low-paid occupations. They earn much less than whites with the same schooling. They are paid less for doing the same work as whites. The gap between Negro and white income is increasing rather than shrinking.

C. The problem is a two-edged one in that jobs are disappearing in many industries, while the rank racial discrimination that exists in expanding industries is intensified by a hardening of rules for qualification, seniority, nepotism, and training. Labor unions, especially those of the craft-type, constitute a major barrier to the Negro in his quest for bread. In many Northern cities, journeymen and helpers are imported into construction sites because of the shortage of skilled labor. Negroes have found it almost impossible to get union cards as workers in many construction industries. Even the apprenticeship system has not been a way of entry for Negroes, rather kinsmen of the journeymen already employed have been, in many cases, the only men certified for training.

This kind of discrimination long has been a sore point in Northern Negro communities. Almost spontaneously, the Negro community in every major metropolis has closed ranks and is solidifying itself around the issue of equal job opportunities now. The issue is being stated primarily in moral terms, to wit: why should Negroes take all the burdens and risks of the economic order? Should not these burdens and risks be spread out so that they rest equally upon the whole of the population? Why should Negroes be overly penalized, i. e. told that little can be done about an equal share of jobs simply because there is a job shortage?

D. Negroes further complain that since the union structure grossly discriminates, city, state, and federal governments should stop all work on public projects until a solution is found, even if it means drastically restructuring the practice and policy of labor organizations. Indeed, most Negroes are so angry that they are ready to go to war with unions, management, and government until basic job rights are won. Basic job rights are understood by Negroes to mean preferential hiring for them so that they may begin now to catch up, waiving of sponsorship rules, dissemination of job information in the Negro community, a visible system of checks and balances against discrimination, hiring of Negroes as helpers (which almost never happens), giving of examinations by an impartial board, union membership for those who pass, placement of experienced people who do not pass the examination and a regular panel review at regular intervals to ascertain if the system of hiring and training is fair.

E. These basic antagonisms to the white power structure cannot smolder much longer without exploding with a fury that will make nuclear fusion seem tame by comparison. The situation is one of social and economic dynamite.

F. The role of a denomination like the United Church of Christ is to plunge into the midst of the fermenting situation in a number of carefully selected Negro communities. Its goal is to do what is needed which no one else will touch with a ten-foot pole, i. e. to organize the Negro unemployed, the 20 to 25% in our Negro ghettos who have not had a job for several years and answer to the sobriquet "the chronically unemployed."

G. This may be the most important thing that can be done now, as forward a step for this time as was the American Missionary Association's venture into basic education for the Freedman immediately following "the War between the States". Sporadic attempts at redressing the wrongs visited upon the Negro unemployed are being made by groups in nearly every major metropolis. Many represent ministers' movements who see such a large group of men without jobs as the major problem of the American Negro today. The difficulty is that too few have really dug in enough to know the magnitude of the feeling of the jobless themselves, those most affected by discrimination.

IV. How This Is to Be Done?

A. Select five major metropolises with large Negro populations and high rates of persistent unemployment such as New York, Chicago, Washington, D. C., Los Angeles, and Detroit and designate them as pilot areas for organizing the unemployed beginning with the Negro unemployed. (A sixth metropolis, such as Pittsburgh, may be designated as a pilot area beginning with the white unemployed or neighborhood with large unemployment of both whites and Negroes.)

B. There are several options as to procedure in organizing the unemployed.

1. The organizer first may wish to secure the understanding and support of the mass Negro churches. A new type of clerical leadership is emerging in Northern urban communities which is concerned with the bread-and-butter problems of the Negro people. These leaders determined to break the old patterns are looking for media through which they can communicate with the submerged groups in their neighborhoods. While it is true that the submerged have rejected the church as irrelevant, they rise up in enthusiasm when religious institutions show awareness of their presence and move out to ascertain their needs and problems. Again, Negro ministers are usually high in the urban power structure in a way that few white ministers are.

2. The organizer may want to enlist the support of the Negro aristocracy and middle-class through the secular organizations which constitute the backbone of the Negro community. A substantial part of the problem of the Negro unemployed is due to their lack of communication with the old-timers and professionals who have earned a niche--however precarious it is in the total scheme of things--in the social structure. Often summarily rejected by Negro respectables some of the submerged react with behavior patterns of boredom and violence. Increased communication, identification, and participation in the plight of the most needy are necessary for enhancing the socio-economic status of all Negroes. Too many Negroes with some kind of status, work at levels far below their qualifications, often in jobs and roles that well could be performed by those now unemployed. Breaking of racial restrictions on a local level may open the way for all groups to rise higher and for many of the unemployed to get jobs.

3. When all is said and done, however, it is the white middle-class which is the major contemporary block to both Negro aspirations and the persistently unemployed. It is the pussyfooting of members of this group which is responsible for the invisibility of the poor. The organizer may wish to help them come to grips with facts he uncovers or bring them into direct confrontation with the needy. This can be done through enlisting the services of the imaginative in churches, unions, and management, health and welfare, government, etc. in organizing the unemployed.

4. The organizer may choose to work directly with the unemployed, ignoring for the most part the other groups which are aiders and abettors in the misery of his present situation.

C. No matter which of these options he chooses, (and this may vary from pilot area to pilot area) the organizer must understand the two-fold nature of his mission. It is first to plant seeds of tension and unrest among the unemployed so that they are motivated to transform their basic situation.

There is no such thing as an orderly revolution. The present myth of unjust order has to be shattered before a just order can be achieved. Secondly, his mission is to bring the unemployed together so that they meet their own needs in terms of contemporary understanding and are reconciled to the rest of the society. Reconciliation may occur because of the questioning of fundamental theological and socio-economic assumptions now thought sacred. The meeting of needs has to occur in both practical and imaginative contexts. The unemployed have to get jobs, decent welfare subsidies, basic education, and technical retraining. At the same time they have to challenge the assumption that only the highly-trained man deserves a role and a status in contemporary society.

D. This is an example of how the organizer may proceed if he chooses to work through the structure of mass churches.

1. He may begin by persuading ministers of these churches to start some excitement around basic bread issues so that churches and bread become synonymous in the thinking and feeling of the Negro community. If no demonstration for equal job opportunities has occurred, it may be one of his initial steps to get one started with the ministers and churches as visible symbols of militant leadership around which the Negro community is to be mobilized. Picketing may be started and sustained at a site which is clearly symbolic of the kind of job discrimination which Negroes meet. The first role of both organizer and the clergy is to rub raw the wounds which are festering until a climate of opinion is created for radical change in the basic situation which created the wounds in the first place.

2. This is done through community mass movements, training sessions in the churches, walking picket lines, considering the new badge of honor to be that of being arrested for sitting in front of trucks at business sites to prevent their entry. In short, a new form of preaching and witnessing to the Christian faith through direct action becomes the new style of life for the community.

3. As the ministers get involved in maintaining picket-lines for the selected demonstration, they soon recognize the need to involve more of the hard-core (unemployed, etc.) of the community not usually involved. Since a certain number of demonstration fodder is needed each day, radical reconstruction takes place in the ministers' thinking and approach, and they soon come to grips with the fact that their life situations need to be more intimately intertwined with the unwanted, the unwashed, and the unemployed. They must go all out to get related to this group as the militant and fearless core on which they will have to depend when negotiations drag, the picket line drops off, and a bold front has to be maintained.

4. Ministers may then be involved as the focus for organizing the unemployed. Who they are and where they are must be ascertained. This means ministers in the taverns, barber shops, beauty parlors, pool

halls, and in all the congregating places, explaining what the bread situation actually is and how each unemployed person is involved. This further means each church taking a geographical area of responsibility through a knock-on-every door and ring every doorbell campaign in which every resident is interviewed, committed to full support of tactics in the "jobs" demonstration, and registered in terms of an inventory of his skills. This also means hiring buses, cruising up and down the community's main stem and emotionally involving the street corner hanger-on in the fight for bread.

5. In the midst of such an emotional climate in which the whole community participates, organizer and clergy can then proceed toward organizing the unemployed to enlist others, set up classes to interpret their basic situation, discuss what Christian faith has to do about all of this, and mobilize them into small teams for dramatic action. Once the primary steps of organization are realized, the unemployed can articulate their feelings and concern and begin to roll as the largest organized group in the Negro community. The power implications of this move would be tremendous. Imagine the consternation of the political, business, and labor leaders of the whole city when faced by this prospect.

6. What the new unemployed union is to do with respect to program and procedures cannot be fully ascertained at this point. It could provide a source of workers for the new jobs that are certain to open as racial barriers fall. It could provide training in community organization for the group least articulate. It could provide a medium through which the unemployed would be reached for improvement of job skills. It could provide a force of possible action that would make all economic social and political communities aware of its potential power for good, reform, revolution, and redress of inequities. It could be the vanguard of an over-all organization of the unemployed of all races able to deal intelligently with the problems of automation, cybernation, and chronic unemployment. The job prospect of the future will be very bleak unless those who have the most self-interest in their future can begin to articulate the programs that society ought to be undertaking.

The organizer is to work with the churches in finding and identifying the persistently unemployed. Contact is to be made through the normal gathering places or the rudimentary expressions of social organization that already exist in each community such as taverns, barber shops, beauty parlors, and the street-corner society.

The vanguard that is to make the contact is to be composed of those who are taking part in demonstrations. The basis of appeal is to be this: now that we are opening up opportunities, what shall we do to seize them? Special classes in basic reading and math skills are to be set up in each church. The assistance of the specialist is to be sought in identifying trades and occupations in which there are now labor shortages and those

which are projected to have shortages in the future. Teams of teen-agers are to be set up with the help of those who have been especially trained to make interesting today's world (cf. the M. I. T. science teaching program), so that youngsters may be challenged by facts they once thought dull and uninteresting.

The organizer is also to develop a new ministry of the laity for determining practical procedures for getting the unemployed together and exploring the relation in depth of bread and butter problems to the issues of faith, meaning, and integration. What he does in this connection may renew an evangelistic spirit to a labor movement once heralded as crusading and dedicated to left-out America, but now regarded as middle-class and stodgy.

Above all, the organizer has to realize that, in all of his contacts, he is dealing with the great network of relationships in which the persistently unemployed are caught. He has to be adept in recognizing that such seemingly diverse problems as alienation from the American cultural consensus, how to pay the rent, housing conditions, no real choices in voting, and punitive attitudes toward welfare programs fall equally within the purview of his concern. He has to recognize further that his initial action to get people united in breaking the chains which keep them ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed is of dubious value unless new skills, new proficiencies, new values, and new understandings are created in the process. This is exactly why he is to go in and organize the unemployed.

E. Why direct encounter without intermediaries may be necessary.

There are those who object to the procedure just outlined. They see too many weaknesses in any parish structure for ministry to the unemployed. They call therefore for working directly with the unemployed without any kind of structural mediation in the hope that faith structures adequate to their situation may emerge. It may be necessary to review the realities of the situation of the persistently unemployed who are Negro.

1. They are mainly interested in the bread and butter problems which torment their waking and sleeping hours. Their beliefs, modes of behavior, psyche, mores, and folkways and even their religion are affected by responses to these problems.

2. They know that when they go looking for jobs, they are told to "come back later". They believe that this is the reason so many are presently out of work.

3. They know that the dollar does not buy the same housing for them as it does for other groups. They know that it is often embarrassing and sometimes dangerous to try living where they please and can afford.

4. They know that every other youth over 16 with whom they are acquainted is both out of school and out of work.

5. They know that their own children seem behind those in other communities in the mastery of such fundamental tools as reading and writing.

6. They know that many streets are death-traps to those who walk them, and that behind many stoops, menaces to life and limb lurk in order to prey.

7. These are the bread and butter problems about which the Negro jobless feel most intensely. They are possible of solution if common focus on them can be shared by enough people, and some idea, person, or group can reach deeply enough into the springs of their motivation and hope.

8. But like any other people, the Negro jobless are concerned with more than just bread and butter issues. They are also concerned about their nature and destiny, their role in civilization, their power and status, and in broadening and deepening their relationship with visible and invisible reality and other people. Unlike many other people they tend to view bread and butter and nature and destiny as all of the same piece.

9. They believe that study-action processes on concrete economic issues open up political issues and these in turn open up tremendous issues of a spiritual nature and that the boundaries among all of them are artificial.

F. How to go directly to the unemployed.

1. It is our point of departure that resolutions of the situation faced by the Negro unemployed will have to come through study and action processes involving those serving (the Ministry of the Church) and those being served (the unemployed). Doing something significant with the submerged rather than for them is a necessary understanding at this point in history. The pilot project will have to identify with the unemployed by meeting them where they are and as they are, by initiating a series of visceral questions in which they will be involved in finding the answers and then moving on to a new position in which both servants and subjects of concern contribute substantially.

This means not only a new and bold look at submerged people and listening to them, but also a new way of building within them the understanding and power to criticize their condition and change it. When we say power, we mean the capacity and the vehicle to make and carry out decisions.

Many brilliantly-conceived programs aimed at submerged people and listening to them, but also a new way of building within them the understanding and power to criticize their condition and change it. When they felt that so-called "experts" preferred to settle their destinies rather than involve them at decision-making levels, they summarily rejected the whole package.

Nobody knows as much about the extent, depth, and consequence of the victims of persistent unemployment as those who have to live with them. They see them they hear them. They feel them. They reflect upon them. They have to move in this context and in spite of it. The locale of their thinking, feeling and moving is the street. They have created or made-over the institutions around which they organize their lives. These institutions include taverns, storefront churches, social clubs, pool halls, street-corner societies, barber shops, and beauty parlors. These are meeting places where people express themselves and know what they want. They resent outsiders telling them what to do. They often move to render outside decision inoperable because they were not involved in the process from the beginning.

What the pilot project in each city is to do is to uncover means through which the submerged may be assisted to think and act.

2. This is how the project may proceed among the submerged:

a. Set up contact points or listening posts through which to organize or conduct a ministry. The purpose of this listening post is to determine how to reach the group at the point at which their problems are most articulate and to discover which persons are best able to communicate with the rest. Such a post is an effective and imaginative handle.

b. Seek out key persons or natural leaders around whom people cluster and air their gripes. Regard each key person as a potential enabler, catalyst, evoker, minister, and organizer. After briefing, he must be able to remain in his present network of communication and raise the right questions among his fellows. Simply meet this key person where he is and present him with a challenge.

c. Gather the key people for addressing themselves to the problem of approaching the unemployed. Set up courses of study designed to refine and polish their innate ability and to help them understand the issues. Weld them into task forces for exploring the bread-and-butter and related issues in depth.

d. Isolate your major targets, i. e. specific actions in which the taskforces will engage. Who are they attempting to organize? For what purposes? How are they to do it? Around what sub-issues do you get the greatest amount of articulation and involvement? What is the specific role of Christian faith? How do you organize and commit at the same time?

Assign a taskforce to each major point of contact to carry on the ministry and to begin the task of organization. Each taskforce is to start conversation, wherever it hangs out, organize, secure commitment, and devise ways of creating para-congregations with clearly-defined roles even in e.g., a tavern society. A taskforce will ask power questions, identify questions, role questions, and human destiny questions. For example: What do we need to achieve? How may we achieve it? What role are you willing to play in achieving it?

e. The goal of each taskforce is to ever widen the circle of participation. Each group is to be specially trained in organizing as many people as possible.

f. Through this procedure, those who need most to be reached will be reached. The Negro unemployed do not believe that the opportunities of which they hear are Kosher. They feel the walls are still there. If their own leaders share in the dissemination of information about training and job opportunities, a great hurdle will be overcome. They can also be helped to understand what the true picture is for the unskilled. They must be helped to understand that 200,000 jobs exist in the service industries for which Negroes are not applying. They need to be oriented toward training in those skills in which there will be shortages for many years to come. There is a dearth of practical nurses, automobile mechanics, and auto-body repairmen. These are jobs for which many may be trained if organized in a way in which morale is boosted and the dissemination of information takes place expeditiously.

More importantly, when organized, the unemployed can help to determine the parcel and baggage of their own future more realistically than anyone else can for them. If work is to become a luxury for most men in the future, today's unemployed may be regarded as the pioneers engaged in terms of finding out what an abundant and meaningful life is for all of us. They may even be the pioneers who break open our civilization to a new style of life in which both racial and economic segregation disappear, because men find a more adequate and meaningful way of ordering their relations, one to the other.

V. Proposed Annual Budget for each Pilot Project

Organizer or Project Director	\$10,000
Office Secretary	4,000
Office rent, supplies, postage	3,500
Program	3,000
Total--each project	<u>\$20,500</u>

Annual total five projects	\$102,500
Total five projects for two years	\$205,000

VI. Responsibility for Program and Funding.

Necessary funds are to be sought from the Committee for Racial Justice contingent upon approval of this proposal by the Board of Directors of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. Responsibility for projecting, initiating, developing, and supervising this program should be assigned to the Department of Urban Church of the BHM.

This program may be extended to more metropolises by its referral to the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches. This group may want to stimulate other denominations to project similar ministry to other metropolitan areas.

J. Archie Hargraves
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