

## THE ARCHIVES OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### Research Report: The Question of Reparations to the African American Community and the General Convention Special Program

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The demand for reparations for slavery and exploitation of the African American community was presented to the Episcopal Church formally in 1969. This demand, and the Church's response, should be viewed, however, within the context of the movement within the Church to use its financial resources to redress social and economic injustice in America's urban centers. The discussion about race and equality reached a flash point in 1967 with the establishment of the General Convention Special Program.

The 1967 General Convention was held in the wake of the unpublicized walk through the ghettos of Newark, Detroit and Harlem by Bishop Hines and the Church's growing sense of urgency about the plight of Black Americans in urban centers. The 1967 General Convention gave rise to the General Convention Special Program (GCSP), which was a dramatic re-alignment of the Church's funding and spending priorities toward domestic social issues. While others within the Church had lobbied for attention to racism and poverty in the Black community (e.g., the work of the Union of Black Episcopalians), the GCSP was the first effort to focus significant resources on organizations outside the Church.

The funding for this project began as an Executive Council resolution, just days before the 1967 General Convention<sup>1</sup>. The resolution, as requested by Bishop Hines, transferred \$221,200.35 from the 1967 budgeted appropriations to fund the Crisis in American Life project, soon to be called General Convention Special Program. A second Council resolution was passed at the same meeting outlining the plans for the project; it suggested that the Council support the Church in addressing the problems of American cities. With the support of Executive Council, the special program had a much better chance of gaining approval at General Convention. Bishop Hines and other supporters of the program created a convincing argument which General Convention responded to by adopting a budget for the 1967-1970 triennium which allocated two million dollars annually for programs directly related to the urban crisis, including \$500,000 in grants. Additionally, the Women of the Church responded to the Presiding Bishop's call with an impressive allocation of \$2,265,917.47 of the 1965-1967 United Thank Offering to fund the Crisis in American Life program.

The 1967 General Convention adopted five criteria through Resolution No. 6 that were meant to guide the grant making process with a strong emphasis on appraisal, audit and evaluation<sup>2</sup>. Following the Convention, requests for grants started arriving at the Church Center offices and the Executive Council. Before the formal organization of GCSP, the Presiding Bishop authorized ten grants totaling \$121,004.00<sup>3</sup>. In November following General Convention, Leon Modeste was appointed to the position of Acting Director of the General Convention Special Program by Presiding

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<sup>1</sup>Records of the Executive Council, Minutes, September 15, 1967. Archives of the Episcopal Church. RG 40.

<sup>2</sup>*Journal of General Convention of the Episcopal Church...1967*, p. 430-31.

<sup>3</sup>Foundation For Christian Theology. *The General Convention Special Program: History, Grants, Results, Future!* (1970: Foundation for Christian Theology). p. 4.

Bishop John Hines. In the remaining months of 1967, GCSP awarded eighteen grants depleting the remaining reallocated funds given by Executive Council for that year. These grants were given prior to the creation of specific criteria and process by Council or even the Special Program office. The hastiness of this process created discomfort among some Episcopalians who questioned the ultimate use of the funding. More telling was the discontent of African American clergy within the Church who were concerned that their voices were not being adequately heard in the clamor and rush to take action.

In the life span of GCSP, several grants created division within the Episcopal community. Distribution of grants to groups suspected of advocating violence or having members with violent histories caused alarm. An example that achieved some notoriety in this respect was a 1968 grant for \$15,000 to the West End Community Council, also known as the Black Unity League of Kentucky (or BULK). Many Episcopalians in the Diocese of Kentucky objected to the grant due to a BULK organized rally that turned riotous. Following the negative reaction caused by the grant, members of GCSP, including Mr. Modeste, went to Louisville to justify their support for the grant. Modeste reported that the Church would not have granted the money to BULK had they advocated violence<sup>4</sup>. He also mentioned their sponsorship of other activities, including sending six busloads of mourners to the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Nevertheless, this event among others served to illustrate the need for greater oversight of the Special Program.

Formal application guidelines and a process were finally set up by GCSP in February 1969. The purpose of the grants set by GCSP were as follows<sup>5</sup>.

1. Community self determination on national, metropolitan, and neighborhood levels (urban, suburban, and rural) for social, political, or economic power, including basic research and planning to these ends.
2. Programs of service to the poor, designed and controlled by those to be served.
3. Community leadership training and experience in areas of need identified by the applicants.

Additionally, GCSP and General Convention agreed that none of the funds could be utilized by groups who advocated any form of violence as a means to its end.

On May 20, the Black *Manifesto* was brought forward by Bishop Hines to the Executive Council<sup>6</sup>. The *Manifesto* demanded that white churches and synagogues pay 500 million dollars to the National Black Economic Development Conference as reparations for past exploitations. The reaction to James Forman's demands were mixed. Bishop Hines created a committee of Council members to shape a unified Church response, later known as the "Coburn Committee." The committee presented

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<sup>4</sup>Foundation For Christian Theology. *The General Convention Special Program: History, Grants, Results, Future!* (1970: Foundation for Christian Theology). p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>"General Convention Special Program: Guidelines for Applicants." Records of Executive Council of the Episcopal Church. February 1969. Archives of the Episcopal Church AR 87.3.7

<sup>6</sup>James Forman, *Manifesto To the White Christian Churches and Jewish Synagogues [sic] in the United States of America and All Other Racist Institutions*. Adopted by the National Black Economic Development Conference April 26, 1969, Detroit, Michigan. Forman made a formal presentation of the *Manifesto* on May 1 to bishops Bayne and Mosley at Episcopal Church Center followed by a meeting with Bishop Hines on May 13, 1969.

their report to the next General Convention and recommended that, “the Episcopal Church is to support and expand the operation and budget of the General Convention Special Program.”<sup>7</sup> Among the eight resolutions of the report, the committee responded specifically to the Black *Manifesto*’s reparations demand with the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That this Church, without concurring in all of the ideology of the "Black Manifesto", recognize that the Black Economic Development Conference is a movement which, at this moment, shows promise of being an expression of self-determination for the organizing of the black community in America.

Of the eight resolutions proposed by the Coburn Committee, all were passed except those directly relating to the Black *Manifesto* (i.e., the reparations clause). The concurred resolutions speak to the intention of funding economic and social programs in the African American or minority communities. The General Convention minutes are ambiguous as to precisely how the *Manifesto* clause was dropped from the concurred resolutions. Two related, but separately submitted, resolutions imply that the General Convention was seeking to avoid either accepting or rejecting the whole of the *Manifesto*, which was highly controversial and labeled “ideological.” The Convention did, however, commend Council for its attempt to implement the spirit of the *Manifesto*. Council had drafted a response to the *Manifesto* stating, “we recognize the continuing poverty and injustice in our society to which it speaks, but do not accept the *Manifesto* as it is presented<sup>8</sup>.” The irony of the Black *Manifesto* is that fear of its radical implications (i.e., reparations) may have helped generate support for GCSP among Episcopal leadership.

The funding for GCSP reached \$5,346,013 in the first three years, \$2,346,013 contributed by Council, and \$3,000,000 from the Episcopal Churchwomen<sup>9</sup>. No further discussion was made of the *Manifesto* or reparations at subsequent General Conventions or by the Executive Council.

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<sup>7</sup>“Report and Recommendations of the Executive Council on Racial Programs,” Appendix 17, *Journal of the Special General Convention...1969*, pp. 443-446.

<sup>8</sup>“ A Response to The Manifesto,” Records of the Executive Council, Minutes (Appendix), May 1969. Archives of the Episcopal Church. RG 40.

<sup>9</sup>Foundation For Christian Theology. “The General Convention Special Program: History, Grants, Results, Future!” Archives RG87.1.3