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**Conference Asserts Racism is Relevant Issue**

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*Episcopal News Service*

ATLANTA (DPS, Feb. 11) -- Although much of the United States seems to consider racism an irrelevant issue, the spectre of it brought more than 200 Episcopalians to a three-day conference here that heard strong evidence that its death has been vastly exaggerated.

The 200, representing more than 50 Episcopal dioceses and all orders, included white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American people. The Feb. 2-5 Conference was called by the Coalition for Human Needs Commission, an agency of the General Church Program that provides cooperative grant-making and educational outlets for the Church Center ethnic ministries.

Through a vigorous schedule of keynote addresses, provincial strategy sessions, workshops and small group discussions, the participants explored the elements of racism in American society and in the Church and sought to develop strategies of education and reform. The conference fell between one held by the World Council of Churches last year and one scheduled in mid-February by the National Council of Churches.

In the presence of 200 Church leaders -- including nine diocesan or coadjutor bishops and 31 deputies to General Convention -- and the sequence of national and international meetings were not enough, the two keynote speakers devoted much of their energy to laying to rest the assertion that racism is not a relevant issue.

The speakers, the Rev. Izaiah Williams, director of the Center for Urban Black Studies of the Graduate Theological Union of Berkeley, Calif., and the Rev. Norman Faramelli, director of planning for the Massachusetts Port Authority, pleaded with the conferees not to fall prey to current thinking that oppression and disadvantage are purely economic or class issues.

As a result of their work and the other elements of the meeting, the conferees drafted a message to Executive Council asking General Convention consideration of a five-part resolution that would provide funding -- through the Coalition -- for educational and advocacy programs to help Church members become aware of, and counter, the "systemic racism" within American social, political, economic and ecclesial structures.

The resolution, if approved by Council and Convention, would also call upon the Church's domestic dioceses to form panels "to help each diocese become an agent of change in dealing with systemic racism."

Although little of the direct words of the keynoters appears in the document, the call for the Church to become an agent of change is clearly rooted in their remarks.

Williams decried racism as "the only ism without an avowed constituency," and conceded the difficulty of understanding "something so massive and so subtle."

Claiming that "familiarity has bred, not contempt, but moral paralysis," Williams asserted that the nation "had reached a moral truce with racism at the awesome price of justice."

He called upon Church people to recognize racism as sin, to call it as such and to remember "that guilt need not be paralyzing. It can be generative of searching, of new response."

Williams' warning to the Church was that the "geniality and collegiality" might need to be shattered in order to create the social distance necessary for prophecy to function. "The great prophetic voices have found it necessary, quite often, to be the lonely voices. We can't even have a solid discussion if our collegiality won't

allow a division of the house."

One of the discussions for which Williams pleaded was over what he called the "theoreticians" of the new racism: scholars and politicians who assert that racism -- "manifesting itself in massive discrimination within the social institutions" -- is mythology.

He cited the work, *Wealth & Poverty* by George Gilder as a major example of this material. This writer, whose work is said to guide or reflect the current government's thought, states flatly that "the idea that America is a racist society just won't wash." Williams quoted the book extensively and many of Gilder's assertions struck the conferees as sufficiently racist to draw gasps of surprise.

Williams' thesis was backed by the second keynoter, Faramelli, who called *Wealth & Poverty* the 'summa theologica' of the new economic theories and of the "racism is dead" mythology.

"If racism is dead, it is the most dynamic corpse I've ever seen," he said, adding, "I've usually found that racism increases in direct proportion to the rumors of its demise. In other words, the worse it gets, the more efforts there are going to be to denying its reality."

Faramelli's task was broken into two parts that included a three-prong citizen response and a five-point program of Church action.

He called for a full debate of economic issues, one that would help people recognize and correct the distortions and myths that have grown up and that would explore fully the premise that a much more solid economic base is needed in this country. "Don't exacerbate racism by making minorities fight over a shrinking pie."

He also pressed for a renewed "massive public sector role" in securing the rights of minorities to housing, job training, education and health care, maintaining that the private sector was not capable of securing these rights. "We need to engage in a new demythologizing against the myth of the omnipotence of the free market. Most economic models don't even work for economists."

His talk to the Church focused on the Christian potential to be a moral example, a model and an agent of change and pointed to five areas in which Church institutions could act.

In the first two categories, he called on the Church to be an arena of discourse and, through that, an agent of moral change. "Let's dare to be irrelevant and engage in a deep, challenging moral discourse," he said, using that discourse to re-assert that racism is "sin standing in need of redemption."

Noting that any complete doctrine of the Incarnation "has to be both cosmic and personal in nature," he said reform needed to be both personal and institutional and urged Churches to set a moral example and model through monitoring and correcting their own racial imbalances, establishing and advocating housing projects and, if need be, selling stock in firms that refuse to comply with affirmative action programs. He said Churches would provide communities of support through liturgy, trained personnel and conscientious efforts to provide minority access to Church resources and structures.

Conceding that his last point was the most controversial, Faramelli called upon the Church to be "an instrument of social transformation" in two related ways. He asked for training and education programs to support Church people who work in social institutions, teaching them to recognize and combat racism within their job settings.

Finally, he said, it was necessary for the Church to work to force social change from without. Saying that the "assertion that you can't support radicals and talk to businessmen in baloney," he noted that much of the effective change that took place within the MassPort structure came about through outside pressure, supported from his office.

He called on the Church to create "zones of freedom" from which prophetic voices could work. "Confrontation can be non-violent. I hope it would be, but it cannot be non-conflictual."

Despite the calls for discourse and prophecy, the meeting remained generally convivial with the allegedly popular new economic myths finding no public defenders. Conference observers often heard comments that Asian, Hispanic and Native American interests might have been given a wider voice, but this view also did not find its way into the plenary sessions.

The one note of dissent came near the end when Williams, in response to a question, spoke of his pessimism about the Church's ability or willingness to do anything about racism. He cited "the arrogance of white liberals" whom he perceived as unwilling to listen to new minority voices and told the conferees: "Do you want to make a dramatic statement? Force your seminaries to turn over their tax free lands to community programs. Join us in a suit of the Graduate Theological Union. Don't always talk about what's possible. I want you to think of the impossible."

Attached is the text of the report and resolution.

A message to the Executive Council adopted unanimously by the Conference on Racism sponsored by the Coalition for Human Needs in Atlanta, Georgia.

#### Preface

We, as committed members of the Episcopal Church, are extremely concerned by the racism of our church, our government and our society; and we confess the extent to which we ourselves have manifested and participated in that racism.

We believe that all people are the children of God by creation; that all Christians are inheritors of the kingdom of heaven by baptism; that as members of the body of Christ we are responsible for making that equal and mutual membership manifest into the world.

Recognizing that our Gospel and our tradition demand us to show special favor to the stranger (refugee), the homeless, the poor, the orphan and the widow, we call upon our church and our government to address the ways in which our policies and practices have adversely and disproportionately affected minorities and the poor.

Finally, we believe we are accountable to our God and to our brothers and sisters:

to remove the manifestations of racism in our part of the body of Christ;

to bear prophetic witness in opposing manifestations of racism in our church, in our government, and in our society;

to affirm the unique worth and equal value of every person under God; that same God who shall come to be our judge.

Therefore we commend the following for your consideration:

*WHEREAS*, the Coalition for Human Needs Commission did convene a National Conference on Racism in response to the actions of the General Convention of 1979; and

*WHEREAS*, the persons from more than 50 dioceses in the United States -- Bishops, clergy and laity -- did attend that conference and pass this resolution unanimously; and

*WHEREAS*, it became obvious at that conference that racism is systemic in our church and in our society; therefore be it

*RESOLVED*, that the 1982 General Convention continue the Coalition for Human Needs Commission as a high priority program; be it further

*RESOLVED*, that the Coalition for Human Needs Commission determine a method for the church to use in understanding philosophies of governments and institutions that encourage racism, and proclaim the church's teaching as clearly and specifically as possible in response to these philosophies; be it further

*RESOLVED*, that the Coalition for Human Needs Commission, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop and appropriate staff persons named by him, provide diocesan bishops with materials that may be used by church people in each diocese (specially at conferences for various age groups) to become aware of the extent of our systemic racism; and be it further

*RESOLVED*, that the General Convention call upon every diocese in the United States to establish

appropriate committees or commissions necessary to help each diocese become an agent of change in dealing with systemic racism; and be it further

*RESOLVED*, that the Triennial Budget 1983-85 include a sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ annually for this purpose.

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