

# Methodist missionaries report on Nicaragua

Four United Methodist missionaries working in Nicaragua have related in a letter that the life of the church there has been "relatively unaffected" by the state of emergency imposed by President Daniel Ortega and ratified after modification by the National Assembly.

Worship services and other activities continue as before, said the missionaries, with a permit being required for any service held off church property. Permits are "generally granted," they added.

The letter was sent to all bishops of the United Methodist Church by the Rev. Lyda M. Pierce, the Rev. D. Paul Jeffrey and Peggy and Howard R. Heiner, all of whom work with the ecumenical committee for aid and development known as CEPAD (*Comite ecumenico pro ayuda al desarrollo*).

The letter was in response to a resolution passed by the Council of Bishops expressing "deep concern" over reports of "increasing intimidation and restrictions by the [Nicaraguan] government on the freedom of the church to preach or publish the church's understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ if that understanding is interpreted by the government as containing negative references to the government and its policies."

The missionaries responded:

## Bishop Tutu thanks American people

Profound thanks to Americans who have supported South African Blacks in their struggle for freedom was voiced by Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu of Johannesburg at an ecumenical service Jan. 12 in St. Marks United Methodist Church in New York.

"This is one time I can speak without fear of contradiction when I say I speak on behalf of millions," Bishop Tutu told the 1,000 persons present. United Methodist Bishop C. Dale White of New York introduced the Nobel Prize winner as "one of the world's great prophets" who brought biblical insights to the struggle, and stressed the importance of using peaceful means to bring liberation.

"We must say that that description of Nicaragua is simply not true. What there is not freedom to do is work to overthrow the government." The state of emergency specifically applies only to those suspected of treason, the missionaries added.

Members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Nicaragua have "abused their freedom of religion and speech to actively work in support of the counterrevolution," the missionary letter said. It cited refusal to register published material and identification of draft evaders as "seminarians."

The government explained the recent detention and release of three Protestant pastors and the questioning of five others by saying the pastors were urging youth to break the law by not complying with the Patriotic Military Service. At a press conference two months ago, the government also cited the pastors' links to the Institute for Religion and

Democracy (IRD), a U.S. organization reported by the Ministry of Information to have ties to the Central Intelligence Agency.

A government official said the pastors were questioned because of their political activities and had nothing to do with their freedom to practice religion. The pastors were released after being warned that future illegal activity would not be tolerated.

CEPAD leaders who spoke to the detained pastors said they reported no torture, the letter said.

The U.S. government is using some political, labor, religious and other groups as an "internal front" to destabilize the Nicaraguan government, according to the missionaries.

The letter added: "Working through the 'religious affairs' staff of the U.S. embassy here [Managua], as well as through other contacts such as the IRD in

the United States, the CIA is doing all it can to pull certain sectors of the church into the counter-revolution."

The United Methodist missionaries' letter paid tribute to "the Nicaraguan people" as they struggle for survival. Nicaraguan Christians were called a "cloud of witnesses" who have "welcomed us with Christian love and taught us much about living a life transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"As they bury the victims of terrorism and try to rebuild their burned school and farms, they nonetheless love us—citizens of the country whose government's evil policy in Central America is the cause of their martyrdom."

The bishops were invited to visit Nicaragua to see for themselves what is happening, or to write or telephone their concerns and questions.

## Church leaders unite against apartheid

First steps to unify the influence of millions of U.S. Christians against the "morally indefensible" structures of racial separation in South Africa were taken Jan. 13 at an unprecedented meeting of leaders from 33 U.S. Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies, and adjunct organizations.

Following up a meeting convened by the World Council of Churches the past December in Harare, Zimbabwe, the 120 church leaders called for formation of the Churches' Emergency Committee on Southern Africa. They also endorsed a number of specific actions to be taken in coming weeks, intended to help bring a peaceful end to apartheid.

In addition to endorsing the emergency panel and urging the action steps, those present here, including a half-dozen United Methodists, also unanimously affirmed the "Harare Declaration" adopted by the church leaders from four continents at the meeting in Zimbabwe. That statement asks "immediate and comprehensive sanctions" against South Africa, and supports those calling for the resignation of the Botha government.

## Network expands

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inghouse for efforts to counter violent bigotry. Its extensive research has confirmed that Klan growth is but a part of a much larger white supremacist insurgency in the United States.

The CDR will monitor and oppose groups such as the Posse Comitatus, Aryan Nations, White Patriot Party, Liberty Lobby and the LaRouche political operation, as well as the KKK.

"The Klan resurgence is not so much a product of a 'lunatic fringe.' Rather, it is one component of a deepening racial fissure in our society," said Rev. Vivian. "Hate group activity is not a passing fad, and incidents of violent bigotry and nightriding increase in such an atmosphere."

Lyn Wells, executive director of the Center for Democratic Renewal, believes that "America is in the midst of a crisis of direction. There is an increasing contention for the hearts and minds of the American people between those who defend the best ideals of democracy, pluralism and empowerment of our citizenry—and those who have turned to scapegoating. Both the Radical Right and the more respectable 'New' Right would return our country to a period when access to democracy was most restricted and

exclusionary."

Countering what the Center calls "the politics of fear," it will continue to assist victims of racial or religious attacks, and to press for prosecution of violent bigots. Vivian announced a major expansion of the Center's research and monitoring activities, including establishment of a new office in the Midwest, the site of an alarming rise of Radical Right-wing propaganda and recruitment among desperate family farmers. Leonard Zeskind has been named the Center's director of research and will head its Kansas City operation.

The CDR will expand its public information operation with the publication of a bi-monthly report, *The Monitor*, and will announce a major Conference on the "politics of fear," to be held in Washington, DC, in the fall of 1986. Intensive briefings for church, civil rights, and other organizations will lead up to the major meeting.

The Center's board of directors includes representatives from such organizations as the United Methodist Church, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Klanwatch, the National Education Association, the National Organization for Women and the YWCA. Over 80 groups are now affiliated with the CDR.

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