



Genesee Ecumenical Ministries

17 South Fitzhugh Street • Rochester, New York 14614 • Telephone (716) 232-6530

The Rev. Lawrence E. Witmer, Executive Director

June 4, 1981

Dear Friend:

As you are probably aware the long-planned trip to South Africa was thwarted again by the obstructive delaying tactics employed by the government of South Africa in withholding our visas beyond our intended date of departure (May 16). After fourteen months of patient negotiations, we have learned for the second time we are not welcome there. This action, blocking our visit with Bishop Desmond Tutu and key church leaders, demonstrates the alarm with which the Botha government views such contacts.

Despite meeting every condition imposed upon us (including arrangements for interviews with ten organizations suggested by the government), we are denied opportunity to witness apartheid and efforts to end it at first hand. Despite planned visits to Kodak and Xerox facilities, South Africa has chosen to isolate itself further from the inquiring eyes and ears of the world. Evidently the influence of these corporations is not great enough to gain permission for their stockholders to visit these facilities.

There have been many expressions of protest and outrage in the press and from the official bodies of various church judicatories. Copies of several clippings are enclosed as well as a telegram from Bishop Tutu.

In the process of trying to work with the South African government we have had our own experiences of bureaucratic oppression and manipulation. We hope and trust that our representatives in Congress and the management of Kodak and Xerox will share our outrage at this arbitrary refusal. There are some lessons we may have learned most forcefully in not going.

One cannot escape the conclusion the South African government has something to hide. If substantial progress is being made as officially stated, if American corporations are improving the life of black and colored peoples, then surely South Africa has nothing to fear from us.

The treatment we have received does not encourage us to believe those who say democracy will come if we give South Africa time. It is clear that the present government has no intention of moving toward one person/one vote democracy. Instead it seems intent on beautifying the window dressing so apartheid will appear benign.

-- Continued --

We have met three times since our visas were refused and have decided to stay together, doing all in our power in this community to assist those struggling for justice in South Africa. We will continue to work toward a significant scholarship fund for black South African students. We will continue to speak the truth as we understand it based on over two years of study, reflection and experience. We invite you to join us in that endeavor.

Our initial discussions have identified the following areas for continued action and involvement:

- (1) A continuation of advocacy and educational efforts, making use of recent publicity and heightened visibility.
Consciousness-raising conferences.
Action on the issue of freedom of travel.
Writing on the issue for at least eight to ten publications
- (2) To build on the fellowship and bonds forged with Christians in South Africa during the planning of the proposed visit. We would like to strengthen these links and build productive relationships with Bishop Tutu and the South African Council of Churches.
- (3) Planning a supportive consultation for Christians concerned about South Africa outside that country.
- (4) Assist other groups that may wish to visit South Africa.
- (5) Within the next month to convene a consultation and planning meeting in Washington, D.C. to brief selected members of Congress, denominational executives and agency representatives on developments related to the refusal of visas; to discuss the issue of the freedom of American citizens to travel to South Africa and what should be done to promote effective congressional legislation for the enforcement of visa reciprocity; to plan strategies for intensifying collaboration with progressive South African church leaders in their effort to keep the world's spotlight on the failure of the government to bring about real change; and to plan how to mobilize various pressures to keep these Church leaders from being silenced and persecuted for waging a peaceful struggle against apartheid.

Such advocacy and educational efforts would require financial support, and we ask that those who have contributed to the cost of the proposed trip consider having their contributions used in this way. A more detailed description of plans and budget would be developed soon. Of course, contributions would be returned to persons who request it. (It would help our planning if such requests could be made by July 1.) The scholarship fund (presently \$1,706) will soon be forwarded to South Africa. Additional contributions are welcome. We propose that \$3,294 of the travel fund balance be added to the scholarship fund to make the total amount \$5,000.

-- Continued --

Finances related to the trip can be summarized as follows:

TRAVEL FUND

Income

From individuals, local congregations, church boards and agencies \$ 23,748.00

Expenses

For long distance phone, telegrams, office mailings, travelers checks, penalty on unused air tickets \$ 3,053.68

Added to Scholarship Fund 3,294.00

Total Expenses 6,347.68

Balance in Travel Fund \$ 17,400.32

SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Income

From individuals and congregations \$ 1,706.00

Added from Travel Fund 3,294.00

Total -- Scholarship Fund \$ 5,000.00

In reflecting on our frustration in dealing with the South African government throughout this process some of us have taken comfort in the reaction of Bishop Tutu when notified recently that his passport would be taken after critical remarks about the South African government. He said he would not take back anything he had said. "Having one's passport confiscated is not the worst thing that can happen to a Christian. Even being killed is not the worst thing. For me, one of the worst things would be if I woke up one day and said to people, 'I think apartheid is not so bad.' For me this would be worse than death."

Thank you again for your interest and support.

Sincerely,



The Rev. Frank H. Anderson, Chairman
South Africa Trip Committee

Enclosures:

- Press clippings
- Telegram from Bishop Tutu
- List of members of the visitation team

Rochester
Times-Union
May 20, 1981

Inviting trouble

Gayraud Wilmore, one of the 11 Rochester church people who for the second time have been blocked by the government of South Africa from entering that country, tells of his outrage in our letters column today.

Managers of Eastman Kodak and Xerox corporations ought to be outraged as well.

South Africa's intransigence is hardly surprising. It is not the free country it claims to be, and it has long been afraid to let its people (especially blacks) have much contact with Americans who criticize racial apartheid and the American corporate presence in South Africa.

Companies such as Kodak and Xerox have a special stake in this because they say they run their operations according to the controversial "Sullivan principles," which supposedly guarantee equal opportunity regardless of race. Since critics say the six principles are too little and too late, Kodak and Xerox should be anxious to show what they have accomplished.

Both companies did in fact invite the church group to tour their South African plants. That's down the tubes now, of course, and Kodak and Xerox have lost an opportunity to sway public opinion.

But will they be upset enough to urge South Africa toward a more enlightened view, and to protest as firmly as they defend their own conduct of business in South Africa?

T-U 5/20/81 'Deplorable incident,' says S. Africa cleric

Times-Union staff and wire services

The second cancellation of a planned trip to South Africa by a group of 11 Rochester religious and community leaders because of problems in obtaining visas was today called "a deplorable incident" by Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

Last year, the group, sponsored by the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, was denied visas just before they were to leave for South Africa.

Last Saturday, the group's visas did not arrive before the group's planned departure and the trip was canceled for the second time.

No further attempts to make the trip are planned, according to the Rev. Dr. Gayraud S. Wilmore, director of the Black Church Studies program at Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary.

In a statement from Johannesburg, Tutu said:

"The fact that no visas were issued to the Rochester group confirmed that South Africa had a lot to trade from people who would want to go beyond the 'bright economic prospects' of South Africa, its mineral wealth and its strategic geographical position.

"The tragedy of the resettlement

camp, the inferiority of black education . . . are only a few of the non-exportable sins of South African society which have to be kept away from intelligent eyes and ears."

Tutu added that the denial of the group's visas "is by no means an isolated one. The refusal of visas is exercised with the same tyrannical defiance of justice and morality as the withdrawal of passports. (Tutu has had his passport revoked because of his criticism of the South African government's racial policies of apartheid.)

"This disrespect for individual freedom exposes the so-called 'changes' in South Africa for what they really are: window dressing.

"Whoever it may be, an individual or a country, that fails to recognize the strategies of the (Prime Minister P.W.) Botha regime as mere cosmetics, is betraying the black cause in South Africa and obviously has no interest in the liberation of our country."

The Rochester group, in addition to visiting religious leaders in South Africa, was to have visited the South African operations of Eastman Kodak Co. and the Xerox Corp.

The group was also to have visited religious leaders, businesses and government agencies suggested by the South African government.

READERS' VIEWS

What does S. Africa fear?

On May 16, three hours before departure, 11 prominent academics and church leaders of Rochester were advised by Mr. Rusty Evans of the South African Embassy that they would not be granted visas in time for a scheduled flight to confer with church leaders and observe the much publicized "progress" of race relations in South Africa.

Two years ago the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries was invited by Bishop Desmond Tutu to exchange views and strengthen relations with groups like the South African Council of Churches and the (black) Federal Theological Seminary in Pietermaritzburg. This winter the black Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa became a major sponsor of the proposed visit.

For the past 14 months the Rochester group has been in painstaking negotiations with the South African Counsel General and the U.S. State Department's South Africa desk to see that all requirements were met to make the trip possible. In order to get the balanced picture that the South African government prescribed the Americans even consented to see specific persons and agencies designated by Mr. Andre Brink of the Counsel General's office in New York City.

The inability of the government to grant visas, for the second time, and on the agreed upon date of departure, can only be interpreted as alarm and confusion in New York and Pretoria. There can be no question but that the government cannot demonstrate the progress it claims is taking place and has extravagant fear of contact between certain of its church leaders and church leaders from the outside.

The Rochesterians, of course, were not unaware of this paranoia, but it was a valuable lesson for the interracial group from America to go through what its friends in South Africa must experience every day.

It may seem odd that after three centuries of oppression of blacks there are still Christians in South Africa who are trying to bring about basic change without bloodshed and seek collaboration with friends abroad. Such people must not be abandoned because of our cynicism about what good they may be accomplishing. Indeed, American churches have not experienced more success in persuading banks, corporations and their own government to desist from supporting apartheid than South African churches have had in destroying it from within.

Now black Christian leaders in South Africa are asking brothers and sisters on the outside to take seriously Jesus' statement, "I was in prison and you visited me." They want people to learn of their situation at first hand and go home to redouble their efforts against racism.

While it is not surprising that the government would not welcome such visits it is ironic that at the very time that the Foreign Minister, Mr. R. Botha and his official party was being entertained in Washington the State Department finds itself powerless to enforce visa reciprocity upon South Africa in behalf of a group of American citizens on a mission of peace.

The Rochester group has called upon President Reagan to suspend the visa privilege of South African nationals until such time that Americans can travel to South Africa without harassment and undue encumbrances. Church groups in the U.S. must not only support this demand, they

must also increase contacts with and defend persons, like Bishop Tutu, who continue to struggle from within the country under the threat of imprisonment and death. It is time for American churches to boycott banks and corporations which insist upon doing business in South Africa while these conditions exist.

Gayraud S. Wilmore
Professor of Black Church Studies
Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/
Crozer Theological Seminary

Telegram - Western Union 1981 May 19 PM 3:19

TO: South Africa Visit, Planning Committee
Frank H. Anderson, Rochester District

United Methodist Church

FROM: Bishop D. Tutu, South African Council of Churches
DS. G. Lubbe, Organising Committee
Rev. J. F. Bill, Organising Committee

Statement re: Proposed visit by Rochester Group

For more than a year now a group of prominent theologians and civil leaders under the leadership of Professor Gayraud Wilmore of Colgate Rochester Divinity School from the Rochester community, New York, USA has been attempting to visit South Africa. When they first applied for visas in 1980, they were informed by the South African Consulate in New York that their applications were unsuccessful because their visit would contribute to existing tensions between Church and State in South Africa.

In the beginning of this year they submitted new applications for visas and had high hopes that these would be granted. They were informed by the South African Consulate in New York that it was necessary for them to meet with certain organisations and individuals chosen by the Government so that they might hear the other side of the South African story. This our American friends were quite willing to do. Meetings with these organisations and individuals were arranged and confirmed and the Consulate as well as the Department For Foreign Affairs were duly informed.

It was, therefore, with shock and amazement that we received the news that two hours before their departure for South Africa on Saturday, 16 May, 1981 the visas had still not been granted. According to the South African Consulate in New York, the Department For the Interior still had certain investigations to complete. The Rochester group had no choice but to cancel their proposed trip to South Africa. It is, however, very ironical that the cancellation of their visit coincided with the dining and wining of President Ronald Reagan and Mr. Pik Botha, the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs. The naivety of the supposed leader of the Western World once more surprises us. To give recognition to the changes which are taking place in South Africa whilst his fellow American citizens are not accorded the opportunity to come and witness these changes strongly indicates that the South African Government has presented Mr. R. Reagan with a pair of blinkers. The fact that no visas were issued to the Rochester group confirms that South Africa has a lot to hide from people who would want to go beyond the bright economic prospects of South Africa, its mineral wealth and its strategic geographical position.

The tragedy of the resettlement camps, the inferiority of black education as well as the ugliness of Influx Control are only a few of the non-exportable sins of the South African society which have to be kept away from intelligent eyes and ears. We want the international world to take note of this deplorable incident, and also to remember that this is by no means an isolated one. The refusal of visas is exercised with the same tyrannical defiance of justice and morality as the withdrawal of passports. This disrespect for individual freedom exposes the so-called changes in South Africa for what they really are - windowdressing.

Whoever it may be, an individual or a country, that fails to recognise the strategies of the Botha regime as mere cosmetics is betraying the black cause in South Africa and, obviously, has no interest in the liberation of our country.