

Board explains position

Church replies to demands

By a staff writer of
The Christian Science Monitor

Boston

The Christian Science Board of Directors has responded point by point to the recent eight demands of the Metropolitan Boston Committee of Black Churchmen (MBCBC). The Board emphasized that The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, was "especially desirous of contributing to the well-being of the black community."

It said that the church "should like to do this through the most responsible, experienced, and genuinely representative black institutions."

"For several months," the Board said, "we have been in the process of establishing a Community Relations Office, which we are staffing with an experienced black official. We will base our assistance on the recommendations of experienced and responsible members of the black community."

As for the MBCBC demand for "reparations" from all Boston churches, the Board said: "We cannot speak for any other church or any synagogue. We do not believe it wise to respond to an admitted need in the precise manner proposed."

The Board explained further, "We have sought to participate in a meeting, with our highest church officials present, to hear further explanation of their demands from the MBCBC. They have declined to take part in such a meeting without further commitments which we felt unable to make. But again our church rules prohibit the proposed disclosures, our property holdings are far from 'vast,' and publication of membership figures is prohibited by our Church Manual by Mary Baker Eddy, Founder of this church, which is the keystone of our church government."

Possible meetings discussed

Prior to the Board's statement on June 6, Hayward Henry, acting chairman of the MBCBC and president of the Black Unitarian-Universalist Caucus, told a press conference at the Union Methodist Church in Boston's South End that the Christian Science church officials "are not sincere in wanting to sit down and negotiate with us."

Mr. Henry stated that his group had been contacted by representatives of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and had talked with them but that they were simply "negotiating on negotiations."

He said that the church had offered to send a committee of high church officials to meet with members of his organization, but that the officials would merely listen and not enter into negotiations.

This condition his group said it would accept only if they could be assured of a second meeting at a time and place specified by them at which some form of "dialogue" would be entered into. This he said the church had turned down.

"We feel we have very few options available," he said. "They [the Board of Directors] must accept responsibility for whatever happens." He was asked just what would happen next. "You will hear from us about that," he replied.

The black group's demands were in support of a Black Manifesto issued by the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDC) in Detroit on April 26.

That document included a demand that American churches contribute to the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) an overall figure of \$500 million. The money would be turned over to the NBEDC.

Board's statement

The Boston group issued eight demands of their own. Six of them were directed at The First Church of Christ, Scientist.

The following is the full statement issued by The Christian Science Board of Directors:

"We are deeply conscious of and sympathetic with the needs of the black community, and of the history of black people in the American community. Indeed The Christian Science Monitor has currently been publishing a series of articles by a distinguished black historian bringing these facts to wide public attention.

"Therefore we are eager to respond in every wise way to good neighborliness with our black fellow citizens. As a worldwide movement we feel this obligation very keenly, and as a church headquartered in Boston we are especially desirous of contributing to the well-being of the black community here. We should like to do this through the most responsible, experienced, and genuinely representative black institutions.

"As to the specific points presented in the Black Manifesto of the Metropolitan Boston Committee of Black Churchmen, we have the following statement of position:

"1. 'That churches and synagogues in Boston contribute \$100 million to IFCO earmarked for NBEDC.'

"We cannot speak for any other church or any synagogue. We do not believe it wise to respond to an admitted need in the precise manner proposed.

"2. 'That all churches and synagogues make immediate public disclosure of their total financial assets for proper assessments.'

"Again we can speak for no others, but our own church rules and policies prohibit any such disclosure. We do not admit the propriety of the term 'proper assessments.'

Church rules noted

"3. 'That an immediate meeting be held between the Metropolitan Boston Committee of Black Churchmen and appropriate officials of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, to disclose the extent of their vast property holdings, their total financial assets, and their membership figures for proper assessment to be made.'

"We have sought to participate in a meeting, with our highest church officials present, to hear further explanation of their demands from the MBCBC. They have declined to take part in such a meeting without further commitments which we felt unable to make. But again our church rules prohibit the proposed disclosures, our property holdings are far from 'vast,' and publication of membership figures is prohibited by our Church Manual by Mary Baker Eddy, Founder of this church, which is the keystone of our church government.

"4. 'That the professional position and financial status of the five members of the Board of Directors, the finance committee, and the business committee of the First Church be publicly revealed.'

"We do not know what is meant by 'professional position' but presume there is no secrecy about such information. The 'financial status' is each individual's private business, not even known to his other colleagues.

"5. 'That the Second Church of Christ, Scientist, located in Roxbury, be immediately turned over to the black community of Boston.'

"Second Church, like all other Christian Science branch churches, is the property of its own members, over which the Mother Church has no ownership authority. Second Church has many black members, and what the members do is their own decision.

"6. 'That The Christian Science Monitor do an immediate series on the American Church as an Economic Institution.'

"The Monitor will decide its own series according to its best editorial judgment. For many years it has sought to serve the cause of justice to all minorities, and the black people in particular, and it will continue to do so.

"7. That black employees of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, be immediately upgraded to all levels of mobile employment with the appropriate dignity and salary

accompanying such promotions; especially black employees in nonprofessional categories.'

"We are eager to promote and help train black employees to any positions for which they are qualified. We have recently upgraded many of them. We are glad to discuss these matters with a committee of our own employees, removing all possible misunderstandings and bringing about all possible improvements.

"8. 'That an immediate investigation be conducted of the proposed housing plans of the Christian Science Church to ascertain whether or not it intends to create another "white-middle class ghetto."'

"All our housing plans are public information which we are glad to share. Our own buildings are for church use. We are working hard with private developers and public authorities so that a substantial share of the apartments built on the periphery will be for moderate- and low-income tenants. Of course there will be no racial barriers in any of the buildings.

New office established

"Beyond these specific points, we would like to say that our development officials will strive harder than ever to include a substantial number of black workers on the building projects.

"In addition, for several months we have been in the process of establishing a Community Relations Office, which we are staffing with an experienced black official. We will base our assistance on the recommendations of experienced and responsible members of the black community.

"We definitely are concerned with the solution of community problems. We have in the past year made some solid progress in this area, and we believe that we have as a church much sharper awareness than ever before of community needs and responsibilities.

"We expect to work closely with community leaders who have already shown serious commitment to ongoing community programs for those of all races, colors, and creeds. The question that formed the theme of our denomination's annual meeting was 'What Can We Do for Our World?' It wasn't a casual topical choice. It expressed a groundswell of concern and commitment for their fellow men from thousands of Christian Science church members from all over the world — people of all races and colors.

"The successes of government, technology, and industry all too often seem to lie just outside the most basic concerns of the human heart. We believe that breaking through to meeting these concerns will not come through demands, divisions, and confrontation but an inspired sense of the oneness and solidarity of the human family. Only in this way will the walls really come down for good."