Minority Projects Given Funds

TAMPA, Fla.—Money for ten minority self-determination projects was the big news at the semiannual meeting of the Commission on Religion and Race here in late February.

Some months ago the commission listened [see CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE, Nov. 12, 1970, p. 3] to demands for self-empowerment by various ethnic minorities and pledged its support. Here the commission kept its word, expending $475,000 for small business development and service programs, in addition to empowerment.

The money was the first granted from $2 million designated by the 1970 General Conference for the commission’s use in each of the 1971 and 1972 years. Among those funded was the controversial Inner City Parish of Kansas City, Mo., which received $40,000 for one year.

Largest project allocation was $125,000 to Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) to be channeled through a Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment Co. (MESBIC) initiated by BMCR. Purpose of MESBIC is to provide capital, generally in the form of loans, to minority entrepreneurs.

Commission officials stressed that in all grants they sought to demonstrate the principle of self-determination by ethnic groups and were not supporting individuals or organizations in themselves.

The commission urged annual conferences to include all ethnic groups in 1972 Jurisdictional and General Conference delegations where such groups hold conference membership. The same concept was urged in the election of bishops, including “need for the election of a Hispanic member to the episcopacy.”

A Mississippi member of the group got quick passage of a statement setting up procedures to be followed when worshippers are turned away from churches for reasons of race.

The statement was that where such incidents are reported, the commission, working cooperatively with the bishop, district superintendent, and pastor, would seek a “satisfactory and affirmative solution.”

The statement further said that if “within a reasonable length of time” a local church is not open to all, the bishop involved would be asked to take whatever steps he deemed necessary. “Under no circumstance,” said the commission, “should a situation be allowed to go uncorrected after the first meeting of the annual conference” subsequent to the incident.

Heaviest debate of the two-day meeting centered around the recent action of the Missouri West Annual Conference withdrawing support of the Inner City Parish of Kansas City.

The commission said Missouri West action has “implications for similar instances of local, district, conference, area, and general church reaction against minorities wherever they function against the ideas and wishes of the white majority in our church.” In a carefully worded statement, the commission asked the Missouri West Conference “as it continues to study the situation to exercise its responsibility to provide ministers for black people according to the peculiar needs of that community.”

Meeting for the first time with this patient, careful, but deliberate official church agency for racial justice were four youth nonvoting members.

Shortly before the meeting was adjourned, Bishop Kenneth Goodson, commission chairman, asked one of the youth to describe his biggest impression of the commission. His reply, “The way we dealt with each other and weren’t afraid to speak.”

In addition to the larger grants, other approved funding included:

- MARCHA — $20,000 to develop needs of Spanish-speaking United Methodists, Los Angeles, Calif.
- Asian American Ministries, Los Angeles, Calif. — $23,500 each for 1971 and 1972 to develop information and data on Asian-American United Methodists and ministries to bridge generation and nationality gaps.
- Rio Grande Annual Conference — $32,000 each for 1971 and 1972 for specialized training for Spanish-speaking pastors.
- Ethnic Planning Strategy Committee, Los Angeles, Calif., to develop new ministries in Hispanic-American churches, $14,000 during the next two years.
- School of Human Dignity, Chicago, Ill., to aid youth employment and work with street gangs — $20,000 in 1971.
- A project in Tuscaloosa, Ala. — $20,000 during the next two years to develop neighborhood centers in low income black communities.
- Two programs in Tempe, Ariz., working with Indians — $65,000 during the next two years.

—JAMES CAMPBELL