



Sister Felicitas Sister Margaret Isabelle Sister St. Joseph Sister Mary Paul Sister Liguori Sister Bernice Sister Alonzo Sister Josepha Sister Mary Christopher Sister Mary Eleanor

# Our Nuns in Selma Report on Plight of Negroes Who Want to Vote

By SISTER MICHAEL ANN, S.S.J.  
Administrator  
Good Samaritan Hospital  
Selma, Alabama

Experiencing a mood as apprehensive as the air, for it was humid outside and the temperature climbed to the high seventies, we drove from the hospital to our lawyer's office. Purpose of the trip: to obtain legal assistance in securing the release of one of our licensed practical nurses — a twenty-year-old Negro girl — who had been detained in the Dallas County Jail for seven days for taking part in a Civil Rights demonstration.

We had been unaware of the plight of this young nurse until the day after her arrest. The charge was unknown as far as we could determine but supposedly it was: "contempt of court" — "making a mockery of the courtroom."

Our first reaction was one of mild concern but also one of pride. Here was an employe of ours, a recent graduate of our school of practical nursing, who had demonstrated her love of

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freedom and who now was paying the price for demonstrating her love.

We became more concerned for her safety each day since we had expected her release at the end of the usual five-day sentence for these cases.

Finally, at the recommendation of a high city official, we contacted our lawyer who accompanied us to the county jail. Upon reaching the third floor of the City Hall which is the county jail area, we first had difficulty in finding out correct details as to where she was and the charge. We were told that the recording deputy was days behind in his listing of persons who had been jailed during the demonstrations.

I will not easily forget the sensation I experienced at this point. Not to be able to locate someone — and to have added to this, the awful feeling . . . the cold knowledge that the custodians did not really seem to care where a person was created — a sense of disbelief in the reality of what was going on. How could this be? In this the quiet old city of Selma that few people outside of Alabama knew about fifteen or twenty years ago? Has everything suddenly changed into a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? It seemed that way — and fear



SISTER MICHAEL ANN was born alongside courage as we waited!

Finally, we were told that we would be permitted to see our nurse. We were ushered into a cell but not before we caught a glimpse of our missing nurse, standing in the hallway, wiping away her tears with the collar of her coat, and clutching a small paper sack.

She told us that she had been in line at the Dallas County Court House, protesting by her presence, the denial of her people's right to vote when she was ordered to march up the steps of the courthouse. She obeyed but was shortly afterwards taken to county jail with a group of girls.

The lawyer told her she should "go home and stay out of this mess!"

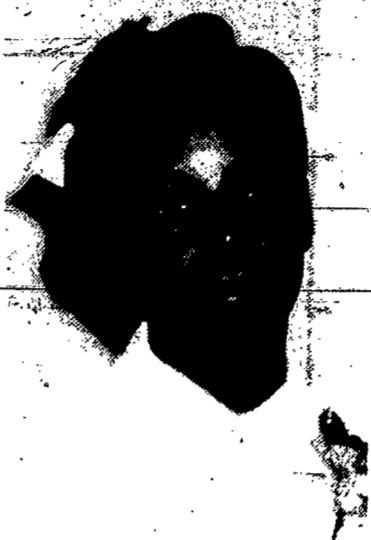
To this the nurse said softly, "I don't think this is a mess."

We were so proud of her . . . but we knew she had to leave that jail and get out into the air.

She later told us that the window of the cell where she and thirty other girls were kept was ordered shut by one of the jailers earlier that warm day. Why? Who can answer that?

The courageous young woman finally decided — perhaps reluctantly — that she could do more for her people by returning home and to her work at Good Samaritan Hospital. So she signed her bond statement and I countersigned it.

At this point, I was almost ill. But I left that jail with a deep determination to encour-



MISS BESSIE HOUSER more were jailed than registered

age our hospital employees — most of whom are Negro — to work for the right to vote, especially after hearing our nurse describe the life she led during seven days in jail.

Briefly it was like this: only two "meals" — of cornbread

and peas — were served a day, these at noon and 4 o'clock in the afternoon. There were no blankets at night, even when the nights were cold.

Bathroom facilities consisted of a commode with no partition to separate it from open view and a small sink that did not furnish enough drinking water for the group. When a group of younger girls were added to the cell, the older girls gave them their bunks and slept on the cold floor. When they sang the familiar "We Shall Overcome," the guards were so annoyed that they threatened to send in deputies to beat them.

So we took our young nurse to her home — a typical small, overcrowded, run-down bungalow on a dirt street made muddy and nasty by a recent rain. When we arrived, her mother wasn't home. Our nurse's young brother said his mother had

gone to the grocery. Soon she returned.

Oh, to see the joy in her mother's embrace as she welcomed her daughter back home! Both mother and daughter wept openly. Her mother was so grateful that we had brought her daughter home safely. This mother expressed so eloquently the feelings we were all experiencing when she was asked how she would feel if her daughter had to go to jail again.

She replied, without hesitation, "If it ever happened again I would rather take her place in jail than to suffer the agony of not knowing what was happening to her."

This is one incident in the racial crisis in Selma, Alabama, but it is representative of hundreds of similar situations.

The solutions is Prayer — Sacrifice — Courage.

## Who They Are, Where They're From

Selma—Members of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester missioned to Selma are:

Sister Mary Paul, S.S.J., Superior of the local community and Principal of St. Elizabeth's School. A native of Rochester, Sister Mary Paul is in her third year in Selma. Sister teaches the 7th and 8th grades at St. Elizabeth's.

Sister Michael Ann, S.S.J., Assistant Superior and Administrator of Good Samaritan Hospital. Sister Michael Ann succeeded Sister Louis Bertrand as administrator in May of last year. This is her third assignment in Selma. Sister was a nurse supervisor at Good Samaritan from 1949 to 1953 and served as acting administrator from 1954 to 1955. She is a native of Corning, New York.

Sister Liguori, S.S.J., a native of Waverly, New York, is in her fourth year at Good Samaritan where she is in charge of the pharmacy and the Volunteer Program. Sister had been to Selma previously for three months during 1954-1955 to care for Sister Louis Bertrand who was convalescing from major surgery.

Sister Alonzo, S.S.J., has been assigned to Good Samaritan Hospital as manager of the business office for the past sixteen years. Sister is a native of Geneva, New York.

Sister St. Joseph, S.S.J., who is in her first year at Good Samaritan, is Supervisor of Operating Rooms and also Purchasing Agent. She is a native of Elmira, New York.

Sister Margaret Isabelle, S.S.J., is concluding her ninth at Good Samaritan where she is in charge of Pediatrics and Maternity departments. Sister hails from Danville, New York.

Sister Mary Christopher, S.S.J., a native of Rochester, is concluding her first year in Selma where she is Director of the Good Samaritan Hospital School of Practical Nursing and Supervisor of the Medical-Surgical floor.

Sister Josepha, S.S.J., is in her second year in Selma where she teaches 5th and 6th grades at St. Elizabeth's School. Sister is a native of Auburn, New York.

Sister Eleanor, S.S.J., now completing her 8th year at Good Samaritan Hospital, is Director of Nursing Service and Director of Good Samaritan Hospital Nursing Home. Sister is also a native of Rochester.

Sister Bernice, S.S.J., is also in her first year in Selma. A native of Webster, Sister teaches the 1st and 2nd grades at St. Elizabeth's School.

Sister Felicitas, S.S.J., a native of Rochester, is in her first year in Selma. Sister teaches the 3rd and 4th grades at St. Elizabeth's School.

## Twenty Five Years of Mercy in Alabama

By JOHN WRIGHT, JR.  
(Special to the Courier from Selma)

Selma, Ala. — The Diocese of Rochester has a close kinship with this Deep South city of Central Alabama. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have worked with the Negro people of Selma and Dallas County since the first two members of the community came in 1940. They came to assist two priests who belonged to the Society of St. Edmund. The priests came to Selma from Vermont to labor among the Negro people.

There are presently eleven Sisters of St. Joseph missioned to Selma, a name now well-known all over the world because of the civil rights demonstrations held here the past

three weeks as local Negroes attempt to obtain the right to vote. Rev. Martin Luther King came to Selma to personally direct the demonstrations.

The traditions and complexities, which have created the racial injustices that exist in Selma are frustrating to comprehend in 1965 America. But they do exist. The white Southerner who believes in segregation is being forced to wrestle with his conscience more and more each day as his fantasy world of white supremacy heads toward oblivion.

The Sisters of St. Joseph living in Selma right now as you read this have experience firsthand the deep emotion of see-

ing segregation in action — of seeing hate and disgust in a white man's eyes as he mirrors the torture of watching his cataclysm explode like the myth it always was.

It is not a myth that will disappear at the touch of a fairy godmother's wand. Its price comes high — sometimes as high as life itself. Remember Birmingham? St. Augustine? Mississippi? Pain, suffering and even death are the necessary ingredients to provide a cure for the ills of segregation and racial discrimination.

Selma is a city of an estimated 35,000 persons, at least half of whom are Negro. The town has a youthful, energetic 35-year-old mayor, Joe T. Smitherman, who has been in office since last October. He wants to rid his town of its distasteful racial image — but he hopes to do it and still maintain some forms of racial segregation. Mayor Smitherman defeated former mayor Chris Heinz who shortly after the election was named Chairman of the Dallas County White Citizens Council.

Mayor Smitherman has enjoyed the confidence and trust of the Negro people in Selma. At his swearing-in ceremony, he stated that he was a segregationist and saw no need for any biracial committees in Selma. He repeated his stand two weeks ago. But the Negro feels that Mayor Smitherman will work

to make the cross of being a Negro more bearable. This is progress where progress has come slowly.

But the trouble in Selma has centered within the area of authority of the county government and not the city. The demonstrations have taken place principally in the vicinity of the Dallas County Court House on the corner of Lauderdale Street and Alabama Avenue, just a few hundred feet from the Alabama River.

The beautiful green marble building, three stories high, is a sharp contrast to the typical old courthouse buildings still in existence in the county seat of many towns.

It is in this courthouse that the Dallas County Board of Registrars qualifies persons who make known their desire to become a qualified voter. The obstacles, which are now well-known to the world, included, until a recent Federal District Court decision, only two days per month in which persons could register and a literacy test that contained some questions even court judges would have difficulty in answering.

The most prominent figure in the racial troubles here has been Sheriff Jim Clark, sheriff of Dallas County. Sheriff Clark and his posse are symbols of the South's weakening grip on segregation. Until Mayor Joe

## Nun's Errand To County Jail

By SISTER LIGUORI, S.S.J.

With two other Sisters, I started for the Dallas County Jail in Selma on a bright, warm afternoon. Our mission was to visit a Negro boy of high school age from our Parish who had been under arrest for over a week on a so-called contempt of court charge.

He had been arrested while participating in a demonstration march near the Dallas County Court House. We were especially anxious about the youth because he had only recently been discharged from Good Samaritan Hospital following major surgery.

After parking the car close to the jail, we entered the building. A sign directed us to an elevator leading to the third floor where county prisoners were held upon arrival. We asked a deputy if we might see the boy. We were at once informed that he and all other juveniles had been transferred to Camp Selma earlier in the afternoon.

Camp Selma is a work camp for Negro prisoners, about ten miles from Selma. Just as we parked the car and stepped out, two guards armed with guns and billy clubs approached us while a third glared at us from a nearby look-out tower.

We asked to see the youth, and after some hesitancy, one guard offered to go inside and see if he could get permission for us to see the boy in a separate visiting room. During this interval, the other guard talked about how the Negroes refused to obey the Sheriff and how they were in contempt of court.

Before long, the guard returned and said he had been in communication with Sheriff Clark who told the guard he saw no reason why we should visit them. We were told to re-

turn on Sunday, the regular visiting day.

In one statement, one of the guards said no juveniles had been brought there today but in the next statement, he said that in the busload he brought out that day there really could not have been more than four or five over twenty.

Our mission was not accomplished. We had been sent from one jail to another without being permitted to see the youth. Conflicting statements were made. He must have been at one jail or another. Of one thing we are certain, the boy is not at home. His good parents are concerned about him.

How many times is this anxiety multiplied tonight in this racially-tense city where Negro boys and girls are being held in crowded, unsanitary surroundings with meager, poor food thrown at them at irregular intervals?

And what is their crime? They march peacefully in non-violent protest against the injustices under which their race suffers in this Deep South.

## I Saw Hate

By SISTER JOSEPHA, S.S.J.

I saw hate today. The man walking around the guard tower watched our every movement. As we pulled away, I slowed the car to wave and say: "Hell-o, There." And I saw hate — hate aimed at me and I shuddered. Behind my smiling face there was a trembling woman. This question keeps ringing through my mind: "How would I feel if my skin were black and I saw many hate-faces all day long?"

## Teenage Lad, from Hospital to Crowded, Cold Jail

By SISTER ELEANOR, S.S.J.

A 17-year-old Negro boy was brought to Good Samaritan Hospital from the county jail with suspected appendicitis. It was determined that he did not have appendicitis. He improved and his doctor was ready to discharge him after three days in our hospital.

I called the county jail to be sure it was all right for the boy to go home. Since there were so many jailed in the demonstrations, they hadn't been processed, according to the jailer, that

I was sure they would say to send him home.

Instead the deputy answering the phone said, "Hold him there until we can send someone after him." I asked how long would he have to stay in jail. "Until he was processed," was part of the answer.

The answer to why the boy must go back to jail was indefinite so I fabricated a little and said I knew the boy's doctor would not have discharged him unless he could return home. The deputy said he would have

to check on that and finally decided we had better hold the boy until he called me back.

The doctor agreed to cancel the boy's discharge if leaving the hospital meant returning to jail.

I asked the patient why he was jailed in the first place. He said last week he and some other teenagers carried picket signs in front of the Dallas County Court House. He said the court room is on the second floor, and the windows were closed. He said court was recessed and the judge was at lunch. But when the boys and girls were arrested they were tried for disturbing the judge's court room.

There were twenty-two boys in the group arrested with him and several girls. At the county jail there were 83 men and boys in the bull pen, separated from the regular prisoners by a cat walk.

It was cold for several days. The boys slept on tables. The only blankets were those few passed through the bars by regular prisoners from empty bunks in their cells.

A lawyer visited them Saturday and said they would probably be out of jail by Monday. Tuesday they were still in jail. They had to pay a fifty-dollar

fine or work it off at the rate of \$3 per day until they have worked out the fifty dollars.

The deputy never called back so in the afternoon I phoned the jail again. This time the deputy said whenever the boy is released from the hospital to notify the county jail and they will take him back to jail.

It takes courage to walk into a hostile place and to say you want your rights when the persons to whom you speak are unwilling to admit that any rights are being denied.

"Freedom Now!" is a rallying cry at the weekly mass

meetings held to encourage the Negro people to act in order to secure their rights as Americans. Yet in the fact of apathy and opposition, and at times, real hatred and provocation, there has been in three weeks of non-violent demonstrations only one instance where a Negro retaliated. They have listened, instead, to their ministers who have told them there must be no hatred in their hearts even towards those who hate them and wish them evil. They have based their cause and their hope on Christian love.

We have much to learn from them about Christian virtue.

## New Rites Booklet Ready For Lenten Study Groups

The diocesan Lenten Discussion Club book selected for 1965 is Father William J. Leonard's "New Horizons in Catholic Worship." The title was announced by Rev. Albert H. Schnacky, director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine this week.

This booklet, Father Schnacky said, is an effort to clarify the magnificent message of the Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy.

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