



6-7-1977

## **Letter: Chancellor Reese to Betty Cleckley Regarding Mortar Board Membership and Black Student Fellowship at the Baptist Student Union**

Commission for Blacks

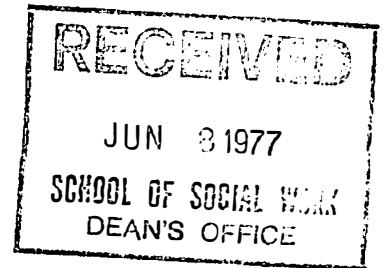
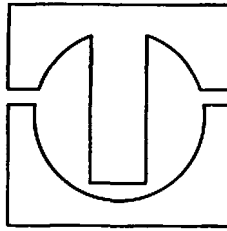
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Office of the Chancellor/The University of Tennessee, Knoxville/506 Andy Holt Tower/Knoxville, Tennessee 37916

June 7, 1977

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Dr. Betty Cleckley

FROM: Jack E. Reese *JER*

Two matters have come to my attention in the last two days that I want to pass along to you for sharing with the Commission for Blacks.

First, the new president of Mortar Board, Nancy Sharp, came to office to express concern about the lack of applications from Black students for Mortar Board membership. As you know, Mortar Board is an organization that honors seniors (formerly women only, but now both men and women) for academic achievement and institutional service. The "tapping" of members takes place each spring during the member's junior year. The senior year is spent as a member of Mortar Board. Do you think the Commission for Blacks might encourage Black students to apply for Mortar Board membership when the call for applications goes out next winter?

The second item I want to pass along is the attached description of the Black Student Fellowship that has been organized by the staff of the Baptist Student Union. The report was distributed today at my quarterly luncheon meeting with the Campus Ministers Council. It was pointed out that the Fellowship is not limited to Baptists only, although Baptists do predominate in the membership and at this particular time, hold all the elected offices. That just happened, however, and both the student members and the Union staff invite all interested Black students of all denominations to participate. I thought this might be of interest to the Commission as it looks for additional outlets to meet the needs of Black students.

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Enclosure

cc: Dr. Luke Ebersole

BLACK STUDENT FELLOWSHIP  
OF THE BAPTIST STUDENT UNION  
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

A MODEL FOR MINISTRY  
BY BILL LEE, CAMPUS MINISTER

NEED

Like many campus ministers, I have had a keen desire to minister to black students and yet have been faced with frustration in not being able to carry through on genuine intentions. Still the need prevailed on the campus at U.T. with an increasing number of black students (over 1400 at the present time - an increase of threefold in the past six years), no organized Christian fellowship for black students on campus, only a handful of black students participating in predominately white Christian organizations, and no on-campus black minister.

There are more black students on our campus than are on most predominately black college campuses.

HISTORY

The history and events leading to the formation of the Black Student Fellowship are very brief. We are only in the infancy stage, and events leading to the creation of this group moved very rapidly and also qualify as a serendipity type of experience. My conversations with John Corbitt of the NSM Staff have been taking place over a number of years, but only within the last year have they begun to get through to me, mainly beginning last summer at our National Workshop in Clinton when I attended John's seminar. I sought some interpretation by John on black separateness, and he began to talk about a post-intergrationist stance and the black experience. I did not understand all that I heard and didn't agree with other parts of his explanation. I must admit that I was still frustrated that he was not giving me much encouragement about black students plugging into our existing BSU program.

I took John up on his offer to visit our campus as a special consultant from NSM. He did this in November (76), and we agreed before his coming that we would attempt to accomplish several objectives:

1. Meet individually with several black pastors in Knoxville
2. Meet the head of the Black Cultural Center on campus
3. Interpret to the white BSUers the black student
4. Take initial steps toward having the National Baptist Student Area Retreat in Knoxville in April of '78
5. Counsel me further as to how to reach and minister to black students
6. Promote the 1977 National Retreat.

For the most part these objectives were met. We did not arrange for any group meeting with black students on this visit.

After receiving additional publicity and registration forms for the National Retreat, I was determined to take a group from our campus to Memphis, I visited black church services and talked with black pastors in an effort to enlist retreat attenders - two pastors came through. I also visited a rehearsal of the Black Liberation Concert Choir and offered them an invitation to sing at the National Retreat. The majority of the choir members are from Memphis, and the choir had been unsuccessful in getting to Memphis to sing during the four years of its existence. They jumped at the chance. We took 20 choir members and 18 other students to the retreat on a church bus furnished by one of our local white Baptist churches.

The weekend was beyond my expectations. The program was excellent, registration (nearly 1,000) and attendance at all sessions was outstanding, and the spirit of the group was super. The students from U.T. had their eyes opened to BSU, summer missions and on-campus Christian fellowship. On the bus returning to Knoxville the decision to organize was overwhelmingly endorsed.

#### ORGANIZATION

A week after returning, the retreat group met at the Baptist Student Center for a cookout and organizational meeting. Twenty-six attended. The president of the existing BSU attended. We dealt with basic questions: Why a Black Student Fellowship? What should the group be called? Where should they meet? What kind of organizational structure was needed?

After a discussion of the pros and cons of a Black Fellowship, it was decided that black students would get a better response from their fellow black students if they were inviting them to attend a meeting that was a distinctively black experience planned by black student leaders. There was also genuine concern from the group that this not be an isolated or segregated group. Therefore several features were initially put in the organization to allow for what has become known as overlapping:

1. All meetings of both the Black Student Fellowship and the existing BSU would be open and attendance from each group to the other be encouraged.
2. The meetings would take place in the Baptist Student Center, thus providing for informal contacts by individuals.

3. Two members of the Black Student executive council be designated as executive council representatives to the existing BSU and that the existing BSU president meet with the Black Student executive council.
4. The present campus minister serve both groups.

The executive council, besides the two E. C. representatives, is composed of a president, correspondent, missions, outreach, social and program chairpersons. They meet weekly following the weekly general meeting. These officers were installed with the new existing BSU officers at the spring BSU banquet. The officers are in the process of establishing committees.

A letter was mailed to all black students enrolled at U.T. announcing the formation of the group and inviting them to attend the Monday evening programs. Three weeks after organizing, a high attendance of 47 was recorded.

#### RELATIONSHIPS

The establishment and maintenance of certain relationships are imperative to insure ongoing support and success:

1. The BSU director should develop good working relations with the black pastors and ministerial groups in the community.
2. On-campus contacts with black leaders of such groups as the Black Cultural Center, Black Student Union, Afro American Student Liberation Force, Gospel Choir, etc. should be begun.
3. Regular contact with John Corbitt with a visit to our campus.
4. Regular contact with Ed Wheeler and the Department of Cooperative Ministries at the Home Mission Board.
5. Interpretation to the local Southern Baptist Association as to developments.
6. Seek support from and report to other campus ministers concerning developments.

#### EARLY RESULTS AND EVALUATION

I am very optimistic about our situation here at U.T. The students, both black and white, are excited about what is happening, and the black students believe that it is going to work. We have some good leadership, and it will improve with some training.

For those who would be critical of the approach, my main argument is that since its inception only six weeks ago, I have had meaningful contact with over <sup>70</sup>~~170~~ black students.

We have two in the group going out as summer missionaries this summer.

At this point we have talked about and encouraged interaction of the two groups, but except for structured/planned interaction there has been only a minimum. However, I believe it will come.

The BSU through the years has developed resources and opportunities on the campus for students - black and white, and it has only been in the last few weeks that black students on the U. T. campus have become aware of the wide variety of opportunities for Christian fellowship, study, worship, witness and missions that can be theirs.

Two black students had been classmates and passing acquaintances on campus, but Alan said that after finding out that Chris was a Christian, it was "like meeting him all over again." There are a lot of black and white students on our campuses who need the opportunity to "meet each other all over again" - perhaps a Black Student Fellowship is the answer.