

Missouri. Shepherd's involvement is an example of short-term crisis advocacy. Shepherd responded to the needs of the situation, used his influence and knowledge of the community to avert a violent confrontation and moved on.

The second story is an example of strategic, long-term advocacy. At requests from local members, the United Churches of Christ took a strong advocate stance on behalf of the black community in Wilmington, North Carolina. Although the church's role was not always a popular one, it has been effective. Due to the widespread attention given to the situation, individuals imprisoned for racial justice activities have been freed, and the "Wilmington Ten" case has been removed from the "political oppression" rosters of the well-reputed Amnesty International. In December 1980, charges against the "Wilmington Ten" were overturned by a federal appeals panel.

Advocacy is the most demanding activity for peacemakers, the role perhaps least assured of success, the most prone to being misunderstood. But then, should followers of the crucified Christ expect otherwise?

Youth and Police in St. Louis

"I recall at one point a near riot was in the making several blocks from Macler's shop. The incident was around a confrontation of the police and some youth who were being apprehended for apparently no good reason. The youth resisted arrest and additional police were called in for more reinforcement. Immediately approximately 25 police cars appeared. Macler saw the event happening and proceeded to intervene. Macler did not take a neutral position but took a pro-youth position. He immediately asked the police to postpone arresting the youth until some black policemen were present. The police responded. The youth were fearful of being beaten immediately when they were delivered to the police station. That was a procedure often used by St. Louis police. Macler was able to assure the youth that they would not be beaten. At that point already 500 or more neighborhood people had gathered with bricks, bottles, and other objects to begin the confrontation. A police car was overturned. In that incident Macler was able to cool tempers enough so that the youth could be taken to the police station; the crowd finally did disappear, and the youth were not booked for any offense. Had Macler not arrived at precisely that moment, a full-scale riot would have taken place in the next 20 minutes. Macler, however, did not take a neutral position. He very clearly and firmly confronted the police and their policy. He made his support for the youth who committed no offense very clear. The result was that no riot occurred. I could cite at least two or three other such incidents where Macler was able to intervene. The only way that Macler could intervene was because of his understanding of the community and being known by the community, both the residents and the establishment, and his own personal concern for the welfare of human beings. While every major city in the U.S. had riots during the 60's, there was not one incident of any rioting or even brush fires in St. Louis. My judgment on that is that St. Louis had a Macler Shepard who was able to effect authentic conciliation."

The Church and the Wilmington Ten*

In February 1971 in Wilmington, North Carolina, tensions resulting from desegregation of the city's public schools culminated in several days and nights of unrest in Wilmington, including two deaths and the burning of a grocery store. Nearly a year later charges were brought against 16 persons (later reduced to 10) for burning down the grocery store, whereupon they were jailed for four months without bail. The "Wilmington 10," as they came to be known—nine black males and one white female—were tried, found guilty, and sentenced to a combined total of 282 years in prison. Despite numerous appeals, they all returned to prison in February 1976 to begin serving their sentences. Except for the white woman who had the lightest sentence and was released on parole in the spring of 1977, all are in prison.

For me, the Wilmington 10 case might have remained simply a story, another instance of injustice, had not one of the defendants entered Talladega College in Alabama where I teach. Following the trial William "Joe" Wright was out on bail and became first my student, then my friend. Gradually I became more and more involved with both him and the case, assisting with personal matters, relaying messages, even assisting with aspects of his case. And as I learned to know Joe, I began to understand the tremendous burden, and the scars, which this case has placed upon him. He is now in prison—and has been in prison longer than even I with my skepticism about justice in this land expected him to be. The license plates of the state that has imprisoned him, incidentally, declare that North Carolina is "First in Freedom."

The story began in Wilmington, an economically insecure port city (in the southeastern part of North Carolina) with a long history of racial tensions. In the fall of 1970, court-ordered school desegregation took place. Black high schools with long and often proud traditions were demoted to junior high schools, with students and faculty getting distributed among the previously all-white schools. Many students were now in a minority situation for the first time.

Demands for increased black participation in school affairs began, culminating in a demonstration in January 1971 when one high school refused to allow an assembly program to be dedicated to the honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Student leaders were expelled, and some violence occurred—perpetuated, it appears, mainly by whites.

Students then decided on a boycott, and the local United Church of Christ opened its doors to boycotting students and community persons. Community support grew, but so did tensions, and the local U.C.C. minister finally appealed to the main church offices for leadership. The Commission for Racial Justice of the U.C.C. then sent Rev. Ben Chavis, an experienced community activist and mediator, to Wilmington, to assist.

*By Howard Zehr, Jr. Reprinted from *Gospel Herald*, Nov. 1, 1977. Portions deleted.