

M E S S A G E T O T H E C H U R C H E S

The Rev. John F. Thorne was taken into detention on Saturday, May 24th, 1980 at 12.30 p.m.

Within an hour of Mr. Thorne's arrest, the Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and Dr. Kleinbooi went to John Vorster Square to obtain further information regarding his detention. The officer in charge of the enquiry office refused to disclose the name, telephone number or whereabouts of any senior officer of the Security Branch. He took the names and telephone numbers of the Rev. Joseph Wing and Dr. Kleinbooi and agreed to communicate them to the head of the Security Branch on the Witwatersrand. He also received Mr. Thorne's medication and promised to make arrangements for him to receive it. No communication was received from the head of Security.

Mr. Wing then communicated with the headquarters of the Security Branch in Pretoria. He spoke to a junior officer, who was not aware of Mr. Thorne's detention. The officer agreed to convey Mr. Wing's message and telephone number to the head of Security. There was no response.

Mr. Wing also made an unsuccessful attempt to reach the residence of the Minister of Justice in Cape Town.

At a meeting of ministers in Coronationville that evening, it was agreed that a service of intercession for the Rev. John Thorne should be held at the Congregational Centre, Braamfontein on Monday, May 26th, 1980 at 9.00 a.m., following which the ministers present would walk to John Vorster Square in clerical robes to present a petition expressing solidarity with Mr. Thorne, as a brother minister, and calling for his release.

Church leaders and ministers of C.U.C. - related Churches in Johannesburg were contacted by telephone and asked to attend the service and walk thereafter to John Vorster Square to present the petition.

The service was held as planned on Monday, May 26th, with about 100 people attending. Fifty-three ministers and lay people joined the walk to John Vorster Square. At the corner of Britchard and Sauer Streets they were arrested. They were then taken to John Vorster Square, where the head of the Security Branch was given the petition for the release of Mr. Thorne, together with a copy of the order of service used at Braamfontein and a brief statement outlining the motivation of the protest.

The Rev. John F. Thorne was released at 4.30 p.m. on Monday, May 26th, 1980.

The group of clergy and others were taken into custody and appeared in court on Tuesday, May 27th, 1980. The case was remanded until July 1st, 1980, and they were released on their own recognizances.

A copy of the petition presented to the head of the Security Branch on the Witwatersrand is attached hereto.

The purpose of the walk and petition was not to seek confrontation with the Government, but

- (a) to express solidarity with a brother minister who had identified himself fully with the needs of the community and his people in the exercise of his pastoral duties.
- (b) to protest against detention without charges being preferred, and the suspension of the rule of law on which such detention is based.

The Church leaders, ministers and others who were held in custody were deeply aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit with them and of the loving concern and support of the People of God. Their worship and fellowship in the cells was an enriching experience in which they discovered that they were ONE IN THE SPIRIT AND ONE IN THE LORD. The unity which so often seems to elude us in Plans of Union became a reality as together we sought to be faithful to our common Lord and to one another.

I.C. Aitken
GENERAL SECRETARY: PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.

+TIMOTHY BAVIN
ANGLICAN BISHOP OF JOHANNESBURG

FREDERICK BELL
GENERAL SECRETARY: FEDERATION OF
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCHES
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

STANLEY PITTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE SOUTH-WEST
TRANSVAAL DISTRICT OF THE
METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

DESMOND TUTU
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

JOSEPH WING
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UNITED
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA

DETENTION

of the

REV. JOHN F. THORNE
Minister of Bosmont Congregational Church,
Former Chairman of the United Congregational
Church of Southern Africa, Ex-President and
General Secretary of the South African Council
of Churches.

WE, Ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ and religious leaders of other Faiths, do hereby protest against the detention of the Rev. John F. Thorne, without reasons being given or any charges preferred.

We respectfully submit:

1. That the Rev. John Thorne in identifying with the legitimate aspirations of the young people committed to his pastoral care has acted in obedience to God and in the service of his people.
2. That in all his dealings with the students, the parents and the teachers, the Rev. John Thorne has consistently upheld Christian standards of justice and truth.
3. That as a respected leader of the Church and the community the Rev. John Thorne has always advocated change by peaceful means. He is a man of peace and has exercised a restraining and reconciling influence during the recent unrest in the schools.
4. That the detention of the Rev. John Thorne could exacerbate the volatile situation which prevails in black education at the present time.

As Ministers of Religion, we, like our brother John Thorne, are bound by our commission to serve God and the people committed to our pastoral care.

If in the exercise of his ministry the Rev. John Thorne is guilty of any offence which warrants detention, we as his fellow ministers are guilty of the same offence: in the exercise of our ministry our first loyalty must always be to God and the justice of his Kingdom.

We, therefore, hereby express our solidarity with the Rev. John Thorne in the work and witness of the Christian Ministry. We believe that he has based his work and witness on the following Biblical principles, on which we take our stand as the only basis for his action and our total pastoral and social responsibility:-

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself." St. Luke 10: 27

"What is it that the Lord asks of you? Only to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly before God." Micah 6: 8

"Is not this what I require of you: to loose the fetters of injustice and to set free those who have been crushed?" Isaiah 58: 6

"We must obey God rather than men." Act 5: 29

WE HEREBY CALL FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF JOHN THORNE FROM DETENTION