

REFORMATION SUNDAY: OCTOBER 29

1963

A Year of Presbyterian Reform

“The churches have long pronounced, and they’ve said it ever since the New Testament was written, that we’re for a non-segregated church and a non-segregated society—but it’s been mostly talk. And during this year of 1963 it’s clear that this crisis is a national crisis and that the pattern, the segregated pattern of life needs to be broken.”

On July 4, 1963, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) Rev. Eugene Carson Blake and African American Elder Furman Templeton approached Gwynn Oaks Amusement Park in Baltimore. The pair, along with other civil rights activists, were arrested for trespassing.

Months before Blake and Templeton’s attempt to desegregate the Maryland amusement park, the 175th UPCUSA General Assembly created the Commission on Religion and Race (CORAR). The new commission would be the focal point of the UPCUSA’s concern for race relations and would work with interfaith and ecumenical groups to address racism in the United States. Headed by Gayraud Wilmore, CORAR would also design “comprehensive and coordinated strategy for direct and cooperative action.”

Blake and Templeton’s action, captured on 16mm film and available in Pearl Digital Collections, is just one of the visible acts of protest and reform enacted by the UPCUSA that year. On August 28, Blake would join over 200,000 protestors at the March on Washington where he would speak alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., and other religious and civic leaders.



Eugene Carson Blake entering a police van after being arrested at Gwynn Oak, 1963.

For more Reformation Sunday resources, and to view the digitized 16mm film of Blake’s arrest, visit www.history.pcusa.org/rs