SHELBY COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
CRIMINAL COURTS BUILDING
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

January 30, 1969

Sheriff William N. Morris, Jr.
Criminal Courts Building
Memphis, Tennessee

Re: Rev. James L. Bevel,
Dr. William A. Rutherford

Dear Sir:

On January 23, 1969, on your instructions, myself along with Captain B. J. Smith, met in your office at approximately 8:00 P.M. in preparation for a visit by Mr. Percy Foreman, attorney for James Earl Ray, who was to be accompanied by a Rev. James L. Bevel.

At 8:20 P.M. we met Mr. Foreman and Rev. James L. Bevel who gave his address as 919 North Eighteenth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a Dr. William A. Rutherford, male colored, whose address was given as 334 Auburn, Atlanta, Georgia, whose phone number is 522-1420, who is described by Rev. Bevel as a National Director of Special Affairs for the S.C.L.C.

At this time, the undersigned accompanied by Captain B. J. Smith, Mr. Foreman, Rev. Bevel and Dr. Rutherford, went to the third floor maximum security area to prepare for Rev. Bevel and Mr. Foreman's visit with Ray. This was done after following all procedures pertaining to Ray's custody. We received a request from Rev. Bevel and Mr. Foreman that Dr. Rutherford wished to discuss this case with James Earl Ray, as well as Rev. Bevel and Mr. Foreman, at which time you gave your permission. Upon arriving on the third floor Rev. Bevel and Dr. Rutherford were given a very thorough search being stripped of all clothing and being given coveralls to wear while conversing with Ray. Both subjects readily submitted to the strip search with no complaint and were very cooperative.

At 8:30 P.M. on January 23, the three above listed subjects started their conversation with James Earl Ray. They were allowed to talk to Ray through the speaker leading into one of the cells in his block and that at no time did they or could they have had physical contact with Ray.

For security reasons Captain Smith and the undersigned were positioned so that we could observe Rev. Bevel and Dr. Rutherford at all times, and due to the fact that they were talking in rather loud tones to Ray we could easily hear one side of the conversation. We did not hear any of the responses from Ray to questions asked by Bevel and Rutherford. Mr. Foreman started the conversation by introducing the two subjects to Ray.

Rev. Bevel made the statement right after being introduced to Ray, "I have a feeling that you did not murder Dr. King". Bevel then proceeded to go into a long conversation with quite a bit of rambling and I got the impression that he was preaching to Ray. He asked Ray if he wanted him to serve as full co-counsel with Mr. Foreman. Mr. Foreman interrupted at this point and stated that Ray had certainly wanted his help and had so advised him (Mr. Foreman) but this was a matter that would have to be discussed with the court. Rev. Bevel then told Ray that it would certainly be of help to him (Ray) if he, (Bevel) was seated at the counsel table as full co-counsel for the man who has supposedly murdered his best friend, Martin. Bevel stated he thought that this would help Ray's case very much. He then added that if the Judge turned down this request then he would be violating Ray's civil rights, because any man anywhere in this country can choose anyone he wants as his counsel. Dr. Rutherford started talking to Ray at this time and was interrupted on occasion by Rev. Bevel. Nothing of consequence was said. At 9:00 P.M. I advised Mr. Foreman that their time was up and on three or four occasions, both Mr. Foreman and myself had to tell Dr. Rutherford and Rev. Bevel that the time was up as they apparently wanted to keep talking to Ray. Mr. Foreman was obviously ready to stop. We did allow Rev. Bevel to talk a few more minutes to Ray while Dr. Rutherford was changing his clothes and as soon as Dr. Rutherford was clear the changing room, Rev. Bevel came out making the statement, "This man is no more guilty than I am".

Captain B. J. Smith quoted Rev. Bevel after he had entered the room to change clothes as saying, "He's had it", referring to Ray. He next made statements to the effect that you guys would arrest anybody and let 'em fry just to say that the killer of Dr. King has been arrested.

I observed Rev. Bevel and Dr. Rutherford very closely while enroute to the third floor and while in the vicinity of "A" Block. Dr. Rutherford was engaging everyone in conversation and Rev. Bevel appeared to be looking all of our facilities over very closely and on one occasion while waiting for Captain Smith to finish the strip search of Dr. Rutherford, Rev. Bevel started walking around in the open area on the third floor, obviously trying to look at the other cell blocks, although their doors were shut anyway and were not visible to him.

During the conversation between Rev. Bevel, Dr. Rutherford and Ray, no information was exchanged that would be of benefit to this case.

Respectfully,

ROY C. NIXON
CHIEF DEPUTY

RCN/lpt