

## BIOGRAPHY

Howard Kester was a leader in the fields of race relations, economic reform, and church reform in his native South. He was also an educator, beginning as a speaker-leader on the lecture and conference circuits on southern campuses, and later as a teacher and educational administrator in community schools and at the college level. Perhaps the central theme of Kester's work was his search for the meaning of his Christian religion, a search which required him to inquire honestly into the tenets of this religion as they applied to the problems of his neighbors, his friends and his society, and to act forthrightly on his conclusions. The emphasis was always on action. "Sure you've got to believe in the Gospel," he once said, "but you've also got to do something about it."

Kester was one of a number of young men and women who emerged, in the decades following the First World War, as leaders in those areas of southern life dominated by the Student Christian Movement. Their problems were the problems of a rural culture steeped in tradition as it attempted to absorb and cope with the industrial development, increasing urbanization, technological progress, and rapid change of twentieth century life. The young reformers were charged with the desire to understand, combine, and give effective expression to their heritage as Christians and as Americans as they faced life in the "New South".

When Kester enrolled in the Vanderbilt University School of Religion in the fall of 1926, he already had a reputation as a young radical. Five years earlier, at the age of 17, "Buck" Kester had gone to Lynchburg College with a desire to study for the ministry. He soon became one of the leaders of the Lynchburg College YMCA. He attended the conferences held every summer at the Blue Ridge Assembly located near Black Mountain, North Carolina. He became the first "fraternal delegate" to the conferences of Negro students held at nearby Kings Mountain and invited Negroes to attend the Blue Ridge conferences in the same capacity. He worked for an end to separate organizations for white and Negro students within the Student Christian Movement. He spent a summer in Europe observing the effects of the "Great War", a trip which turned him into a life-long pacifist. By the time Kester graduated from Lynchburg in 1925, Virginia had the first functioning interracial student council in the southern states.

Kester's plans to study at Princeton Theological Seminary ended in March of his first year, when, dissatisfied with the "ivory tower" atmosphere he found there, he determined to continue his studies for the ministry but only on his own terms which were, opposition to segregation, belief in pacifism and a conviction that an effective minister must be concerned with such problems. He was supported in his decision by Dr. George Washington Carver, who attended the Blue Ridge Conference in 1926, and with whom he developed a close friendship. He was also supported by Alice Harris of Decatur, Georgia, who attended the same conference. They were married the following February.

In the fall of 1926 Kester enrolled in Vanderbilt University, supporting himself by working as the associate secretary of the school's YMCA. He organized a series of interracial conferences and meetings involving students and faculty from colleges in the Nashville area, notably Vanderbilt, Fisk, Tennessee A and I, and Scarritt. The following spring, when he organized a meeting in protest against the involvement of allied American, British, and French troops in the Chinese rebellion, Kester was informed by the chancellor of Vanderbilt that he was out of a job.

That spring, Kester accepted a job in the New York headquarters of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an international Christian pacifist organization founded by British Quakers during the First World War, as the organization's youth secretary, attending conferences and organizing local groups for FOR on campuses throughout the country. His time was spent mainly in travelling from one campus and student conference and classroom and speaker's podium to the next, speaking, discussing, debating, lecturing to classes, and organizing local clubs dedicated to FOR principles, chiefly in the South.

The Kesters returned to Nashville in the fall of 1929, so that he could complete his work at Vanderbilt, where he received the Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1931. Kester continued to work for FOR, now as southern secretary, travelling, speaking, and organizing, through 1933. He kept on the move, speaking, attending conferences, meeting with church, labor, and political leaders, writing, investigating conditions, returning home to try to catch up on a hopeless and ever increasing mountain of correspondence, and then hitting the road again to raise funds, make more speeches, and meet with more people. The only extended breaks Kester had during this period were those ordered by the family doctor.

In addition to his continuous work with college students, Kester came into regular contact with a number of people and organizations active in areas relating to his work and interests. Among these were Dorothy Detzer of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, James Myers of the Federal Council of Churches, Willard Uphaus of the Religion and Labor Foundation, Benjamin Marsh of The People's Lobby, Louise Leonard McLaren of the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry, Helen Dingman of the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, and James Dombrowski, Myles Horton, and Eugene Sutherland of the Highlander Folk School.

By 1931 Kester had come to see his work in terms of three general issues: an attack on the practices and attitudes of racial segregation, an opposition to war and the use of violence, and an opposition to capitalist economics. He believed these issues were in reality a three-pronged attack on the most pressing problems confronting the South. These issues all stemmed from the same central philosophical position: the belief, as taught by men like Reinhold Niebuhr, in the need for a direct application of the teachings of Jesus to current social problems. Social action was the necessary outgrowth of a genuine belief in the validity of basic Christian teachings and at the same time an effective expression of those teachings.

In the years following 1931, Kester became involved with a number of organizations concerned with one or more of these three central issues: integration, pacifism, and socialism. In the fall of 1934, he wrote the first of a number of reports for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), detailing the results of his investigation of a reported lynching. The NAACP was interested in having as complete a record of such occurrences as possible, both in order to bring criminal charges, and as part of their effort to maintain a running record of the black experience in America. Regularly during the 1930s, Kester was asked by NAACP secretary Walter White to travel to a particular town and ascertain the facts on a rumored lynching. Kester's reports were filled with factual detail concerning the circumstances of the lynching, often including the names of many of those directly involved or responsible. He also reported on the economic conditions of the town at the time, in an effort to explore all the circumstances which would lead to such an event. The NAACP published several of his reports in its efforts to secure the passage of anti-lynching laws by Congress. The Lynching of Claude Neal, a report of a particularly brutal killing in 1934, found its way to President Roosevelt. None of the reports was published with Kester's name attached, as this would have seriously hampered his work in the South in this and other areas.

In the fall of 1931, while on a trip to New York City, Kester joined the Socialist Party. On his return to Nashville, he worked with others to establish a local party organization and to distribute party information through the local chapter of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID). In early 1932, he took charge of the Nashville end of the LID lecture circuit series, and every year after, until 1940, he was himself a circuit speaker. In the fall of 1932 he ran for Congress on the Socialist Party ticket, but lost.

Problems arose between Kester and the FOR leadership in New York, stemming from the struggles within the leadership concerning the definition of pacifism. The Kesters became involved in a miners' strike in Wilder, Tennessee, which resulted in violent confrontation and the death by gunshot of the union's president. Violence was a constant companion of attempts at labor organization all over the country, but FOR leader John Nevin Sayre felt that to choose sides in a violent controversy was to condone the use of violence. Kester, while renouncing violence personally, was willing to see its necessity under certain circumstances. The conflict ended with Kester's resignation from his office and the organization. His resignation prompted that of national leaders such as Reinhold Niebuhr, J. B. Matthews, Bradford Young, and Elizabeth Gilman, who complained that Sayre's view of pacifism, now the official FOR view, was too restricted to allow for effective action in many situations.

During the weeks that followed a number of these disaffected FOR leaders gathered and founded the Committee on Economic and Racial Justice (CERJ). The express purpose of this new group was to raise money to pay Kester a salary while he worked in the South at whatever projects he deemed important. The committee was organized in the middle of February, 1934, with Niebuhr as chairman and Elizabeth Gilman as treasurer. Some initial funds were pledged and gathered, and Kester was hired as the executive secretary of the organization. His only restrictions were those of his own judgment regarding the

amount of time he should give to whichever activities he considered significant.

In the spring of 1934, Kester attended the first meeting of the Conference of Younger Churchmen of the South, a gathering of liberal clergy attempting to find ways to make the church more active and more responsive in its role in southern life. Kester organized the group's second conference that fall. He wrote the poem, "I See America," in an attempt to describe the incongruity of poverty, especially persistent in the South, in a country so seemingly rich in resources. He also wrote the first of several liturgies, "The Ceremony of the Land." That fall he also investigated the Claude Neal lynching for the NAACP.

The depression had hit all levels of American society hard, but among the hardest hit were the landless farmers who worked the cotton fields of the South. There were southern areas where the system of farm tenancy operated little differently from a kind of feudal community in which the local planter controlled the crops to be planted, the money to be paid, the food and equipment supplied, the schooling offered, and the justice administered. The law was as fair in operation as the planter required it to be. It was a time when cash was scarce, cotton prices were low, and the government was paying landowners not to plant.

In July, 1934, in the small town of Tyronza, in the plantation country of northeastern Arkansas, a group of tenant farmers and sharecroppers, black and white, joined together to form the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU). It soon became apparent that the union meant to offer, and was capable of offering, a serious threat to long established patterns of plantation power. By the winter of 1934-1935, a wave of terror had set in as croppers in northeastern Arkansas were threatened, beaten, killed, evicted, or run out of town.

In January, 1935, Kester responded to the urgings of a Vanderbilt schoolmate and close friend, Ward Rodgers, and visited Arkansas, where he immediately became involved with the work of the STFU. Together with H. L. Mitchell, the union secretary, member of the Socialist Party, and a former sharecropper himself, Kester spent the first months of 1935 traveling around northeastern Arkansas, speaking at rallies, organizing locals for the union, and meeting with leaders. His position with the union was always vaguely defined. He became whatever was needed: organizer, speaker, philosopher, poet, polemicist, and fund raiser. It was Kester who insisted that the union should remain non-violent as a matter of policy. He also directed much of the union's publicity campaigns, writing the pamphlet Revolt Among the Sharecroppers, and organizing national fund drives such as National Sharecroppers' Week. He also organized clothing drives which were successful in providing union members with clothes. He composed lengthy statements on farm tenancy which the union presented to Governor Futrell's Commission on Farm Tenancy in late 1936. Kester's "Ceremony of the Land" was used to climax the 1937 union convention.

The work was exciting but it was also dangerous. By 1935, H. L. Mitchell and the union headquarters had moved to Memphis, Tennessee, partly to be more centrally located for the rapidly expanding union membership, but partly because Mitchell had received numerous threats against his life and that of his family. In 1935, in Birdsong, Arkansas, Norman Thomas was dragged from the platform on which he was addressing a group of union members and roughly handled. In January, 1936, Kester was forcibly taken from a union meeting in Earle, Arkansas, and nearly lynched. Frank Weems, a union member, disappeared, presumably killed or frightened away. When Claude Williams tried to investigate what had happened to Weems, he was beaten. C. T. Carpenter, union attorney, was threatened, and his home was riddled by shotgun bullets as an added warning.

Union members would not be deterred and the union achieved some successes. A strike in the fall of 1935 succeeded in raising the pay men received for picking cotton. The publicity the union stirred up led Governor Futrell of Arkansas to establish a Commission on Farm Tenancy in 1936, and President Roosevelt established a similar commission the following year. Paul Peacher, deputy sheriff of Earle, Arkansas, was tried and convicted of peonage. The union's membership grew.

One of the most striking outgrowths of the union's work was the Delta Cooperative Farm. Established at Rochdale, Mississippi, in the spring of 1936 through the efforts of Sherwood Eddy, former international YMCA leader, William R. Amberson, a socialist-minded biologist, and Reinhold Niebuhr, and led locally by Sam Franklin, a missionary recently returned from Japan, and Gene Cox, the farm was exactly the kind of cooperative farming experiment which union leaders had felt all along would provide the most practical answer to the problems of the rural South. The farm continued to operate through the mid-1950s, when those who were living there were finally forced out by the threatening action of the local White Citizens Council.

Kester's relations with the Communists had never been very cordial. Earlier in the 1930s he had travelled to New York City with several of his friends to visit Earl Browder, chairman of the Communist Party in the United States, to determine whether in fact the party offered the best chance for helping the country and the South. Although he spoke with Browder for two hours, Kester later recalled that it took him only fifteen minutes to decide that the Communists were not for him. He agreed with many of their stated goals but was appalled by what he felt was a complete lack of any moral sense.

Kester's experiences with the Socialist Party did little to change his attitude toward the Communists. He had maintained his membership and activity in the Socialist Party from the time he had joined it in 1931, and by 1937 he was a nationally known figure within party circles. Norman Thomas and Clarence Senior both corresponded with Kester, and he admired both of them, particularly Thomas. Kester's successes in publicizing the STFU were in a sense party successes because although the union and the party insisted that there was no formal connection between the two, the union leadership was

dominated by party members. In 1936, Kester was mentioned by the New York Herald as a possible running mate for Norman Thomas on the national party ticket that fall. The following spring Kester was one of the platform speakers at the party convention in Chicago, where he was elected to the party's national executive committee.

The Socialist Party during this time was a highly fragmented collection of opposing interest groups. Kester was very disturbed by the amount of energy being expended in factional disputes. These disputes came to a head in the fall of 1937 at a meeting of the national executive committee in New York at which a group allied with the exiled Communist Leon Trotsky was expelled. Kester sided with Thomas and voted for expulsion. There followed a bitter series of fights on the state levels, as in Ohio and California where the Trotskyites tried to seize control of the party offices and machinery in opposition to the national executive committee. The upshot of the battle was a weaker Socialist Party which continued the downward trend evidenced by its poor showing in the 1936 presidential campaign.

While Kester considered the union and the party work important, he did not feel that these were the only areas to which he should be devoting his time. The Conference of Younger Churchmen of the South had not met during 1935, but Kester had managed to organize another meeting during the fall of 1936. At this conference the name of the organization was changed to the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen (FSC), and it was put on a more solid structural foundation. Kester's work with the Fellowship during 1936-1937, his continued work with LID, student conferences, fund raising, and his work with the union and the Socialist Party proved to be too much, and in May, 1937, he was ordered by his doctor to stop and rest for at least a month and probably more. The rest continued through the summer, and although he attended the student conferences at Blue Ridge and Kings Mountain, as he had every summer for a dozen years, he remained relatively inactive during this long recuperative period.

When Kester returned to work in the fall, he was more determined than ever to devote the main thrust of his energies to his work in the religious sphere. He had long felt that his strong attraction to social action was grounded in his religious convictions. Religion, he was convinced, could exercise the most potent influence for meaningful social change in the South. It was in this frame of mind that Kester returned, first to New York to vote with the Socialist Party's executive committee on the expulsion of the Communists, and later that same month to Memphis, where STFU affiliated with the Communist dominated United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), a move which he did not approve.

During the fall of 1937, Kester attempted to fulfill the commitments he had already made to a number of groups, but at the same time to devote his energies, already strained, to the development of the FSC. In October, 1937, he investigated conditions of peonage among the Negroes of Warren County, Georgia, for the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). That same winter he travelled through Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan on a LID lecture tour, and later in the spring he attended a meeting of the UCAPAWA

leadership in Washington, from which he was expelled. But he struggled to spend more and more time on his work for the Fellowship and with friends such as T. B. Cowan, Walter Sikes, and Eugene Smathers. In December, 1937, Howard and Alice Kester began publication of the Fellowship magazine, Prophetic Religion, and continued to edit and write articles for the journal through 1941.

In the spring of 1938, the Kesters acquired property in High Top Colony, a semi-cooperative community near Blue Ridge Assembly and Black Mountain, North Carolina, inhabited mainly by Student Christian Movement leaders such as Will Alexander, Dagnall F. Folger, and Edward S. King. They built a cabin there and in the spring of 1939 moved home and office from Nashville to Black Mountain. Mrs. Kester handled the office while Kester spent much of his time on the road.

When people contributed money to the Committee on Economic and Racial Justice, they often assumed that they were also supporting the union. Many committee members assumed that the union was receiving most of Kester's time, but Mitchell and others felt that Kester was not spending as much time with the union as he should, and Mitchell wrote to the committee, requesting that Kester be assigned to the union's work for a specific period annually. By 1941 the committee members seriously questioned their organizational structure. If Kester was going to work full-time for FSC, they felt the FSC should pay his salary and the committee should either disband or find other work. The committee existed to support Kester, not the FSC. In the fall of 1941 the executive committee of CERJ decided that the committee should dissolve and FSC should assume the responsibility for Kester's salary. The decision was satisfactory to all concerned, including Kester, who felt that the FSC was the proper agency to support his work. CERJ formally dissolved on January 1, 1942, and all remaining assets were transferred to the Fellowship. A new organization, the Friends of the FSC, was formed as a fund raising group operating in the Northeast to help with the Fellowship's work.

The move had come at a time when the work of the Fellowship was expanding into a number of new areas, largely due to Kester's activities, and the result was the need to raise three or four times the budget it had been able to raise in the past. The demand was a heavy one and it could not have come at a worse time: the nation was involved in a war and the FSC was met at every turn by the war-inspired desire to put off any confrontation on domestic problems during the crisis. The FSC had to regroup its meager resources. Plans had to be cut back. Prophetic Religion was first delayed and then ceased publication altogether. The Kesters' salaries were barely met. They decided to look elsewhere for employment.

In June, 1943, they decided that he would accept the offer of a position as principal of the Penn Normal Industrial and Agricultural School on St. Helena Island off the South Carolina coast. In December, 1943, the Kesters left Black Mountain and moved to St. Helena, toward what they hoped would be a more settled and secure life.

Located on the island of St. Helena, off the South Carolina coast town of Beaufort, Penn School was the first school for Negro children in the South. The Union army "liberated" the island in the spring of 1862, only

to find that the white plantation owners and overseers had fled with the retreating Confederate army, leaving behind their land and their slaves. The slaves were declared free, but their ignorance and inexperience with any but a slave-based economy created considerable problems for an occupying army unequipped to deal with their needs and preoccupied with the other concerns of those early war years. Two women from Philadelphia, Miss Laura M. Towne and Miss Ellen Murray, financed by northeastern Quaker groups, journeyed to the island later that year and established the school, naming it after William Penn. The two founders died within a year of each other, in 1904. They were replaced by two more northern white Friends, Miss Rossa B. Cooley and Miss Grace B. House.

Misses Cooley and House were not simply missionaries dedicated to work in an educationally deprived Southland; they were educational experimenters, well read in the current literature of educational reform. Their goal was to expand the function of the school from simply providing the more standard academic instruction to that of a community-based center for seeking and exploring solutions to community-wide economic and social problems.

Financing the school became more and more difficult with the arrival of the Depression. The upkeep of many of the buildings was necessarily put off. The quality of the staff dropped, as low salaries and the isolation of life on St. Helena could no longer compete with the attractions of other locations. The expansion of the public school systems and the increasing willingness to hire Negro teachers attracted people who in earlier times would have gone to Penn. The coming of World War II, which further tightened the money supply and which drew off even more Negroes into the various armed services, aggravated these already serious problems.

It was at this point that Misses Cooley and House retired, and Howard and Alice Kester assumed their duties as principal and director of academic instruction. Shortly after their arrival in January, 1944, the Kesters found themselves faced with problems they had not been led to anticipate. Almost immediately after their arrival on St. Helena, they were informed that unless the quality of the faculty was immediately improved, the school was in danger of losing its state accreditation. In addition, there was the effect of what one friend called "82 years of inertia and a charitable paternalism with all its opiate effects" (S. J. Wright to Howard Kester, Dec. 19, 1944).

The Kesters obtained the promise that they would have time to build up the faculty to an acceptable level, thereby saving the school's accreditation. While Alice concentrated on this program and generally on improving the academic offerings of the school, Howard involved himself in an examination of the physical plant, the school farm and machinery, and the existing programs in vocational instruction. He submitted his conclusions to the board of trustees, along with an analysis of the current operation and assets of the school and his specific suggestions for moving forward. The buildings were all to be renovated, the school was to establish regular channels for securing the cooperation and assistance of the state extension service, an ambitious crop and livestock program was to be initiated, new



machinery acquired and old machinery replaced, fences were to be built, and land was to be cleared. The trustees were startled by the sweeping nature of Kester's proposals, but they were also impressed by what he was suggesting, so they voted unanimously to back him and his program "all the way".

While the Kesters worked at mobilizing the school and island community to bring about their proposed changes, the trustees worked at providing the required financial backing. Problems quickly developed in both areas. There was considerable resentment on the part of some community and staff members to Kester's programs, and this resentment acquired a rallying point when in the fall of 1945 Misses Cooley and House returned from their summer home on Long Island to their winter home on the island. That same fall Alice Kester came down with viral pneumonia and was forced to limit her activity drastically until the late spring of the following year. A year later, Howard became ill, attacked by viral pneumonia, influenza, and his recurrent asthma all at the same time. He was partly out of action for about two months.

Meanwhile, the board of trustees was not as successful as they had hoped in raising the needed funds. Not only were Kester's new programs threatened, but it was difficult to find the funds to keep the existing programs functioning. In February, 1948, Kester presented a report to the board of trustees on the state of the school. The report was prepared by a team from Clemson and eight other colleges, led by sociologist Ira De A. Reid, who analyzed Penn's services and the community's needs and recommended severe changes in the nature of the school organization. After considerable debate, the board accepted the basic recommendations of the report, and Kester was authorized to carry out the details of the change, which transformed Penn from a school to a center for community service groups and an adult education program.

After working several months on the necessary arrangements, and confident of a smooth transition, the Kesters, their jobs now eliminated and desiring in any case to move on, submitted their resignations to the board, effective in September, 1948. That summer when they returned to their home in High Top Colony they had left St. Helena for good.

During the 1940s the members of the FSC had not been idle. By the middle of the decade, the Fellowship had resumed its earlier level of activity, and Prophetic Religion had resumed publication. An earlier idea of organizing a "Seminary in the Cornfield" had by the late 1940s combined with a felt need on the part of many Fellowship members for a meeting place where interracial conferences, retreats and work camps could be held. The FSC purchased 385 acres outside Swannanoa, North Carolina, and Kester was asked to assume the responsibility for all the work of the Fellowship and for the building and management of the fellowship center.

As always money remained a problem. The FSC was \$2,500 in debt in 1948. The organization was going to have to raise a budget of \$15,000 to meet the debt and finance this new costly project. As time elapsed and the money did not

In the meantime, other Fellowship concerns continued. In 1952 the participants in the Blue Ridge Retreat voted to end the dual organizational structure which had characterized the Student Christian Movement, and to have only one organization to which members of both races would belong. This was particularly rewarding for Kester since, as a student attending the same conference thirty years before, he had presented a similar motion. Retreats and conferences were held regularly for Fellowship members, and the concerns of the Fellowship for increased interracial communication and understanding, care for natural resources through the work of the Friends of the Soil, and community-centered ministry work continued.

In the racially troubled summer and fall of 1955 the Kesters travelled across the South, meeting old friends and examining the situation first hand. Their report, which was contained in the Fellowship newsletter of November, 1955, was not an encouraging one. Consistently they found friends and Fellowship members in trouble for openly expressing integrationist views. The interracial Providence Farm, heir to the Delta Cooperative Farm of the 1930s, was feeling strong pressure from local citizens' groups. It was finally forced to close its doors the following summer. In 1956 Kester wrote:

The ranks of our Fellowship has been hit pretty hard this summer: two members of the Executive Committee have been forced to leave their churches, another is now on the carpet and a fourth has been ambushed and his farm store dynamited. The situation is tighter than I have known it in twenty years and it could get a lot worse. (Howard Kester to Q. Leisher, Aug. 13, 1956)

In late 1955 Kester began organizing a conference of church leaders throughout the South to discuss problems growing out of the May, 1954, Supreme Court decision. The conference was held in Nashville in January, 1956. The enthusiasm of this group, coupled with the increasing reaction of other elements of southern life to the Court's actions, made it seem that another, larger conference would be valuable. Beginning in the summer of 1956, Kester began organizing this conference, eventually named the Conference on Christian Faith and Human Relations. It was held in Nashville in April, 1956, and Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered the main address for the 400 clergy and laymen from across the South who participated. The conference condemned the use of violence and called for southerners to obey the law and end segregation in the schools and elsewhere.

This conference was the last major project Kester undertook for the Fellowship. The FSC had always had money problems, and these contributed to Kester's difficulties. More important, perhaps, was Kester's realization that the work of the organization was not shared among members but allocated to whatever people were willing to do it. Often that meant the Kesters. The sense of dissatisfaction the Kesters felt with this situation was increased when they received a number of complaints from FSC members who wanted them to spend more time "in the field" rather than on office work or the development of the fellowship center. In any case, the Kesters left the Fellowship in the fall of 1957, this time permanently.

From 1957 until his retirement in May, 1970, Howard Kester's principal work was in the field of college teaching and administration. In the fall of 1957 he accepted a position at Eureka College in Eureka, Illinois. He worked as professor of history and sociology, director of student affairs, and dean of students. While at Eureka, Kester worked continually to involve the students in college decision making, to help them assume the responsibility for running their own lives, and to involve them generally in the life of the college community. The weight of his many responsibilities at Eureka and his desire to return to the South led Kester to resign in 1960.

In that year, also, the Kesters returned for the last time to Black Mountain. Howard worked with the Christmount Assembly, an assembly ground located near Black Mountain, as administrator, organizer, and fund-raiser. In 1963 he began to teach part time at Montreat-Anderson College, in nearby Montreat, North Carolina. In 1965 he left his work at Christmount altogether and assumed full-time teaching duties at Montreat. In 1968 he became dean of students.

After a long and painful illness, Alice Kester died in early April, 1970. Howard retired as dean of students at the end of May 1970, and gave up his teaching duties the following spring, retiring to his home in High Top Colony.