

North Shore Cadre

For two decades Rodney and I treasured collegiality and missional focus with seven other suburban couples. It began with the women meeting together, then expanded to involvement of our husbands. We became known as the North Shore Cadre.

From the premise that local communities constitute the basic building blocks of society, in 1964 the Ecumenical Institute began working in a ghetto neighborhood on Chicago's west side, which they called Fifth City.

By early 1967, the Institute staff devised a program they called “the Trilogy,” designed to recruit and involve affluent suburban women who had been RS-1 participants. The room was filled to capacity with over one hundred women from the Chicago region. The Trilogy, three Wednesday luncheons in April, involved many for the first time in the west-side ghetto.

Following the Trilogy about thirty women met together once a week. When Joe Mathews, the Dean of the Institute gave us an assignment to put out a mailing, several women recognized that stuffing envelopes and licking stamps didn't fit their idea of significant urban engagement. The reality of the urban issues had captured the heart of these women.

Another one-day session held in the fall invited more volunteers to work with 5th City. One group of women began helping in the 5th City pre-school where I volunteered once a week. Every week I loaded broken tricycles into my station wagon. Rodney repaired and salvaged parts so two broken trikes became one workable vehicle. He accused us of running a demolition derby instead of a preschool.

Then in April the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and subsequent riots rocked and scarred the community.

The Institute Staff said a radical “no” for the women to continue active participation in 5th City.

We continued to meet once a week in the suburbs for study and planning. We struggled how to support 5th City from a distance and redefine the new women’s role in the urban. We named ourselves the New Woman’s Forum.

By the fall of 1968 we decided our husbands should meet each other. One of the women said, “Okay, I can have an Open House.” We planned a cocktail party at her house in Park Ridge.

Two couples Joe and Charles and their wives came from the Institute, Rodney said afterwards, “I liked talking with all those people. They are a neat bunch. The bartender Len hired for the party blew my mind. Once I told him what I wanted to drink, he never forgot it. We haven’t ever been to a party with a hired bartender, have we?”

Early in January at the Dresslar’s farm near Crystal Lake our next gathering opened the door to becoming a group. To further our understanding of 5th City, Joe Mathews, spent the weekend with us. Joe’s energetic affirmation was a compelling invitation to the men. Being a Methodist pastor with a Bishop for a brother, we thought he must know things we don’t., Intriguing that he never talked about God.

It was Super Bowl Sunday and everybody insisted they had to get home for the game. So toward the end of Sunday morning, Don stood up and addressed a question to each couple. He went around the circle asking, “Do you want to continue to meet together each week to study and plan how we support 5th City?” Only two couples said, “no.”

Sixteen of us started meeting once a week at one couple’s big house on Waukegan Road in Lake Forest. All the men had successful jobs, but yearned for something broader. We studied the happenings in the world

and the church. As Rodney and I discovered patterns in the world and in our lives we knew this was a path for the journey we must walk.

We participated in weekend courses with the Institute at their west side campus in 5th City: cultural studies, individual and the family, world religions, and imaginal education. Several of us began to learn how to become teachers of the Institute's courses.

Slowly the pegs of care for the broader world took hold within our hearts.

Priscilla H Wilson, December 8, 2014

North Shore Cadre:

Betty & Sheldon Hill, Georgianna & George McBurney, Mary Warren & Don Moffett, Betty & Martin Pesek, Laverne & Jim Phillips, Priscilla & Rod Wilson, Anne & David Woods