

A PILOT PROJECT  
EXPERIMENTING WITH THE STRUCTURES AND DYNAMICS  
OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

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by

The Ecumenical Institute

a division of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago

## PART ONE: The Presuppositions

### THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Across the earth, Protestant congregations are awakening to the startling new world, in which they have to live and for which they are responsible. It is a strange world of radical revolution. Radical in scope because history is experiencing for the first time a universal upheaval in consciousness; every continent, every people, every individual, every stage of life is affected. The depth of the revolution is, perhaps, even more significant. It penetrates beneath the economic and political dimensions of our social life to the very well-springs of human living itself. Concretely, the explosion in civilization now at hand is created by the convergence of three revolutions.

First, the scientific revolution is altering our model of the universe and our image of human participation in it. The universe of Dr. Einstein is woven into the very fabric of post-modern man. The concepts of the observer's role in the experience of reality, of the expanding universe and the dissipation of energy, of relational substance, and the significance of models in determining what happens in nature and history--all of these have altered the common sense of everyday thinking. The cosmological revolution has totally changed man's picture of his environment.

The second major force in the transposition of humanness today is the technological or Urban Revolution. The form of human settlement molds the life style of its people. Today the entire world is emerging into a cosmopolis which, first of all, is a state of mind. The power of the rural mind-set has been exhausted and is being replaced by the rising urban mentality. The simplicity of natural rhythms has been replaced by the complexity of historical variation. The intimate and provincial have given way to the anonymous and comprehensive. Stable patterns have been uprooted by rapid and perpetual social change, and the very roots of life are being transferred from the memories of the past to the possibilities of the future. In brief, the new urbanity is demanding different life postures which embody fresh and unique feelings after and understandings of inner human relatedness and social grounding.

The third dimension of the cultural revolution is the universal and crucial alteration of the "mood" of man. In new depth and increased intensity man has become a self-reflective or self-conscious being. Perhaps "intentionality" is the most definitive characteristic of the new mood. The post modern man takes nothing for granted, nothing on the authority of the past. Instead he forges temporal models out of the signals of the times by which he intentionally carries out the future. To do this he has been forced (consciously and unconsciously) to reinterpret radically old life-stories and to create fresh ones. There is a revolution in progress in the symbols, myths, and rites through which man is ultimately

Present to his life and times. This is an upheaval in the natural religious attitudes of man. It has indescribable consequences for every historical faith, "secular" or "religious" and for mankind at large.

### THE REVOLUTION IN THE CHURCH

This three-pronged cultural revolution comprises the world in which we live today. To designate it as good or bad, right or wrong, is to miss the crucial issue and to abstract oneself from reality. It is the given of our time to which the people of God must speak and in which they must serve. The Church has always had this two-fold responsibility: to articulate its gospel to the world and to embody this message in its life within the historical process of a more just society. In assuming this dual responsibility the Church has witnessed its own revolution which also is described by three upheavals.

The first is the theological resurgence which was born out of the Church's recognition that she must speak to and live in the world she had been given, rather than dream of victories in a world that is past. Contemporary theologians have struggled for forty odd years for the means to proclaim the Word in a relevant manner to our dynamic world. These endeavors recovered for the Church the understanding of the sovereignty of God; first of all in the sense of His lordship over history. In our concrete history we live before the Sovereign One. It is the Lord Himself who is at work in the cultural revolution. To live before God is to receive as a gift, the new world and its possibility. The next step in the recovery of theology focused on the sovereignty of God in the hearts of men, or the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In Christ occurs the transformation in the depths of man's being whereby he is enabled to live before the Creator, that is, enabled to take upon the task of living creatively in the historical time and place given to him. Along with this a new awareness of the place and significance of the Church as the Word-bearing community in history came into being. In the light of these steps one would rightly expect the third phase to be a renewed grasp of the sovereignty of God in the personal life and the dynamics of society. This emphasis on the Lordship of the Spirit has brought the Church into the middle of the world as it is presently given to us, demanding new styles of Christian living in radical obedience to God which minister unto the well-being of all men by creating new structures of justice.

Along with the theological revolution the Ecumenical Awakening has emerged. It is the denominational, sectional, national and cultural barriers which the Church in its present historical manifestation. What the twentieth century history brought into being in the past, the new anvil of the cultural revolution is altering. Categorical requirements are upon the whole Church. This is the clue to the Ecumenical movement God is creating. Ecumenicity is not a blending of differences, but a demand upon all to pick up the task of becoming the Church in the post modern

world. It is the common experience of all churches of the demand to minister no longer to themselves but to the need of the world in its new historical situation. The ecumenical revolution clarified the fact that first and foremost the Church is mission to the world.

Coupled with the theological and the ecumenical movements of today is the awakening of the laity that occurred following World War II, manifest especially in the lay centers that now cover the world. The Layman arose from the shambles of an old world to behold the arrival of a new era. He experienced a new need for being a person of faith but he also saw the demand to rethink what it would mean to be a person of faith in every facet of life. He could no longer comfortably live in a community that did not raise the serious questions. Neither could he participate in activities that were not genuinely related to the actual world and to the actual need of the time. He demanded a gospel which spoke realistically to the world of reality. He insisted upon a community that embodied its message in the civilizing process of history. The revolution within the laity above all else pointed out that genuine faith is only present where it is acted out by men who image themselves as mission in and to the world.

### THE PROBLEM BEFORE US

Converging of these three forces that define the renewal of the Church in the midst of the historical revolution of our time has led to certain crucial awarenesses and requirements. The first is that the intellectual side of theologizing for the twentieth century revolution has been accomplished. The difficult and painful task now remains to apply these insights to the practical situation of post-modern man and society. The second is that the Church now has forged a new abstract image of herself as mission to history, to civilization and to the world. The problem before us is to put concretion upon this. How is the concept to be embodied in historical forms? How can the idea of mission be transformed into social process? A third result is the recovery of the sense that the local congregation is the heart-beat of the Church. It is the vital outpost where the Church contacts the world. It is where the models and constructs of the Church as mission must finally be hammered out and put into action.

It seems obvious that these three demands are intimately interwoven and that they converge on the problem of the local church. This would indicate that the most urgent task of the people of God is to discover fresh external structures and internal dynamics for the outposts of the Church in and through which the Church may be in actuality mission to history. Any serious concern for the renewal of the Church absolutely demands this. Perhaps her very existence depends upon it. There is already present today very precise guides for such efforts. Any local congregation which intends to be mission to history must be engaged in four serious activities: Corporate Worship, Corporate Reflection, Corporate Discipline, Corporate Action. Any earnest experiment that is concerned

with the Church as mission must begin with these not because they are sacred but because they are essential to serious mission.

First, whatever else the task of the Church may be, she is called to worship God. Worship is a focal action without which all other endeavors lose their meaning and become somehow perverted. Bereft of common worship, her reflective life turns to barren intellectualism; her common life becomes a security seeking fellowship of mutuality and her activity is reduced to the promotion of social ideals, the cultivation of individual virtue, or worse, the defending of her own existence. The Widom of our age has forced us to understand that without an empowering symbolic life no man can exist as a genuine person. Without significant worship of God, the Church cannot be the Mission of God to civilization.

Second, we are more lucidly aware than ever before that man lives by deep personal pictures or images of himself. He forges his creative responses to life out of the "images" of who he is within the models of his environment. The churchman of today needs fresh and relevant images of what it means to be the Church, to be the wedge blade that breaks upon history, to be the obedient representative of all creation. He needs images of his election to bear the Word through which all men can live, of his calling to responsibility for the world, of his vocation as one of the prophetic minority who stands at the impingement point of the future and signals to the rest of mankind the path it must follow. He must understand that he is to create new images of personal and social morality, new modes of the family, the polis, and world-wide involvement. Clearly this demands rigorous common reflection upon the meaning of the faith of our fathers and upon the nature of the world to which we must declare it. The very idea of mission categorically requires the enterprise of serious education within the local congregation.

Third, the container of the two feci, worship and reflection, is the Church's common life or discipline for the sake of its task in history. Without conscious submission to the concrete and particular task the churchman lapses into lethargy, becomes a victim of petty desire and dissipates his energies in insignificant activities. Without discipline mission fades; reflection becomes abstract; and worship turns irrelevant. The fellowship or discipline of the Church also involves common planning and common execution of the specific task assigned to the corporate body by virtue of its location in time and space. Discipline is not for the sake of preserving faith, but always for the purpose of accomplishing the task. It is the free covenantal act by which a community binds itself together in effort and accountability to the end of realizing a common mission.

Finally, the people of God who choose to stand before the Lord of history always find themselves standing before the ever present need of all mankind. The Church has the perpetual role of interfering with the civilizing process to meet this need. It is first and last mission to history, bearing witness to the Word and incarnating that witness in acts

of loving justice in the social order. The important concern here is that this calling is specific and concrete. It is to be carried out by the local congregation assigned to its particular place and time in history. Surely the activities of common worship, study and discipline are a part of this mission. The emphasis however must be upon the corporate action of this body in the world. The former are but means to this end. Furthermore, this term corporate is to be underlined. Every act of the individual is to be grasped as an expression of the congregation in fulfilling its task. The intentional thrust of the separate person is born out of the thrust of the whole body. And most crucial, the body must directly act as a unified pressure in bearing witness and establishing justice. This is to say the congregation as a congregation acts. It is a corps of sentinels calling into question the demonic within the social structures, and raising up new forms of justice that minister to the well-being of the neighbor.

THE COMPREHENSIVE AIM

This all too briefly stated analysis was formulated by the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute over a period of ten years spent in working with the grass root problem of the 20th century church. Informed and motivated by these presuppositions the research section of the Institute last fall spent three months laying the ground work for a pioneer project relating to the local congregation. On the basis of this preliminary exploration the Institute is now prepared to execute a formal pilot experiment on a three year trial basis. Its purpose is to seek new external structures and internal dynamics whereby the local church can become in actuality an expression of the body of Christ as mission to history in the twentieth century. The design calls for utter openness for any approach in line with the above stated convictions, risking complete failure and the necessity of beginning all over again from the bottom or dropping the effort entirely. Abstractly stated this is a simple task. Concretely envisioned it is filled with frustration, uncertainty and complexity. It is the Institute's strong conviction, nevertheless, that on such bold ventures lie the temporal hope of the present historical manifestation of the Church.

In the light of the historical situation it would seem that any such experiment ought necessarily to be executed within an urban complex and nowhere is the need for such projects more apparent than in the inner city. Here, to put it most gently, the established churches have been losing ground. Store front congregations and other churches of a popular appeal attract members, but too frequently abstract themselves from the real needs of the community. It is urgent that many and varied experiments in new models of the local congregation should be located in such areas. For this reason the Ecumenical Institute has selected Chicago West as the locale of their projected experiment. For this reason they have moved their faculty and headquarters into the East Garfield Park district of that area of the city.

THE PROJECTED MODEL

Such a project cannot begin in a vacuum. There must be hypothetical patterns or tentative models which represent the past experience and reflection of the group concerned and that of others with similar concerns. Indeed such beginning images must finally be informed, in principle, by all of history. The experimental structure proposed for the initiation of the pilot project proposed by the Ecumenical Institute can be indicated by three historical categories: temple, synagogue and guild. The temple is comprised of several or many synagogues which interlock in direct action in society through a variety of guilds. The temple is the focus of representational worship, on behalf of the specific society and all creation, and the coordinating center informing and relating units in the master engagement. The synagogue is the basic dynamic unit here yet revolves, in

a manner of speaking, about the temple. Its role is to nurture, train, and discipline the troops. The guild is the task force comprised of individuals or groups from the various synagogues making the direct attack upon the social structures in light of the specific human needs. The Church is not any one of these but all three at once. In this model all four of the marks of the missional Church above described, common worship, study, discipline, and action are included, hopefully in a fashion that shall deliver the Church to actually be mission to the world in our time.

The Ecumenical Institute will begin by establishing synagogues, first one and then more and then move to forming guilds and the Temple construct. It is anticipated that the house church groups will consist of eight to twelve families and that they shall at the start meet once a week in homes, in halls or in the Institute's facilities, as determined by the groups themselves. The meetings will be times of corporate worship, serious study, discussions on discipline and the initial planning of tactics and strategy relative to meeting the needs of Chicago West. The Temple image will be developed in their common discussions and in one form or another brought into being as quickly as feasible. It could take several shapes: adherence to a now existing denominationally related congregation, becoming a new parish of some religious body, or being a cooperative venture of several denominations. The guilds will be stressed particularly in the experiment. They too can take many shapes in accord with the social concern. They can be school teachers bound together to improve the educational situation in Chicago West. They can be composed of those assigned to special concerns or projects: political, housing, crime, and on and on. Whatever their form, the guilds are to be the exposed outreach of the Church. Though they are the very heart-beat of the experiment, they cannot come first. The Church is its outreach but it cannot be its outreach without the accompanying activities.

The project intends during the first year to bring into being three or four synagogues, working toward the Temple construct, and initiating reflection upon the guilds. The second year will involve developing the Temple image, and establishing experimental guilds while, if deemed wise or possible, other synagogues are added and training of interested clergy inaugurated. It is hoped that the third twelve months will be a test of the established model and that special attention will be given to the clergy training aspect of the project as well as to preparing the involved laity to become cadres for the establishing of other such expressions of the Church. At the end of the three year trial it is the intention of the Institute that whatever is constructed of enduring possibility will be turned over to those agencies concerned with continuing it. Yet it is important to reiterate that this model is experimental and tentative. The actual operation of the project may disclose it to be impractical or that the scheduled development of it is quite in error.



### THE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Recruitment in such a project is itself a major experiment, and this is a part of what the Institute has in mind. House churches viewed under the category of mission can be organized according to a variety of patterns and in a multitude of ways. They could very well be established by individuals with a common sense of mission who reside in widely separated parts of the city. Or they could be recruited from a distinct section of the metropolis or from a specific neighborhood, a single block, a housing project, or an apartment building. The kinds of people assembled could also differ greatly. They could be church people, the faithfully committed, those operating on the peripheral edge, or the church dropouts. On the other hand, the synagogues might be created from the ranks of the unchurched, both the unreached and the rebellious, or from the latent church in the world. Obviously the composition could cut across both worlds and be organized according to vocational involvement or social interest. Again a variety of means of recruitment could be used. The Institute could assemble a corps of families from the individuals it has touched in its schools on the West Side. They could be recruited from an already existing congregation or from several churches who might send out missionaries to form such a cadre. The synagogues also could be formed through direct visitation or through block clubs or other secular organizations.

The Ecumenical Institute is interested in each of these approaches, and feels that they and more need to be tried. Each of the proposed house churches in the project hopefully will be of a different pattern and recruited in a different way. For the initial step this spring and summer, house churches will be formed in Chicago West. The first method for experimentation is to approach those who have had contact with the Ecumenical Institute in committee meetings, community projects, through renting of apartments or through taking the courses offered by the Institute in Garfield Park. The next method is to ask several churches to send "missioning corps" of two or three families to experiment with such a project. The third method is to hold a special week-end theological course for block clubs or other organizations and recruit those interested for a house church.

### THE PROJECTED PROGRAM

An attached chart presents the pattern and development of the general activities of the project for the first year. The program of course will be fashioned by the above analysis of the interior activities of the local congregation: study, worship, discipline, and corporate action. In each case the plans are laid in terms of the overall rationale and are directed toward the everyday concerns of the families and individuals involved as well as toward the total group.

1. Study. The synagogues will begin immediately to engage in the study of contemporary theology followed by a course in contemporary

culture. These are hard-headed practical studies which the Institute faculty has developed through years of experience in the theological training of laymen. Subsequent courses will deal with Church history, Bible, the family, the city, and world geo-politics. While these formal studies are being pursued the members of the house church will be engaged in an attempt to analyze and understand the socio-political structures and problems of west Chicago. Furthermore a program of training for the children will simultaneously be carried on. This will involve experimenting with new materials and methods, with particular emphasis to be laid on discovering novel ways for such education to be carried on within the family.

2. Worship. The first concern will be to enable the members of the house church to grasp the meaning and role of worship for everyday life. Second, while the house church is engaged in simple patterns of corporate worship, they will develop a rationale for the structure and movement of the Christian form of worship. The next move will be to involve them directly in experimentation with new forms of liturgy especially designed for a house church community. Following this attention will be centered on formulating relevant and empowering patterns of family worship and structures for solitary devotions for post-modern man. The intention would be to finally arrive at the place where the eucharist can be recovered in intellectual understanding and personal efficacy, perhaps to be used as the central liturgy in the house church.

3. Discipline. The discipline of the synagogues will begin with simple stress on attendance and preparation. With experience, study, and discussion it is intended that a common rule of life will be developed. This will be a very gradual development in the context of clarifying, first of all, the meaning of mission and secondly the necessity of corporate action and common worship for significant mission. Particularly its possibility will depend upon formulating the concrete tasks that must be assumed by the house church or the guilds that issue from them. Finally, the rule will be formed in the midst of learning together the means and requirements to enable one another, families and individuals, for the sake of carrying out a common calling. In brief, the discipline will be realized only as the synagogue becomes in actuality a covenanting community for the sake of mission in the world.

4. Action. The chief purpose of this project is to discover ways the local congregation can seriously exercise its mission as the prophetic minority in its world. The first effort in the house churches will be to enable the members to understand in depth this new image of the Church. Then follows the work of studying and "mapping" the mission area of the world to which they are assigned, Chicago West. This means ferreting out the socio-economic-political structures, the power centers, resources and potential, the conscious/unconscious operating images, mystiques, myths, and so on. It means apprehending and understanding the immediately urgent and the long range problems that deprive well-being of all. This in turn,

will be followed by planning concrete strategies and tactics for effective action in the light of the plans. Indeed, finally comprehensive battle plans and time tables must be prepared. Out of precisely this kind of effort it is believed the guilds and the Temple construct will naturally emerge.

#### THE ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTIONS

Although this project makes the focus of its experimentation new structures and dynamics for local congregations on the west side of Chicago, it expects to contribute to the well-being of the Church at large. Of course it is set up to administer to a specific location and people. But on the other hand what is learned may directly or indirectly serve many other current efforts and forms of the Church.

The project is intended to make a contribution to all local congregations regardless of their location, composition, or assigned task, just because it is concerned with creating new congregational models for our time, enabling the Church to be the Church in the world. The project can perhaps especially contribute to various work and special ministries of the Church in the center of the great metropolitan areas as the Institute engages in the exchange of insights relative to these areas where the churches are losing ground.

The project can serve the general field of Christian education, by providing new curricula, materials, and procedures for the training of adults and children. It can share tried pedagogical methodologies for broad use as well as devices and approaches especially useful for "inner-city" work. New models of the family, new forms for public, family and private worship and many other possible tools for wider use may well emerge. The experiment can be of direct assistance to various pastoral training centers and seminaries by providing a laboratory and place for intern training at the grass roots level. It can also serve the seminaries as a resource in forming relevant practical theological courses.

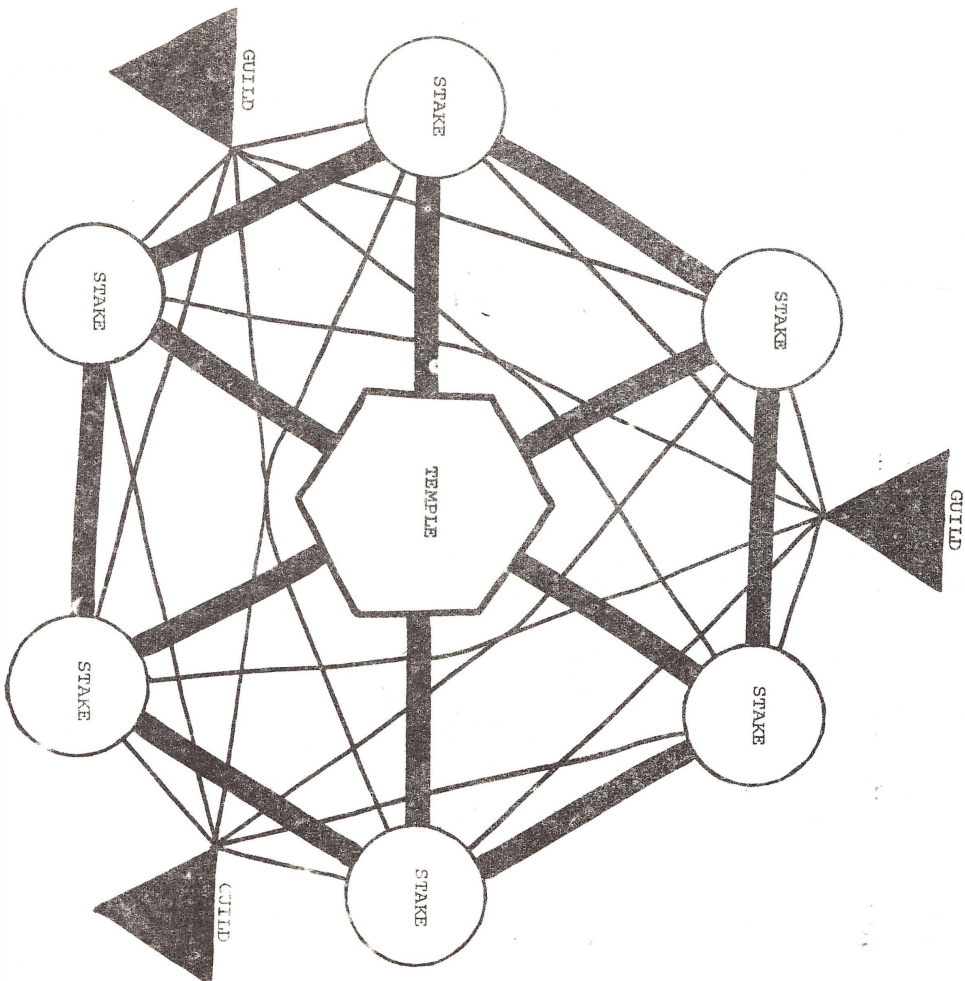
Obviously the project can potentially add to the efforts of the many social action agencies of the Church on both the local and national level. The same is true relative to boards of evangelism, domestic and foreign missions and departments of lay activities. Indeed, if the endeavor is at all successful, it is difficult to see where its fruits would not be useful simply because it will be dealing with a root issue in the life of the whole church today.

A Pilot Project: Experimenting with  
the Structures and Dynamics of the Local Congregation  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PILOT PROJECT FOR 1964

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Common Worship	Examination of the meaning of ritual	Experimentation with the focus of worship	Exploration of family and solitary devotions	Analysis of the role of the Eucharist
Common Study	Introductory Course in Contemporary Theology	Introductory Course in Contemporary Culture	Courses in Church History and Urban Dynamics	Courses in Biblical Studies and World Society
Common Discipline	Discussions on the meaning of discipline	Experiments with the forms of discipline	Studies in family structure and disciplined living	Establishment of a common rule of life
Common Action	Collecting data of Chicago West	Making plans for direct action	Testing tactics in missionary forces	Creating pilot forms of the guild
House Churches & Special Projects	First house church and initial experiment in child education	Second house church and advanced experiment in child education	Third house church and experiment in family education of children	Fourth house church and incorporation of experiment into house church

THREE YEAR DEVELOPMENT OF THE PILOT PROJECT

	First Year 1964	Second Year 1965	Third Year 1966
	Development of house churches	Development of guilds and temple	Testing of the full project
Common Worship	Experimentation with forms of worship in the house churches	Establishment and experimentation with forms of temple worship	Experimentation with cultic rhythms and music in temple worship
Common Study	Fundamental courses in theology and culture	Emphasis on teacher training and and problem courses	Experiment by laymen with full adult education
Common Discipline	Developing the structure of the experi- mental rule of life	Testing the content of the experi- mental rule of life	Enlarging the applicability of the ex- perimental rule of life
Common Action	Preparatory planning and organizing for direct action	Social Action in the west side through the guilds	Inclusive pluralistic structures for prophetic minorities in Chicago West
Special Projects	Curriculum and methods of theological & cultural education of children in a house church situation	Curriculum and methods of education of high school drop-outs in a house church situation	Experimentation with total education of children and youth by a house church.



A SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM  
OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION



The church must capture urban man if it is to fulfill its assignment in the 20th century. The city must be seized. And this not only in the socio-political sense of influencing the comprehensive power structures and top level decision-making centers; it must also grasp it in the geo-social sense of reaching the masses on the most local level. Failing this task, it shall not have dealt with the city as the church at all. The Ecumenical Institute's project relating to the renewal of the local congregation is dedicated to the latter task. Indeed, it is an effort to do both jobs at once.

Geographically it will begin with CHICAGO WEST, one of the tragically dramatic inner-city areas of the great Mid-American metropolis. This area, which roughly coincides with the westward expanding Negro ghetto, has been "gridded" into eleven sections. All of these must be approached systematically by the church. Section VIII is the East Garfield Park community where the Ecumenical Institute is located and where its 15 family-unit faculty resides. The pilot experiment of the Institute will be carried out in this community. The results will first be shared with other institutions at work in other sections of CHICAGO WEST and facing similar problems. In this fashion, the whole of CHICAGO WEST can be penetrated on the community level.

Section VIII is approximately 50 blocks in area. Of these, about 30 are used for residential purposes. The population is almost entirely composed of Negro citizens recently migrated from the rural South. Few segments of the American people are more culturally, economically and politically deprived. The area is densely populated and generally, housing is in a rapidly deteriorating condition. Only one established church exists in the Section and there are no community organizations operating.

The Institute has divided this Section into two Zones, each with three Sectors. Sector "C", the immediate neighborhood of the Institute, has been selected as the focusing point for this experiment. This Sector has been further divided into six stakes. A cadre or house church or synagogue will be established within each stake. One of these will be localized in a massive, city-sponsored, hi-rise housing project for elderly citizens. One will be in an apartment house; another will be established through an already existing "block club." The others will be located in smaller multiple dwelling units localized into convenient city blocks. The temple of this model will be located temporarily in the Chapel Building of the Ecumenical Institute.

Three guilds will be formed as rapidly as feasible. One will deal with the political issues and problems relative to the Sector in relation to the total East Garfield community, to CHICAGO WEST, to Metropolitan Chicago, to the nation and to the world. Another will concern

itself on the same levels with the economic dimension of social existence; the third, with matters relating to the broad cultural existence of the community as part of society at large. The major concern of the guilds will be to attack with power very specific problems in these three facets of society that have to do with the well-being of men. Specific details and models are necessarily not included at this time. Periodic reports will be available and further information can be obtained by writing to the Institute.

The attached charts present graphically what has been described. Chart I locates CHICAGO WEST in relation to the central City of Metropolitan Chicago. Chart II is a schematic abstract of the Section grid for CHICAGO WEST. The smaller lines indicate possible Zone divisions within the individual Sections. This chart must be considered as an abstract of the existing situation. As each individual Section is explored, major modifications will have to be made in these general Zone and Section divisions.

An example of this occurs in Section VIII (Chart III) where Garfield Park is found to occupy half of this Section. We are able to divide the remaining area into two Zones (A and B), each of which is divided into three sections (A, B, C). The smallest lines found within Sector C of Zone B indicate stake boundaries. Chart IV shows this stake arrangement in relation to the street pattern of Sector C.

CHICAGO

