
**A History of
The Ecumenical Institute,
The Institute of Cultural Affairs
and The Order: Ecumenical**

ICA THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

By 1974, the many aspects of the work of the Institute had been grouped into three major programmes, for which the ICA took responsibility. They are the Human Development Programme, the Community Forum Programme and Research, Training and Interchange.

The **Human Development Programme** is designed for use by a particular local community, either rural or urban. It is based on the methods researched in the first three projects. Since 1975 pilot projects have begun in over 300 communities in 25 nations. Each project seeks to demonstrate effective social and economic development that can be applied to its region and nation. The starting point is a week-long consultation where a broad cross-section of the community, voluntary consultants from both public and private sectors and ICA staff work together to design an integrated four year plan for comprehensive local development. In Europe there are four Human Development Projects. In Maharashtra, India, an experiment to use the original pilot project to spark off development across the state is in process. At present 232 villages in Maharashtra are involved in the development effort known as the 'New Village Movement'. Similar experiments are being carried out in Kenya, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The **Community Forum Programme** uses simple workshop methods in a community meeting that help clarify community concerns and create practical plans to tackle local problems by using the community's available resources and co-operative effort. There have been over 1,000 Community Forums held in thirteen countries in Europe. The methods have been adapted for use by groups whose particular concerns often require a special approach. These include the Global Women's Forum and the Community Youth Forum.

The third programme consists of the **Research, Training and Interchange** that is carried on by ICA staff, voluntary consultants and local people from around the world. The Human Development Training Institute is a direct result of this programme. It has been extensively used in India, the Philippines, South Korea, Africa and Indonesia to train community leadership, village volunteers and government field workers.

The Institute's curriculum evolved into two distinct branches — the Institute of Religious Studies (focusing on biblical and theological courses) and the Institute of Cultural Studies (focusing on contemporary society and changing attitudes in the family, in community and the world). The religious seminars present people with an opportunity to re-discover the meaning and relevance of the Christian message in the modern world. The cultural seminars provide people with a way to understand the basic dynamics of society, the current issues and new trends of thought within various disciplines. Since the first seminars were taught, hundreds of lay people and clergy have attended them in many countries.

By 1964 the Ecumenical Institute had begun working closely with groups of people who had found the seminars relevant to the needs of their own Church and community. At their request more advanced research and training programmes were developed. In 1965 a summer research assembly was organised and was subsequently held annually. These research assemblies have been attended each year by up to 1,000 people from around the world. Their research creates and refines the practical methods and design through which both EI and many other groups have sought to serve the needs of local communities.

During this period, two extensive training programmes were developed: the Academy, an eight week course of religious and cultural seminars, and a six week International Training Institute. The ITI was based on the Academy curriculum, but with a greater emphasis on practical field work. The first ITI was held at Trinity College, Singapore, in 1969 and was attended by 102 people from 23 nations. Since then the ITI has been held in Africa, India, North and South America, Australia, Europe and Western Samoa.

The growing acknowledgement of both the 5th City experiment and the religious and cultural seminars led to a number of invitations to the Institute to work in other countries as well. In 1968 there were just over 100 people on the staff of the Institute, all living in 5th City — by 1974 the number of staff had grown to 1,500, working in over 100 offices in 20 nations with a large percentage of the staff coming from countries where offices had been newly established. Co-ordinating centres were established in Bombay, Hong Kong, Chicago, Brussels and Kuala Lumpur.

After careful research and analysis of the methods and programmes that had been successful in 5th City, the Institute accepted invitations from Australia and the Marshall Islands to begin similar projects. These projects were viewed as experiments to test the original methods developed in 5th City in the diverse situations of a remote Aboriginal settlement and a South Pacific Island.

Many professional and business men and women took part in all three development projects as voluntary consultants. They asked the Institute to design a seminar to demonstrate the relevance of the project planning methods to other groups in different circumstances. This led to the development of LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies), a seminar which has since been used by social agencies, governments and private businesses around the world.

THE ORIGINS

After the war both the Second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches and Vatican Council II began to review the critical issues then facing the Christian Church. At the 1954 meeting of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois, a resolution was made to begin a centre for the training of laymen in North America, taking as an example the existing Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. In 1956 Christian businessmen in Chicago founded the Evanston Institute of Ecumenical Studies and invited Dr. Walter Leibrecht to come from Germany to be the director.

During the same period, a group of students and staff at the University of Texas began to research the practical relationship of their faith to contemporary life. This group called itself the 'Christian Faith and Life Community' and was founded by a former Naval Chaplain, Rev. W. Jack Lewis. Drawing from the experience of experimental lay communities in Europe such as Taize and Iona, the Christian Faith and Life Community evolved a common life of worship, study and mission and was recognised as a significant experiment in forming a Christian community. It designed a curriculum for students and laity under the direction of Dr. Joseph W. Mathews, formerly an associate professor of Social Ethics at Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas. The curriculum included courses in systematic theology, Old and New Testament and Christian ethics. The community began to turn its attention to the role of the local congregation in society, and a week-end residential seminar, known as Religious Studies I (RS-I) was developed. This seminar was taught to local congregations and student groups.

When Dr. Leibrecht returned to Germany in 1962 the Church Federation of Greater Chicago took responsibility for the centre and reorganised it under the name of 'the Ecumenical Institute'. The Federation invited Dr. Mathews of the Christian Faith and Life Community to become the Dean. Seven families from the Christian Faith and Life Community decided to join him there to form a corporate teaching staff. These families came as volunteers without a salary. They continued to develop the curriculum for local congregations while researching the form and meaning of contemporary Christian community. After studying the forms of corporate life of the historical religious orders, the staff began to model the community after the 'third' order or family orders, emphasising a corporate life-style of worship, study and service. This was the origin of the Order: Ecumenical.

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

In 1963 the seven families of the Ecumenical Institute moved to Chicago where they undertook a practical experiment in comprehensive community development. From the premise that a local community is the basic building block of society, the Institute began working in a ghetto on Chicago's west side, known as 5th City. Door to door interviews and neighbourhood meetings provided a way for the local residents to review their many problems and to begin to design practical solutions. Forty-five programmes in social and economic development were created and carried out by voluntary and corporate effort.

PURPOSES OF THE ORGANISATIONS

The purpose of the Ecumenical Institute is to serve the needs of the Church in order that the Church might increase the effectiveness of its service to society. Its programmes express and promote the awakening and renewal of the congregations and academic institutions of the Church through a curriculum of religious and cultural studies. The programmes include an eight week Academy and a three week International Training Institute. The Ecumenical Institute was formerly an autonomous division of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago and in 1964 was incorporated as a non-profit-making organisation in the State of Illinois.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs is a legally distinct but related organisation, first incorporated in 1973. Its purpose is to develop practical methods of comprehensive community renewal and to motivate co-operative action. These methods are designed through practical field work and research conferences. The ICA offers a wide range of programmes and serves as a consultant to many communities and organisations. It provides training and planning processes to enable people to implement creative social and economic change. It has branches in 40 countries. They make up an informal federation of autonomous, national, non-profit-making organisations.

The work of both the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs is supported by individuals, foundations, corporations, service organisations and Churches. Specific programmes and projects also receive support from government agencies. The boards of the EI and ICA in the various nations are comprised of individuals from the business, professional, religious and civic communities. They do not receive a salary for their services.

The purpose of the Order: Ecumenical is to serve the Church and society. It provides the training and research staff of the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs. It is self supporting through income earned by its members in various professions who contribute their salaries to a common fund. Part of this fund is held in reserve to be used for the health, education and welfare costs of the staff and their families for as long as they remain members. Each year at the annual general meeting of the Order and of the supporters of the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs, a consensus is reached as to the general priorities and emphasis for the ensuing year. In the light of these priorities staffing allocations are decided and then each of the Institute's national organisations designs its programme for the year.

The Order: Ecumenical includes both family units and single people. Membership does not presuppose a particular religious or ideological persuasion and includes people from many different religious backgrounds. Members volunteer to be a part of the Order from their desire to live a life of service that is based in a structured community and has a definite and active concern for creative renewal within society. Entering or leaving the Order is the decision of each individual or family. The Order: Ecumenical was incorporated in 1973 as a non-profit-making organisation. It conducts no programmes of its own and does not raise funds, therefore it has not applied for tax-exempt status. The Board of Directors is composed of Order members who receive no payment for their services.
