



Letter to Laymen

THE CHRISTIAN "FAITH AND LIFE" COMMUNITY



VOLUME III

AUSTIN, TEXAS, FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, 1957

NUMBER 8



Dear Everybody:

These past seven years have been unbelievably thrilling and exciting... The 16 months of preparatory study in Europe... nine months of prayerful, often careful planning... then the actual birth of the Faith and Life Community, now a ram-bunctious five year old.

Looking back, the one thought that comes again and again is sheer gratitude to God for His leading. His infinite patience with

our finite stumbling... and gratitude to all you folks whose prayers and encouragement and financial support have been essential ingredients in the daily diet of the new-born child of the church.

This summer our staff is scattered over the globe to learn and share insights concerning the training of the laity. I am participating in consultations of the Commission of the Laity of the World Council of Churches at Yale University. World leaders already acquainted with the Community were responsible for our invitation. Joe

Mathews reports from Europe a realization that the Community is considerably ahead of the centers he has visited so far.

What does it all mean? Perhaps that the Faith and Life Community is at the end of the beginning. Definitely that staff and board members and all of you with whom we have talked are looking forward. Let us move forward in faith. God grant us courage and wisdom. May His strength be perfected in our weakness. Adios for now. Come to see us.

W. JACK LEWIS

Yesterday... No One Had Been This Way Before.

This is the story of a search... for a way to help people find The Way. It's a story about young people and not-so-young people who help them.

Strictly speaking, it all began in July, 1952, when the Secretary of State issued, with appropriate seals, signatures and ribbons, a state charter to the *Christian Faith and Life Community*.

Newspaper clippings telling of the chartering are yellowed and torn. But they set forth clearly the purpose of the new-born organization: "to maintain a residential hall alongside the University of Texas and conduct religious education for University men students, public school teachers and laymen."

Two months later the Community, using a modest one-half of a building known as Norco Arms, opened its doors. Thirty young men, representing six Protestant denominations, enrolled for the trial run. Each committed himself, in addition to his regular University studies, to utilize his "vacant" hours—10 per week—in a challenging new "laboratory course in Christian living." Regularly scheduled study of the Bible, Biblical theology and Christian ethics, group worship and fellowship through conferences, seminars and supper sessions filled out this extra curriculum.

Aim was not to replace or compete with, but to work "hand-in-glove" with the participants' regular church activities.

It was the official beginning of an effort to train "lay ministers"... young adults who would be informed, effective, constructive, really *full-time Christians*, on the campus and later as doctors, lawyers, businessmen and public officeholders.

It was a bold attempt to come to grips with the generally accepted attitude of "Well, it's all right for preachers, but when

you get out into the *real* world, you've got to look out for yourself..."

"Who Am I?"

The chartering in July, 1952, is the basis for the Community's Fifth Anniversary.

But it wasn't the *real* beginning. That goes back into the 1940's and the experiences of a frustrated young minister who saw a problem and sought a solution—from the Solomon Islands to the Scottish Highlands.

W. Jack Lewis had been a Presbyterian minister for 10 years in 1950 when he left a pleasant post as minister to students at University Presbyterian Church in Austin to go to Scotland. He alone was dissatisfied with the job he was doing there. The students flocked to his programs.

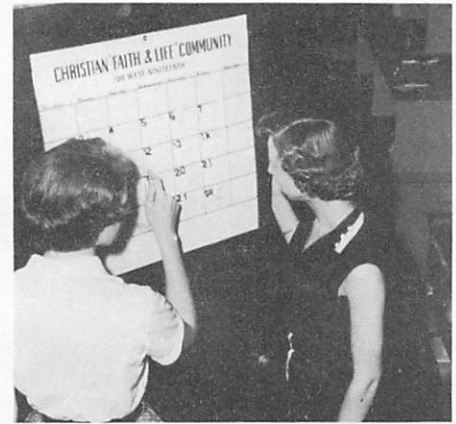
But just bringing in a lot of people wasn't enough, Lewis felt. He had reached a lot of people as a Navy chaplain during World War II and before that as director of Presbyterian student work at Texas Tech in Lubbock. He was convinced his once-a-week programs lacked depth, were way out on the edge, rather than part of the fabric of University life.

What was needed, Lewis felt, was a program that would give students an opportunity for more intensive, continuous study of the Christian faith, a chance really to get down to brass tacks with such questions as "Who am I? Who is God? What is my relationship to Him? To others?"

Logarithms & Diapers

College years, when minds and bodies develop so rapidly, are the crucial time for confronting these questions, Lewis felt. What's been gained if the graduate goes out into a bomb-happy world with a head full of logarithms and a Christian faith "still wearing diapers"?

He studied a year at St. Andrew's University in Scotland and traveled over Great



IN WOOTEN HALL... The women "insisted."

Britain and the Continent to observe special centers, institutes and movements for training laity. A statement by one of the dons at Cambridge University stuck in his mind: "The way in which a student lives at Cambridge is more important to his education than what he actually studies."

Thus the goal became, not a college, but a *residential Christian* community where students might learn from living together, as well as studying together, what Christian faith means.

A lot of prayer and planning, work and worrying ensued.

Pinch-Hit Pastor

Ministers and laymen over the state helped. One day Lewis was telling his plan over coffee to a rancher in a small Texas town. Afterward when he got ready to leave, Lewis lifted his cup for a final sip. Under it was a check for \$2,000.

Others gave generously, even sacrificially, to help launch the venture. But even so, money was never a surplus commodity around the Community. (Nor is it now.)

Lewis supported his family (six in all) by pinch-hit pastoring while he worked to gather support to open the Community. (An oil-rich church offered him its pastorate during that period.)

A group of distinguished names was brought together when the Community's charter was signed. They included University deans, ministers, outstanding Christian laymen in law, medicine, engineering, business, public office. Others of the same calibre have been added through the years.

Since the Community had no program director that first year, teaching was carried on by seminary professors, Bible chair directors and student work leaders on a part-time basis. All were able men, but the come-and-go arrangement was far from ideal. There had to be a lot of makeshift and make-do. As Lewis said: "Problems were many; it seemed as though no one had been this way before."



EARLY STUDY GROUP... A chance to get down to brass tacks.

Today... It Can't Be Measured in Inches or Ounces.

Like any five-year-old, the Community today has grown a lot, with the stumbling, groping—and learning—that accompanies growth. But no longer can it be said that "no one has ever been this way before."

Every month was eventful... After the first year the Men's Branch expanded into all of Norco Arms... At the same time the women "insisted." So the timetable was pushed up and a Women's Branch opened in classic-pillared Wooten Hall. Mildred Hudgins, former Methodist missionary and college teacher, came to be director...

Joe W. Mathews, former Army chaplain and theology professor, came to be full-time director of life and study... A frame building was acquired for offices... Students proved they weren't mere sallow-faced scholars by hammering and sawing in the broiling sun to build a Common Room behind the Men's Branch... Later they pitched in again, hauled rock and dug foundations for a chapel. For lack of money, it still has no roof or pews, but they held year-end worship sitting on the ground in the sunshine, singing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"...

Money was an ever-present issue. Many people helped, but expanding needs were and still seem to be always a step ahead... "We live on the narrow edge of the abyss financially most of the time," says Executive Director Lewis... He's still pinch-hit pastoring...

Three hundred students, representing 15 denominations, 45 fields of study, 15 nations and 13 states passed through... For 10 hours a week they studied and worshiped together—and spent uncalculated more hours in spontaneous bull sessions on "what it's all about"... But no one called them "Holy Joes," for they fanned out into University life, working in clubs, fraternities, sororities,

and churches, politicking, parading, dating, dancing, getting pinned, married...

Shaking The Foundations

In most areas—staff, students, space, equipment—the Community has expanded almost five times over what it started with. But statistics don't tell the story. There's no way to measure the spiritual growth of men and women. No way to prove it has or hasn't happened.

But the people who have been closest to Community life say it *has* happened. They describe the effect of this past year's curriculum on many students as bringing a "veritable shaking of the foundations in order that that which could not be shaken might remain."

Last year's study, developed after four years' trial and error, was admittedly "not kid stuff." Laymen, it was found, "were tired of being fed theological pabulum, ready for real meat."

They got it. First from the Bible and also from Tillich, Richard Niebuhr, Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Herberg, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Luther, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin and others. They got it too in lectures and discussions under leadership described as "vital, but at the same time disturbing (especially to the status quo), destructive of our false gods, leading to a ruthless confrontation with the self, a confrontation with the God who meets us in Jesus Christ..."

The program director called response "astounding." Mathews pronounced the lay students as good and in many cases better in the handling of subject matter than those in the school of theology where he had been teaching.

Battleground For Revolution

The students' own statements at the end of 1956-57 reflect no "Whoopie, school's out" mood, but rather that each has taken hold of something and can't let go.



PARTY FOR BRIDE-TO-BE... They danced, dated, pinned.

A senior pre-med student: "It has changed my perspective of life. It has given me great food for thought and made it possible for *me* to do the thinking. It has precipitated in me a great quest for further knowledge."

A liberal arts senior: "I now at least know the direction to start in for further study and understanding. I think I'm finally beginning to see what being a Christian is all about."

A graduate student in philosophy: "It has been the battleground for a revolution in my life."

A geology senior: "Community participation has brought an acute awareness of great need to concentrate on a day by day, moment by moment appraisal of where I am going and what my responsibility."

A sophomore in mechanical engineering: "I feel now that I am ready to grow and that, with God's grace and further help, I can now escape the doom of a life of non-service...."

A graduate student in elementary education: "It has... pointed a way that will never let me be satisfied with just existing."

The Community continuously seeks outside evaluation. As one means to obtain this critical analysis, it set up an Advisory Council of outstanding theologians and educators from over the world. Two council sessions have been held.

There'll never be any way to measure—in inches or ounces—what the Community accomplished in five years. But amidst this uncertainty, there's no lack of certainty.

One student saw it this way: "We realize the loftiness of our goal, and the chance that in our human frailty we may never fully attain it... (But) those of us who are now members feel that with more hard work and Christian leadership, the idea of the Community will grow and become, not only a unique program at the University of Texas, but a burgeoning force sending out branches across the nation and world."



BUILDING NEW COMMON ROOM... No sallow-faced scholars they.

Tomorrow . . . After Experimentation, Wider Horizons.

And what of the next five years?

That, to Community leaders, is the most exciting part of all. With much of the experimentation past, they look forward to swifter advances, wider horizons. By 1962 they hope the Community program will have reached every concerned Christian in Texas who is looking for means to deepen his own faith or willing to help make it possible for others.

For the University campus they envision a model plant, a Co-Educational Branch with living units for 50 men and 50 women and common facilities for worship, dining and study. (At present six congested blocks separate the two branches, hindering joint efforts and requiring duplication of staff and facilities.) Eventually, six to eight communities at UT alone seem feasible.

University Community, it is hoped, will continue to point the way for groups at other campuses. Already two more such movements have developed—at Penn State and Boston University.

But most challenging are the possibilities beyond the campus. By '62 the Community hopes to have developed means to make its program available to long-out-of-school laymen in towns and cities across the state and even beyond. Use of audio-visual aids and group dynamics techniques are being explored for study where trained leaders cannot be present. Eventually, an Ecumenical Institute is planned for training both ministers and laymen to lead group in their home towns.

Already a Good Start

As to the financial future, "grass-roots" expansion is again the goal. Aim is to shift from dependence on the occasional heart-warming, but uncertain, large gifts, to steady support from a large corps of small givers all over the state.

That effort began with the launching of the Board of Development plan this summer. The completed Board of Development will have a member in each of 25 Texas cities (see cut). This member will be responsible for organizing a group of concerned Christians in his town into a local Board of regular Community supporters. Initial goal is \$100 per month from each town's group.

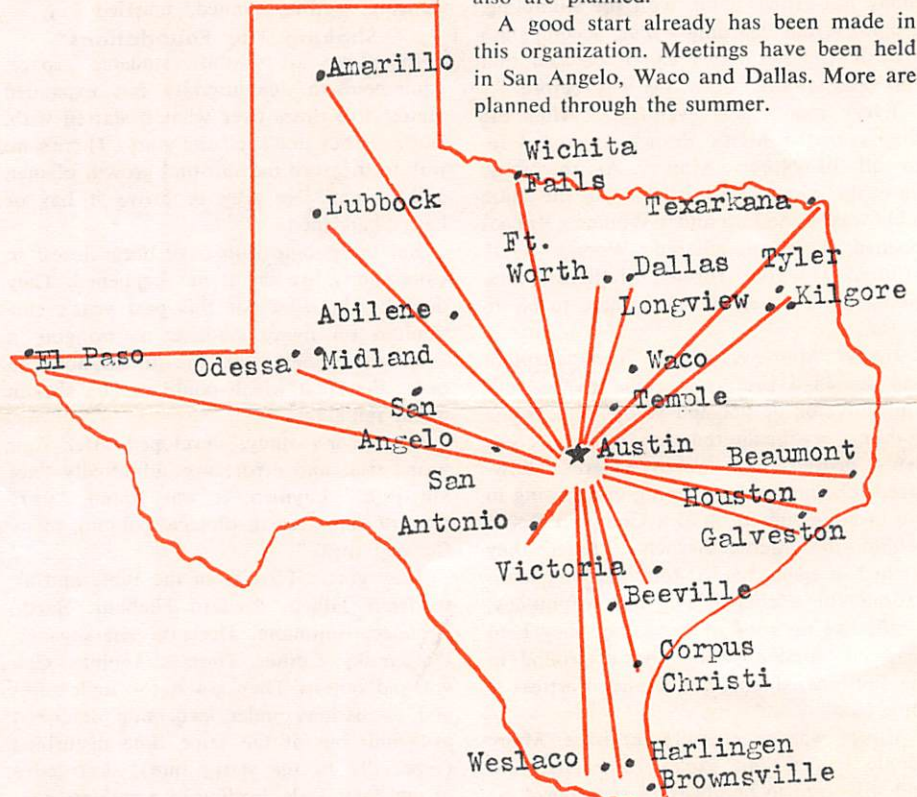
There are many Christian people who can and will give \$1, \$5, even up to \$25 a month to the Community without taking from their normal church giving. Finding them will mean the difference in the Community's future.

The Board of Development groups are viewed, not just as financial boosters, but as a means of getting more people over a wide area acquainted with the Community's mission. Many are expected to become leaders in the expansion of the ministry of the laity.

The local groups will have annual visits from the executive director. One or more

visits by Development Board members to observe and take part in the Community also are planned.

A good start already has been made in this organization. Meetings have been held in San Angelo, Waco and Dallas. More are planned through the summer.



BOARD OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN . . . Members in these 25 Texas cities will participate.



SAN ANGELO MEETING . . . First local board was organized.

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