

THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
A TWENTY-FIVE YEAR PROFILE

1954
To
1963

A new understanding of the world had evolved by the beginning of the last half of this century. The war had given people direct exposure to parts of the globe only heard of before. The experience created both a new consciousness of other cultures and a significant realignment of basic institutions. Practical steps were taken to assist in post-war reconstruction and third world development, notably with the establishment of the World Bank. The globe's economy was bolstered by the energetic rebuilding of Germany and Japan and the expansion of multi-national corporations. The development of the European Economic Community symbolized the dream of a new Europe. The United Nations became the hope for a viable instrument of world peace. NATO and SEATO underscored efforts by many nations to rethink their roles in a new political order. The end of colonialism brought a new brand of nationalism perhaps best illustrated on the African continent.

In America, education provided through the GI Bill and the dramatic rise of the middle class assured the nation of great prosperity. Beneath the surface, however, bubbled an unrest born of inequity and visibly documented in the awakening of the Civil Rights Movement. The rumblings of protest, first heard in Little Rock, culminated in 1963 in the Poor People's March on Washington and Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have A Dream".

A legacy of the 19th century missionary movement was a functioning international network through which the Church undertook to serve the needs of the post-war world. An urgent need for social repentance emerged after the experience of "the holocaust". Internationally, the Church participated in numerous relief and reconstruction programs. Laity and students spent summer months working in war-torn Europe. Theologically the Church faced the challenge of articulating the tragedy of the war. This was explored in the work of many writers who wrestled with the issue of responsibility and man's faith in a secular society. Involvement in global missions gave rise to a new understanding and striving for authentic ecumenicity. At the same time, the role of the layman assumed new importance and the work of Christian communities such as Iona in Scotland, Taize in France and the German Evangelical Academies gained prominence.

The critical issues facing the Church were confronted both by Vatican II and by the second General Assembly of The World Council of Churches which met in Evanston in 1954. In its deliberations the World Council called for a lay training center for North America similar to the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. In response, the Church Federation of Greater Chicago commissioned the founding of such an institution in Evanston in 1954. Under the direction of German-born theologian, Dr. Walter Liebrecht, this center was originally known as the Evanston Institute of Ecumenical Studies and later as The Ecumenical Institute.

During this same period the Christian Faith and Life Community was undertaking an experiment in campus ministry with students of the University of Texas at Austin. Its founder, W. Jack Lewis, a former navy chaplain, was concerned for research and training in the relationship of faith to practical contemporary life issues. Drawing on the experience of European communities such as Iona, Taize and House Felixt in Germany where students alternated life in Christian community with work in the factories, the Christian Faith and Life Community became a significant experiment in a common life of worship, study and mission.

As the community grew, Dr. Joseph Wesley Mathews, Professor of Systematic Theology at Perkins Theological Seminary, was invited to join the staff as Director of Curriculum. He developed a curriculum oriented for students and laity and including courses in Systematic Theology, Old Testament, New Testament and Christian Ethics. The insights of 20th century theologians such as Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr were particularly helpful as the community struggled with issues of lay witness and the responsible life in faith.

As additional courses were developed for laymen, the community began to turn its attention more and more to the issues of church renewal and the mission of the local congregation in society. Seminars for clergy were developed such as the Parish Ministers Colloquy which was held two days a week over a four-week period. Sixteen theological courses were eventually combined in one weekend seminar known as Religious Studies I (RSI). Local congregations and student groups began to sponsor RSI across the nation. In 1962 when Walter Liebrecht left Evanston to assume responsibility as Protestant Observer at the Second Vatican Council, Dr. Mathews, joined by seven families from the Christian Faith and Life Community, was invited to Chicago to become Dean of the Ecumenical Institute.

1963
To
1968

The relative stability of the post-war years seemed to end with the assassination of President John Kennedy. Around the world, governments changed in a surprising number of countries, perhaps most notably in Russia, Indonesia, India, Egypt and many of the African and Latin American nations.

At home, the optimism of the early 60's seemed to give way to a sense of ambiguity, if not despair. Under the image of "The Great Society" many positive programs were introduced to deal with the growing demand for social change. Such agencies and programs as HUD, HEW, VISTA and Headstart are illustrations of this. At the same time, however, protest in many forms proliferated. The Civil Rights Movement shook the fabric of American society. With heroes taken from the new music, activist political writers and the literature of the absurd, especially the younger generation organized everything from non-violent demonstrations to urban gangs and even radical guerilla-type groups.

While progress was made in the area of civil rights, life in our inner-cities continued to deteriorate. The institution of marriage experienced growing stress as some states recorded more than a 50% divorce rate. Advances in technology, and particularly in the media, ensured that all these events were more accessible to more people than ever before. The post-war sense of globality was now directly at everyone's fingertips. As Marshall McLuhan put it, we became aware that we live in a "global village".

During this period, The Ecumenical Institute experienced itself facing the same question as Vatican II: How does the Church respond to the needs and demands of the mid-twentieth century? In particular, the Institute undertook to develop practical methods whereby local congregations could respond effectively to the needs of their communities or parishes. Four basic directions were pursued. First, the Institute's curriculum in religious and cultural studies was further defined. While these seminar programs were primarily intended for use by local congregations, their appeal eventually carried over into many sectors of society. The intent of the religious seminars was to enable lay people to rethink and articulate the meaning of the Christian message within the idiom and realities of modern life. The cultural curriculum was intended to provide people with a basic grasp of the dynamics of society and of the current issues and breakthroughs of the various disciplines of thought. By 1968, the Institute's curriculum was being used by thousands of people a year across the United States.

Second, the Institute directed a great deal of its work towards the needs of the young - those most directly involved in the turmoil of the times. A distinctive pedagogical method was developed and programs devised which challenged youth with the issue of responsible participation in society. Programs held across the nation ranged from preschool education through supplemental high school curriculum and university seminars. Special emphasis was given to the training of teachers of all age-levels.

Third, the Institute became persuaded that the local community with its institutions of the family, the school, the place of work, etc. is the basic building block of society. With the growing distress of local community life, particularly in inner-city situations, it became apparent that a demonstration of revitalized community was needed. Hence, the Institute undertook a practical experiment in comprehensive community development. The location for this experiment was a sixteen block area in Chicago's westside ghetto known as the 5th City community. In 1964, the Institute and its seven staff families moved from Evanston to 5th City and began working with local residents to discern the community's problems and design practical, locally-based solutions. Neighborhood workshops and door-to-door interviews identified 9,216 separate problems. In response, forty-five programs in social and economic development were devised and implemented through voluntary cooperative action. Replicable methods for effective local renewal took shape and 5th City began to emerge as a sign of hope for inner-city rebirth.

Finally, through its seminars across the country and increasingly overseas, a network began to develop of people who had found Institute programs relevant to the needs of their own churches and communities. The Institute started to work on a continuing basis with this network of people, providing advanced training programs and bringing people together in various research and study configurations. Most notable amongst these was the emergence in 1965 of the Annual Summer Research Assembly. These events involving as many as 1000 people have continued to meet yearly in Chicago, drawing people from across the world. Using 5th City as a 'living laboratory', the Research Assemblies have produced the practical designs and models through which the Institute has sought to serve the needs of local revitalization.

During this same period of 1963 to 1968 the Institute's staff grew from 13 to over 100 members. This relatively rapid growth in staff confronted the Institute with practical issues and problems for its internal operations. The common residential life-style of the Faith and Life Community was maintained after the moves to Evanston and 5th City. With growing numbers it became increasingly necessary to establish common understandings and structures for the enablement of the staff and its work. For advice in this regard the Institute studied the founders of the historical religious orders who had faced similar issues as their orders grew beyond the founding members. Through this study and practical experimentation a number of intentional structures emerged in the common life of the Institute's staff. First, it was apparent that any group of people which lives and works in Christian community needs a mutual understanding or covenant to guide its life together. Hence, during this period the staff of the Institute first struggled to articulate the delineations of its common life and self-understanding as a group of people.

Second, the Institute worked to order and organize its task. Various personnel configurations were established for the direct work of the community and for the internal support of the staff. An understanding of assignments and common time designs emerged as ways of enabling the work. Third, it was recognized that certain dynamics were needed to hold the community together in its decision to be of service to the needs of the times. Hence, daily worship, regular study and occasional celebrative events became part of the common life of the community.

Finally, it was seen that a common economic vehicle was needed for the sustenance of the staff. Again, the Institute looked to the wisdom of the historical religious orders as well as to the European Protestants experiments in Christian community. A self-support mechanism was instituted whereby on a rotational basis staff members worked in ordinary remunerative employ to support the whole community. From this earned income each staff member received a small monthly stipend. This common economic mechanism enabled two-thirds of the Institute's staff to work full-time in program implementation at any given time. Each month, part of the earned income was put aside in various funds for the longrange support of the staff. These funds provided for such contingencies as health care, annuity and education of the staff's children.

1968
To
1974

After 1968 the phenomena of social and political unrest seemed to intensify across the globe. From Biafra to China to Japan to Latin America, the world experienced unprecedented turmoil. At home, the quick succession of the urban riots, the Vietnam War, the counter-culture lifestyle and Watergate brought the entire nation to a point of critical reevaluation. Spiraling inflation and the flexing of muscles by the OPEC cartel made already serious economic issues even more complex. In the midst of all this the world experienced the glimmerings of a new kind of hope as it witnessed men actually walking on the moon.

The turbulence of this period focused new directions for the Ecumenical Institute. Its work became delineated in three related areas. First, programs and training for those involved in the life of the Church continued to expand. In particular, requests for Institute programs in other countries proliferated. Second, the expansion of programs to many varied situations around the world required an articulation of the dynamics of human sociality in all its manifestations, not just through the perspective of the Christian Church. Summer Research Assemblies grappled to discern the fundamental issues within society and to develop new programs to address these problems.

Third, in response to the growing number of requests to provide on-site volunteer staff, the Institute began to establish staff offices around the world. In 1968 the Institute's staff numbered a little over 100 people all living in one location in Chicago's 5th City. By 1974 the staff numbered 1500 people operating out of more than 100 staff locations in 20 nations. Coordination centers were established in Bombay, Hong Kong, Brussels, Singapore and Chicago. A large percentage of the new staff was indigenous to the various nations where the Institute provided its programs.

The development of the Institute as an international organization was in response to a growing number of people who had been involved in programs and saw relevance in them for their local church or community. Groups across the world began to request advanced training opportunities. Hence, the Institute developed two extensive training programs for this purpose. The first was the Academy, an eight-week program scheduled quarterly in Chicago and offering the complete Ecumenical Institute curriculum of religious and cultural seminars. The second, The International Training Institute, is a six-week mobile school based on the Academy curriculum but with a more practical field orientation. The first ITI, held at Trinity College, Singapore, in 1969, was attended by 102 participants from 23 nations. Since then, the ITI has been offered on seven continents.

At the same time the major riots which shook urban America in 1968 and particularly the westside of Chicago - made the people of 5th City renew their determination to create a viable sign of human community in the midst of the widespread inner city collapse. By the early

1970's, 5th City had been recognized as one of the preeminent demonstrations of community development in the United States. Such recognition was afforded by many including George Romney of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and by Mayor Daley of the City of Chicago.

Interest in Fifth City's successful development led to a growing number of invitations to establish similar demonstration communities in other parts of the world. After careful research and analysis of the methods and programs which had worked in 5th City, the Institute established two demonstration laboratory projects to test the methods in diverse situations. The first was in a remote Aboriginal settlement of Australia and the second was the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific.

Finally the Institute began to develop programs for particular audiences such as women and youth. In particular, the growing number of Institute volunteer consultants from business and professional fields requested a seminar which would share the Institute's planning methods. This led to the development of the LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) seminar which has been used around the world by companies such as IBM, McDonald's Corporation and Bell Laboratories and by government and social agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation, HEW (Region 7) and the Indonesian Department of Economics.

In 1973 the Institute of Cultural Affairs, previously developed as a program arm of The Ecumenical Institute, was formally incorporated. Two realities determined the necessity of establishing the ICA as a separate entity. First, such a growing percentage of Ecumenical Institute programs was by then oriented for constituencies outside the life of the Church that it became appropriate to hold these various programs within a separate, secular organization. Second, in many countries the Institute's staff and program participants were largely indigenous and often representative of the other world religions. In India, for example, the Institute's staff was largely Hindu. Hence, The Institute of Cultural Affairs was incorporated to accommodate the growing secularity of EI programs as well as the wider ecumenicity of its staff and colleagues. At this point only the Academy and the International Training Institute remain as regularly scheduled programs of The Ecumenical Institute.

1974
To
1979

While 1974 seemed to mark the beginning of a quieter period for the world, realities such as detente and the SALT Agreements, the new governments of Africa, the mutual diplomatic recognition of China and the United States, the accord between Egypt and Israel and the fall of the Shah of Iran point to a remarkable shift in national and international relations. Phenomena such as the protest against nuclear energy and the tax payers revolt indicate a new insistence that local people's voice will be heard in the affairs of economy

and state. World-wide inflation and the energy crisis have ensured that a basic theme of the grassroots voice is a dawning awareness that all resources are finite and decisions about their ordering and preservation must be made with the broadest possible consensus. Further aspects of this grassroots movement have been a marked resurgence of local initiative and a trend towards more familiar and conservative stances in politics and religion.

By 1974, 20 years after its inception, the Institute's programmatic thrust had evolved to a point of clarified definition. Three programs have emerged as primary to the Institute's work. The Human Development Program is a phased effort for sharing methods of comprehensive local development with particular villages, towns and urban neighborhoods around the world. Since 1975 pilot Human Development projects have been initiated in over 200 communities and 25 nations. Each project is intended as a demonstration of rapid socio-economic development for its region and nation. The projects are initiated by a week-long consultation involving a broad cross-section of local residents, ICA staff and volunteer consultants representing a wide range of expertise. The product of each consultation is an integrated four-year plan for comprehensive local development. In the State of Maharashtra, India, a concerted effort is being made to replicate the Human Development Program across the state's 35,000 villages. At present, over 150 projects have been initiated in the Maharashtra Village Replication Project.

The Community Forum Program began in the United States in 1975 as a part of the Horizons Program of the American Bicentennial Celebration. It is known across the country as the Town Meeting Program. Since then its effectiveness in encouraging citizen participation has been demonstrated in 8000 communities and 32 nations. Its one-day "town meeting" format enables local citizens to create and implement practical plans for solving local problems out of their own resources and cooperative effort. One demonstration Town Meeting has been locally sponsored in every county of the United States.

An extension of the Community Forum Program has been a number of Special Focus Forums for groups whose particular concerns require a specialized planning emphasis. While Forums have been designed for the specific needs of many groups such as the Community Issues Forum which focused on local law enforcement problems, three formats have evolved as formal ICA programs. Global Women's Forum, Community Youth Forum and LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) for business and agency personnel have been offered in 23 nations.

The third major program area is the continuation of research, training and interchange for an expanded network of ICA volunteer consultants around the world. While Institute programs more than doubled in 1978 over the previous year, costs rose by only 3%. This is largely due to the increased participation of volunteer consultants. Consultants donate both time and resources to assist in the implementation of Institute programs. In the United States alone, over a million hours were given during 1978.