

BRIEF STATEMENT ON BACKGROUND OF FAITH AND LIFE COMMUNITY AND ITS AIMS FOR THE FUTURE

This work began out of a sense of frustration in facing the abysmal illiteracy of students and other adults in fields of Bible, Biblical theology, and Christian ethics. Man's extremity is God's opportunity, and such was true in the birth of this whole program. After ten years in the ministry, six of which were spent as minister to students and four as Navy and Marine Corps chaplain, I finally decided to take my family to Scotland where I studied a year at the University of St. Andrews under D. M. Baillie. We also spent three months touring Britain and the continent following the leads provided by the World Council of Churches as to the activity of Christian laymen in the various countries. We were able to observe at first hand the workings of the Iona Community, the Christian Frontier Council in England, the Evangelical Academies in Germany, the Church and World Institute in Holland, the Zoe Movement in Greece, and the Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland. People everywhere were most gracious to us, and we learned very much from their experiences. I was also able to work in a short course at Cambridge University in England and to learn something of the advantages of a residential college situation.

Upon returning to Texas in August, 1951, I felt moved to take the leap of faith in starting this work. With the help of interested Christian laymen who made financial support possible, I spent the next five months in formulating the program, and in September, 1952, we were able to open the first residence hall for men, beginning with 30 students representing six denominations. The Board of Directors is also interdenominational, consisting of seven ministers and eighteen laymen at the beginning. Then when we added a women's branch in September, 1953, we increased the Board to 35 members including 11 women.

Beginning February 1, 1954, we will have more than 80 students in residence, representing the following denominations: Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Greek Orthodox, and Church of Christ of the Philippines. These students are engaged in 30 different fields of study at the University of Texas and are receiving Christian education in the framework of a Christian community while enrolled in this great secular institution which is state supported. We believe this may prove to be one real way of overcoming the handicap of Biblical and spiritual illiteracy on the part of adult laymen. We have had inquiries from numerous colleges and universities in the United States and serious inquiries from the Student Christian Movement of Canada.

We are definitely in an experimental, exploratory stage, and although we are making many mistakes along the way, we do believe we are on the right track. About 15% of our students thus far are deciding to change their life work to the ministry, but this "attrition" is to be expected. Already we have found that students leaving this program to enter theological seminaries seem to be better equipped for what they receive there. We have much to do in the development of a curriculum that communicates with the layman in terms of his faith and life at all points. In addition to the staff listed in the brochure, we now have a Southern Baptist minister who is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Texas and an honor graduate of Yale Divinity School. He leads the seminar in theology and Christian ethics. Rev. Roy Sherrod of Austin has replaced Paul Wassenich as Bible instructor of the men.

We have been searching for a full-time Director of Curriculum, and at present are in correspondence with Elton Trueblood and Dr. Clarence Hamilton, who is a guest professor at Union Theological Seminary this year. Dr. Trueblood would serve in a consultative capacity. It is possible that Dr. and Mrs. Hamilton both will join us in September of this year, she taking the position of counselor-lecturer to our women students and serving generally in her field of family life and counseling. If both Dr. Hamilton and Elton Trueblood can combine to help us develop our curriculum, we feel we will be on the way toward a much sounder program. The Community itself provides a laboratory in which the student may experience the "Community of forgiveness."

We need advice and suggestions from people who are interested in what we are doing, and who are equipped by training and experience to steer us clear of pitfalls. We are working in a complementary relationship with the denominations which have churches alongside the University campus. In no sense are we in competition with them and we hope that the end results of our work will be the production of three-in-one persons: Christian parents, Christian churchmen, and Christian citizens. Financially, we are being supported almost entirely by interested Christian laymen and we hope in the near future to spread the foundation to "Friends of the Community" so that many people of average income may contribute one or two dollars a month to provide the sustaining funds for this program. We do hope in the future that some national foundation will become interested in our work. It is our prayer that in a few year's time this work will begin to spread to other campuses across the country. Also, we hope to convert the curriculum into a group study correspondence course which can be used on a denominational or ecumenical basis at the grass roots level.