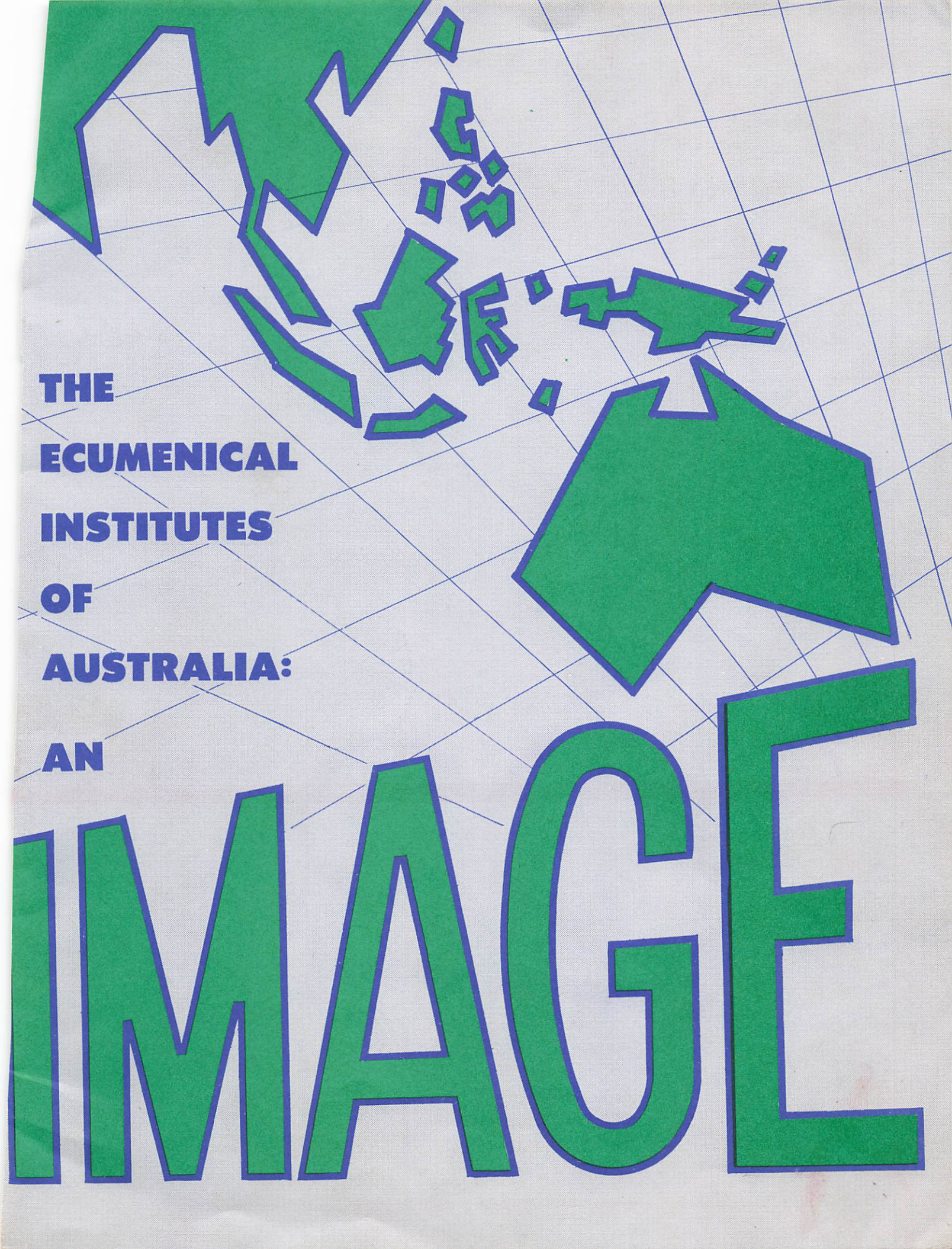

THE
ECUMENICAL
INSTITUTES
OF
AUSTRALIA:
AN
IMAGE

PUBLISHED BY
THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTES: AUSTRALIA
BOX M44 S.M.E.
PADDINGTON, N.S.W. 2021.
PHONE 31-4878.

Printed by QUALITY PRESS P/L, 21 Ross St., Forest Lodge, Sydney 2037.

AN IMAGE OF THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTES OF AUSTRALIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JUST WHAT ARE YOU REALLY ABOUT . . .

. . . The asker was a dignified, retired business man in his mid-seventies, and a dedicated Anglican vestryman. During his two years of direct association with The Ecumenical Institutes of Australia, he'd asked the same question many times. But different people gave different answers:

"We're a church-oriented research and training organization. . ."

"We teach weekend courses all over Australia. . ."

"The Institute investigates, and trains people in, sociological methods. . ."

". . . Institute programmes for racial and cultural minorities. . ."

"We're world-wide . . . seven continents."

All of which is true.

But that wasn't really his question. He wanted the story of the Ecumenical Institute, including where it comes from, what it does and why, what it is aimed toward. He is one of many that have asked. In three years, Institute programmes have moved across Australia like a bush fire, and that makes people curious.

These pages will try to tell the story — at least in part. Not all the questions have answers. For strangers, perhaps this will be an introduction that occasions more questions. For friends and acquaintances, perhaps there will be a unifying theme to which they can more adequately relate their own experiences.

As a beginning point, the Ecumenical Institute is a child of its age. It's an age in which the word "revolution" is a mass media cliche; technological, racial, cultural revolutions, or whatever other kind. Some people join revolutions, some fight them. Still others, maybe most, just tell themselves that things are as they always were. The Ecumenical Institute has sought to be faithful to its time by transcending it. It has tried to honour what is ancient over what is merely old. Long-range vision has been highly favoured over novelty.

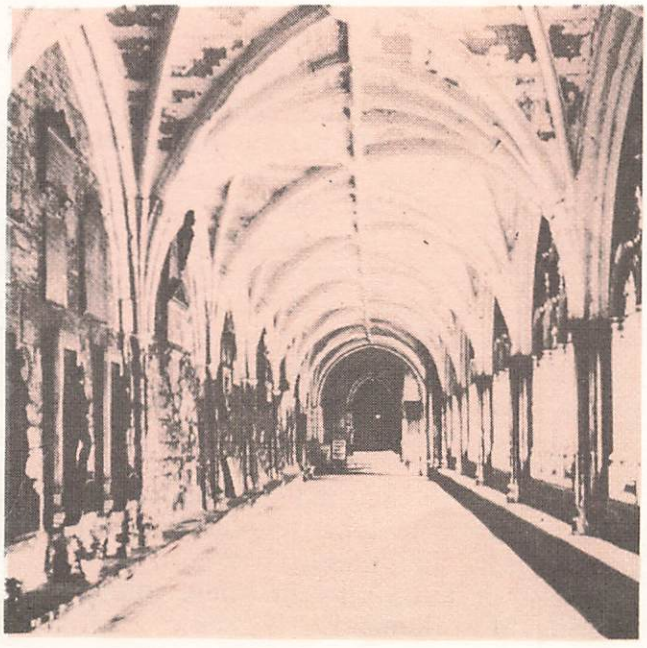
Hence, much of what the Ecumenical Institute has to say and do is not new. What is new is the way things have been put together — things of the past and future, religious and cultural things, theory and practice. It also has some unique methods of thinking and acting. Other than that, it is a very ordinary group of people, deeply interested in the future of the church.

But that future looks like an open question, not only in Australia, but everywhere in the world. Many are convinced, by the sheer extent of social unrest that marks the 20th Century, that something fundamental is happening to the very spirit of mankind itself. Religious and secular prophets of doom give one answer to just what that is. Others, including associates of the Ecumenical Institute, believe it's the Lord's own time of opportunity pressing hard upon us.

What is necessary is that the historic church reach out to grasp its opportunities. Therefore, in its relations with the historic church, the Ecumenical Institute seeks the privilege of serving as a kind of research expedition into the future. There are ample precedents for the role, in or out of the church. Successful business enterprises maintain semi-independent research and consulting agencies. In political life, minority parties have appeared to support a particular issue for a decade, and have then been absorbed into the main stream. For Protestant churches, liturgical and Christian education "movements" have long since become indistinguishable from ordinary church life. In the Roman tradition, Franciscans, Jesuits, Benedictines and Trappists are but four of hundreds of religious orders that could be named.

In this sense, the title "Ecumenical" has little to do with church union or pulpit exchanges, though these might be important in themselves. Here it simply means a universal fellowship of people concerned to turn the ancient wisdom of the church into fresh, contemporary insight. Its concern is to provide a new hope for mankind everywhere. It is the practical, missional task, not theory, which defines what is ecumenical.

So, where did the Ecumenical Institutes of Australia come from? How? Why?



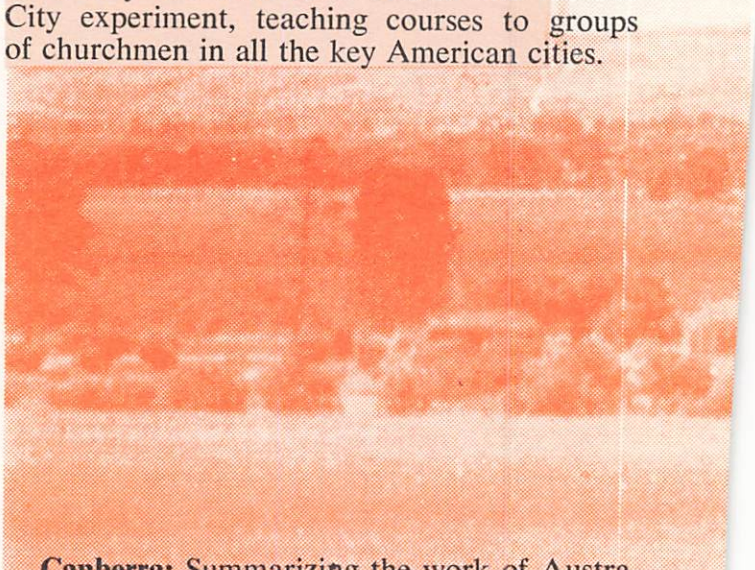
THE SYMBOL OF OTFORD: BEFORE AND AFTER

The Otford Conference, 1967, has become a key symbol for the Ecumenical Institutes of Australia. But the 70 churchmen there might not have said so at the time. Even now, it's difficult to imagine a town boasting two petrol stations, a general store, and a Methodist conference centre as a symbol of much other than the bush surrounding it. But it served as a focal point of at least six creative currents of Australian and international church life. Here they are listed according to the names of the six cities of their origins.

Bossey, Switzerland: Post World War II reconstruction saw striking innovations in European church life. The Lay Academy movement gave a way to remotivate churchmen of every occupational level. Ecumenism gathered momentum. The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey was formed, to give documentation and encouragement to the new tide of interest. Resembling Australian and U.S. Ecumenical Institutes of the present in name only, it sparked the ideas that made those that followed conceivable.

Austin, Texas: Post War years in the U.S. saw developments in numerous forms of "specialized" ministry, among them the university campus ministry. The Christian Faith and Life Community at the University of Texas in Austin, was one that came up strong in the mid-1950's. Its director and initiator was the Rev. Jack Lewis, and his associate was Dr. Joseph Mathews, later Dean of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago. They worked to give university students an abbreviated, but no less rigorous, version of seminary education. Perhaps their best work was in the application of some innovative educational methods, incorporated later into the work of the Ecumenical Institutes for use in local churches.

Chicago: A World Council of Churches meeting in Evanston, Illinois, a north shore suburb of Chicago, passed a resolution to establish an Ecumenical Institute for the North American continent. In design, it was intended to be similar to the Bossey experiment. Its first Dean, Dr. Walter Liebrecht, adhered to that plan from 1957 to 1961 when he was called to be a Council of Churches Observer at Vatican II. It was then that Dr. Mathews came from Austin, bringing several Faith and Life Community staff members with him. A year later, with the guidance of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago under the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A., the group decided to respond to the need for church presence in the inner-city. They moved to Chicago's West Side black ghetto, and began the experiment in parish work among local residents now known as 5th City. At the same time, they began to pass on what they had learned at Austin and the 5th City experiment, teaching courses to groups of churchmen in all the key American cities.



Canberra: Summarizing the work of Australian Frontier, Sir James Darling, its Chairman, had this to say: "The task of Australian Frontier is to help a large continent to become a great country by enabling individuals to find out how they personally can contribute to this end." One of Frontier's many and highly creative steps to this end was to introduce the work of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago to Australian church leaders. Institute staff members, including Dean Mathews, were invited to teach a course at Wesley College in the University of Sydney.

The course fired the imaginations of a number of those present. It effectively articulated some ideas that hitherto had been nurtured privately, or aired only in small, intimate gatherings of work-mates.

Sydney: In the 1960s, a small group of inner-city parish ministers was formed, known first as the "Sydney Colleagues," and later, as the "Sydney Ecumenical Associates." They had set themselves the task of exploring the relation of the inner-city church to its urban community. To augment the financing of their work, they took cleaners' jobs at the University of Sydney for a small monthly pay cheque.

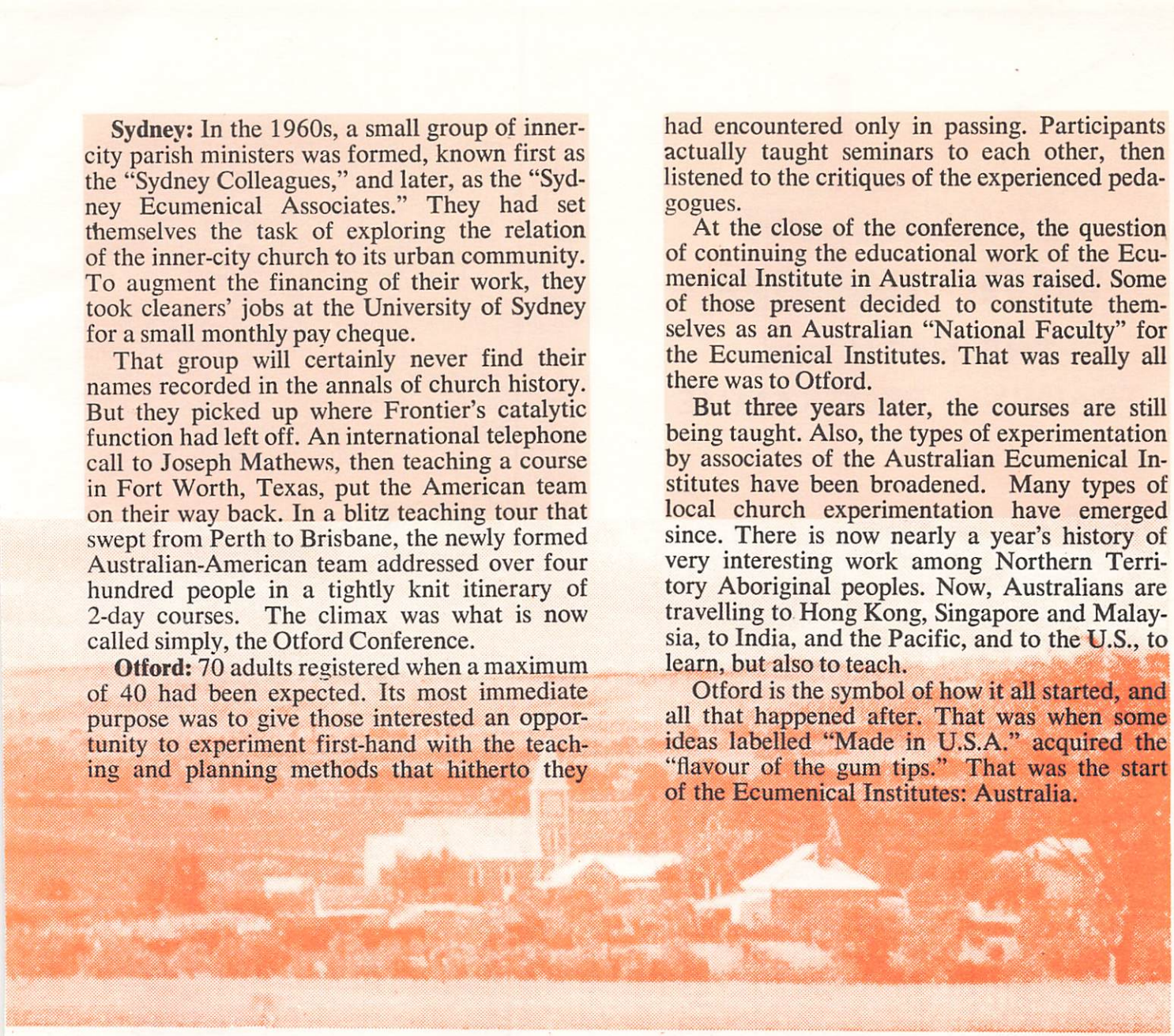
That group will certainly never find their names recorded in the annals of church history. But they picked up where Frontier's catalytic function had left off. An international telephone call to Joseph Mathews, then teaching a course in Fort Worth, Texas, put the American team on their way back. In a blitz teaching tour that swept from Perth to Brisbane, the newly formed Australian-American team addressed over four hundred people in a tightly knit itinerary of 2-day courses. The climax was what is now called simply, the Otford Conference.

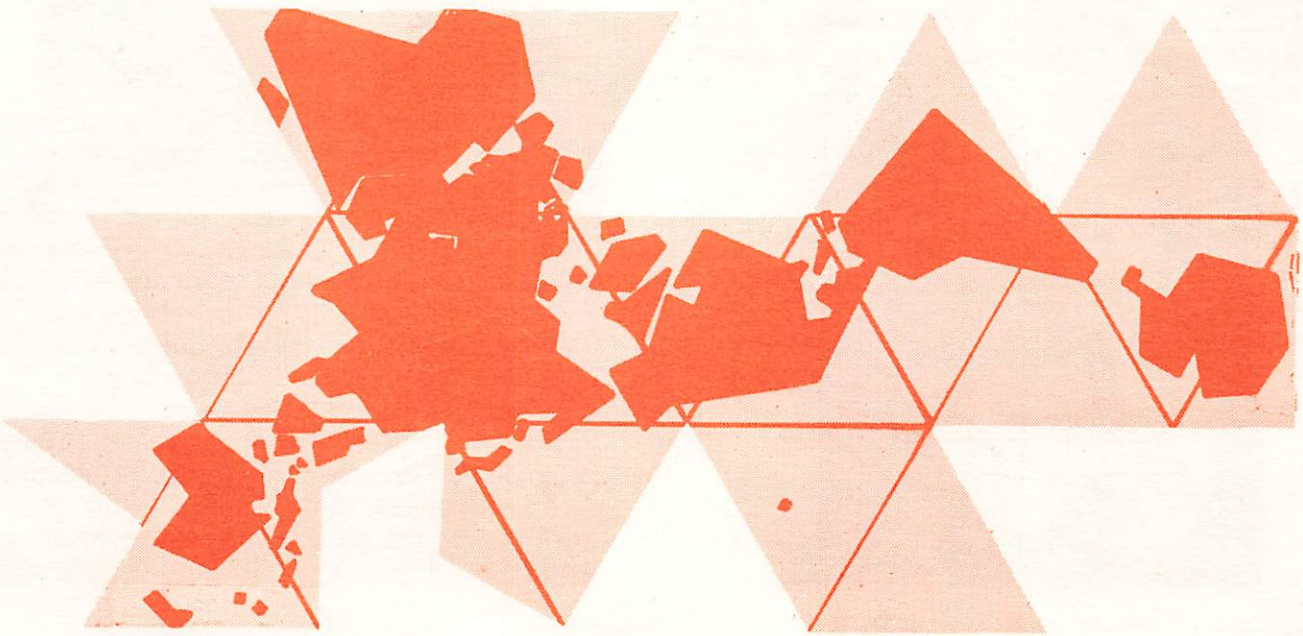
Otford: 70 adults registered when a maximum of 40 had been expected. Its most immediate purpose was to give those interested an opportunity to experiment first-hand with the teaching and planning methods that hitherto they had encountered only in passing. Participants actually taught seminars to each other, then listened to the critiques of the experienced pedagogues.

At the close of the conference, the question of continuing the educational work of the Ecumenical Institute in Australia was raised. Some of those present decided to constitute themselves as an Australian "National Faculty" for the Ecumenical Institutes. That was really all there was to Otford.

But three years later, the courses are still being taught. Also, the types of experimentation by associates of the Australian Ecumenical Institutes have been broadened. Many types of local church experimentation have emerged since. There is now nearly a year's history of very interesting work among Northern Territory Aboriginal peoples. Now, Australians are travelling to Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, to India, and the Pacific, and to the U.S., to learn, but also to teach.

Otford is the symbol of how it all started, and all that happened after. That was when some ideas labelled "Made in U.S.A." acquired the "flavour of the gum tips." That was the start of the Ecumenical Institutes: Australia.





EDUCATION WITH IMAGES

THE NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Aim

"When I returned from that first course conference," remarked one minister of his experience with the Ecumenical Institute, "I was sparking at 500 volts. You know the syndrome — you wake up your wife in the dead of night to recite part of a lecture you've just remembered because you've been reflecting and you're excited all over again . . ."

Not everyone responds quite so warmly. Occasional people respond just as vigorously —in the opposite way. But the point is that few leave an Institute course in a neutral state of mind. For most, what happens there is significant enough to require a decision, about their relation to life, and so, about their relation to the church. That is exactly what is intended.

These courses have one purpose. They are to aid local churchmen once again, and with new seriousness, to take up the service of the church to the world. They have a method toward this end. They simply offer some firm images of the future that an excited, creative church could have. Then, after beginning courses for laymen and clergy, there is a curriculum of "advanced courses." These provide cultural, theological and Biblical grounding to fill out the images with more specific comment and know-how.

Institute courses are not a substitute for sound, continuing local Christian education. They fill a gap. Because of the intensity of these forty-four hour weekend programmes, they can give local churchmen a new clarity and breadth understanding of their faith which is hard to find elsewhere. Because of the power of some of the images used, they can incite fresh enthusiasm. And because some Ecumenical Institute methods are relatively new, they could inform the ways in which some existing curricula are used.

National Coverage

By October 1970, total Ecumenical Institute course participants numbered about 2500 in Australia. To gain maximum effectiveness from limited resources, the Australian National Faculty made an early decision to press for broad geographical coverage rather than depth penetration. As a result, course graduates and firm colleagues can now be found in every major Australian city.

Broad geographical coverage has presented problems. For one, it costs money. American teams shocked Australian colleagues with their willingness to spend money on air travel and trunk line telephone calls. But in so doing, they communicated also a high estimate of the value of serious churchmanship. In the church as in business, dedication and the willingness to invest, both together, make things happen.

Diffusion of energy and resources yields results more slowly. Continuing collegial sharing and guidance are also more difficult to maintain over large distances. When the results of hard work do not quickly become evident, spirits can wither.

But the Ecumenical Institutes of Australia continue to expand in a way that would not have been possible under a more limiting policy. Broad geographical coverage develops a solid, broad base for further activity. The original faculty decision has proved to be correct.

The Pedagogical Method

The methods are what most often intrigue people about the work of the Ecumenical Institutes. But there is confusion, sometimes, as to just what those methods are. Most seem sure they are valuable. But often, they are not sure why. A university lecturer said the course he took was the most valuable educational experience of his life, but the "study material is too hard." In another instance, a plumber and a housewife teamed up at a course to suggest to staff how the same material could be made "more intellectually challenging." Some people say they like the content, but object strongly to the methods, while others say just the opposite. A few words on pedagogical methods might at least sharpen the issue.

One basic methodological presupposition is that the church in fact, has an exciting and creative future ahead. On this matter, Institute faculty run squarely counter to popular opinions, and, for that matter, to doubt and cynicism among churchmen as well. Defeatism and the temptation to retreat inward are the most powerful enemies the church has today.

The Institutes also presuppose that Christianity, and therefore Christian education, is first of all a matter for adult minds and spirits. In the long run, this is the only stance that will sufficiently honour the importance of the church's ministry to children and youth. Only adult churchmen thoroughly aware of the claim of the church upon their own lives, can seriously be expected to impress sensitive and critical younger minds.

But closest to the bone is the presupposition that neither facts nor theories are the most important content of education, but images. Of course, every skilled teacher knows that anyway. But the Institute gave it a name: "imaginal education."

Imaginal education refers to the fact that human beings do reflective thinking in images. Usually, they are visual images, but the other senses come into play too. If this be so, then the best way to present a man or a woman with a new life possibility is to offer a new image. In exploring this same insight, the philosopher Plato built an entire rational structure, even going so far as to say that the image (the ideal) is the only reality there is.

The oriental philosopher-sage Lao-tse was on the same road when he said that if a man would change his behaviour, he need only change his language first. In London, classes are now being held in English for business men with cockney accents. The idea, of course, is to improve their "image". The English, the French and the Spanish all insisted that subject peoples learn the language of the conqueror for reasons identical to those that cause communist nations to use "brainwashing".

Such diverse geniuses as Einstein, Henry James, Newton, Freud and Jung testify in their writings that their greatest creative contributions arose first in the form of mere mental pictures. Churchill, Roosevelt, and more recently, Kennedy, were great imaginal educators, as witnessed by their speeches. And, as if these illustrations were insufficient, consider the undeniable effectiveness of modern saturation advertising. Demagogue or hero, the methodology behind charisma is often much the same. Changed images change lives.

Course Content: Images of What?

So, Institute courses use images. Images of what? The Christian Faith, of course. But what about it? God, Christ, the Holy Spirit? Or all three, perhaps?

No, not God — man is, as the Bible says, made in the image of God, but that only intensifies the question. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas worked hard at describing God by describing all the things God isn't, then attributing to Him the opposite. For example, there can be nothing God can't do, so God is all-powerful. But that seems awfully abstract to 20th Century ears. More to the point is to say when and where the activity of God goes on. That's the question that Ecumenical Institute teachers seek to raise. They speak of history, and the personal problems common to everyone. Then they point and say "where do you see it".

They don't really try to present images of Jesus the Christ, either. There are already too many competitors — most of them utterly lacking in virility. But leave that to contemporary artists and film makers to correct. Institute faculty would rather point to how people experience the event of Christ. Although most have not sufficient theological sophistication to use that name yet, every man knows of the blind who learn to see, the deaf who hear, and the lame who not only walk, but run and dance as well. Only the poetry has changed.

"The Spirit (wind) blows where it wills," says Jesus in St. John 3:8, "you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it is going. So with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

So, an "image" of the Spirit is as absurd as an image of the wind. But there have been many people whose lives have demonstrated radical freedom, like the "wind", through their encounter with the Christ. At least it is possible to talk about the style of men of responsible freedom. This is what the third session of the R.S.1 course is about.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

RS-I THE THEOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

A prerequisite course focusing on the basic spirit questions in the post-modern world; problems of authentic self-understanding, decision-making, vocational significance, human relations and creative participation in civilization. The aim is to enable the participants to think through for themselves who they are and how they can involve themselves in the present age.

CHRISTIAN MEMORY

RS-II A THE HISTORICAL CHURCH

A study in the theology of the fathers of Christianity amid the milleux of their eras. Writings by men of faith are scrutinized for the Christian community during the ancient, medieval and modern periods.

RS-II B THE NEW TESTAMENT

A study of the witness to the Word in history made by the early Christian community. The perspectives of John, the Synoptic writers and Paul toward the event of Jesus Christ are examined together with the basic cultural heritage of the Greek, Hebraic and Gnostic life styles.

RS-II C THE OLD TESTAMENT

A study of the understanding of God present in historical living as known to the people of Israel. The life stances taken in the wisdom writings, the prophetic pronouncements and the covenant law are probed in the context of the historial background of the ancient world.

REFORMULATION MODELS

RS-III A THE LOCAL CHURCH

An analysis of the new image of the Church as mission to history. The inter-dynamics of the parish, local congregation, and cadre are examined in depth and practical models are forged in workshops on witnessing and justing love, worship, study, and enabling discipline.

RS-III B THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

An analysis of the people of God in history as they are manifested in the faiths of today. Papers from Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, nationalism, communism and humanism are used to explore the issues and dilemmas of spirit men in the universal human community.

RS-III C THE WORLD RELIGIONS

An analysis of the human ur images by which people live out of their distinct cultural inheritance. The articulated visions of cultural leaders in civilization today are analyzed in order to reveal the unique gifts of Africa the Far East, Sub-Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the West.

PARISH LEADERSHIP COLLOQUY (PLC)

PLC PARISH LEADERSHIP COLLOQUY

The Parish Leadership Colloquy is an intensive involvement with the 20th Century Theological Revolution as it has reformulated the stance of faith for contemporary man and as it has become the imperative to renew the church in our time. Set into eight sessions the course moves through the church's prior task of clarifying the Word in the Post-Modern Era to its present struggle to pour its theological wisdom into new sociological constructs which can effectively reformulate the church. On this new edge of the Church concern the PLC is specifically aimed at providing church leaders with practical tools, methods, parish and local congregation models for the renewal of the Church.

But there are images of the church — by the multitude. The church is community, power and love, the backbone of historical Western civilization. Some images are new. Most of them are older ones with long forgotten power.

This is a sketch outline of the basic course. Again, it puts out more questions than answers, but for those interested in more, the course is probably available nearby four or five times each year.

The four key theologians whose works are read in the basic course seminars are: Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, and H. Richard Niebuhr. Because these men were also deeply concerned with the fundamental structure of human life, their work lends itself to use in the course. The excerpts are brief, but they are also highly representative of the authors' thoughts. To know Tillich's method, for instance, means that one already knows a great deal about what he would have to say on other subjects. It makes it possible for the reader to dialogue with the author — not on mere academic theology, but on the underlying concerns of life itself.

Institute courses tend to emphasize man's capacity for rational, responsible decision making. This sometimes causes concern to sophisticated theologians interested in matters academic, particularly those whose background stressed Calvin's strain of determinism. One view that many have found viable is that these two emphases are the poles of a paradox: one experiences the past as destiny, yet precisely at the moment destiny is most brutally crushing, even the moment of death, the possibility of a new relationship to it, in the freedom of the Resurrection, presents itself most forcefully. Man experiences this as having made a decision, yet he also experiences the decision as having been made outside himself, beyond the capacity of his own will. The Ecumenical Institute's stress on decisional possibilities is more in the nature of a strategic emphasis than a theological dogma. The 20th Century Church needs to hear more about what CAN happen than about what cannot.

CULTURAL STUDIES

CS-I THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

An introductory course on the postmodern world as found in its scientific common sense, its urban style of life, and its secular mood which requires a revolutionary response, skill at model building, and a decision to act concretely to renew our social context. The aim is to cultivate people of wide vision trained to perform the practical tasks demanded for full humanness in our world.

CULTURAL WISDOM

CS-II A PSYCHOLOGY AND ART

A study of cultural wisdom relative to understanding individual human beings. The science of psycholanalysis is examined in its biological, social and rational schools in tandem with the impressionism, expressionism and intentionalism of the arts.

CS-II B SOCIOLOGY AND HISTORY

A study of cultural wisdom pertaining to the social dynamics in the human community. The science of sociology involving analytical models for the economic, political and cultural aspects of society, is over against history, the objective, rational and existential appropriations of humanness.

CS-II C NATURAL SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

A study of cultural wisdom regarding the comprehensive grasp of human existence. The natural sciences of biology, physics and mathematics are placed in relation to the philosophical approaches present in analytical, existential and metabilt intellectual postures.

RESPONSIBILITY MODELS

CS-III A THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY

An analysis of domestic life, the marriage covenant, family structures and the new image of the family as mission. Through workshops new models are created for the roles of the sexes, the budgeting of life expenditure and the symbolic relationship of the generations.

CS-III B THE COMMUNITY AND THE POLIS

An analysis of the structures in the inner city, suburbia and outlying communities as segments in the metropolitan world. Model building methodologies are used to grasp a vision for local economic, political and cultural reformulation.

CS-III C THE NATION AND THE WORLD

An analysis of the situation around the globe economically, politically and culturally. The problems, goals and strategies for the future world are brought together in the creation of models for a responsible citizenry.

SPECIAL CONFERENCES

CONSULTATIONS

The methodologies developed by the faculty are used to draw together the wisdom of particular groups of people to enable them to analyze the area which they hold in common and plan constructively for the future in that area.

ADVANCED STRATEGY COURSES

The continuation of model building applicable to local parishes and to areas of missional concern is made possible by sessions in both theoretics and practics to further the spirit movement of our day.

PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING COURSES

The methodology for teaching courses is presented to enable course grads to use the structures of lectures, meal conversations, seminar techniques and other pedagogical tools to carry on theological and cultural education.

Comprehensive Curriculum

The R.S. 1 course just described is the foundational presupposition of everything that the Ecumenical Institute does. Hence, it is prerequisite to the "advanced courses" of the comprehensive curriculum.

There are two basic areas of advanced study: Theology and Culture. Since the Word of Jesus Christ is never spoken except it happens in a particular historical and social context, it is just as critical for the missionally focussed church to know its cultural context as for it to know its own theology.

Taken together, the cultural courses summarize the impact of the urban, scientific and secular revolutions of the present age. The three so-called theoretical courses are a highly eclectic ordering of relations between the sciences and the humanities—one of each in all three courses. The practical courses run the spectrum from the most local — the individual — to the most universal — the globe. They are "practical" because they present simple but effective methods for analysis and group planning. Their effect on most people is simply to increase their confidence in their own ability to think and plan rationally for the future. Nearly every one has experienced victimization to expertise. But that need not block anyone from full, intelligent participation in determining his own future, and that of his community, his state and his nation.

Church History, New Testament and Old Testament add theological depth to the primary R.S. 1 course. They are also capable of releasing a fresh appreciation of the writings of the church fathers. The two scripture courses are more concerned with the approach than the subject matter. Highlighting the wealth of dramatic material in scripture permits many people to find vigorous contemporary life where they had least expected it.

Of the courses in practical theology, the most frequently taught is the one on "The Local Congregation". Again, the emphasis is on group methods for specific planning. "Gridding" is a simple, imaginative way of gaining a grasp of parish geography. "Problem-matting" is a way of clarifying parish problems, far beyond the usual vague intuitions. "Battle-planning" is the name given to the method for charting goals with their appropriate implementing tactics, strategies, working tools and personnel.

Pedagogical Training

Institute pedagogy training has two basic parts: there is method demonstration and there is practice teaching. It is a kind of training by apprenticeship. Old hands just watched, sometimes for two years or more, before being allowed to address a group. Particularly for highly educated clergymen, it is very difficult to make the transition from an analytical to an "imaginal" way of thinking. Those who make the effort usually find it rewarding.

Educators are often intrigued by the Institute's use of team teaching. It has several advantages beyond the obvious one of providing relief to the constant drain of wrestling continuously with a group morning, noon and night. It gives new teachers the opportunity to try out their discoveries under experienced guidance that can also serve as a backstop when necessary. Since the same team is rarely together more than once, or at the most, twice a year, it's difficult to grow stale. New situations demand fresh responses, so that teachers often learn as much from the students and from each other as the students learn from them.

The most important advantage is to the students, however. While one teacher is at the blackboard, the other, or the others as the case sometimes is, can listen to the questions that lie behind the ones that are actually asked. He can decide to bring them to light directly. Or, he can plan ahead, working out whatever might need special stress in the next lecture, conversation or seminar.

The most conventional way for new teachers to begin is to enter what is called a "Teaching Guild". These usually consist of about a dozen people including one experienced pedagogue. Members take turns going through various aspects of the course. The pedagogue has his choice as to whether he will critique directly or whether he will encourage the group to participate in evaluation. If necessary, he can reteach a section indicating how it might be done otherwise.

Good teachers here, as anywhere else, develop slowly. But there is no substitute for long, patient study and experience. There is now much interest in other parts of the world in application of Institute pedagogy to church education employing existing curricula. This trend may well be expected to continue.

THE LOCAL CHURCH
A VISION
A MODEL
AND
A SIGN

To Learn to Dream again

The church in the 20th Century is suffering not from its failures, but from its successes.

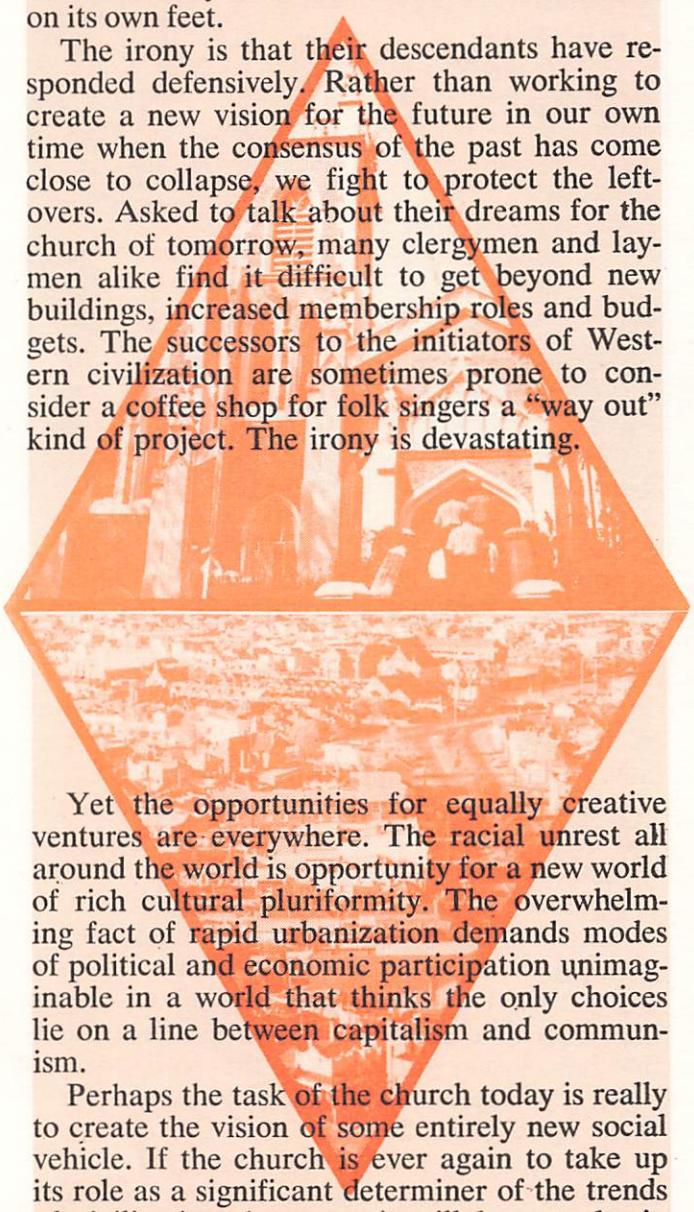
A case in point is the evolution of today's secular structures of education from primary to tertiary. Once, a school was nothing more than a loose gathering of disciples around a particular teacher. Education for the general populace was inconceivable. But the church felt the need to provide special instruction for catechumens, the new initiates into the faith. That process was expanded to train men for the priesthood, primarily within the protective confines of monastery walls. This structure was expanded again to provide educational benefits to sons of the nobility. Secular influences entered, and eventually dominated education, creating their own quite separate institutional structures. But the vehicle of education, so shaped, was birthed and nurtured by the church. The system kept on expanding right into the present age of nearly universal education. A strong case could be made for the assertion that the very success of the church in demonstrating the validity and necessity of education that society-at-large has now been forced to take full responsibility for it.

Hospitalization and medical education has a similar history. The "Good Samaritan" took his battered charge to be cared for at an ordinary inn. Medieval monasteries began providing separate facilities for the ill. Today, legislatures squabble not about the existence of hospitals, but about how many, how big, and where they should be. Special medical education was but a logical next step.

Modern science has roots in the secret garrets of medieval alchemists, despised, but supported by the church nonetheless. Astronomy, from its Western and not its Middle Eastern side, developed from the quasi-religious practice of astrology. Modern trade unions can be linked to the early tradesmen's guilds. The "bourgeois" commercial class, the present middle class to which nearly everyone feels he belongs, was itself at first fostered by the church.

The 20th Century is an age when all these things have been taken over from the church by society itself. The present diminution in the size and power of the church, seen from this standpoint, is the price of success. Our Christian forefathers effectively worked themselves out of a job! They literally built a civilisation, and when they were done, the civilization stood on its own feet.

The irony is that their descendants have responded defensively. Rather than working to create a new vision for the future in our own time when the consensus of the past has come close to collapse, we fight to protect the leftovers. Asked to talk about their dreams for the church of tomorrow, many clergymen and laymen alike find it difficult to get beyond new buildings, increased membership roles and budgets. The successors to the initiators of Western civilization are sometimes prone to consider a coffee shop for folk singers a "way out" kind of project. The irony is devastating.



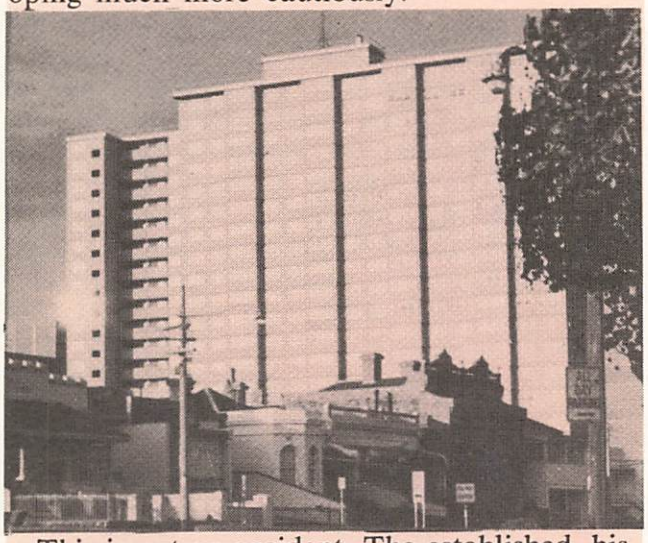
Yet the opportunities for equally creative ventures are everywhere. The racial unrest all around the world is opportunity for a new world of rich cultural pluriformity. The overwhelming fact of rapid urbanization demands modes of political and economic participation unimaginable in a world that thinks the only choices lie on a line between capitalism and communism.

Perhaps the task of the church today is really to create the vision of some entirely new social vehicle. If the church is ever again to take up its role as a significant determiner of the trends of civilization, however, it will have to begin to re-explore its own possibilities with new awareness. It will need to experiment with its own interior life and work in such a way that it looks towards the future, rather than defending its past — which hardly needs defense.

Integrity Is A Comprehensive Model

Staff members of the Ecumenical Institute are sometimes asked why, since it is so much interested in the work of the local church, there is not more to show.

The most obvious answer is that the Institute is still very young, as agencies of the church go; four or ten years, depending on whether it is measured by its existence in Australia or from its birth in the U.S.A. As a training service agency, its growth has been vigorous and rapid. Its practical research function has been developing much more cautiously.



This is not an accident. The established, historical branches of the church have a positive responsibility to be "conservative". That is, one of the key functions of ecclesiastical authority is to test the introduction of new ideas and new organizational elements before admitting them to full standing within the tradition of the historical body. As J. B. Phillips translates the words of Gamliel in Acts 5:38, "For if this teaching or movement is merely human it will collapse of its own accord. But if it should be from God you cannot defeat them. . ." Precisely this judgment belongs to the church.

Those who do not choose to submit to the testing of the historical church have a simple alternative. They can separate. They can begin their own splinter group. The Ecumenical Institute has chosen not to allow this to happen to itself. If it stands at all, it will stand as an adjunct to the established church.

A second reason why results are hard to show is related to the fundamental nature of the task being undertaken. The very first job is to help churchmen learn to dream again. The popular imagination about the church needs refurnishing. This is why E.I. has chosen to stress the teaching mission, the "imaginal mission" of the church.

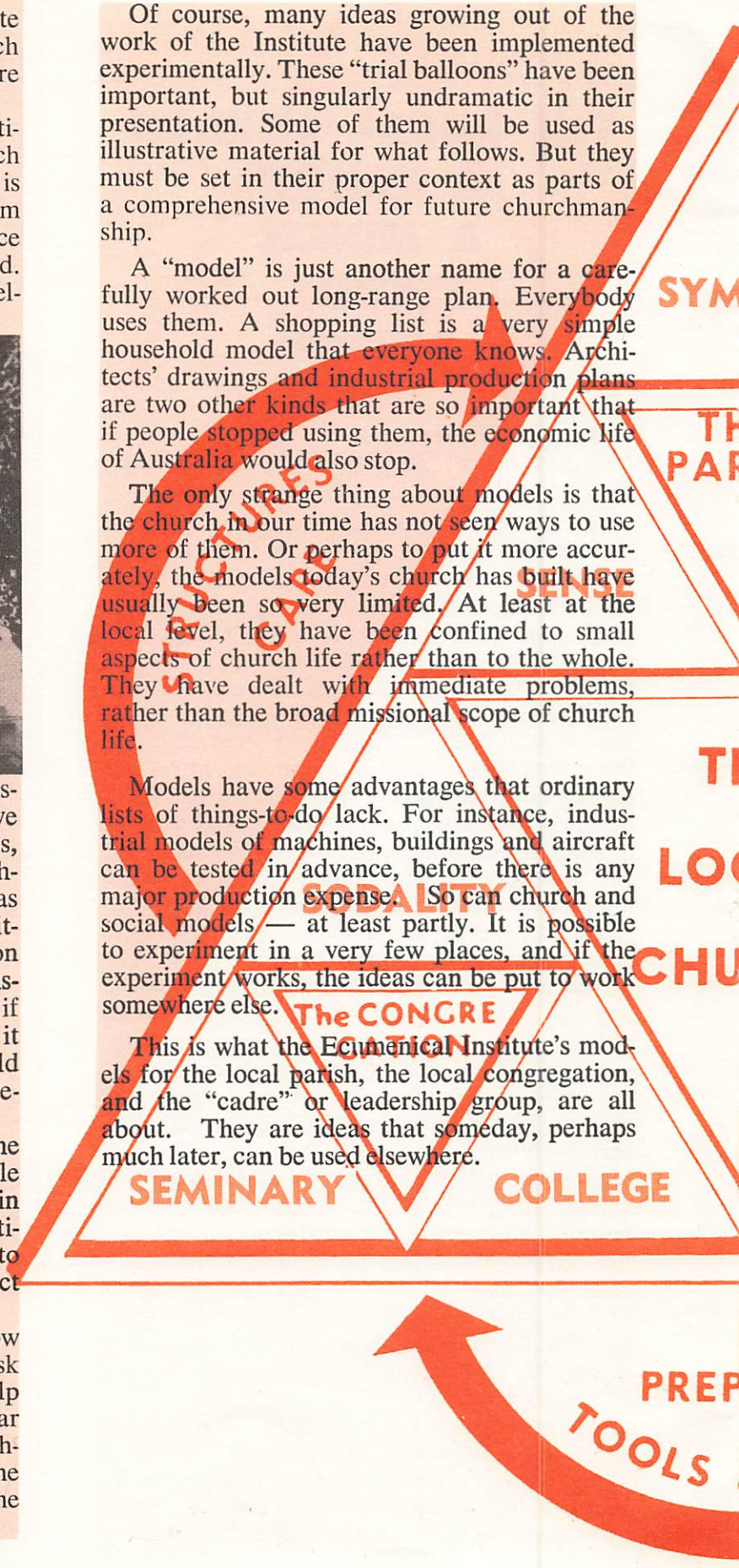
Of course, many ideas growing out of the work of the Institute have been implemented experimentally. These "trial balloons" have been important, but singularly undramatic in their presentation. Some of them will be used as illustrative material for what follows. But they must be set in their proper context as parts of a comprehensive model for future churchmanship.

A "model" is just another name for a carefully worked out long-range plan. Everybody uses them. A shopping list is a very simple household model that everyone knows. Architects' drawings and industrial production plans are two other kinds that are so important that if people stopped using them, the economic life of Australia would also stop.

The only strange thing about models is that the church in our time has not seen ways to use more of them. Or perhaps to put it more accurately, the models today's church has built have usually been so very limited. At least at the local level, they have been confined to small aspects of church life rather than to the whole. They have dealt with immediate problems, rather than the broad missional scope of church life.

Models have some advantages that ordinary lists of things-to-do lack. For instance, industrial models of machines, buildings and aircraft can be tested in advance, before there is any major production expense. So can church and social models — at least partly. It is possible to experiment in a very few places, and if the experiment works, the ideas can be put to work somewhere else.

This is what the Ecumenical Institute's models for the local parish, the local congregation, and the "cadre" or leadership group, are all about. They are ideas that someday, perhaps much later, can be used elsewhere.



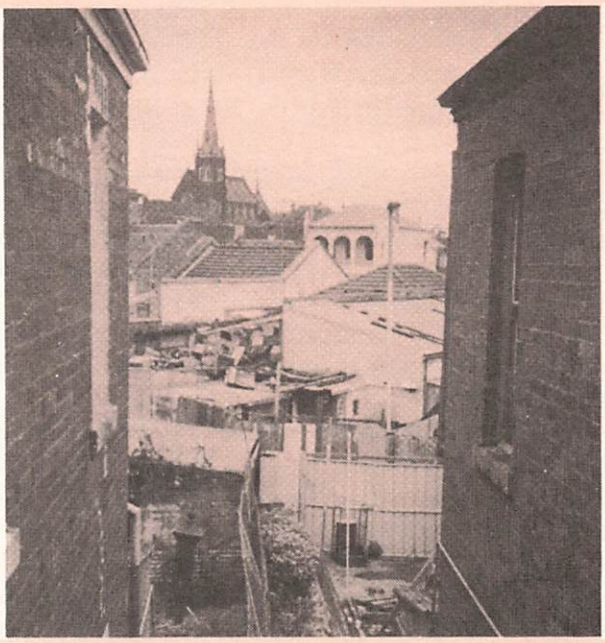
The Model For The Local Church

The local church is not one, but many things. If it is a gathering of worshippers on Sunday morning and evening, it is also a parson making his calling rounds in the local hospital. If it includes a Sunday school for children, it may also have an elder women's knitting club. On week days, it is individual members in dispersion; but it also has its own form of government. The corner building with a peaked roof and a steeple is important; so is the community extending out around it for a half mile or more.

Planning for the future, model building, has to take all of these things and many more into consideration, or it will not work. To prove it, one only has to count the number of large, magnificent church buildings attended by less than one hundred people — but which were obviously designed for several times that number. Or consider what happens even to well-trained communicant youth as they grow older, when young adults are not provided for in the life of the church. Unless they are all dealt with at once, problems tend to be like dragons' heads —cut off one in order to watch two more appear in its place. So, the model has to be comprehensive; it has to include everything.

One way to begin to hold all the parts together is with a simple diagram like the one accompanying the text. The parish is related to the geographical community around the gathering place of the local congregation. The congregation itself is the worshipping studying, caring community of faith. The cadre is a fancy name for the leadership of the local church. It comes from ancient Rome, where it referred to a small military command unit, and it has been used since by the medieval church. Sometimes this group is the same as the official board. Sometimes it is made up of quiet, invisible workers whose names hardly anyone knows. No local church exists that does not have all three of these parts.

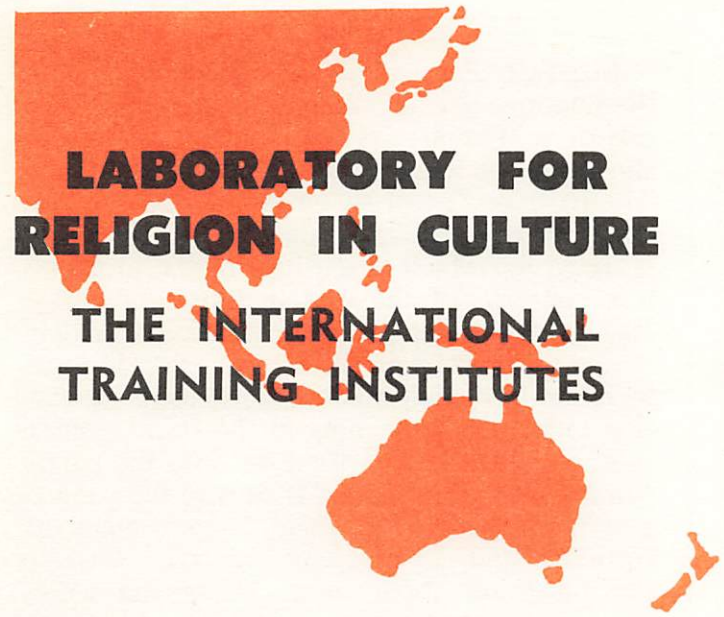
But that diagram didn't say a thing about the relations between the parts. This additional one does. The arrows represent an attempt to show that the local church is not a static thing. The parts don't just sit on top of one another. They are in a dynamic relationship. The cadre is the group which is sensitive to the problems and concerns of the surrounding community. Just as the church treasurer alerts the congregation to financial problems, this group is doing its job of leadership when it alerts the congregation to what is happening in the world around it. It doesn't just send itself out into the parish turning on the fire hoses. It runs to the congregation, begins its work there. It helps members to understand the problems and trains them to do something about them. Then the whole congregation turns to the problems of the parish, bringing to bear the total combination of talent.



It is important to realize that the parish, the congregation and the cadre in this model, are not particular groups of people confined in the bounds of one box, unable to move from it. When the local church is working effectively, people will be changing positions constantly. Parish people, who once only lived in the community, find themselves drawn into the life of the church. Some congregation members may find themselves more often in the parish than in the church building. Church leaders tire, so they move back into the worshipping, studying body for fresh nourishment. All that ever remains the same is the dynamic relations of the parts.

LABORATORY FOR RELIGION IN CULTURE

THE INTERNATIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTES



"Tell me", said one of Australia's leading Roman Catholic officials, "is your programme about the horizontal or the vertical aspects of life?" The context was a visit to encourage future clergy participation in a training conference.

The question arose from the awareness that the church in renewal has two significant yet qualitatively different responsibilities toward itself. One is to sharpen again its tools of thought for education, planning and action. It's here that E.I.'s Comprehensive Curriculum is primarily designed to give help — in the horizontal dimension.

But there is need for another kind of training as well. The International Training Institutes provide a kind of laboratory experience for churchmen, willing to use their own lives in community with others, to experiment in building a "secular-religious" life style, appropriate to the 20th Century. Religious style is the vertical aspect of life.

The training institutes last long enough to make possible many forms of experimentation. The condensed "summer programme" versions last only three weeks. The longest is Chicago's Church and World Academy which goes for eight weeks during three seasons of the year. Those held in Hong Kong, Singapore and in India last about a month and a half. To date, only the shorter summer programmes have been held in Australia, in Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, but that may be changed in the near future. Facilities used have ranged from comfortable university settings and union halls to near-primitive church operated bush camps.

The "laboratory" operates through a carefully structured context that significantly alters conventional awareness of time, space and relationships. For together, these three comprise one's "life style". For example, if each human life can be conceived of as a transitory link between the past and the future, then style has to do with how the two are balanced in behaviour and thinking. Or, if each person is a unique solitary being, then he knows his uniqueness only in the context of some community. The balance between time spent as a solitary, and time spent in community, is one aspect of a person's style.

Examples of space in style are simpler. We see some people as being "cosmopolitan", others as "provincial". Styles of rural life, where space is abundant, permit forms of activity that would be inappropriate or even dangerous in an urban setting.

Style in human relationships is closely related to symbols. Sydney-siders and Melbournites, for instance, sometimes tell themselves different stories, or "myths" in the technical use of the term, about their ancestry, occasionally resulting in funny but irritating differences in style. The presence of New Australians, and the more recent forms of confrontation between Aboriginals and white Australians, all tend to make differences in cultural myths and symbols much more apparent than they once were.

Students and faculty of the International Training Institutes have the opportunity of exploring together all of these aspects of style in some way. Geographical location itself plays an important part. Neither Australians nor Americans will ever be the same after careering down a narrow mountain road in India, in a bus loaded beyond capacity with local farmers, their children and their produce. Habits of courtesy and conflict have their effect too, especially over eight weeks when the insulation given tourists is peeled off in intimate personal contact.

There is a deliberate effort to vary habitual rhythms of daily and weekly time. A 6:30 a.m. rising hour is luxury itself after a week of getting up in the pre-dawn shadows. There has been minor agitation among some labour groups for a four-day work week, and likewise there has been concern over what would be done with

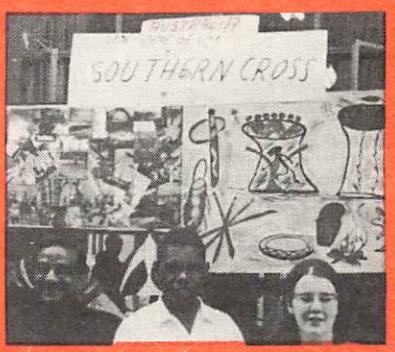
the additional leisure time. I.T.I. participants have explored the idea of what it would mean to divide the week into two, with totally different forms of work and activity in each.

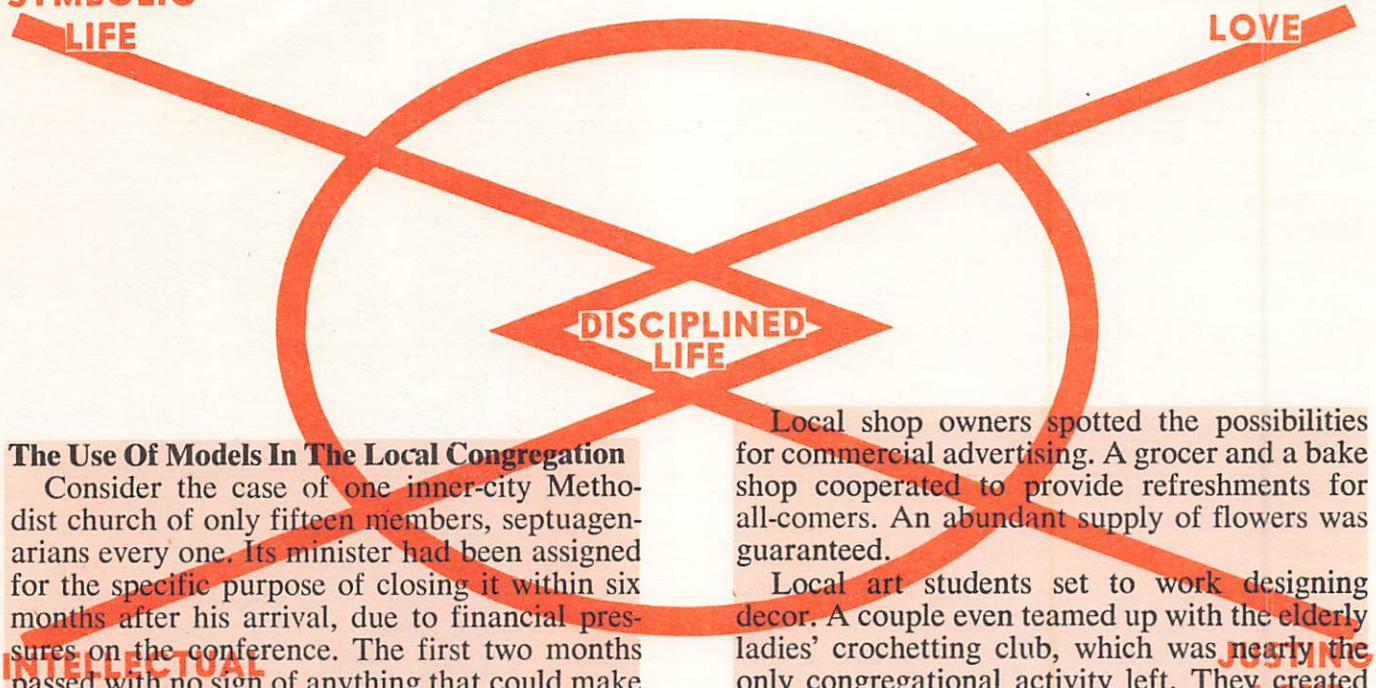
Most significant has been the intentional provision of meditative and reflective time. Either alone or in groups, individuals are encouraged to examine their interior lives for a brief time each day. Through systematic rethinking, new experiences can be appropriated. Old ones can be re-evaluated and re-organized in new, and perhaps more healthy ways. And deep reflection on the writings of some of the early church Fathers, such as Augustine, St. John of the Cross, Luther and the works of more contemporary writers, can produce a wholly new sense of identity with the history of the church. As always, structure and method are critical keys. Serious contemplative reflection is something quite different, both in quality and degree, from day-dreaming or wool-gathering. Discipline is the difference.

The church of the past has had its names for practices such as these, of course. Religious style is a contemporary way of talking about "piety" or "virtue", or "moral rectitude". These words are difficult to use now because they imply a static quality not appropriate in a world where relativity and change are among the more obvious facts of life. They have instead become derogatory terms in the secular vernacular, perhaps justly. But the demand for a fitting style is just as clear now for the 20th Century, as it ever was at any other time in the history of civilisation.

Contemplation, meditation and prayer are also as necessary as they ever were. International Training Institute experimentation appears quite conservative when measured against some of the more extreme forms of religious exercises of the past — intense fasting, for instance, or the practice of making long pilgrimages when travelling was inherently dangerous. It may yet prove necessary to take up far more radical kinds of experimentation to unlock the depths that these exercises implied.

An International Training Institute holds together many of the threads that compose the life and work of those who associate themselves with the Ecumenical Institute. It is primarily a training enterprise. But as such, it points to possibilities in the work of the church in two dimensions: both in undergirding the dimension of man's spirit, and in responsibility to society.





The Use Of Models In The Local Congregation

Consider the case of one inner-city Methodist church of only fifteen members, septuagenarians every one. Its minister had been assigned for the specific purpose of closing it within six months after his arrival, due to financial pressures on the conference. The first two months passed with no sign of anything that could make a different strategy seem reasonable.

The minister himself had nothing against closing the church. He had some glimmering of a vision of what the church could conceivably have become. He knew the models that had been developed at the Ecumenical Institute, and he had some ideas of his own he wanted to use. But they could wait until later when he had a different situation at least a little more hopeful. Here there were no resources. There was not even enough happening to offer a starting point. Three months passed.

One Sunday after services, three aged members approached their pastor with a modest request for a special anniversary service. The church was due to "celebrate" the 100th year since its founding. On the surface of it, it was just a very nice idea. It could have been just an opportunity to put a sentimental flourish on the closing communion service. Instead, it triggered a chain of activity that ultimately guaranteed the future of the church as a vital, functioning part of both community and conference.

First, the minister checked with local officials of the neighbourhood association. He found that, yes, they would be quite interested in supporting a centennial celebration, purely for historical reasons.

Next, some of the grey heads in the congregation set to work to produce a short, written history of the church. A local newspaper editor got wind of the idea, and expanded it to include a more general history of the community. The week of the celebration, it was published as a special supplement to the newspaper.

Local shop owners spotted the possibilities for commercial advertising. A grocer and a bake shop cooperated to provide refreshments for all-comers. An abundant supply of flowers was guaranteed.

Local art students set to work designing decor. A couple even teamed up with the elderly ladies' crochetting club, which was nearly the only congregational activity left. They created 10 x 12 feet banners for hanging on neighbourhood utility poles and the church rafters. In bright, vari-coloured felt and silk they depicted events, dates and the names of places and people.

The day of celebration was a huge success, complete with wireless and T.V. camera crews everywhere. Neighbouring pastors came and brought some from their congregations with them. Residents turned out who would otherwise never have crossed the threshhold of the church. All told, from the beginning of preparations to the end of the celebration, nearly 1000 people were directly involved in some way.

The excitement of such things does not endure long, of course. It still could have wound up as just a nice idea and a fun-filled happening. But it didn't. A year later, the fifteen members had multiplied by four—60 active members actively participating in worship and church programme on a regular basis.

The reason, of course, was the presence in the life of the congregation of a long-range model that lay behind everything that went on in that three month period.

According to this model, there are three major areas that include almost all aspects of the life of any local congregation. First, it has a symbolic life. That is to say, it worships and it understands itself through its worship. Secondly, it has an intellectual life, which means there is always some form of study, though that may be nothing more than a long sermon in the midst of worship. Lastly, it always has some aspect of missional discipline. This means that

every local congregation knows that it has a reason for its existence, and that it is organised for that purpose. However nominally, members contribute money and time. Even if the missional purpose has been distorted by turning completely in upon itself, it is still there, and members still "discipline" themselves by participating in it.

In the illustration above, even that much of a model was sufficient at least to give order to the undifferentiated despair of the situation. More importantly, when the suggestion of the centennial celebration was made, the pastor had a ready-made mental context in which to place it. Without that, the idea would have gone the way of all impractical and idle day-dreams.

This occasion afforded the congregation opportunity for some new experiences in worship. Over the period of a long run of supply preachers, for instance, the prayer of confession and the absolution had been dropped out. These could be reinstated for the "special" occasion without offending anyone. Likewise, some new congregational responses were introduced. The congregation appreciated the chance to participate more fully in the order of worship.

Because worship is the primary way through which the church remembers the Word in Jesus Christ and rehearses its relation to that Word, it is a critical point in congregational renewal. Precisely because symbols are so powerful, changes in the liturgy require careful advanced planning.

The history of the congregation was also a crucial part of its liturgical or symbolic life, though less apparently so. For the history of the church can ultimately be nothing less than a more recent restatement of the Incarnation. In this particular case, the written document gave the congregation members, old timers and newcomers alike, a story, or a "myth" if you will, of how they were serving God in the world. It was the start of the congregation's ability to appropriate a future missional plan.

That same history document provided the link between the liturgical and intellectual life dimensions of the model. All the excuses about study being "too hard" or "not leading to anything" were finished. It became abundantly clear what serious study could mean. When new members came in, they were immediately put through the Institute's R.S. 1 course as a theological refresher course, followed by an introduction to the history of the congregation which led to planning participation.

Once serious worship and study life had seriously begun again, the matter of discipline tended to take care of itself. With a local missional programme under way, it was easy for anyone in the congregation to talk about why money was needed for something beside fixing stonework and leaky drainage systems. The Methodist Conference still had its financial problems that made it impractical to support one more inner-city mission. But the pastor and two congregation members went out on one Sunday afternoon and raised $2,000 in cash, a feat hitherto impossible.

Discipline, understood as regular and determined participation in direct missional engagement, flows only from an adequate understanding of the task. These people had gained a vision of how and why their lives and resources should be claimed by the church, even to the exclusion of other private activities. Contributions and participation are secondary to that fundamental insight.

Discipline also has its implications for "polity", or the practical decision-making process of the church. Some of the congregation members, with the full consent and knowledge of the rest, have committed themselves to a corporate team ministry. The pastor himself is only one member of the team, although he has specific responsibility for the symbolic life — the "administration of the Sacraments". Together, they have begun to look hard at the life of the parish community around them. Now they know they have the potential power to deal with it in significant ways, which is only another way of saying that they have "heard the Word".

One church began with a pre-school catering to the needs of New Australians in a Sydney suburb. As its parish council began to look around, it also discovered new kinds of opportunities never dreamed of before. It found it could provide stage facilities for young Australian theatre people swimming hard against the flood of international competition. Two rooms in a second parish building became a psychiatric clinic. Similar types of experimentation are under way in Grafton, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide and Broken Hill.

But the power of these experiments is not confined to geographical locations. The power resides in the corporate use of a common model that anyone can pick up. With the model, but only with it, the hundreds of experiments now going on everywhere in the life of the church can eventually coalesce.

THE TASK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

A parish is a three-dimensional kinetic sculpture in geography, made from brick and bitumen, human ideas, bones and nerves. It's a mass of specific detail, down to knot-holes in weathered fences, and the configuration of the cracks in the cement footpath. It smells of rain-soaked earth and petrol fumes, cabbage cooking in a pressure cooker, flowers, and the combined essences of cats and dogs in the back lanes. At night it is lit by shop windows and T.V. haze behind filigreed verandah railings. In general, a parish is that which a church, or a cluster of churches, has decided to love down to the last human and material detail.

A method of ordering the myriad details is what the Ecumenical Institute call gridding. A grid is a simplified map made of straight lines, and therefore easier to remember by far than a map. It shows distinct divisions, traffic routes, landmarks and gathering places. Making the grid and then checking guess-work against field observations is fun and interesting. Things are noticed that were ignored for the first 100 times driving or walking by. A grid is also a way of involving local congregation members in pre-planning analysis for the future. It can also readily become a symbol, a visible image of the mission of the church in the community.

Parish Mission

Once the parish has been gridded and catalyzed, what then? How does the Word of new life in Christ get implemented in parish action?

In Medieval times, the one church in each parish had a straightforward answer: feed, shelter and clothe the widows, cripples and paupers. Anything more complicated should be referred to higher authority.

In most of the pleasant suburban and rural parishes of this country, one is tempted to ask what problems are there? There are rich and poor, but "poverty" as it is used elsewhere in the world, hardly exists. National and state governments leave plenty to be desired. But people with adequate motivation have plenty of opportunity to get into the act. Australian cities have ample cultural variety, myriad recreational resources and a beauty of their own comparable to anywhere else in the world. Nor do severe social problems, high crime rates and appalling blight yet come near to counter-balancing the multitude of advantages. If transportation is congested, or land values a bit dear, then perhaps they are a fair cost for preserving a more sedate, nonchalant human pace of living.

ECONOMIC

From this approach, a strong case could be made to the effect that the Australian church has no significant immediate crisis in its ministry, apart from the tasks of meeting the vigorous demands from youth, pensioners, new Australians and, perhaps, the Aboriginals. But no fundamental alterations in the structure of Australian community life are called for, or at least, none present themselves strongly.

Approached from the standpoint of immediacy and particularity, that is, approached from the level of the parish itself, this position is nearly irrefutable.

The Global Perspective

The love of God is like looking through a wide-angle camera lens. It sets each neighbour, every parish, in context with every other neighbour and parish. It compels one to relate to the particular in terms of its relation to the whole. For example, a country estate with gardens may be a beautiful thing. Seen on its own, it is easy to "love". But viewed in a setting of surrounding destitution and a starving populace, it becomes something else altogether. It may even be a dramatic demonstration of radical irresponsibility. Hence, the love of neighbour, who is close at hand, is always measured against the love of God, or the love of that which is universal, whole, distinctly "other".

STYLE

Look again at the Australian parish ministry. Perhaps the commandment to "love God" demands vastly more than the satisfaction of immediate, practical needs. Each of Australia's major cities is a beautiful jewel. But the setting is no longer "Australia: The Island Continent", as the travel brochures phrase it, or even "Australasia". The setting is nothing less than the

whole of Asia, including the smouldering cities of Bombay and Calcutta, and eager, acquisitive Tokyo, Singapore and Hong Kong. Seen from this perspective, the parish ministry of church coffee houses, youth programmes, bowling clubs and annual fetes are by no means excluded. But they do take on new implications: They do point to newer and far wider priorities.

Contextual Practics

Once the focus of particular service in a universal context is clear, parish ministry then becomes more a question of style and method than of activity for its own sake. The question for the churchman is no longer whether parish community life is comfortable, but whether it calls forth the maximum of human creative potential. The government will always be interested in the rate of employment among both old and new Australians. The church is interested in the questions related to "vocation" — the extent to which human lives are woven into the broadest form of the human enterprise. Or, the local parents and citizens association may be concerned that community youth are kept "active" and "off the streets". The church will be interested in the ways in which the current experiments in youth culture will affect the style of mature man and womanhood in the next decades. In brief, the parish ministry lives under the searching light of the "love of God" when everything that happens in the parish is made to happen, ultimately, for the sake of all men.

How the global perspective is to be worked out in specific local detail is not an easy question. The Ecumenical Institute in the Chicago Ghetto acted out of the self-understanding that nothing was to go on in 5th city which in the end, could not be applied in a similar situation in Brazilia or Caracas or anywhere in Asia. It therefore focused upon the task of training community leadership to assume total responsibility for the project, and upon the method for building structures that would allow the community to care for its own needs.

A group of wealthy, North-shore Chicago suburban laymen decided that in their situation, responsible parish ministry meant "total contextual re-education" for their surrounding neighbours. As one feature of this they organized what they called a "global odyssey" programme. Since these people had both the money and the desire to travel, they combined forces. They set up a one-month intensive tour, touching on twenty of the largest cities on every continent they were allowed into. They gridded the cities they visited, searching out both problems, and present and future possibilities. Trained cameramen and film editors, themselves members of the tour, photographed what they saw, then developed a sophisticated travel documentary, perhaps superior to the usual "African safari" lantern-slide travelogues. By the end of the welcome-home visit rounds, group members had opened many new windows for their suburban parish friends and neighbours. Calcutta and Nairobi and Lima and Chicago had been moved a few miles closer together.

In Australia, kindergarten pre-schools are attached to many local churches these days. They provide most helpful service to the parish in several ways. But pre-schools where the children of new Australians and old residents are put together deliberately, and where the children are encouraged to explore their cultural differences at their own elementary levels, are not quite so common. This is a real, though perhaps minor, expression of the "love of God" happening in one Sydney suburban parish.

Counselling and "life-line" services are no longer unusual, either. But sometimes their scope can be extended far beyond what was the original intent. Business, community and union officials of one town discovered that a coalition of local churchmen was able to shed unexpected light on some particular sources of strife, simply because their perspectives spanned a longer time period, extending back into the past, and forward into the future. It became a kind of invisible consulting team engendering a degree of trust that could have come from nowhere else, because no one else could view community life wholistically.

Parish ministry in a comprehensive context can be either "community reformulation", actually dealing with the structures of community life, or it can be community "contextual re-education".

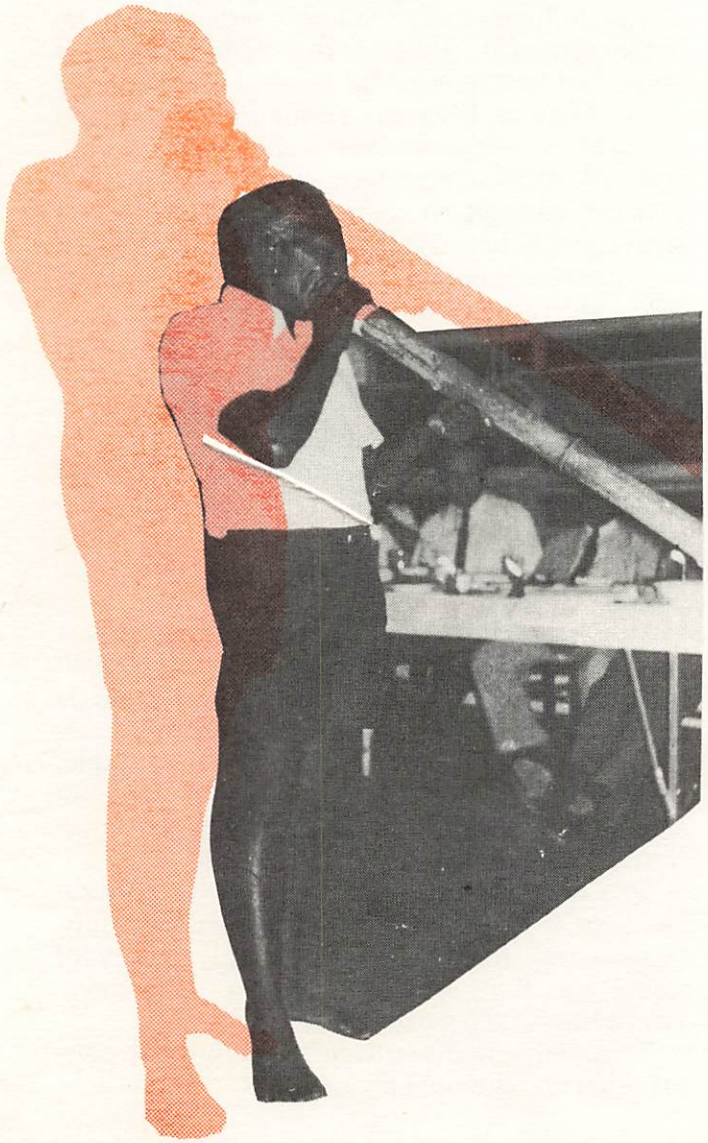
Where there are heavy concentrations of new Australians or Aboriginal communities, structural change or improvement may be what is required, through community organization training. The public education system, for example, simply has not provided sufficient in-depth training in English language use, or in vocational re-training.

The question of integrating diverse cultural elements is the concern of established residents. "Contextual re-education" is simply a way of doing just that, without destroying the integrity of life for the newcomers.

Together, these two elements represent powerful parish missional thrust.

MULTI-CULTURAL AUSTRALIA:

PAST AND FUTURE DREAM-TIME



Foreign observers have sometimes observed that Australia is the only nation left in today's world with the possibility of becoming a genuinely pluriform society. They mean, of course, that the Aboriginal peoples are the only minority peoples left anywhere in the world with an authentic culture of their own, not absorbed or destroyed entirely by the dominant racial group. That is both true and remarkable.

It is also true that it may not be so much longer. But an end to the Aborigines need not come through overt white hostility. The most profound danger to these people lies in their own internalization and appropriation of deep-seated white convictions of black inferiority. For whites do believe that Aborigines are not only a different order of humanity, but also that they are of a somehow "lower" order on the evolutionary scale. It is a subtle conviction and not always conscious. But the subtlety communicates itself over the generations. The danger comes in the fact that Aboriginals have come to believe it of themselves. When that happens, there is no more motivation to care for themselves, nor to preserve their own utterly unique, 30,000 year-old experiment in being human.

It need not end that way here in Australia, as has already happened to some degree in North America and even in Latin America. There are missionary representatives of the church, government officials and others who understand the importance of a continued vital Aboriginal presence. They see that the undeniable gift of white rational and technological superiority was won at the cost of relinquishing awareness of fundamental human dimensions of the spirit, and they see that the Aborigines have ready access to just that sort of wisdom. The white rational capacity came to us in exchange for knowledge of what the Aboriginals call the "dream time". The result is that most whites live perpetually with huge knots of unidentifiable feelings, drives and urges which are simply not understood. Sometimes psychologists and psycho-analysts have to be paid vast sums of money over long periods of time in order to untangle them.

Seen in this light, the "Aboriginal question" is a concern that belongs to the church in a way that it can belong to no one else, as indeed its missionary representatives have long recognized. It may yet prove possible for whites and blacks to share with one another the gifts of the mind and the gifts of the spirit.

The problem is precisely how to bring the Aboriginal gifts into the future. Everyone knows that in their present forms, they will not long survive the rigours of the 20th Century urban, scientific and secular revolutions. Some new and relatively stable form of Aboriginal community must be created to preserve and transmit the ancient values and insights.

Knowing full well that the National Faculty of the Ecumenical Institutes had no more in the way of "answers" than anyone else, some Presbyterian and Methodist mission directors decided to "give it a try". What the Institute staff did bring was a decade of experience working with the black American minority, and some ideas developed in ministering among American red Indians.

The first course that included a dozen Aborigines was taught at Mowanjum, a few miles south of Derby, on the north-west coast of Western Australia. The responses of one of the two tribal "elders" there fairly tells the story of what happened. "This was a good time. We did not understand everything, but you opened new windows on my mind, which is hope for my people. You taught us not new things, but a new way to say it."

Later courses were similarly received. One group spent the afternoon following the close of the course painting and feathering themselves in the traditional tribal manner. That evening they danced through many of the old stories, the elder women sitting on the sidelines explaining the proceedings. According to the mission director, that was the first time that had happened in over four years. They had understood enough of what was intended in the course to desire once again to lay claim to their heritage.

Out of another context, Institute staff members were invited to Yirrkala in Arnhem Land to work with the staff of the Methodist missions in order to develop a curriculum for Aboriginal Christian education. The Aborigines liked the work that was done. The mission staff acquired some new ideas they felt were intriguing and helpful. At the conclusion of the experiment, each of the visiting staff received an official letter of appreciation.

Some work has begun on the development of a dramatic interpretation of the Aboriginal heritage for the stage. The first draft of the narrative script grew out of months of asking questions, testing one articulation after another on Aboriginal audiences. Its purpose is twofold: one is to provide Aboriginals with a way of articulating their cultural gifts within an English language framework. The other, of course, is to make that alien life-understanding comprehensible to whites in a way that is more aesthetically appealing than in the anthropological essays now commonly available. It is hoped that the all-Aboriginal cast will eventually be able to use this new mode of expression for other kinds of presentations of their own particular creation.

Another possible step might be the establishment among Aborigines of an experimental community reformulation project. This may be much longer in coming, since it will necessarily involve the cooperation of several government and church agencies concerned with Aboriginal affairs. It would naturally be quite different from any previous experiments in local parish development. But at least some of the methods now available would be immediately applicable. Interest on the part of some Aboriginal leaders is present.

The Aboriginal people need not die out. If the possibilities are grasped, Aborigines may in fact prove to be an important key to a wholly new kind of future for all Australia. The black and brown and red peoples of the world beyond Australia expect nothing. But they could be surprised and shocked into a new consciousness of white sensitivity and compassionate understanding that they know they will not find anywhere else on the face of the earth. Australia could be a key to 20th Century racial confrontation going on all across the world, healing, harmonizing, perhaps in some ways, resolving.

EXPLORATIONS IN CHRISTIAN LIFE STYLE

On the surface, it appears contradictory that just at a time when it seems traditional ties to church, nation and family seem fading, there is also a broad and spreading popular search for commitment. Top-knotted Buddhist evangelists parade the streets of Sydney with tambourines and singing during business hours — and often receive a hearing. Established commercial bookshops carry ample stocks of distinctively non-Christian religious literature — because it sells. Loosely-knit communal living experiments are everywhere — because people crave involvement with others outside the formal structures of work, school and social organizations.

Human beings seem made in such a way that they experience the fulness of life only when they are called out of themselves to something greater. The Shorter Cathechism put the matter in the traditional language of the church in the opening question this way: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

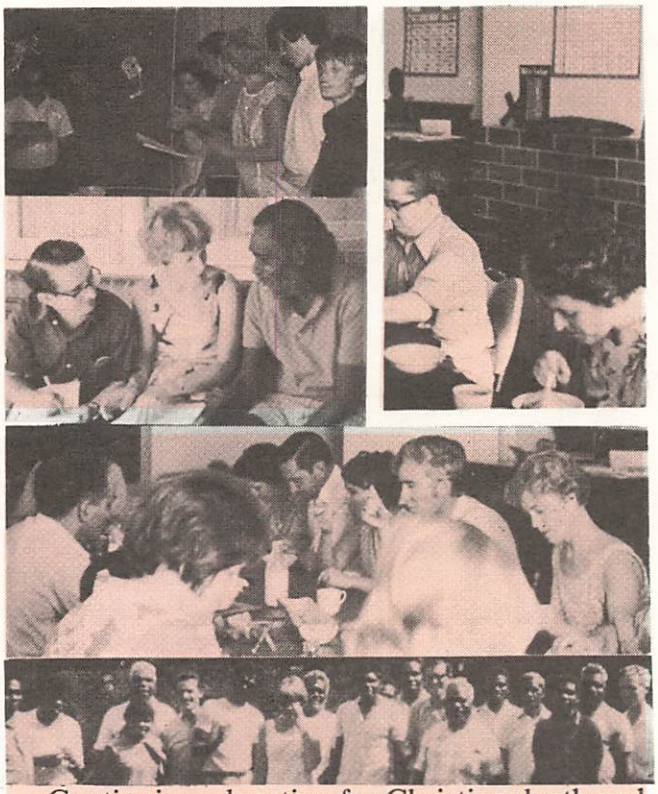
Most people with one foot still firmly planted in the Christian tradition of our society find many of the alternatives to Christian commitment faddish and lacking in authenticity. Yet there is a widely felt need for bold new explorations in new forms of Christian styles of living. After all, the Christian faith that swept the world had its beginnings in Christian community. It therefore seems appropriate that some contemporary form of Christian community should provide part of the context for regrouping forces and reconstituting the thrust of the church into the future of mankind.

This sort of reflection lies behind much of the Ecumenical Institutes' process of growth. Most of those who are associated with the Institutes, either as members of the National Faculty, or working in local programme promotion, do not participate directly in the life of the religious community. They do frequently make use of the practices developed in corporate life, either in the life of their individual families or even in local church life. It is exactly this sharing that is intended by the community itself.

The international base of the communities of the Ecumenical Institutes is, of course, Chicago. There, it is constituted primarily along the lines of an ecumenical religious "order", with wide representation from many Protestant denominations, and a large and growing representation of Roman Catholics and Anglicans. There are nearly two hundred adults in the Chicago community, but the number is regularly diminished by assigning out groups of families to developing "religious houses" throughout North America and to various international programmes.

Institute centres are family communities, which distinguishes them most markedly from the established religious orders in various major divisions of the church. In whatever country they are located, members live as family units, and they participate in the missional work of the community as families, including in whatever ways possible, the children.

The internal life of these communities is somewhat carefully structured to include elements of worship, study and discipline. The liturgy of the Daily Office takes place every morning at 6:30, and every member of the community is expected to be present every day without exception. This is required out of the knowledge that worship is the foundational activity of the church from which its self-understanding and therefore, its strength is derived. There is also a weekly celebrational feast on Sundays for the adult members of the community, and all are expected to participate in at least one local church Sunday worship service.



Continuing education for Christian depth and breadth is a need everywhere in the church. It is also one that can be met more easily while living in community than in the ordinary context of the nuclear family. Sometimes, the community gathers for an hour of study during the evening, perhaps to read a current theological work together. At other times, it may meet in the morning to work together on some book about a current social issue. This way, everyone reads at least ten up-to-date books in the course of a year.

Decisions are made in the community by means of the consensus method. Issues are raised for discussion and decision by a constantly changing group leader. They are discussed to whatever depth is necessary until the consensus is arrived at. Results are often quite different from what is originally intended. If there is an extreme difference of opinion over some particular matter, it may be shelved until some future time when the context is changed. Or, one member may simply decide to swallow his reservations for the over-all health of the group. Once a decision has been made, and once a consensus has been arrived at, it is understood that every member of the group speaks and acts as though of one mind. There are few of the divisive escapes from responsibility coming from excuses, such as "Well, I certainly didn't vote for that, etc. . . ."

Economic life is also a shared dimension. The over-all purpose is to channel as large a percentage as possible of available economic resources into the missional task. In order to do that, one member of each family is sent out to work at a secular job, so that friends and associates of the Institute across the country are relieved of the burden of salaries and individual family expenses. All contributions therefore go directly into programme. In addition, the community is able to make available for the programme a small excess of its earnings, due to the savings that come from bulk purchasing of supplies, and savings on car and housing expenses.

The purpose of life in community is, and always will be, the enablement of the external task of assisting in church renewal. In this regard, it differs greatly from most other experiments in group living, where the primary purpose is the added comfort and convenience, of one sort and another, to community members. The community itself, as well as individual members, lives out of the understanding that life is at its richest when lived on behalf of the world beyond it.

There are, however, many features of the corporate life that are pleasant and attractive. The quality of fellowship of the "Work team", is high. The primary corporate and symbolic meal of the day is breakfast, which is often a high point in community life. Busy family and working people often find that it is difficult to arrange for planning and reflection at a time in the day when there is not some prior claim on their time. The Institute communities solved that problem by setting a common rising hour at 5:00 a.m.—often a hardship at first, but one which rapidly becomes an easy matter of routine. Evening meals also provide opportunity for planning and sharing. The community also makes possible a simplicity of life that most find quite enjoyable.

The communities of the Ecumenical Institute are still young. In Australia, they are quite young—one or two years, depending on who does the reckoning. For the moment, the only sizable group is located in Paddington, an Eastern suburb of Sydney, living in the partly borrowed, partly rented Presbyterial church manse there. The congregation has been receptive, and from time to time, members have taken part in community life as visitors. It is a happy arrangement.

PROSPECTUS

There is of course, much more that could be said of the Ecumenical Institutes of Australia and their sisters around the world. Each city and each town in which this work has taken root has its own story to tell. These, taken collectively, are far more important than what has been recounted here. They are the very reason for the existence of larger programmes of the Ecumenical Institute. Success or failure in their ability to enrich the life of the whole church will eventually decide whether this story is even real.

For these local happenings are part of a fabric that is being woven across the face of the globe. It appears now in spots and patches. The separate strands and pieces have yet to be woven together into a united whole. The work in Australia must join together with the strands that come down from Asia to the North, from Africa to the West, and from the Pacific and the Americas to the East. The pieces of the finished fabric will never be identical to one another. The mystery of life and the variety of the races of man are far too complex for that. But the globe has become too small and too crowded for us to deny the unity of the diverse elements any longer.

The church, too, is finally one—despite occasional strident protests to the contrary. But it is not a simple, organisational oneness, nor shall it ever be. It is a single happening for all mankind. It is the one and once and for all happening of Jesus Christ, the happening for all times and all places. The healing of the "body of Christ", broken on the world, with its fragmented geography and torn peoples, is the only story worth telling. If the story of the Ecumenical Institutes is finally able to be absorbed in that Story, it will have accomplished all it ever set out to do. That is the only story there is.

THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTES: AUSTRALIA
BOX M44 S.M.E.
PADDINGTON, N.S.W. 2021.
PHONE 31-4878.

☐ I wish to contribute to the work of the Ecumenical Institutes Australia. Please find $..... enclosed.

☐ I wish to order ..... copies of the **IMAGE** @ $1.00 copy (Multiple copies at reduced price)

Name.....

Address.....

City..... Post Code.....