

A TWENTY-FIVE YEAR PROFILE OF
THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE, THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
AND THE ORDER: ECUMENICAL

Historical Context

THE
TIMES

A new understanding of the world had evolved by the beginning of the last half of this century. World War II had given people direct exposure to the globe, creating 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 as with the establishment of the Marshall Plan and 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 shape of a new Europe. Political change, marked by shifts in many governments, most notably Indonesia, India, Egypt, and many of the African and Latin American countries, dramatized the instability of formerly established structures. Complexity and ambiguity characterized the times and the phenomena of social and political unrest seemed to intensify around the world. Many domestic programs both in the United States and in other nations, were introduced to meet the demand for change. At the same time many protests such as those about the role of women, youth and minorities arose around the world. With the availability of communications technology there rose an insistence from local people that their voices be heard in the affairs that affect their future. Worldwide inflation and the energy crisis birthed the awareness that resources are finite and decisions about their use and distribution are necessarily made with the widest possible consensus. At such critical junctures in history there arise groups of people of many persuasions and objectives who channel their resources and energy to serve the social and economic needs of the times.

THE
RESPONSES

One way to grasp the development of the form of service to the world is to examine the role of the voluntary sector as different from the private or the public sector. The meaningful contribution and important role of the voluntary sector is illustrated by such organizations as the Red Cross, UNICEF and the Peace Corps. The formation of disciplined and dedicated groups and communities within the traditional religions is also evident throughout history. Within the church this intensified response to meet serious social needs is seen in the development of religious orders such as the Franciscans or, more recently, the Sisters of Charity with Mother Teresa and in groups such as the Salvation Army, and the Taize Community in France. It is within this context that this 25-year Profile traces its own historical development of the Ecumenical Institute, the Institute of Cultural Affairs and the Order: Ecumenical and its intent to be a serious response to the demands of our time.

Organizational Development

During the post-war years, critical issues facing the Church were being reviewed both by Vatican II and by the Second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches which met in Evanston in 1954. In its deliberation, The Council called for a lay training center for North America similar to the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. In 1956 concerned Christian businessmen in Chicago made possible the founding of such an institution, known as the Evanston Institute of Ecumenical Studies and invited Dr. Walter Liebrecht to be the Director. In 1962 Dr. Liebrecht returned to Germany to resume his seminary teaching.

In the early 50's, as one among many responses in the life of the Church, a group of students and faculty called the Christian Faith-and-Life Community undertook an experiment in a campus ministry at the University of Texas at Austin. Founded by W. Jack Lewis, a former Navy Chaplain, the group was involved in research and training in the relationship of faith to practical contemporary life issues. Drawing from the experience of experimental lay communities in Europe, the Christian Faith-and-Life Community became a significant experiment of a contemporary Christian community practicing a common life of worship, study and mission. Under the Director of Curriculum, Dr. Joseph Wesley Mathews, formerly an associate professor of Social Ethics at Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, the community developed a curriculum for students and laity including courses in Systematic Theology, Old Testament, New Testament and Christian Ethics. As the community began to turn its attention to the issues of the local congregation in society, a week-end seminar known as Religious Studies I (RS-1) was developed and was sponsored by local congregations and student groups across the nation.

Following Dr. Liebrecht's resignation from the Evanston Institute of Ecumenical Studies, the Church Federation of Greater Chicago assumed responsibility for the center and organized in its place, the Ecumenical Institute. The Federation invited Dr. Mathews of the Christian Faith-and-Life Community to become the dean. Seven families decided independently and self-consciously to join the staff as teaching faculty without compensation. While continuing to develop the curriculum for local congregations, the staff also continued to probe the meaning and form of contemporary Christian community. Studies of the form and learnings of historical religious orders were undertaken and the staff began to model itself after historical "third" orders, or family orders. This included participating in common worship, study and missional life in service to the church and world. The Institute's curriculum evolved into two distinct branches called the Institute of Religious Studies (focusing on Biblical and theological courses) and the Institute of Cultural Studies (focusing on contemporary society and the changing trends in the family, in communities and the world).

PURPOSES OF THE ORGANIZATIONS

THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

The purpose of the Ecumenical Institute is to serve the needs of the church. Its programs express and promote the awakening and renewal of the congregations and academic institutions of the church by providing a full curriculum of religious and cultural studies to equip individuals and groups to make responsible decisions. The EI programs include the 8-week Academy and the 3-week International Training Institute. It was formerly an autonomous division of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago and was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Illinois in 1964.

THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Institute of Cultural Affairs, formally incorporated in 1973, is a research, training and demonstration organization concerned with the human factor in world development. The purpose of the ICA is to develop and demonstrate effective methods of comprehensive local renewal and to motivate the spirit of responsibility and cooperative action. The Institute maintains a research effort that develops methods for groups to work together and profitably catalyze their own resources. It offers a wide range of training programs in practical methods, and serves as a consultant to projects in many communities. The approach that is used involves a wide cross section of community residents and organizations in the implementation of their own comprehensive socio-economic development plans. The ICA works in 32 nations with national boards of advisors. In the United States the staff is comprised of 25 salaried personnel and over 400 full-time volunteers with many more part-time volunteers who are engaged in its work.

ORGANIZATION

Both Institutes have been determined by the Internal Revenue Service to be charitable organizations eligible for deductible contributions under section 501(c)(3) and 509(a)(9) of the IRS code. Arthur Andersen & Company annually prepares the Institutes' audits. Both the EI and the ICA are supported by concerned individuals, foundations, and corporations, service organizations and churches. Specific programs and projects also receive support from government agencies. Government grants comprised less than 10% of the program budget in 1978 in the United States. The boards of the EI and the ICA in the U.S. represent individuals from the business, professional and civic communities across the country. All of the directors serve without compensation and some of the board members sit on both boards.

THE ORDER: ECUMENICAL

The purpose of the Order:Ecumenical is to serve the church and society. The Order's major effort is providing the training and research staff of the two Institutes. It is self-supporting through income earned by its own membership that is composed of people of a variety of professional backgrounds who contribute their earnings to a common pool of income. Part of this is held in reserve and is used for the total care of staff as long as they remain members and covers such things as health, education and annuity funds. The yearly program objectives of the Institutes form the basis of the staff's yearly assignments. These program objectives are consensed upon at the annual general meeting.

ORGANIZATION

The Order is composed of single and married family units. Its membership does not presuppose a particular religious or ideological persuasion and includes people from various religious backgrounds. Members volunteer to be a part of the Order out of their personal interest in expressing their concern in service and are free to come and go at will. The Order:Ecumenical was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in 1973 in the State of Illinois. However, it has not applied for tax-exempt status since it does not conduct any programs of its own nor solicit contributions. The Board of Directors is composed of Order members who receive no compensation for their services.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Ecumenical Institute (EI) has a religious and cultural curriculum that it has developed over many years of work. The intent of the religious curriculum 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 across the United States.

The EI started to work on a continuing basis with a network of people who had found Institute programs relevant to the needs of their own churches and communities. Advanced training programs and research opportunities were developed. Most notable among these was the emergence in 1965 of the annual Summer Research Assembly in Chicago. Research Assemblies have involved as many as 1000 people yearly from across the world and have produced the practical designs and models through which EI has sought to serve the needs of local communities.

It also undertook a practical experiment in comprehensive community development out of the understanding that the local community with its institutions of the family, the school and the place of work is the basic building block of society. The location for this experiment was a sixteen-block area in Chicago's westside ghetto known as the 5th City community. In 1963 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 that could be replicated. Neighborhood workshops and door-to-door interviews identified over 6,000 discrete problems. In response, forty-five programs in social and economic development were developed and implemented through voluntary cooperative action.

In response to the growing number of requests to provide on-site volunteer staff, the EI began to establish staff offices around the world. In 1968 the Institute's staff numbered a little over 100 people, all living 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 have been established in Bombay, Hong Kong, Brussels, Kuala Lumpur and Chicago. A large percentage of the new staff was indigenous to the various nations where

the Institute provided its programs.

In 1972 Mr. James Kemper of the Kemper Life Insurance Company presented its building in Uptown Chicago to be the International Training Center of the Ecumenical Institute.

The E.I. also developed two extensive training programs. The first was the Academy, an eight-week program scheduled quarterly in Chicago and offering the complete Institute curriculum of religious and cultural studies. The second was the International Training Institute, 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 in Africa, India, North and South America, Europe, Australia and Western Samoa.

Interest in 5th City's 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 demonstrate the methods in diverse situations. The first was in a remote Aboriginal settlement of Australia. The second was in the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific (formerly a U.S. Trust Territory). During this time the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) was formally incorporated (1973).

A growing number of volunteer consultants from business and professional fields requested a seminar which would share the Institute's planning methods with particular groups. This led to the development of the LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) seminar which has been used around the world by companies including IBM, McDonald's Corporation, Bell Laboratories, Bank Pertanian in Kuala Lumpur, and Bata Shoes in Nigeria and Zambia, and by government and social agencies including Minnesota Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

By 1974 three programs emerged as primary to the ICA'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 a 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 in order that it serve as a model of rapid expansion. At present, over 200 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 12000 communities and 32 nations. The "town meeting" format enables local citizens to create and implement practical plans for solving local problems out of their own resources and cooperative effort. At least 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. Two formats have evolved as formal ICA programs: Global Women's Forum and the Community Youth Forum.

Another major focus is the research, training and interchange which involves an expanded network of ICA volunteer consultants and participants around the world. This has included the formation of the Human Development Training School which has been extensively used to train community leaders in India, the Philippines, South Korea, Africa, Indonesia, and the United States.