

**LITTLE TIME** is allowed in the quick pace of an Ecumenical Institute weekend for chewing the fat. Even that is intense with staff member John Baringer.

**F**orty Protestant and Catholic men and women sat around the tables formed into a square. In the center, on a tattered piano bench, was a well-worn red sweatshirt stabbed through the chest by a well-used bricklayer's hammer.

But all eyes were on the speaker.

"You see, it's as if I came into history with a tag on my toe, 'David Scott, you are going to be the church in the 20th Century. Not the First Century, not the 18th, not even the 19th. P.S. You are going to be the church in the 20th Century even if there is no one out there with you.'"

Behind the square of tables, sitting alone and noting the reactions of the listeners was Scott's teammate John Baringer. They had flown out the day before, Friday, Sept. 30, from their home base Ecumenical Institute in the middle of West Chicago's Negro ghetto, to train the Nebraska laymen and clergymen.

The setting could not have presented more contrast to the ghetto. Back home, whatever window they looked out of—whether in the institute's staff dorm, staff dining hall, classrooms or chapel—their eyes would fall on monotonously gray, dirty, crumbling boards of the ghetto's wall of tenements.

But there was nothing drab about the early autumn open spaces of Esther K. Newman Camp near Louisville in the hills of eastern Nebraska.

Scott's message is blunt.

When people go into a church and think they can escape the 20th Century, he said, they're perpetrating a fraud. "The church is not a place where nice people sit around smiling at each other and living a nice, clean life. The church has been that group of people who step out into no man's land to create the kind of world where people can live as human beings. And

you don't get any goodies for stepping out there. So why do it? No reason. Except the Gospel says: "Wanna know what life is all about? It's out there—giving your life."

If status means something to you, he said, "forget it—it's lonely, ambiguous and insecure out there. You will never know whether you were right or not. . . It means you throw yourself on the barbed wire barrier and wave at the masses behind you to run over your body to a new experience."

### Oblivion

By now the setting makes no difference. No one knows whether he is in a Chicago slum or the bright, sunlit room with stone fireplaces and walls of clear glass.

When Scott says, "Our job is church renewal through lay education — the majority of ministers aren't going to do a thing—laymen run the show," we have trouble remembering we are listening to a Methodist minister.

Scott and Baringer gave up the pulpit ministry to throw themselves into the experimental work of the World Council of Churches-founded Ecumenical Institute. Part of their experimental work is training laymen and clergymen. In the first, basic course, it is based on the works of Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and H.R. Niebuhr. They have found laymen do want to learn and they have had results in sending out aroused persons once they find out who they are, whose they are, and why they are.

Baringer and Scott and their families work with 5,800 ghetto residents of the 16-block area the institute has taken on. This work digs into every corner of the ghetto's life, to solve the problems left in the inner city when the suburbanites fled, and to pass the solutions on.

# E.I.

By Jean D. Leonard



# Human problems are a lot alike - - whether in Chicago's ghettos or Great Plains Farmland

They battle on behalf of the Negroes on housing. Landlords of the area take the life savings of a family for a down payment on a place that has monthly payments so high the landlord will have the flat back before long to start the cycle over again. They battle with health and 75-rats-per-garage. They battle with the cultural poverty in the home, which makes difficult if not impossible the child's future schooling. They battle with the condition of the streets and over the garbage that gets picked up once a month. More than this, says Scott, they battle the "You're no damn good" that all this says to the Negro.

## Image-changing

The main goal of the institute's ghetto programs with pre-schoolers, students, adults and the aged, is to try to change the Negro's image of himself from one who is helpless against fate, to one who is worthwhile and can be responsible for himself.

"You can dare pick up the one life you've got and live it to the hilt," the institute says—to the west-side Negroes and the affluent Nebraskans.

If the church is going to speak to our time, Scott told the Nebraskans, it will change through the laymen. This is happening in many churches. In the Methodist churches, laymen are finding they can have a say in who will be their minister, and where the church goes. One of their bishops, he pointed out, says that six or eight years ago a church in his district used to say, "Just send us whoever you have." Then it was, "Send one who's willing to think radically." Now it's, "Send us whatever minister you want us to train."

Educating laity on what it means to be the church in the 20th Century is the purpose of EI weekend course. The pace is intense from the moment we shiver out of bed to rush to 7 a.m. worship. Worship has an important place in EI's quite original blue-

print for the church of tomorrow. At the institute they need a worship service daily, they say, to decide whether to go back out on the front line.

In creed and organization it is quite traditional, following the ancient pattern of calling persons to confess that they are not giving their all and are alienated from others: to gratitude for being in the world and accepted by God; and to rededication to go back into the world and roll up their sleeves.

In technique, however, it is quite different. The intense beat of the 20th Century permeates the worship service.

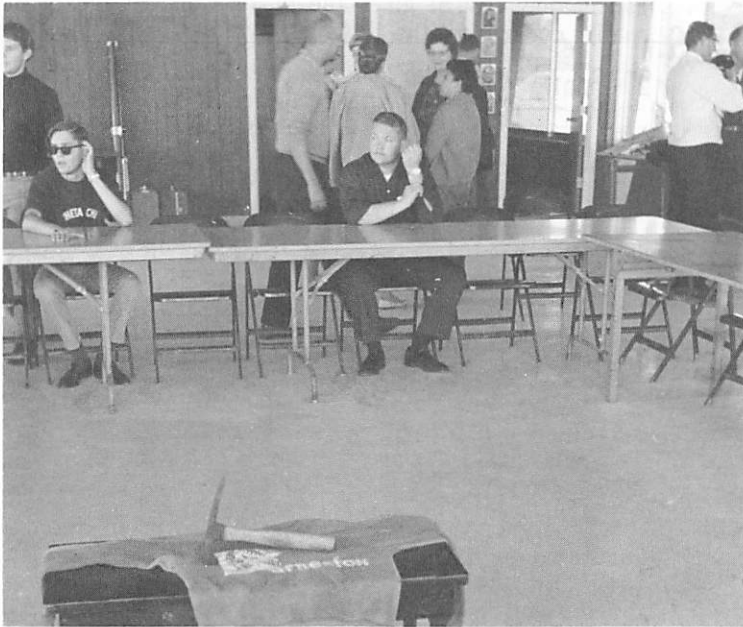
## 'The Beat'

The staff asks that as participants read the liturgies, they bring out the natural rhythm by emphasizing underlined words. They invite the worshipers by their example to move in unison with the beat. In the world, they say, we will be asked for total involvement, not just intellectual. Your body as naturally has a place in the worship as your intellect. Some are repelled by this, many are lukewarm. They give the same reactions to the modern slang the staff uses in study lectures to shock them into new ways of thinking about the church.

Then after the worshipers offer a traditional liturgy of dedication, there is silence. This is broken by someone who narrows down on a concrete area of life that he feels needs concern: Oh, thou who has put us into all of life, we hold before thee the nation's press, particularly the New York Times, and take responsibility for its Washington Bureau Chief, James Reston. Or. We hold before thee the people of Nairobi, and take responsibility for the starving children there.

## Hard Seats

After benediction and a short break, students are back in their seats, in which they sit from 7:30 a.m.



LEAVING to the 40 Nebraskans to interpret was this worn, red sweatshirt and bricklayer's tool on a piano bench with tendon separated from leg and drooping on the floor. Symbolism in religion is important to Ecumenical Institute.

to 11:30 p.m. Saturday, and Sunday from 7:30 to 2:30, with very few short breaks and surprisingly few complaints.

Even at meals the 40 are bombarded with ideas—some from the staff team, some from themselves and some from their fellow Nebraskans. Going around the table, they are asked to give a quick and concrete answer to “What do you see when I mention church?” “What movie speaks to you?” “what book?” etc. They find no refuge in mealtime gluttony, either, because there is something more important going on. Perhaps also because during the meal's grace the staff member mentions that if he were in Chicago, in a few minutes he could have 40 skinny, swollen-bellied children around this table who would starve but for this meal. He then suggests that as they eat they do it in gratitude that they are getting fed, and in determination to make the life the meal savors worthwhile.

### Back at It

Then another short break and another lecture.

Every man holds something up to be the most important thing in life, Scott says. Golf, sex, money, husband. . . . The question is not whether you believe in God, but what God do you believe in. Decide not through piety, he said, but through hard-headed reality, what you'll bow down to. . . . Our task is to try to help concerned people make the decision to give their lives on behalf of the world. He adds that no one can make that decision for a man, and he can decide not to decide.

“If you and I don't decide where the world's going,” he said, “somebody else will. There's always someone willing to take the task off your hands—

the John Birch Society, the Communists.” The same holds for one's decision not to decide what to do with one's life. Someone is willing and eager to tell him—friends, husband, wife.

Or, he continued, a man might decide to wait until he can work out his neuroses—after all, he had a terrible childhood. But, Scott says over and over during a weekend, “All you got is that falling-apart life. . . . You're significant as you sit there. . . . You don't need one thing added to live life. . . . The life you have now is it, period. . . .”

Then came the inevitable story about Jesus and the lame man. Every one of thousands of Catholics and Protestants, laymen and clergy, who have attended this basic study course, either in Chicago where they are conducted every weekend for six months out of the year or across the country — each remembers the “get up and walk” story.

### ‘Off Thy Rear’

Scripture tells about the lame man who had been lying on his cot by the healing pool for 38 years? “As Jesus approached, he seemed to know the man had been lying there a long time,” the speaker says. “You wonder how he knew? Ever see a bed somebody had been lying on for 38 years? Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed. Can you imagine that? The lame man told Jesus he had waited all this time for someone to help him into the healing pool. What did Jesus do? Did he say ‘You come over to the study and we'll do a little counseling’? No. He said, ‘Get up off your can.’”

And, Scott says, Jesus added, “Take that dirty, smelly old bed you've been lying on for 38 years with you.” For that bed was a part of his life, Scott pointed out, and he'd better face it, pick it up and

do what he can with it. When a man is accepted, Scott explains, he is accepted with all his neuroses—which we all have. “I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for my neuroses.”

The 40 remember this when in his final lecture he tells them of civilization’s front line that always has to move ahead of the masses on behalf of the masses. He tells them again they will have to decide if they want to be out there on the barbed wire. It’s amazing what a bunch of neurotic people can do when they set their minds to it.

The institute’s dean, Joseph Mathews—Methodist pastor, university professor and U.S. Army chaplain—has come into contact with hundreds of persons with problems. He says that if laymen know their Gospel and have its self-understanding, they can do a better job counseling man-to-man than the pastor. Men’s problems, he said, short of the ones that require a trained psychiatrist, can be dealt with in worship service.

### Dog Problem

Scott tells of a girl with a dog phobia. She was on the Chicago campus for a six-week work-study session. One day Scott found her in hysterics at the sight of a dachshund. One day she walked into the institute kitchen and there was a pet German shepherd. The girl jumped on a chair screaming. Mathews was standing at the table, he went right on peeling potatoes. “You have a decision to make,” he said. “You’ve got to learn to live in a world that has dogs, or leave the institute. We aren’t going to get rid of everybody’s dogs for your sake.”

She went crying to her room. It seems she had a problem—she had come to the institute to get away from her mother. Now it was her mother or dogs. She chose dogs. Later, she wanted to stay over the break between summer and fall sessions and the staff told her the institute was not a place of escape. She had another decision to make—either go home and come to terms with mother, or you can’t return in the fall. She came back, with a new relationship with her mother.

The “snapping” of people out of their problems, too simple-sounding a word for much of the hard work involved at the institute, also appears to work with ghetto residents. Baringer, whose two children attend pre-school classes with the ghetto children, recalls the instance of a 3-year-old Negro boy who wouldn’t say a word. They bombarded him with teaching. Once when the boy was walking along the street with his teacher, a man stopped and said, “Who are you?” Suddenly the 3-year-old spoke. He said, “I’m the greatest.” “Where do you live?” the man asked. “I live in the universe,” was the answer.

### Universal Knowledge

This knowledge of oneself as part of and responsible for the universe is the purpose behind the courses conducted at EI with sections for clergy, teachers, social workers, high school and college students and laymen. Many pastors attend right along with the laymen, which the institute encourages be-

cause, they say, it gives the pastors insight into how really concerned the laymen are.

The God that the institute presents to these groups is not the promiser of a bed of roses, which the staff says many men today, as in Jesus day, want him to be. Jesus, Scott says, went into the synagogues and said, “You’re looking for a messiah?” “Yes!” “I got news for you, there ain’t no messiah!”

Scott went into some of the controversy about whether Jesus actually lived or not. He pointed out that there are records of Aristotle and Plato from long before Jesus time and yet none of Jesus until 70 A.D. and few that far back.

But we don’t have to know whether Jesus existed, he said. We don’t have to know what he looked like. The question is, does it (the account of his life) speak to you?

He went briefly into some of the problems encountered in literal interpretations of the Bible. The first thing the Romans did when they put Caesar on the throne, he said, was declare him of virgin birth. It was the day’s “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.”

### Moving Presence

Whether as a man or as a most relevant and alive symbol, Jesus’ presence is very much felt through the EI weekend. It falls on the 40 Saturday night as they watch “Requiem for a Heavyweight,” a full-length Hollywood film which bluntly and painfully portrays what it means to put on the crown of thorns.

In another lecture in which Jesus walked again on the water (or on life, as the Bible sometimes used it symbolically, Scott pointed out.)

“... The boat by this time was out on the sea beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night George, (he used George, he explained, because if he said Jesus, everyone would be mentally blocked by some painter’s image of white robes and lily complexion) George came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ and they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart, it is I: have no fear.’ And Rocky answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.’ George said, ‘Come.’ So Rocky got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to George; But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ George immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘O man of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

And so David Scott and John Baringer flew from Chicago to ride down a winding dirt road to a camp carved out of the oak shrubbery on an eastern Nebraska hill. They came to the 40 there on the possibility these were men and women poised on the prow of the boat wondering if they could step out onto the troubled waters with their Lord.