“Just what do you do at The Ecumenical Institute?”

That’s a question often asked the Dean of The Ecumenical Institute.

Here is Joseph Mathews’ answer:

“The program of the Institute is rooted in the new image of the church as mission. We call ourselves ‘Structural Revolutionaries’ because we are unreservedly dedicated to the principle that the church is renewable from within. The new sense of mission in the church is the context for all our activities.

“The local congregation in every situation is the focal point for our work. It is the place where everyday decisions are made, life styles forged and the world most directly and significantly touched.

“Today the People of God at the grassroots are the new ‘elite’ in history—from them will come a disciplined body of churchmen. They must become theologically equipped and practically enabled to be the church in word and deed.

“These insights and convictions set the stage for answering the question ‘What does the Ecumenical Institute do?’

“Our role is to aid in the renewal of the church for the sake of all civilization. Our strategy is three-fold:

1. TRAINING The Ecumenical Institute, founded from a resolution of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, is a comprehensive research and training center. We provide laymen and clergymen with the intellectual tools and the practical model-building skills which every awakened man needs. Our methods and curricula evoke a latent Christian memory and enable participants to appropriate the contemporary cultural wisdom. Both jobs must be done simultaneously.

Over 60,000 persons were touched by the program of the Institute last year. Some 16,000 were directly involved in the curriculum as it was taught by the faculty across the nation and throughout the world.

2. COMMUNITY REFORMULATION Our inner city project goes beyond all previous approaches to community reorganization. We are attempting to build a model which will be applicable to every urban area across the world. In a limited geographical area we deal with all of the problems of all of the people. Crucial to this is the human problem—the way a man sees himself in the world—. In Chicago’s West Side ghetto, the resident operates out of a victim image.

Wherever authentic human community is to emerge, new images of human significance must be consciously created and forcefully dramatized. This is what we mean by ‘imaginal education’—motivating a person to come to terms with his depth human problem. Adequate self-images offer the deep awareness of individual significance, personal integrity, and vocational accomplishment. They endow the human imagination with those pictures that allow a man to appropriate his own unique gift to history.

3. RESEARCH The 200 persons who are the faculty of the Institute work as a research team. New curricula, materials and procedures for the training of adults, youth and children are constantly being developed. New models of the family, new forms for public, family and private worship are tested by the faculty, corporately and individually. Bound together under a common covenant, the faculty is an experimental ‘family order’ discovering what it means to be a disciplined body of people for the sake of the mission of the church. By sharing meals and facilities, living costs are cut to a minimum. By living at the center of our mission in the West Side ghetto, we are constantly involved with those with whom we work. By supporting ourselves financially, every penny that is given to the Institute goes directly into the mission. By living in covenant, we are accountable to each other for the particular aspects of the mission.

“Our world, secular-scientific-urban, is a radically new historical arena. This brand new world demands a new life style—religious-secular, disciplined, practical, and profoundly human.

“That’s what we’re about at The Ecumenical Institute.”

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