

THE ECUMENICAL INTSTITUTE
AND
THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
(HISTORICAL NOTES)
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The twentieth century has presented mankind with profoundly new times, which have affected every social institution. The major shifts in society's basic wisdom, style and symbols have been precipitated by revolutions in scientific understanding, urban living and secular modes. With the dawning of this new age, has come a profound new consciousness of social interrelatedness and resurgent human spirit.

Along with other institutions, the church has responded to these radically new times, Renewal has occurred through a ground swell of theological writings and study, lay participation and visioning, and ecumenical -- dialogue and coordination. The Ecumenical Institute is an outgrowth of these three significant movements in the life of the church, particularly as they were manifest in Europe. Staff members studied, visited and participated in many of these pioneering thrusts of church renewal including Evangelical Academies located throughout the European continent, the Taize Community in France, the Iona Community in Scotland, the House Church movement and Sheffield Industrial Mission in England, as well as Vatican Council II in Rome. The Institute is deeply indebted to the life and work of all these renewal forces within the church.

FOUNDING HISTORY

The Ecumenical Institute was initiated through a resolution on the floor of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches and was actually launched by a group of Chicago churchmen in 1957. Its early form was akin to the German academies, and it was served by theological faculties from the Chicago area and around the world. When its first director returned to his home country of Germany in 1962 the Ecumenical Institute, by then a training division of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, appointed a new director. He brought with him a staff who had been experimenting in methods of concentrated theological training for laity and clergy and forms of disciplined corporate life and mission at the Christian Faith and Life Community in Austin, Texas.

This new staff continued the training programme of the Ecumenical Institute and at the same time began to emphasize the demonstration of faith. The Institute's work became increasingly oriented toward practical training and research, with a special focus on addressing the urban crisis and contemporary community. Thus, initial models were created for Social

Demonstration and Human Development as they were incorporated into an intensive programme of community reformulation. Concurrently, the staff began exploring forms for an ecumenical order of families who would be covenanted together for the sake of effective service in the world.

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The early training of the Institute encompassed a comprehensive set of religious studies courses, both theoretical and practical. Throughout the period from 1962-1964 these courses were taught in the Chicago area. A corresponding curriculum focused on depth understanding of the times, was first offered in 1964 through a seminar entitled, "The 20th Century Cultural Revolution." This was expanded into an inclusive cultural curriculum designed to present models of the edge thinking and issues in cultural disciplines and primal social structures. Coupled with this expansion of the curriculum came requests for a broader offering of the seminars, and the Institute undertook a systematic pattern of course presentation across North America. Some 20,000 people participated in Ecumenical Institute seminars between 1964 and 1967. Requests for such programmes then came from other parts of the globe, and in 1967, a team of four members of the faculty taught courses in Asia and Australia. Similar trips followed in Latin America, Europe and Africa.

Related to the training dimension of the Institute's work was the emphasis on practical research and demonstration. As early as 1962, the Institute through its programme division, The Institute for Cultural Affairs, began work in community development. The pilot experiment was the 5th City Project on the west side of Chicago. This work, rather than being simply an adjunct, was integral part of the training process and a living laboratory for creating replicable models of human community development,

By 1968, the combination of highly practical training and application methods led to increased consultative work with local congregations of churches and communities. In order to meet the demands for this onsite assistance, the Institute deployed permanent staff to four locations in the United States, one in Asia and another in Australia. There are now 104 such centres located in 23 nations.

Each of these staff locations serves in a consultative relationship to church and community groups who are experimenting with creating the structure and form for effective community engagement in their geosocial context. These groups are linked together around the world through an interchange network called "The Primal Community Experiment," with more than 100 communities participating in various stages of development. Another aspect of this interchange, training and planning, is the Global Research Assembly held each summer in Chicago. Since 1965 these three to four week events have drawn together more than 7,000 people from around the world to share insights, build common models and plan the work of the year ahead.

Since 1968 the full curriculum of the Institute has been made available three times a year at the Institute's Academy in Chicago. This curriculum includes not only the full theological and

cultural sections, but also pedagogical, social and religious methods training. The Academy is an eight week in-residence programme in which the participants work and study together, offering opportunities for intensive study, field work and corporate life.

This same concentrated training is offered in a more abbreviated form through the International Training Institute. The ITI was initiated in 1969 at the request of Asian Churchmen who, having attended the Academy, desired a similar course made locally available. Since the first ITI at Trinity Theological College in Singapore with 102 participants, this programme has been offered 46 times throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America, Australia, Europe and North America, with over 4,000 total participants. The most recent ITI's were held in January, 1976 in Amsterdam and Caracas.

As a result of this widespread training, early work in the 5th city community of Chicago, and continuing concern for total human development the Institute of Cultural Affairs began to test the 5th City model in social settings distinctly different from Chicago's west side. Work was initiated in Majuro in the Marshall Islands in 1972 and in Australia Aboriginal Community of Oombulgurri the following year. These Social Demonstration Projects located in situations of seeming hopelessness, train local leaders to shape the future of their own community. The intent is to establish a band of 24 demonstrations, one in each time zone. The projects are to be activated over a three year period beginning in 1975/76 with eight being initiated by the end of each year.

In addition to the Social Demonstration projects of the ICA, the Institute engages in several forms of training and consultation which it developed between 1971 and 1974. The Social Methods School is a five day training laboratory in methods of social change, directed primarily at the local community level. Living Effectively in the New Society (LENS) is a seminar in management planning for corporation executives and the leadership of organizations concerned with operational effectivity. The Global Community Forum is a one day town meeting construct that enables local residents to participate in the planning and development of their own community. All these programmes have been conducted throughout the world, under the coordination of the various staff centres.

Training, whether daylong sessions or twomonth residential seminars, has consistently pressed beyond a concern with intellectual pursuits and action, to methods which touch the depths of humanness itself, occasioning new life decisions and sustaining human motivity. Building on the classical wisdom of the church embodied in exercises such as meditation, contemplation and prayer, the Institute has worked with contemporary forms to address consciousness, both to create the context for change and to nurture motivation and vision.

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Both the Ecumenical Institute and its subsidiary organization, the Institute of Cultural Affairs are independently incorporated as not-for-profit corporations. The work of the Ecumenical Institute has been more related to the church and religious institutions, while the Institute of Cultural Affairs generally deals more with the broader society and secular institutions.

The work and programmes of the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs are guided by two boards, The Board of Directors and The Board of Consultants. The Board of Directors is established according to legal requirements of the nations within which each is located and functions as trustees for the operation of the Institute. The Board of Consultants, some 300 Persons from around the world, of varying professions and expertise meet semi-annually to shape the Institute programmes and operations.

The staff of the Institute includes lawyers, laborers, doctors, teachers, executives, secretaries, clergy and many others who along with their children comprise a global community. The adult staff numbers approximately 1,200 presently. In each location, the staff is self-supporting; that is, by holding jobs related to their own training and expertise, part of the staff earn the living expenses of the entire staff. The only exception to this principle is in the case of Human Development Projects in which some salaries are directed to ICA staff when their special training, skills and experience are vital to the project itself.

The EI and the ICA are tax exempt institutions. Besides programme receipts, the work of the Institute is supported by its own programmes and also by church bodies, small businesses, corporations, private foundations, service clubs, government agencies and concerned individuals around the world. The principle of staff self support allows all contributions to be applied directly to programme expenses.