

# **FOUNDATIONS OF THE ORDER:ECUMENICAL**

**By Joe Pierce**

**In the beginning the Order was a corporate ministry with no name and no structures; only a kind of assumed and unconsciously acknowledged agreement of sorts. It began four men drawn together: one layman and three clergymen, as a staff for the Christian Faith and Life Community in Austin, Texas, along side the University of Texas. The founder, the Reverend W. Jack Lewis was a minister to students who had become frustrated with the Presbyterian denominational structures for religion instruction of students. The structures seemed Irrelevant and riot helpful to those in his charge.**

**As everyone "knows", a Presbyterian in such straits goes to his denominational origins in Scotland for inspiration. So went Lewis, on a junket through the United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, and visiting across Europe in the various lay centers and academies that had been established out of similar frustrations to those of Lewis.**

**While on this trip, Lewis became intrigued with a venture called the Iona Community, a prayer group initiated by Lord McCleod. The main purpose of the Iona Community was daily prayer and systematic donations to rebuild an old abbey on the Island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland near Glasgow. Members were spread across the United Kingdom and fulfilled many occupations as ordinary layman, doctors, barristers, and professors. Lewis also became fascinated with the residential style of religious instruction at Cambridge and Oxford. He began to formulate a plan, for his work back In Texas, incorporating both the dedication of the Iona group and the insights of Cambridge and Oxford. He would establish a student community alongside the University of Texas, where students would commit themselves for a year of Christian living and study while continuing their regular courses at the university.**

**With contributions raised churches and a small grant from the Presbyterian Church, USA, he purchased an old motel located a block from the campus. He formed a board of directors, put up a sign and began recruiting students to join him in the experiment.**

**One student, Fred Buss, has shared Lewis' immediate problem: getting an adequate curriculum now that a good number of students had moved in. Buss happened to hear an address at the university by a guest speaker, Joseph Wesley Mathews. He was deeply addressed and suggested to Lewis that Mathews would be an excellent person to come to Lewis' aid. Mathews was a Professor of Ethics at nearby Southern Methodist University, Perkins School of Theology. Lewis approached him for help. Mathews was attracted by the whole**

dining room. Mathews, as always in those days, was in charge. Lewis was obviously livid. Right there, he said he was picking up Mathews resignation that Mathews had told him was on Lewis's desk anytime he decided to pick it up. Immediately there were several other resignations, unexpected by Lewis. He said he would have to call a Board Meeting to confirm his decisions and would do so the following day.

Those who had resigned started having morning meetings to figure out what they would do. They began brainstorming places to go. Previously, Buss had gone to seminary at Yale, Cozart had gone to to do graduate work in English Literature and Brockway had gone to the University of Chicago. When they heard of the 'amebic split' they also sent in their resignations. Brockway had a professor, Walter Leibrecht, who controlled an institute in Evanston, Illinois, that had been established as a result of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Evanston in 1952. Professor Leibrecht wanted to go to Vatican II as a Protestant observer and also find some way to unload the institute while making the move. When Brockway heard this and of the resignations in Austin, he told the old members of the staff of the Faith-in-Life Community about it on the phone. This made them put Evanston on their list of places to check out, the Evanston Institute of Ecumenical Studies, later to be called the Ecumenical Institute.