

Short Versions of Long Threads

That Weave a Network of Care Across the Carolinas

In 1963, a group of seven families moved from Evanston, Illinois into the facilities vacated by Bethany Theological Seminary on the West Side of Chicago. These families, under the leadership of Joe and Lyn Mathews, served as the initial staff of the Ecumenical Institute (EI). Together, they lived and worked to create a common financial system and corporate, covenantal polity arrangement. They imaged themselves as a 20th Century family order, the Order: Ecumenical (O:E). They began working with the community around their new facility; this project became known as the Fifth City Human Development Project. Beyond their neighborhood, they worked with congregations of all denominations. Their initial course offering was called Religious Studies - I (RS-I). Teams of RS-I teachers offered the program across the United States and internationally by conducting 44-hour seminars that reimagined the Christian message using 20th Century theologians committed to personal responsibility and sociological change.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) began as a program division of the Ecumenical Institute but was independently chartered in 1973 to work directly with corporations, government agencies and local community groups. The two entities continue to function as separate but related organizations.

Joe Mathews' brother, Bishop James "Jim" Mathews, was married to the daughter of a respected Methodist missionary that had served in India for many years. Thus, when the Institute decided to expand its work internationally, Joe and Jim were able to contact senior church leaders and prominent industrialists across India. In 1975, when the Institute was ready to replicate the Fifth City project around the world, one of the early projects was started in the village of Maliwada, not far from the Ellora Caves and the city of Aurangabad in the State of Maharashtra.

In 1968, the staff of EI decided to diversify their operations across the US. They sent teams to Atlanta, Boston and Los Angeles; an additional group moved to the south side of Chicago. These people were all part of the O:E and called the places they lived and worked, Religious Houses.

Nelson and Elaine Stover each participated in RS-I courses while they were students at Purdue University. When they moved to Chicago after they were married, they became associated with a Methodist Church that was conducting programs related to EI. The Stovers became founding members of the Chicago Religious House in 1968. After Nelson graduated from seminary in 1970, the Stovers moved to Atlanta to become part of the leadership team of the Atlanta Religious House. Part of their responsibility was to expand the program activities in North Carolina. The Stovers left Atlanta in the spring of 1971 to continue their work with the ICA in Australia, India, Egypt, Belgium and in the Appalachia Mountains in West Virginia.

In 1969, a group of church members in Raleigh, North Carolina invited the teaching faculty of EI in Chicago to conduct an RS-I course in eastern North Carolina. Among the participants in that course was Dr. Bill Bingham, a professor of Civil Engineering at NC State University. Bill was impressed by the passion of the faculty and the content of the course. In the spring of the next year he went, along with his wife, Annette (Greensboro native), to a weekend Spiritual Odyssey conducted by the Atlanta Religious House. When the Stovers came to visit people in North Carolina, they were often hosted by the Bingham Family. In the spring of 1971, Elaine conducted an RS-I at the Bingham's home for elementary school students, the Emerging Generation, including the Bingham family's four children and other children from Raleigh congregations.

Bill, Annette and the four kids spent 1973 living with the Order in Chicago. Bill had a consulting position to earn money for the family, Annette worked in the Institute's print shop and the four children participated in the emerging generation programs after completing their daily schooling. In 1975, Bill was invited to go to

India as a technical consultant to the Maliwada Human Development Project – Annette stayed home in Raleigh to celebrate Christmas with the four kids. Bill and Annette continued to host fundraising teams and others from the ICA who came through the Carolinas. They played an important role in establishing the Gibson Human Development Project on the border between North and South Carolina. During 1980, Annette accompanied the leadership team of the ICA on a global circuit visiting major offices in various countries, including projects in India.

After completing his college education, Allen Bingham, the family's second oldest son, volunteered to spend a year working with the ICA in their human development projects in Kenya. He returned to the States and went to seminary. He now serves Methodist Churches in eastern North Carolina.

When the Stovers decided to return to the United States in 1991, they were interested in locating in the mid-Atlantic states. They contacted the Bingham and Bill offered Nelson "the keys to his car and the keys to their house" for a month while Nelson sought employment and a place to live. Eventually, the Stovers moved to Greensboro where Nelson worked as a computer consultant to support the family and Elaine began offering the ICA's *Technology of Participation (ToP)*® programs. Elaine established a working relationship with the ICA in the US and conducted programs under the auspices of The ICA @ Greensboro for fifteen years. When the ICA-USA reorganized their programmatic structure in 2006, Elaine established her consulting company, **greenschemes**. Nelson served on the board of ICA International from 2004 through 2010. He was President of the Board for the last four of these years and helped orchestrate the transition of the organization's registered office from Belgium to Canada.

Going back a bit, in 1967, John and Lynda Cock read an article about the Ecumenical Institute in Time Magazine and thought that their church groups needed this training for service to the world. They went to RS-I in 1968 and then moved to the El campus in Chicago in 1969 where Lynda played an important role in leading the 5th City pre-school in which their two sons participated along with children from the neighborhood. Eventually, the Cocks would work with the Religious Houses in Kansas City and Washington DC as well as internationally in Australia, Indonesia and India. They returned to John's hometown of Galax, VA in 1984 and opened a men's clothing store. In Galax, they got involved in community activities including the local Methodist church and the Center Street churches. They used their community development skills to resurrect the Downtown Merchants' Association which won a Virginia Main Street program.

Lynda served on the church's mission committee and introduced them to the ICA's work in India by hosting Shakuntala Jadhav when she came to visit the Stovers. The church eventually funded the construction of a school room in the Indian village of Malegaon. In 1993, Lynda and two elders from their church, joined the Stovers on a two-week visit to India including the ICA India's projects in Chikhale Village and Malegaon.

By 1995, the Cock's son, Jeremiah moved to Greensboro to work as a network specialist for the same company where Nelson was working as a database analyst. Jeremiah eventually began his own computer networking company that used ToP methods in many phases of its work. After he sold the company, he joined the Advisory Board of Emerging Ecology. After Jeremiah moved to Spain with his wife and family, John and Lynda moved to Davidson to be near their other son, John. Lynda has been active in maintaining the ICA Global Archives and works with John to prepare a daily blog posting. Their eldest son, John (also a ToP grad), was elected to the ICA-USA Board of Directors in 2019.

In India, in 1977, the ICA was getting ready to expand the Maliwada Human Development Project to include projects in each of the 25 districts of Maharashtra. John Patterson was delegated to locate a project in the vicinity of Bombay (now Mumbai). He contacted friends of the ICA in the business community including a professor at one of the business schools. At the time, Vijay Lokhande – who lived in Panvel on the fringes of

Bombay – was attending night classes in Bombay while preparing to take over the management of his recently deceased father’s company. The professor introduced John to Vijay and a long-term partnership began. Vijay was interested in the ICA’s grassroots approach to development and wanted villages near his town to benefit. John and Vijay visited Chikhale Village – a poor rice-farming community at the end of a mile-long dirt road. Soon thereafter, the Chikhale Human Development Project was initiated.

While they were in India in 1980, John and Lynda helped with some of the programs in Chikhale. Nelson and Elaine Stover moved to India in 1981 and lived in Chikhale during 1983 and ’84. While there, Elaine worked with the health care systems and the pre-school. Nelson worked on fund raising and the beginning construction phases of the Chikhale Training Center. In 1990, this facility was repurposed as the Adivasi Ashram Shalla in Chikhale – today a residential school for 700 tribal children in grades 1 through 12.

In the years after 1977, Vijay continued to be highly involved with the work of the ICA in India. He now serves as Chairman of the ICA: India Board of Directors and was the Vice-President for India of the ICA International Board while Nelson was President. Vijay has ensured the success of the Chikhale School and visits the Stover, Bingham and Cock families when he comes to the US to visit his daughter who now lives and works in California.

Nelson and Elaine have maintained a working relationship with ICA: India since they left the country in 1986. They have been back to India about every two years and frequently take groups of people with them to visit the Chikhale school, ICA: India’s Environmental Education Center in Talegaon and various cultural sights including the Ellora Caves. In 2015, Bill and Annette Bingham returned to India with the Stovers. On the trip the group returned to Maliwada where Bill had been almost 40 years previously. Many of the village elders had fond memories of the 1975 consultation and brought out picture books to share with their guests.

Another thread in the tapestry began during the summer of 1965, when the family of Bob Ouradnik moved from Minneapolis to the El campus in the heart of one of Chicago’s inner-city neighborhoods, 5th City. There Bob trained to become the director of El work in Minneapolis, as an extension of his pastoral work in the campus ministry of the Methodist Church. Some of El-Minneapolis’ urban projects included setting up communal housing that was patterned after the parent community in Chicago. Bob left the campus ministry and eventually moved to North Carolina. In Greensboro, he met Lou Culberson Iclef, whom he married on June 11, 2000. On her property of 5½ acres, they started a small conference center, Sylvan Pathways.

A few years later, at the Ouradnik’s New Year’s Day party, Bob met Nelson and by the phrases they used, the two realized that they had both participated in early programs of El. Bob, Lou, Nelson and Elaine continued to meet in a variety of situations and worked to develop programs of mutual interest.

In 2013, when conversations began regarding the formation of a non-profit organization to conduct programs rooted in the wisdom of the Institutes and in the context of the ecological perspectives of Thomas Berry, Lou was eager to join with the Stovers and others to bring the project to fruition. On August 12, 2013, Nelson, Martha Jane Stover (Nelson’s sister), Lou and Tim Leisman officially incorporated Emerging Ecology in the State of North Carolina. The organization received 501-c-3 status from the IRS and in 2016 became an Associate Member of ICA International.



Emerging Ecology is conducting research dedicated to telling the more complete story of this 50-year journey toward Weaving a Network of Care Across the Carolinas. For updated information visit: www.EmergingEcology.org/History.