

## BELIEFS Values

## Institute brings all creeds together

By RENA FULKA  
SPECIAL WRITER

Barbara Yuhas was in the midst of a job hunt when she stumbled across an advertisement for a secretarial position at the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies.

The job sounded interesting enough. But before she could feel comfortable sending in a resume, the Farmington Hills resident said there was one more thing she needed to do.

"I had to look up ecumenical in the dictionary," she admitted. "I didn't know what it meant."

Yuhas didn't fully understand the dictionary's definition of ecumenical as meaning "worldwide." But that didn't stop her from arranging an interview with the Rev. Dr. James Lyons, the Institute's founder and director.

"Jim and I hit it off and I stayed that afternoon and I've stayed for 11 and a half years," she said. "I still couldn't define ecumenical. Maybe that's because we're still changing."

Since joining the staff as a full time secretary, Yuhas has evolved with the thriving Southfield-based Institute to assume additional responsibilities as newsletter editor, membership drive coordinator and program director.

She schedules lectures and educational programs, is involved with the Ambassadors of Good Will youth program and plans the annual Dove Dinner, Model Passover Seder and Church-Synagogue Tour, all aimed at building and cementing solid relationships between Christians and Jews.

In January, Yuhas kicked off this year's ongoing membership drive, "From Vision to Reality," by sending pledge cards to the 1,500 households on the mailing list.

"Our membership drive gives people all kinds of ranges in the ability to give," said Lyons, a Lathrup Village resident. "Our membership drive doesn't underwrite the Institute, but it gets people involved."

Involvement seems to be the ongoing dynamic that provides a sense of unity for the Institute's



Team: Barbara Yuhas and the Rev. Jim Lyons make a good team at the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies based in Southfield.

diverse members, most of whom make their homes in the North-western suburbs of Detroit.

"We are not fund-raisers. Our total fund raising is done with our programs," explained Lyons. "It's the programs that sell. Even our dinners are a program."

Most of the Institute's supporters have affiliated through word of mouth or after attending one of the lectures or programs offered throughout the year.

"When it comes right down to it," said Lyons, "people support the Institute because it's the right thing to do."

Lyons began the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies in 1982, after serious illness awakened him to rethink the direction for the rest of his life.

With support from Richard Labont, the former director of the Anti-Defamation League, Michi-

gan Region, Lyons left his 12-year pastorate and took to the task of encouraging healthy dialogue between Christians and Jews through programming set in a non-threatening environment. When he's not researching or writing, Lyons is out in the field teaching and lecturing at schools, universities, churches and synagogues across the country and abroad.

"The whole work of the Institute is to ask the difficult questions in a safe way and to handle without getting angry the anger of others, who don't understand," said Lyons, who learned about the history of Jewish-Christian injustices as a student at Wayne State University in Detroit. "There are issues that are painful. We have to deal with the painful issues."

Two years ago, Rabbi Amy Brodsky joined the staff as assis-

tant director to help facilitate the growing number of lay school classes and community outreach programs now being offered. The non-profit organization also relies on a host of volunteers for its continued success and offers a resource media library and an office at 19000 W. Nine Mile Road.

Throughout its 16-year history, the Institute has remained self-supporting. The membership drive accounts for 10 percent of the annual budget, which is set by a board of directors representing a variety of faith backgrounds.

To learn more about the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, call Barbara Yuhas at (248) 353-2344. Contributions can be sent to 19000 W. Nine Mile Road, Suite 205, Southfield, MI 48075.

## You must have an attitude of gratitude to experience pure joy



REV. ALLAN ECKELMANN

"Thank God it's Friday," a co-worker cheerfully exclaimed to a young woman who was passing her desk. "What in the world do I have to be thankful for?" the young woman screamed back with her hands trembling and her eyes filled with tears. Her co-worker, who had just been told that she was a victim of work force reduction.

There would be no more Friday pay checks for her, at least not with this company. She was a single mother struggling to make ends meet, and the doctor had told her that her daughter needed an operation. Those words, "Thank God it's Friday," stung her ears and cut her heart.

Thanksgiving is quite often a matter of perspective, with one person's gratitude revealing another person's pain. If our thanksgiving is not going to smack of vulgarity, we need to be sensitive to those who have so little.

Gratitude depends on attitude. Those who have a greedy attitude can never be grateful, because their greed leaves them feeling constantly unfulfilled. Those who have a mistrustful attitude can never be grateful, because they have no hope for anything positive.

Those who have an aversive attitude can never be grateful, because they cannot appreciate anything they have been freely

given, but only those things which they take. Do you remember Dickens' character Ebenezer Scrooge? Over the years, he had constructed a life of misery for himself, because he lacked gratitude in his heart for the gift of life itself. It was only as he came to accept that gift, that his gratitude burst forth with joyous generosity.

Without gratitude there is no joy. I can't say this enough, if you don't develop an attitude of gratitude, your life will have no joy. Let me put that another way, only grateful people are joyful people.

When we allow life's difficulties to destroy our sense of gratitude we double our misery. The actor Christopher Reeve is a good example of one who does not allow misery to win.

Since his accident, he has been paralyzed and in a wheel chair, but he remains grateful for the gift of life itself. For him, it is a daily attitudinal struggle, but he refuses to let misery have the upper hand.

Consequently, he still has the capacity to experience joy, as he refuses to let his physical disability turn him in to an emotional and spiritual cripple, as well.

If ever there was a living testimony to the reality that thanksgiving is an attitude of choice, Christopher Reeve is that testimony.

My God's gift of life fill you with such gratitude and fill you with joy.

The Rev. Allan Eckelmann is the senior minister at The Congregational Church of Birmingham.

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