



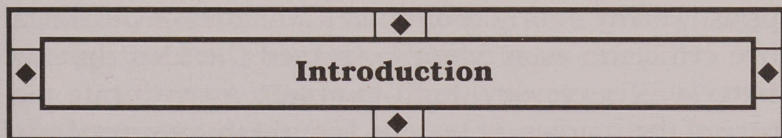
The President's  
Legacy

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**Clinton M. Marsh\***

## **The President's Legacy**



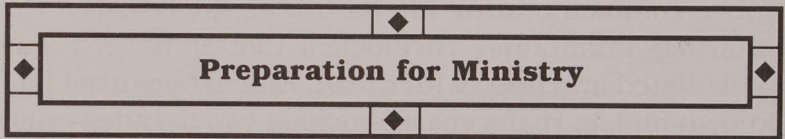
When Dr. Costen invited me to prepare this narrative commemorating his tenure as President of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), I was both elated and filled with dread. Elated because I had known him for many years—at least two decades—and had followed his development and accomplishments, both in the parish ministry and in the world of theological education. Filled with dread because I knew the intense joy of victory but also was aware of the painful dungeons of defeat. Therefore, I wondered aloud: “Has Jim experienced these same emotions, especially the more tortuous of the two?” Of course, I knew of his successes, at least some of them, but of his defeats . . . ?

I immediately decided that the task involved more than my knowledge of his Presidency, but also that of his constituency—the deans, faculty, students and administrators, the dining room workers, those who mowed the lawns and tended the broken windows. My job was to interview, to listen to the many persons on this campus, but also the voices on the larger educational scene, in foundation offices and banks . . . . Over the next few months, as I talked with that constituency, I came to realize, more and more, the vitality of

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this unique Institution and just how much Jim had done to bring ITC to its present level of excellence. I must confess, however, that it was much easier to find praiseworthy information than it was to excavate negative criticism, even when I stressed the idea that the latter was necessary, both to obtain an accurate picture of the man and his task, but also an awareness of lessons that only pain and despair can teach.



**Preparation for Ministry**

A recurring question during on- and off-campus interviews was: "Why is Dr. Costen a skilled fundraiser?" His fascination with the universe of the entrepreneur began—or so it seems—in Omaha, Nebraska, when he, at the age of five years, along with his brother Billy, who was twelve, established a soft-drink stand on the sidewalk in front of their home. Jimmy (as he was known until his college days) was, of course, the junior partner but he enjoyed the work and the business grew, eventually serving a neighborhood of several square blocks and continuing, after dark, on the porch. Over time, the number of salable items increased, including candied apples, popcorn and lemonade. Jimmy was already experiencing the give and take of the world of funds, expressing a profound interest in meeting a public and interacting with them.

The success of the soft-drink stand finally supported their purchase of two bicycles, which were, of course, used for their pleasure, but also for profit. Being



too busy as entrepreneurs to make full use of their bikes, the "company," as it was now called, rented them at ten cents a ride for the average neighborhood kid. However, the sons of the nearby grocer were charged twenty-five cents and permitted longer rides.

At the age of seven, Jimmy developed a secondary business, delivering groceries and, at age ten, he helped a neighbor clean buildings at night. He also shined shoes in the same business area. While in high school, the now-husky lad secured a job in a meat-packing plant where he distributed large barrels of salt. Fully utilizing his time, Jimmy soon learned meat-cutting skills, eventually becoming a butcher.

A fortuitous change occurred when young Jimmy, with the guidance of an influential Presbyterian pastor, left his Catholic background and became a Presbyterian. His new affiliation resulted, firstly, in matriculation at Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, North Carolina, and, secondly, in a call to the ministry. Graduating *magna cum laude* with the Bachelor of Arts, he entered Johnson C. Smith Seminary (JCSS) and graduated *summa cum laude* with the Bachelor of Divinity.

Jim (as he is now known) and his future wife, Melva, met in their psychology class. Melva, a junior college transfer student, excelled in her studies. According to her account, Jim was not only fascinated by her intellect but also by her femininity. They dated the remainder of their college years, marrying in the Johnson C. Smith University Chapel immediately upon graduation. Soon thereafter, Melva began her teaching career at the local high school. Since she had to provide music for the school's graduation, she was almost late for her own wedding. Their honeymoon was nec-

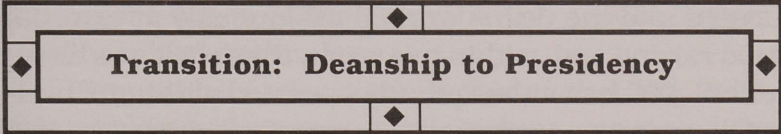
essarily brief due to pressing commitments.

The next fourteen years continued to be formative as he pastored two churches and obtained the Master of Theology *magna cum laude* from Southeastern Baptist Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, where he was the first African American to graduate. His first parish was Mt. Pisgah Presbyterian Church, Rocky Mount, NC, where he brought new life to a waning situation, increasing membership, promoting programs, and building a facility at a cost of \$100,000. He then organized Church of the Master, Atlanta, again promoting a vital membership program, and property valued at \$250,000.

During his tenure at Church of the Master, Dr. Costen, a loyal alumnus, spearheaded the successful effort to save JCSS from closing because of its declining enrollment. Subsequently, in 1969, a provisional year was granted and the seminary prospered. When it moved to Atlanta, Dr. Costen became the Administrative Dean, building strong relations with other ITC Deans, faculty and staff. In the midst of this experience, Jim became the founder, developer and President of Harbison New Town, a HUD-sponsored community near Columbia, South Carolina.

While serving in the capacity of Dean at JCSS, Dr. Costen in 1982 was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church. In this position, the contacts, ecumenical development, international travel, and the broadening vision of church and society, culminated fifty years of preparation.





**Transition: Deanship to Presidency**

The concept of the ITC was the result of an inspired genius and its materialization a miracle. The denominations which comprise ITC—each with its own history, dreams, finances and problems—were suddenly intimately related and required to work cooperatively. Inevitably, tensions, ambitions and jealousies had to be surmounted. This took time as well as grace.

Dr. Harry V. Richardson, the creator of the ITC vision, brought to his Presidency the ability for problem-solving and enthusiasm for this ecumenical dream. His immediate successor, Dr. Oswald P. Bronson, continued its ecumenical spirit and expansion. Dr. Costen, the first President chosen from the ranks of the Administrative Deans, faced institutional problems, but his personal traits and previous experiences equipped him to solve them. His experience as Dean of JCSS enabled him to establish friendships, trust and understanding with other deans, who knew that he was fully conversant with their concerns and problems. As President, he was able to convert these assets into a working relationship, one that enabled the dissipation of parochial concerns. Additionally, the deans felt that they could trust him as President to be unquestionably fair, since he had demonstrated his loyalty to the Institution, not just to JCSS.

The Costen administration inherited a debt of \$780,000. This was partially reduced as the delinquent schools caught the new ITC spirit and challenged their denominations to increase financial support. Dr.

Costen and the deans worked assiduously at external fund raising and, within two years, the deficit was eliminated. ITC has subsequently operated within its budget every year except one during President Costen's tenure.

The Board of Trustees was instrumental in the ITC process, giving solid leadership especially when the school sought reaffirmation by the Association of Theological Schools and accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. From this experience, Dr. Costen initiated a needed long-range planning process. During this time, the Board was restructured and now includes fifteen at-large members, some of whom have been influential in facilitating the President's entrée into financial resources. Throughout this transition from Deanship to Presidency, Jim had firmly established his trustworthiness as a leader. ITC was on its way!



An oft-quoted truism is that an institution is the lengthened shadow of a single person. In ITC's situation, however, this shadow is the reflection of at least two persons—Harry V. Richardson and James H. Costen. Richardson's vision for a united seminary where the combined resources would be more than the sum of their parts was nurtured by subsequent presidents, reaching a high level of actualization during the Costen administration. This achievement was inevitably built upon his profound knowledge of the nature



and urgent needs of the Church—the African-American Church in particular.

It must be understood, however, that the President advocates the necessity of working as a team. The following comments illustrate this:

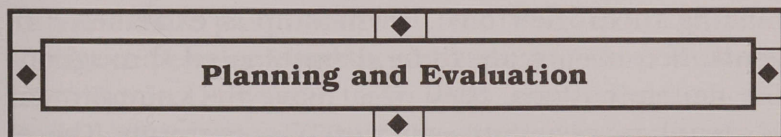
“He has vision and the organizational skills to accomplish objectives.”

“He creates an openness in which others are free to contribute their ideas.”

“He enhances the selfhood of persons.”

“His criticisms are constructive and gentle.”

“He demonstrates perceptivity.”



The Costen administration has developed an effective organizational structure. Entering the presidency he discovered a Business Office that was efficiently managed although understaffed. Institutional growth necessitated enlargement of this staff which enhanced services. This Office now includes the business manager and an assistant, accountants, a cashier and secretaries.

Dr. Costen has developed an Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) whose primary functions are fund raising, public and alumni relations. *The Lantern*, an informational publication, originated as a result of the Administrative Deans' suggestion that their individual publications be combined. The President endorsed this

idea. It is now professionally produced by OIA three times each year and is designed to inform ITC constituents. Another OIA publication, *Briefly, ITC*, is published weekly and distributed to the ITC community.

In order to assess institutional effectiveness, Dr. Costen established the Office of Planning and Evaluation. This office produces the *Fact Book*, a continually upgraded summary of information relative to this process. Additionally, ITC's *Five Year Strategic Plan* focuses on its mission of excellence in theological education.

Another example of the President's ability to work with others is seen in his relationship with the Board of Trustees. Seeing the Board in a broad perspective, he encourages members to grapple with new initiatives, making them their own. Ownership is extremely urgent! If concepts are to be disseminated throughout the denominations, they must have the commitment of church representatives in the ITC community. Therefore, the "creators" must become the communicators. One hears:

"I have never known him to ramrod or be devious."

"He honors process scrupulously."

"He provides guidance as needed."

"He uses authority only when process falters."

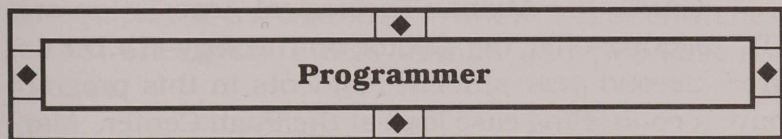
Faculty development has always been an administrative priority for Dr. Costen. For example, he has supported new faculty positions, funded sabbaticals and study leaves, promoted the *Journal of Interdenominational Theological Center* as an incentive for faculty publications, encouraged scholarship and writing, fos-



tered attendance at scholarly meetings, increased faculty research funds—all growth opportunities that enhance faculty careers.

The administrative responsibility of the President extends beyond the environs of ITC. Since 1987 Dr. Costen has been the senior president in the Atlanta University Center (AUC) and has served as Chair of the Presidents' Council. In this capacity he has been instrumental in the continuing development of AUC's Robert W. Woodruff Library for the effective delivery of services. Additionally, he facilitated a general reorganization of the AUC itself.

The President's administrative ability is further evidenced as he has continued to provide leadership to the Association of Theological Schools, serving as its immediate past president. As President of the Association, he supervised its restructuring—a monumental task. In Denver, in July 1996, under Dr. Costen's leadership, new accreditation standards for theological schools in the United States and Canada were adopted.



Dr. Costen's vision for the ITC has developed in light of changes in church, society and technology. Today, programs which could not have been dreamed of in the past are now operative. The following illustrates bringing dreams to fruition:

### **Thomas J. Pugh Counseling Center**

The President has an intense concern for and commitment to pastoral counseling which is integral to the curriculum and practiced in private and family settings. When Dr. Costen envisioned a pastoral counseling center, he recommended that it be named in recognition of the life and services to ITC of Dr. Thomas J. Pugh, for years a leader in the field.

The Pugh Center linked two realities—the counseling program at ITC and the Georgia Association for Pastoral Care (GAPC). Columbia Theological Seminary, Emory University's Candler School of Theology, and Grady Memorial Hospital Health System comprise GAPC. In partnership with ITC it offers workshops, classes and various support groups, providing counseling services and training students in pastoral ministry. Additionally, clergy workshops are held annually. This Center also cooperates with guidance counselors in the Atlanta Public School System. In its first year of operation there were seven counselors and seventeen the second.

GAPC, the Atlanta Theological Association and ITC together offer the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) degree. Second-year student residents in this program have a counseling case load at the Pugh Center. Marriage, personal and other counseling needs constitute a portion of the curriculum.

### **The Institute of Church Administration and Management**

Internal problems of congregations and denominations, caused by the absence of competent adminis-



trative and management procedures, necessitated ITC to develop a program for students and church leaders. Grasping this concept, Dr. Costen moved it to realization. A steering committee of religious, business and academicians guided the program's development. Substantial grants from the Lilly and Ford Foundations were received. As evidence of the program's success, ninety-three students have taken the three-hour credit course as of 1993.

The Institute offers two program schedules: a concentrated one-week course early in the Fall and one during the mid-year break. Plans are entertained to incorporate parts of this program into the ITC curriculum. A number of workshops discuss management and administrative issues:

- Computer skills
- Grant management
- Church budget
- Insurance
- Income taxes

As expected, this Institute maximizes state-of-the-art equipment for training. Without such, churches cannot effectively utilize human and financial resources.

### **The Extension Education Program**

While traveling across the country and meeting with denominational and local church leaders, Dr. Costen became keenly aware that there are hundreds—perhaps thousands—already serving in leadership positions as pastors and ecclesiastical officers who have no access to seminary training. Data gained through

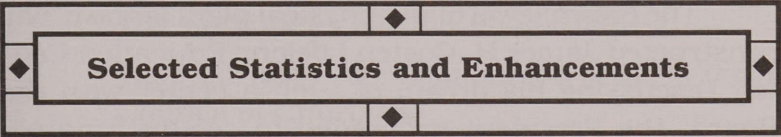
consultations with the heads of several judicatories generated the commitment to extend the teaching and training capabilities of ITC to these students.

The Extension Education Program was developed in 1990 and a director recruited. Dr. Costen, working with a faculty member, secured a substantial grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to launch the program. Although heavily dependent upon foundations during the initial years, this program became self-supporting by the end of its fourth year and exceeded the annual budget by nearly \$80,000 during the fifth.

This educational plan enables students to earn a Certificate in Theology following the completion of twelve courses. Lectures by ITC faculty are available on videotapes—twelve forty-five minute sessions for each course. These are shown and discussed by seminary-trained local instructors, who meet with students for a minimum of three hours weekly. Classes are held in such diverse places as fellowship halls and educational buildings, on college campuses, in community centers and in the lecture halls of community hospitals.

The program began with classes in only three locations: Stillman College, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Edward Waters College, Jacksonville, Florida; and ITC. Today the classes are offered in fifty-two locations across the United States, Bermuda and Canada. Anchorage, Alaska is among the ten new study sites projected to open in the Fall of 1996. Current enrollment is more than 600 students. To date, 285 Certificates in Theology have been awarded.



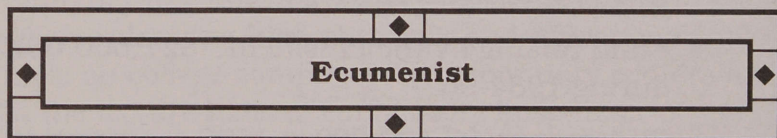
**Selected Statistics and Enhancements**

Dr. Costen's contributions to the Center are immeasurable. However, the following statistics are only partially indicative of the life of the Institution:

- Student enrollment: 450 in 1995-96 compared to 310 in 1984
- Faculty: 39 with 24 full-time positions in 1995-96 compared to 14 full-time and 19 part-time in 1984
- Faculty with doctorates: 22 in 1995-96 compared to 10 in 1984
- Annual budget: \$6,000,000 in 1995-96 compared to a \$780,000 deficit in 1984.
- Fund raising by the President: \$27,500,000 during 1984-96
- Endowment: \$7,400,000 in 1996 compared to \$3,000,000 in 1984
- Construction of Turner Theological Seminary (chapel, dormitory, administration building)
- Renovation of student apartments
- Improvement of classroom building
- Installation of voice-mail system
- Connection of ITC computer network with AUC
- Computerization of seminary offices with Internet connection

The crown jewel of the physical plant is the newly constructed James H. Costen Lifelong Education Center. Discussing his dream of such a center with the Board, the President proceeded to secure funding. During this period, the AUC presidents were negotiating for athletic venues with the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). Since ITC was not chosen for one of these sites, it proposed that ACOG provide \$800,000 toward the proposed Costen Center. In return, members of the Olympic staff would utilize the facility during the games with a profit to ITC of \$250,000.

This Center, additionally, provided the President an opportunity to establish further relations with Morris Brown College and its program of Hotel and Restaurant Management. Students in this hospitality program contract with ITC to develop their skills.



ITC is truly an ecumenical institution to which the President brings his full commitment. Along with Dr. Costen, the late Donald Newby, former Executive Director of the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, facilitated a succession of major ecumenical meetings on the ITC campus:

- The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its Education and Renewal Unit



- The Christian Medical Commission
- The Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches

Ecumenical by nature and vocation, these groups have been surprised and excited to discover the ecumenical spirit inherent in ITC and its widespread reputation.

Further indications of ITC's ecumenical spirit is its dialogue with the Inter-Faith Movement. For example, there is now a rabbi who is a member of the faculty and teaches the course, "Modern Jewish Life." For the last three years Jewish students from New York and Philadelphia have visited ITC. Also, a joint concert of the ITC choir and that of the Jewish Community Center has brought new understanding.

ITC's ecumenical interests have extended into the Black Community, establishing a unique series of programs concerning Black men in prison. Funded by a Lilly grant secured by the President, the series began as a faculty study, continued as three annual consultations which resulted in the following ITC Press publications:

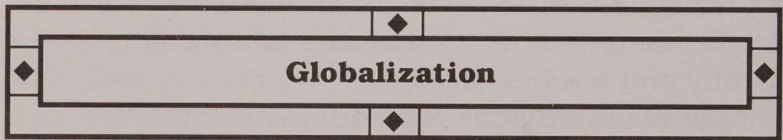
*Black Men in Prison: The Response of the African American Church*, edited by Gayraud Wilmore;

*Reclamation of Black Prisoners: A Challenge to the African American Church*, edited by Glorvna Askew and Gayraud Wilmore;

*From Prison Cell to Church Pew: The Strategy of the African American Church*, edited by Glorvna Askew and Gayraud Wilmore.

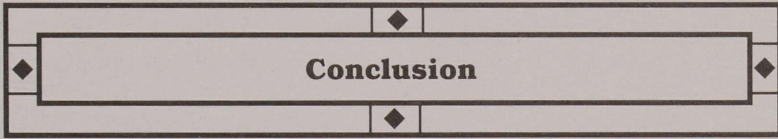
Finally, three examples of ITC's ecumenical commitment to the Black Community are:

- Southwest Atlanta for Progress, founded and chaired by Dr. Costen
- The Atlanta Project, sponsored by President Jimmy Carter
- Membership in the Urban Training Organization



Dr. Costen continues the globalization of ITC initiated by the first President, Harry V. Richardson. From the Richardsons' contacts, students from India became a part of the ITC family. Other prospects occurred when Methodist bishops visited their mission work in Africa. Large numbers of students came from various African countries, although there was an especially strong Presbyterian contingent from East Africa. This was attributable to the President's involvement. One of the results of the influx of African students is that ITC has become a meeting place for various African Churches, many of whom were formally unaware of each other. This process has culminated in the formation of the Pan-African Christian Conference of Churches which was held in Atlanta in 1988 and is scheduled to convene its third conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1997.





On one of their trips to Kenya, the Costens arrived when there had been a severe drought. As they were being welcomed, the heavens opened and the rains came. According to Kenyan lore, it was the arrival of an important woman that brought the rain. Melva was solemnly given her African name, *Nyambura*, "one who brings rain." The President's name was *Macharia*, "one who brings much hope."

In retiring, Dr. Costen has been in consultation with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa for the position of Director of Development. In this capacity he envisions a solid financial base for the seminary education of Presbyterian students.

James H. Costen is ITC, "where'er the sun!"

SEALS DEPARTMENT