

Edward T. Chambers, faith-based organizer, dies at 85: People

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Edward T. Chambers, longtime executive director of the Industrial Areas Foundation, died on April 26 in Kilcoe, Ireland. He was 85 and had advanced Alzheimer's disease, according to the IAF.

The IAF, which describes itself as "the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations," was founded in 1940 by Saul Alinsky.

"Chambers was the lead organizer in many of the IAF organizing efforts in the 1950s and 1960s," the foundation wrote. "He then mentored an entire generation of organizers and community leaders in what he called 'the skills of public life.'"

Chambers, who was the son of an Irish immigrant to the United States, planned as a teenager to be a Catholic priest "and made it as far as seminary before being ousted for questioning the Latin Mass and the priestly practice of turning one's back to the congregation," the *New Yorker* wrote in marking his death.

He became a volunteer with the Catholic Worker movement in Harlem, which led him to Alinsky. He assumed leadership of the IAF after Alinsky died in 1972. Stephen Hart [wrote in the Century in 2001](#) that Chambers pioneered faith-based community organizing with IAF in the 1970s.

"By now the movement has grown far beyond the bounds of the IAF," Hart wrote.

One of those efforts was working with New York clergy to form the organization East Brooklyn Congregations in 1980, which has since built thousands of owner-occupied affordable housing units called Nehemiah homes.

Under Chambers's leadership the IAF also became international, with organizations in Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

"If Alinsky was the Jesus of community organizing, the galvanizing standard-bearer, Chambers was its St. Paul," the *New Yorker* wrote.

Chambers authored *Roots for Radicals* in 2003, building on Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* and *Reveille for Radicals*, and set forth practices for organizers such as relational meetings, also called "one-on-ones." He retired in 2009.

"I realized that I got my energy for this work from other people, so the self must stay in connection with others, new others, others that have more talent and more vision and more power than you have," Chambers told Studs Terkel in Terkel's 2003 book *Hope Dies Last*. "You've got to be in relationship with real people."