



The Polis Center

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on Religion and Urban Culture*

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RACE and RELIGION in Indianapolis

Indianapolis has a typical number of African-Americans for a city of its size. As of the 1990 census, 22 percent of Indianapolis residents were African-American compared to 23 percent for similar sized cities in the U.S. as a whole. Less than 2 percent of residents were "other non-white." With the influx of Asians and Hispanics into the city in recent years, the 2000 census will no doubt reflect an increase in the percentage of "other non-white," but Indianapolis has been and continues to be composed primarily of a white majority and a significant black minority.

This clear demarcation has tended to cast race relations in Indianapolis in stark terms, unmediated by the complex mix of cultures typical of other cities. The Ku Klux Klan was notoriously active here in the 1920s, wielding open political influence of a sort that it never achieved elsewhere, including the Deep South. Historically, the city has been racially segregated; even today the public schools operate under a long-standing requirement of court-ordered bussing.

As part of the Project on Religion and Urban Culture, The Polis Center has been examining the intersections and divergences of race and religion in Indianapolis. In response to a survey, Indianapolis pastors most often identified racism as the civic problem the religious community needed to confront. Most faiths promote the equality and fraternity of all believers as a central tenet. Yet in practice religious congregations are among the most segregated of institutions.

A Polis survey of 306 congregations in Greater Indianapolis (about one-quarter of those in the city) revealed that 87 percent of all congregations surveyed were composed primarily of a single racial group. Mainline Protestant churches (United Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and United Church of Christ) were as a group the most homogenous. Ninety-seven percent of Indianapolis congregations from these denominations, which form the core of American Protestantism, were either black or white.



Although the survey didn't consider issues of class, mainline congregations tend to be middle and upper-middle class, categories that include proportionally fewer African-Americans than whites.

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For New Paradigm Christian Church, led by pastor John Fuller, having an integrated congregation is "a fundamental principle."

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Fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal denominations (Southern Baptist, Church of God, Assemblies of God, and others) appear to be more integrated (87 percent homogenous) than Mainline churches, but the figures may be skewed by a small number of significantly integrated congregations.

The least racially-divided Protestant congregations, at 82 percent, belonged to Traditional Non-Mainline denominations (African Methodist Episcopal, Unitarian-Universalist, Latter-day Saints, Christian Science, Friends, and others).

Catholic churches present a somewhat different picture. The Polis Center survey found that 58 percent of Catholic congregations were primarily of one race. This may be explained in part by the system of parishes in which a church serves a geographical area, and by the universal reach of Catholicism. While there were

relatively fewer Catholic congregations in the survey, they were considerably more integrated than Protestant congregations.

How did congregations come to be segregated? According to David Bundy, associate professor of church history at Christian Theological Seminary, the Mainline Protestant denominations began in Europe as "ethnic churches." Lutherans were German, Presbyterians Scottish, Episcopalians English.

The picture became more complicated in multiracial America. In the South, slaves often attended the same churches as their owners – though they had to sit apart in the balcony.

"Blacks started their own churches because they were treated so badly in white churches," said Sam Jones, president of the Indianapolis Urban League. "Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma* said there would be a race problem in America so long as white Americans held on to their attitudes toward black people."

Elfriede Wedam, senior researcher at The Polis Center, believes religious congregations are self-segregating because they are "voluntary associations. People go where they feel comfortable – which means they will choose a group that reflects themselves."

Black and white congregations differ in some significant ways. The survey found that there are proportionally more, and smaller, black congregations than white congregations. African-Americans make up 22 percent of the Indianapolis population, yet black churches constitute 30 percent of the city's 1200 congregations.

Although black churches typically are located in predominantly black neighborhoods, a smaller percentage of members live in the church neighborhood (36 percent) than is true for white congregations (47 percent), perhaps because urban neighborhoods are more strictly defined than suburban ones. The figure is worth noting if only because of a widespread assumption that black churches are peculiarly neighborhood institutions.

Nearly all congregations have a higher proportion of women members than men, but this is especially true of black churches. In white congregations, on average, 60 percent of the members are women. In black congregations, 70 percent are women. While a greater proportion of black households are headed by women, men control more wealth, a fact that has potentially adverse implications for the financial health of black churches. There are

“For historical reasons, black pastors occupy a position of community and political authority that white pastors no longer do.”

implications as well for efforts to involve congregations in mentoring at-risk youth, the majority of whom are males. Older women predominate in black churches, which young black males by and large do not attend.

Though males are under-represented, African-Americans overall report a higher degree of church attendance than do whites. They are more likely to attend a Fundamentalist, Evangelical, or Pentecostal congregation. Further, the role of religion is distinctive in the black community.

“For historical reasons, black pastors occupy a position of community and political authority that white pastors no longer do,” noted Art Farnsley, director of research at The Polis Center. “The black church was once the only institution in which African-Americans had autonomy and control. It still matters in Indianapolis what certain black ministers think about social issues. White ministers who speak out are often seen as mixing religion and politics in some unhealthy way.”

One way this difference is apparent is in congregations that participate in government-sponsored social welfare programs. “While only a small percentage of all congregations, black or white, are involved in these programs, the preponderance of participating congregations are African-American,” said Farnsley. “This could indicate different social attitudes toward the government’s role and perhaps even toward the separation of church and state.”

Despite racial differences, integration is a priority for some Indianapolis congregations. According to John Fuller, pastor of New Paradigm Christian Church in Broad Ripple, “Having an integrated congregation is one of our fundamental founding principles. Our congregation is roughly one-third white, one-third black, and one-third mixed families. Children of interracial families can come here and not feel different. We’re a support group for interracial families, just by being who we are.”

Fr. Paul Kotter, pastor of St. Monica’s Catholic Church in Washington Township attributed at least some of his congregation’s diversity to the parish system. “We serve all Catholics in the area.” He added that the parish has a reputation of accepting those from different back-grounds and perspectives. “We’re especially attracting a lot of young families,” said Fr. Paul. “Twenty-five percent of our new members are from groups other than white: black, Hispanic, Asian. We aren’t perfect, but we are more integrated than most, when compared to churches around us.” *Continued p.8*



The interfaith Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis conducts prayer services at sites where murders have occurred.

RACE AND RELIGION RESOURCES

The Indianapolis Center for Congregations provides consulting, educational programs, publications, and other services to any congregation in the greater Indianapolis area. Contact: Indianapolis Center for Congregations, 950 North Meridian Street, Suite 950, Indianapolis, IN 46204. Telephone: (317) 237-7799.

The Indiana Interfaith Leadership Council on Racial Reconciliation provides education, development, and information resources about race relations for religious leaders and organizes the annual Celebration of Unity in January. Contact: Lamont Hulse, The Polis Center at IUPUI, 1200 Waterway Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Telephone: (317) 274-2458.

Finding Common Ground Initiative on Race Relations in Indianapolis works to train community trustees, conduct community research and assessment, and improve race relations in Indianapolis. Contact: Lamont Hulse, The Polis Center at IUPUI, 1200 Waterway Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Telephone: (317) 274-2458.

Celebration of Hope sponsors a citywide worship service, and programming to promote racial reconciliation. Contact: Bishop T. Garrott Benjamin, Light of the World Christian Church, 5640 E. 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46218. Telephone: (317) 547-2273. The Rev. William Enright, Second Presbyterian Church, 7700 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46260. Telephone: (317) 253-6461.

SUGGESTED READING

Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993.

Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations*. Washington DC: Alban Institute, 1997.

Susan Juster and Lisa MacFarlane, editors, *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter With Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

PENTECOSTALISM and RACE

The modern Pentecostal movement grew out of an interracial congregation founded in 1906 in Los Angeles. There, an African-American preacher named William Joseph Seymour launched the Azusa Street Revival, which ran continuously for three years and drew followers of every race from all over the country. Observers of the Azusa Street phenomenon were astonished to see an interracial congregation worshipping together under the leadership of a black pastor. A contemporary newspaper account decried the “disgraceful intermingling of the races,” and this hostile reaction would continue to greet Pentecostalism as it spread across America. Certainly this was true in Indianapolis, which soon became a major center of the Pentecostal movement.

Pentecostal services, featuring emotional singing, dancing, shouting, tears, transports of ecstasy, and speaking in tongues, combined the worship styles of African-Americans and Appalachian whites with aspects of the Holiness camp meetings (which had attracted both races) of the

late 19th Century. The similarity of these traditions in style and content, and the personally transforming nature of the Pentecostal experience, allowed participants to cross the racial boundaries that divided the outside world – at least initially.

According to David Bundy, associate professor of church history at Christian Theological Seminary, some Pentecostal churches became segregated “because they faced enormous pressures from outside.

“People were stoned as they walked to church in racially-mixed groups. Pentecostal churches in Indianapolis were picketed by the Klan. There were outbreaks of violence at 11th and South streets, in Fountain Square, and elsewhere in the city. The Pentecostals caused riots just by existing.” Among other offenses, Pentecostals welcomed women into the pulpits, as well as pastors without regard to color.

The reaction was even fiercer in the South, where churches were burned and Pentecostal leaders were jailed for violating the color line.

“Interracial marriages almost split the church in Indianapolis,” said Bundy. “Congregations feared repercussions from this especially.” He noted cases “involving some prominent people in the city” of white women who accepted baptism from black clergy being divorced by their husbands.

Despite opposition, Hoosiers played a major role in Pentecostalism from the movement’s early days. The leaders of the Assemblies of God in its first decades were all from Indianapolis. The Church of God Anderson was founded in Indianapolis. The Church of God Cleveland Tennessee, despite its name, was founded in Westfield, Indiana. Both Church of God denominations, Bundy said, are integrated.

The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, a million member, predominately black denomination has been headquartered in Indianapolis since 1918. According to Bundy, the denomination’s Christ Temple Apostolic congregation on Fall Creek Parkway was for decades “the only genuinely interracial church in the city.”

Indianapolis also played host to one of Pentecostalism’s more notorious congregations. The interracial People’s Temple was founded in Indianapolis by Jim Jones, before moving on to San Francisco, and ultimately to its fate in the jungles of Guyana.

In less than a century Pentecostalism has grown to attract millions of followers worldwide. “Today we have to think of Pentecostalism as a fourth major branch of



Pentecostal services feature emotional singing and praise.

Christianity,” declared Bundy, “together with Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.” Pentecostalism is more loosely defined than the traditional branches, and continues to evolve. He noted that Independent Pentecostalism – including Vineyard and New Paradigm churches – comes out of the healing movement that started in the 1940s in Jeffersonville, Indiana. The healing movement was racially integrated, as are its successors. “New Paradigm churches are finding ways to get past the boundaries of the denominations – which stand against the flow of American culture,” he said.

As the movement has grown in strength and the country has become more tolerant, many Pentecostal churches, including congregations in Indianapolis, are moving to reclaim their heritage of racial inclusion. “Folks drawn from the lower classes, labor, women’s issues, and race are intimately related in the tradition from the beginning,” Bundy concluded. “In Pentecostalism, it is creedal to believe that they are breaking down barriers of race, gender, and class.”



A baptism at Calvary Temple Assembly of God.

LEADING A CONGREGATION

of a Different Race

The vast majority of pastors in Indianapolis, as elsewhere, are the same race as their congregations. But there are a few exceptions.

"When people find out that I'm the pastor of this all-black church, I get looks," said the Rev. Don Claffey of St. Mark AME Zion Church in Fountain Square.

What about racial differences in worship styles, preaching, and music?

"My congregation accepts me for who I am," he said. "I don't look at them as African-American, and they don't look at me as white. We view each other as children of God. I emphasize that. If you start looking at color, you are going to get into trouble."

Rev. Phil Tom of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, who is Asian, leads a congregation that is 99 percent black. He said his work offers a feeling of solidarity among two different groups of color.

"There is a challenge, though," he said, "because I can't ever totally connect with the unique experience of my members. We can understand racism and stereotypes because we both experience them, but we can never walk in each others' shoes."

It is not known for certain how many pastors of one race serve congregations of another, but it is not a common occurrence, according to Art Farnsley, director of research at The Polis Center.

"Congregations that have such an arrangement obviously don't see race as an issue or have somehow moved past it," Farnsley said. "But race continues to be an issue for many congregations even if people think or say that it should not be. When congregations call their own pastors, they may not have to deal with the question directly because it simply never comes up. But in traditions where bishops assign pastors, race can be a more conscious consideration."

Rev. Sharyn Landry Cheek is pastor of Metro Church, which has an integrated congregation. Cheek, who is white, faced flight by some members in 1993 when her husband, Rev. Jerry Landry, passed away. She was left to head the church, which at the time had 700 members, equally divided among blacks and whites.

"People left for a lot of reasons, one of which was that my husband had a very strong personality. There also was an issue with the white men, who had trouble with me being a

female pastor," she said. "I'm not saying that blacks didn't leave, but I had stronger support from the black families."

Today, Cheek's 125-member congregation is 80 percent black and 20 percent white. Race, she said, does not enter into her ministry. "I believe the word of God is the same for all of us. We all are people."

Arthurine Litiskas, a member of Metro Church since 1980, agreed. "When I first started coming here, this church was predominately white. Now that it is predominately black, it doesn't make a difference to me. We just look at Pastor Cheek as our pastor."

Rev. Tom of Immanuel Presbyterian offered these thoughts on segregation in congregations. "We have to put up with racism in our everyday lives, in the workplace and in some of our relationships. Why should we have to put up with this in the church?"

"It's a choice among people of color to worship with their own, especially when they are few in number in a big denomination like the Presbyterians. There is a great burden of expectation placed on people of color when they join a majority white church. The question for them is whether to play by the majority rule. They are tired of playing by that rule and tired of talking about it."

Different worship styles can be an issue when the pastor and congregation are of different races.

"I'm not a shouter," Tom said. "That's not my experience

so I don't try to do it. I do try to listen and learn from my members so that I make their worship experience meaningful."

Cheek's congregation employs a variety of worship styles, from black gospel music to up-tempo tunes to traditional hymns. "We do all kinds of music. It's just worship to me. We dance. We move. We clap our hands. This type of worship has always been a part of us."



Rev. Sharyn Landry Cheek leads a discussion group at Metro Church.

Faye Andrews, a Metro Church member for eleven years, enjoys the flexibility of attending a mixed congregation. "You learn to respect the differences in one other. We worship as we feel. If you're black and you want to be real loud, you're at liberty to do so as long as you praise the Lord," she said. "Or, if you want to be on the reserved side like some of the whites and sit quiet with your hands crossed, you're free to do that. Nobody bothers you."

Claffey also believes there are opportunities in leading a congregation of a different race. "I see that people can get along and work together regardless of the color of their skin. I refuse to make race an issue. When you come here, no matter what color you are, the members will put their arms around you."



Rev. Don Claffey, pastor of St. Mark AME Zion Church.

FRESH CURRENTS

Celebration of Hope: Bridging the Racial Divide

In 1993, the Rev. Bill Enright of Second Presbyterian Church and Bishop T. Garrott Benjamin of Light of the World Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) decided their churches needed to be involved in dialogue about race. The result was Celebration of Hope, an annual citywide worship service for racial reconciliation.

"It began for me on a personal level," Enright recalls. "I had been in Indianapolis for almost 10 years, and realized that I didn't know any African-American pastors."

Celebration of Hope blends white and black Christian traditions of worship and music. Several hundred volunteers from participating congregations work to pull off the annual combined service; tasks include rehearsing for the massive choir, planning for childcare, and training ushers.

Organizers now offer year-round programs, such as pulpit exchanges where pastors of different races preach in each other's pulpits. They sponsor monthly focus groups to discuss racial issues, and prayer groups.

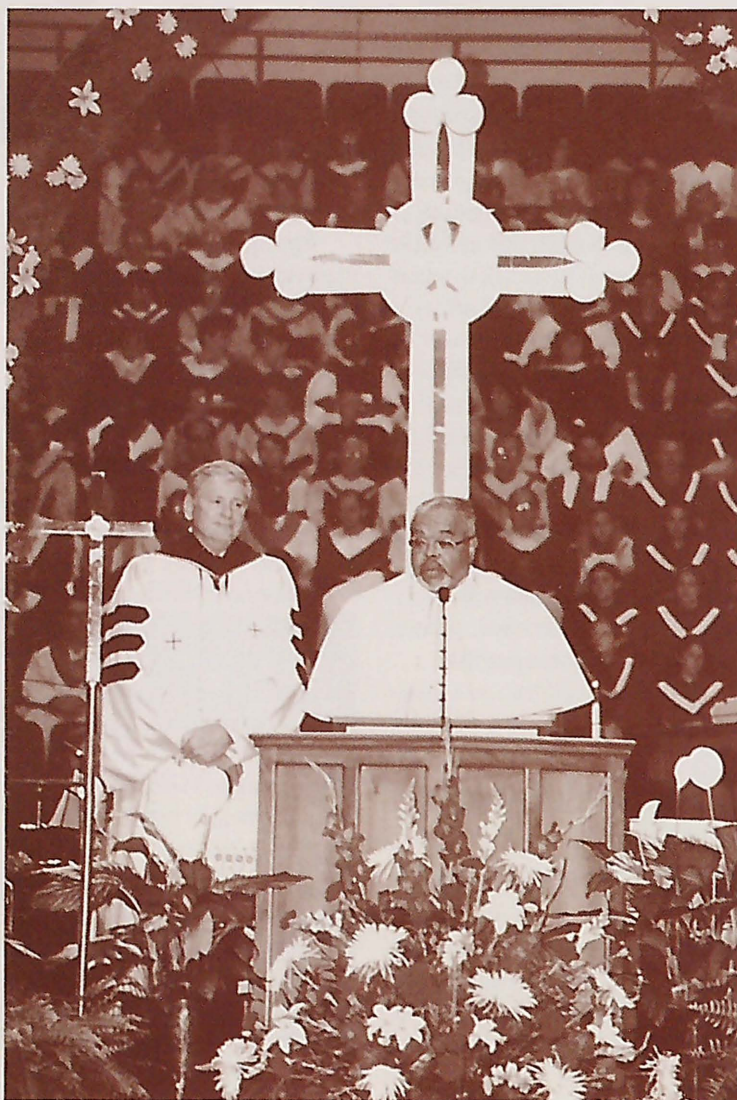
The Rev. Kent Millard, pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church, has been involved from the beginning. "We saw this as an opportunity to live out our command from Christ to live as brothers and sisters," he said. "It's exciting to break down barriers of race and denomination."

This year, more than 40 congregations came together for the annual celebration in April. A second event is planned for September.

"Fresh Currents" offers case studies of emerging developments in Indianapolis congregations and neighborhoods.

Rev. William Enright and Bishop T. Garrott Benjamin, cofounders of Celebration of Hope.

(courtesy of Light of the World Christian Church)



"One has to break down the barriers of historical prejudices."

While the event is open to all congregations in the city, not everyone is participating. "We haven't arrived on all fronts," Enright acknowledges. "We have not been able to get many African-American congregations on board."

Currently, five African-American congregations participate in the event. Robinson Community AME Church is one of them.

"It's an excellent idea in terms of trying to find a way to reconcile the races," said the Rev. Anne Henning Byfield, pastor. "It's not a perfect model, but if we are going to respect each other across denominational and racial lines, Celebration of Hope keeps people at the table talking regardless of beliefs, doctrine, and practices."

Why aren't more African-American congregations participating?

"Money has a major impact," Byfield said. "Many white churches budget, and are not wholly dependent on the Sunday morning offering the way black churches are. The first time we participated, we were down to about 70 percent of our normal offering. Now we have made a commitment that racial reconciliation is more important than finances. We plan for it."

Byfield said that for African-American congregations there is also a question of trust. "One has to break down the barriers of historical prejudices," she said. "If we are going to say that this is important to us as a people, then what we think about white folks or a particular denomination is irrelevant."

Immanuel Presbyterian Church, a black eastside congregation, took part in the first service in 1993, but members voted not to participate again, according to Pastor Phil Tom. "It was a good effort the first year. The church's other pastor and I wanted to take part and the congregation supported us. But the second year, members said the event was centered around a couple of people and congregations. They didn't feel comfortable with that." Members also questioned whether the planned events would have much effect. "We didn't see any strides being made to address the important community issues of justice, desegregation of schools, and housing," Tom said.



Kevin Armstrong, senior public teacher at The Polis Center, believes the event must change to attract more participants. "As long as Celebration of Hope is regarded as a 'Sunday morning event,' then liturgical congregations that must keep open their doors on Sunday, and congregations that rely heavily on Sunday morning offerings to sustain their operations are not likely to participate," Armstrong said.

"Other congregations are reluctant to participate when they feel the event is dominated by a few large congregations, or that the event does not address systemic change in race relations. All of these concerns, I think, have prompted organizers to ask how Celebration of Hope can become a movement rather than an occasion."

The greatest benefit of Celebration of Hope, Enright says, is that "People are sitting down and talking. Friendships are created. You get into some interesting cultural differences when these exchanges occur. Dealing with them is a challenge, but they are not insurmountable."

Byfield sees promise in Celebration of Hope's ability to address issues of racial barriers in the city. "It suggests strongly the prospect that we're going to reach the point of blending. We will be able to say that at least in Indianapolis, the religious community played a significant role in making this happen."

Indiana Gov. Frank O'Bannon, seated with Mrs. Benjamin, attends the annual Celebration of Hope service. (courtesy of Light of the World Christian Church)

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"Reaching out to everyone should be the job of the church," asserted Adrienne Holmes, associate pastor of Victory Memorial United Methodist Church in Fountain Square. She noted that pastor Jim Mulholland, who is white (and as it happens, a Baptist), "was intentional about bringing me into the church." Holmes is African-American. Victory Memorial employs a mix of worship styles and music to serve its racially-mixed congregation. "Churches are not integrated because people are not making a conscious effort," Holmes said. "During the week we have to deal with all kinds of people. When we go to church, it's easy to say, I don't want to make accommodations. To do racial reconciliation, you have to be intentional."

John Wimmer, director of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, believes that difficult issues of reconciling cultural and faith traditions stand in the way more than a lack of desire to change. "Many congregations are worried about racial separation, but for most it is not the highest priority issue."

"I believe the broader public sees racism as primarily a cultural issue that religion should be addressing in some way," said Farnsley. "I don't think the public is calling for churches to be integrated – but they are asking churches to influence people's attitudes and to stand for a value and an ideal that is widely shared."



Tabernacle Presbyterian's recreation programs serve members and neighborhood people alike.

RELIGION COMMUNITY

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