As a community, Indianapolis has stood, and still stands, for the best things in life, for the broad culture that includes all the elements of good education, religion, law, patriotism, self-sacrifice, helpfulness for the poor and unfortunate, and the abiding idea of leaving the world better than they found it. This is the character of Indianapolis. Let our slogan for the future be “a bigger city if God wills, but always and under all circumstances a better city.”

— speech at Centennial Celebration, June 5, 1920

In the summer of 1915, the leaders of the Indianapolis Church Federation—representing mainline Protestants throughout the city—published an “open letter” to the mayor in the Indianapolis News. Describing the city as “wide-open,” they complained in dramatic fashion that “the saloons are generally permitted to remain open at will. The unlawful winerooms, which are veritable death traps to scores of young boys and girls, continue their nefarious business unmolested.” Most disturbing, “the houses of prostitution and assignation, with few exceptions, have been undisturbed, though they are outlawed in this city and state.” The leaders of the Church Federation knew of what they spoke, for they had literally taken to the streets in their investigation of the city’s seamier side.

Seventy-five years later, on an August day in 1990, a group of African American clergy gathered at the front steps of the city’s central police station, where together with laymen and laywomen they protested police vio-
lence against African Americans. Established in the 1960s at a time of rapid social and political change, Concerned Clergy has for the past four decades provided a voice for African Americans in the public square. And in their quest to be heard, the clergy have frequently taken their religion to the streets.

Although these episodes both represent expressions of religion in Indianapolis’s public life, they would seem to have little else in common. In 1915 the city’s most prominent white Protestant laymen and clergy, men who wielded heavy political, economic, and social clout, led the Church Federation. By contrast, in 1990 the Concerned Clergy was led by African American ministers who held considerable moral authority within their own communities but who exerted much less influence on the wider public than the Church Federation leaders had. Even more revealing, the Church Federation used its power to bring city vices to the attention of public authorities; the Concerned Clergy’s object of protest was public authority itself. Despite these differences, both groups shared one important element: both claimed the city, the entire city, as their responsibility. The Church Federation never questioned that it was their right and responsibility to shape the public order, and much like their Puritan forefathers they envisioned the city as a single corporate body over which they held moral guardianship. Although Concerned Clergy did not assume that theirs was the only or even the most authoritative voice in the public square, its members also believed that the civic life of the city was a domain over which they should wield moral authority, and like the Church Federation leaders, they demanded that civic leadership listen to them.

In recent years there has been extensive discussion of the actual and appropriate roles of religion in public life, but the importance of moral civic leadership is rarely explored. Instead, headlines are given to controversial issues such as prayer in the public schools, Christmas crèches on public property, the government’s role concerning religiously freighted issues like abortion, and most recently, the rightful place of “faith-based initiatives” in providing social services and amelioration. For most people, conceptions of religion and civic life include only those attempts to infuse religious practices and symbols into public life, or to use the power of the state to promote a particular religious viewpoint or practice. But social justice campaigns such as the 1960s civil rights movement were also expressions of religion in the public arena. When we imagine the “public presence” of religion more broadly to include, among other things, efforts to “help shape the public morality on the basis of which public decisions about policy are made,” we find that the effect of religion on civic life is not only diverse but that it varies across the country, from region to region and from city to city.

Over the twentieth century, religion in Indianapolis has had much to say about the city’s civic life, as is true in most American cities. But those from the old establishment—white, liberal mainline Protestants—have had very
different things to say than those from the peripheral concentrations of religious and civic power, especially Catholics, Jews, and black Protestants. To understand religion’s role in our public lives, we must consider the relationship between those at the core of cultural and social power, those on the periphery, and the changing nature of their relative positions. This tension between core and periphery is yet another important facet of the competing inward and outward forces that have shaped the city.

Three central issues highlight this changing relationship: public religious celebration; religion and the delivery of educational and social services; and the influence of religion on public policy and social movements. These issues are neither merely local nor are they specific to particular geographical spaces. They extend across the entire city, beyond congregational walls and parish boundaries. But in doing so they take on different meanings and shadings. It is precisely because these issues cross so many boundaries that they provide a useful window onto the ever-evolving public role of religion. Only when we understand religion’s role in defining the city at this broadest level, when we see how religion’s ability to center the city has changed, can we tunnel deeper inside to understand how religion operates within the city’s myriad subcultures, communities, neighborhoods, and institutions.

THE ALL-AMERICAN CITY

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, native-born white Protestants discussed with great concern the changes occurring in the nation’s cities. Beginning in the 1880s, large numbers of eastern European Jews and Catholics migrated to the United States, with most settling in urban areas. For example, in Chicago and Detroit, two of the nation’s largest cities, Jews and Catholics together made up numerical majorities not long after the turn of the century. Leading religious writers such as Josiah Strong and Samuel Loomis debated amongst themselves whether these new immigrants could become fully American while still retaining their own faiths. Similar questions were discussed also among the general population, with many coming to the conclusion that the only way to become a good American was to embrace some form of Protestantism.

Native-born Protestants also expressed concern about other significant changes taking place in urban America. Industrial strikes were becoming commonplace in American cities as workers who were forced to work twelve to sixteen hours a day for low wages challenged the inequalities of the marketplace. New and suspect forms of leisure were also becoming popular, including vaudeville, theater, Sunday sports, and taverns. Together with the growing industrial unrest, they provided a stark contrast to the vision of the small, well-ordered town for which many urban Protestant leaders longed. One historian has described this as a time when the notion of the city as a
holbed of “disorder” became the lens through which Americans viewed the new urbanism. This was especially true of the nation’s Protestant clergy, who expressed anguish over their inability to control these momentous changes and lamented what they perceived as their declining religious authority.

The history of Indianapolis in the early twentieth century is different from those of the nation’s largest cities. In this city—the “Crossroads of America”—immigrants constituted less than 10 percent of the population, so pluralism did not seem as pressing a problem here. Native-born Protestants celebrated the fact that Indianapolis was a “100 percent American town,” where “there is almost a total absence of the foreign floating element.” Given such conditions, one might expect that fears of urban disorder would be muted and questions concerning Americanization and good citizenship irrelevant. In fact, the opposite was true. Believing their city’s strongest virtue to be its true “Americanism,” city leaders took seriously their responsibility to define the parameters of proper citizenship and to enforce those boundaries vigilantly. The boundaries applied not only to the few immigrants who found their way to Indianapolis, but also to all of the city’s native-born residents. In 1916, the superintendent of the city’s largest denomination, the Methodists, said, “The opportunity is at hand to grip this city religiously as it has never been gripped before.” But even then, Protestant leaders could feel control of the city slipping from their grasp.

In their quest to keep hold of the city’s civic identity, the clergy focused considerable attention on Sunday closings. In 1905 they actively supported the passage of a new Sunday closing law that would explicitly forbid the new forms of entertainment that were becoming popular in the city. In particular, they targeted vaudeville and theater productions as well as Sunday baseball games. Anyone found participating in such activities on Sunday would be subject to a five-dollar fine. This new closing law built on the state’s earlier Sunday closing law, which dated from the early nineteenth century and had forbade, “hunting, fishing, quarreling,” and any work defined as “common labor.”

Protestant clergy were confident that they had a right and responsibility to act as guardians of the city’s secular life, but others in the city begged to differ. Fans of Indianapolis’s minor league baseball team, the Indians, clearly liked Sunday baseball, and attendance at the games regularly numbered in the thousands. Supporters of Sunday baseball games hoped to evade the 1905 law by passing the Brolley bill, which legalized Sunday baseball. In addition to fighting the clergy on the legal front, supporters of Sunday baseball also waged a rhetorical war, making the argument that baseball led to the development of good personal character. Supporters of Sunday theater productions also joined the war of words, claiming that “it is entirely consistent from a religious viewpoint for a man to attend church in the morning and attend a decent theater in the afternoon.” Not persuaded
by such arguments, the city’s ministers responded by attempting to pass a more expansive Sunday closing law that would have outlawed all forms of recreational activity on Sunday. They failed at this last attempt, making clear that their hold on the city was weaker than they had assumed. But even the attempt at such an initiative demonstrated that they viewed themselves as guardians not only of their parishioners but of the city as a whole. Moreover, it signaled that for them, secularization was not a theory but a threat.

Reflecting on their waning influence, the clergy warned that the city was risking a “distinct let down in the moral tone for which Indianapolis has a reputation.” It was this fear about the “moral tone” of Indianapolis and a belief that the city should represent the “best” that America could offer that led the men who had been active in the Sunday closing campaigns to establish the Indianapolis Church Federation (ICF). Across the nation, Protestant clergy and laymen began establishing such federations through which they could articulate a single voice as they attempted to control the changes occurring in their cities. Indianapolis was no different. More than one hundred men representing forty of the city’s white mainline Protestant churches attended the Federation’s first meeting held at the YMCA on the evening of June 7, 1912. From the very beginning the concerns that these clergy and laymen held about the health of the city’s public life dominated the Federation’s activities. And it was probably because of these concerns that the Federation’s members decided to elect Vinson Carter, a former judge in the Marion County Superior Court, as their first president. Carter’s experiences in the city’s judicial system had given him a close look at Indianapolis’s vices and virtues. How best to fight the vices and promote the virtues became the Federation’s most popular undertaking, through its Public Morals Committee.

The beginning of the twentieth century was a time when Indianapolis’s elite self-consciously attempted to bring greater order to the city by championing inward, centralizing tendencies in the face of constant outward pressure. In fact, the Church Federation was formed the same year that the city’s economic elite, many of whom were involved in the Federation, joined together to reorganize the existing Chamber of Commerce. Businessmen seeking to create a climate conducive to business growth believed that they needed to bring the major economic players in the city together. These businessmen sought also to systematize and centralize their charitable work through the Community Chest, the precursor to the city’s United Way charities, in 1920. Rather than have each of the city’s charitable organizations run its own fund-raising drives, the Community Chest would hold one grand drive and then disburse the funds to the city’s charities.

Although the Church Federation was a religious organization, the Chamber of Commerce an economic one, and the Community Chest a charitable one, these three groups shared much in common. Many of the same men sat on the boards of all three and none of these private organizations was
subject to the democratic mandates of the formal political system. In fact, the city’s elite were drawn to these private organizations because it had become more difficult to direct an increasingly diverse society through public channels. They realized that they could best maintain their civic influence by centralizing their efforts in private associations that could speak more powerfully than individuals acting alone or small associations representing only a small number of citizens. The city’s Protestant elite was engaged in a process of realignment, with various voluntary groups drawing on modern bureaucratic forms both to shape and to express their collective interests. Together these collective interests created the vision of the city as a singular, unified place, precisely the vision that would reappear with the introduction of Unigov.

A speech to the city’s Centennial Celebration in 1920 summed up the vision:

As a community, Indianapolis has stood for the best things in life, for the broad culture that includes all the elements of good education, religion, law, patriotism, self-sacrifice, hopefulness for the poor and unfortunate, and the abiding idea of leaving the world better than they found it. This is the character of Indianapolis. Let our slogan for the future be “a bigger city if God wills it, but always and under all circumstances a better city.”

Religious guardianship of that better city fell to the Church Federation. Concern about what its leaders viewed as secular threats to the city’s civic soul occupied the Federation in its early years, especially the Public Morals Committee, which focused on passing new legislation as well as monitoring legislation already on the books. The particular concerns were with gambling, prostitution, and the liquor trade. Church Federation leaders conducted what they referred to as monthly vice campaigns in which they used laymen and “detectives” to go undercover to see for themselves the city’s “growing immorality.” During one such campaign, the Church Federation visited nine well-known “winerooms.” Disguised as patrons, the men described how they saw liquor being sold illegally and men and women of questionable character fraternizing in inappropriate ways. Especially disturbing was the large number of girls “coming and going alone,” with its intimation of prostitution.12

In addition to speaking to the police about its discoveries, the Federation published the names and addresses of the winerooms in the local papers. By criticizing the political authorities for failing to enforce existing laws, the Church Federation had a strong justification for proclaiming itself as the only real force in the city standing up for “civic righteousness.”13 The Federation members’ diligence in engaging and shaping Indianapolis’s larger secular culture demonstrates clearly that they saw themselves as the city’s guardians.

At a time when many Protestant leaders believed that Protestantism was
America’s driving moral force, no aspect of urban life escaped their attention. Across the nation, Protestant leaders expressed strong concern about the Catholics and Jews emigrating from southern and eastern Europe. Even though few immigrants migrated to Indianapolis, the native-born residents expressed concern about the supposed threat these groups posed to the larger body politic in Indianapolis, both literally and figuratively. Historian Ruth Crocker has described how the native-born men and women who ran Foreign House, a social settlement house located on the city’s southwest side, took it upon themselves to “Americanize” these new immigrants. They provided civic and English classes to the immigrant men with the hope that these newest of the city’s residents would not be attracted to the radical political messages that often appealed to immigrants who worked long hours for incredibly low wages. At the House’s mothers’ clubs, immigrant women were discouraged from cooking their traditional meals and instead taught how to make “American pies.” Children who attended the vacation bible school learned that Protestantism was the only true faith. Finally, Foreign House’s public health clinic’s primary role was not to attend to the health needs of individual immigrants but rather to protect the city’s native-born residents from the diseases immigrants were assumed to harbor.∞∂

The native-born Protestant men and women running Foreign House were obviously concerned with inculcating new immigrants with the “proper” values of good American citizenship. However, concerns about Americanism and good citizenship were not limited to those who worked with foreigners; they extended to those who provided social services to native-born poor Americans. The more affluent sought to shape the citizenship of the less affluent. This led the congregation at Fletcher Place Church to establish Fletcher Place Community Center and the congregation at Second Presbyterian to establish Mayer Neighborhood House. In both cases, the native-born poor whites who received services learned that Protestantism and good citizenship went hand in hand. This was true not only for the children who attended bible schools or who played in the gymnasiums, but also for the adults who attended the health clinics or received emergency aid.

Indianapolis did not have many immigrants to “Americanize.” However, even a brief glance at Fletcher Place and Mayer demonstrates that the city’s elite took good citizenship seriously and made sure that the city’s residents accepted its parameters. Indianapolis’s Protestant establishment believed that it was precisely because most of their city’s residents were native-born that their city could embody the traits of true Americanism. And they never questioned that Protestantism provided the moral fiber upon which that American identity rested.

The belief that some form of Protestant Christianity was central to the larger task of making good citizens also had an effect on the city’s public school system. As early as the 1880s, students in the Indianapolis public schools participated in daily recitation of Bible verses. However, a proposal
in 1913 to teach the Bible in both history and literature classes sparked a round of heated debates as the city’s growing Catholic and Jewish communities successfully challenged the curriculum as an affront to their own religious traditions. When the Church Federation revisited the question of religious instruction in public schools in 1925, it creatively entitled the new course “Americanization and Education.”

By linking Bible education to the Americanization of immigrants, the city’s leaders hoped to block opposition and appeal to the patriotic and religious concerns of its majority population. Even more important, the course’s title suggests a shift in the strategy of Indianapolis’s religious leaders. They could exert greater influence on the city generally, and education specifically, if they focused less on what it meant to be a good Methodist, Baptist, or even Protestant and more on what it meant to be a good American. By claiming guardianship over the body politic, the city’s Protestant leaders drew on the moral authority they held as religious spokesmen, but redefined their religious concerns as civic concerns. By blurring the line between religion and citizenship, the Church Federation aided the development of a civic equivalent to the nation’s “civil religion,” where religion was a patriotic duty and patriotism was expressed through one’s religious devotion.

Enter the KKK

The belief that Protestantism and Americanism represented two sides of the same coin led some to evangelize the city’s non-Protestants or to encourage greater religiosity among their own. But it also paved the way for hardliners to attempt to exclude non-Protestants altogether. The Ku Klux Klan, which thrived in Indianapolis during the 1920s, gained control of most of the city’s important political offices and institutions, including the board of school commissioners, the city council, and even the mayor’s office. The rise of the Klan at this time has generally been attributed not only to racism, but also to the fears of native-born whites about the large influx of Catholic and Jewish immigrants into America’s cities. Exactly why Indiana, the state with the highest Klan membership, became so hospitable a breeding ground has proved a conundrum of sorts. Indiana as a state and Indianapolis as a city had far fewer immigrants, and far fewer Catholic and Jews, than most other northern states and cities. But if one looks both at what the Klan opposed as well as what it supported, its broad appeal in Indiana becomes clear.

Klan members believed they were fighting for the future of a Christian America, a nation where one could not be fully American without embracing some brand of Protestantism. In this “ideal” Catholics and Jews would not be part of the larger body politic. This idea appealed to those Indianapolis residents who had little or no contact with immigrants and wanted to
keep it that way. Because the Klan was a strong supporter of vice reform and prohibition, it also appealed to those men and women who believed that America in general, and urban America in specific, needed to be morally “pure.”

In a city that prided itself on being all-American, the Klan proved especially appealing. Somewhere between 27 and 40 percent of all native-born white men officially joined the Klan, including many of the city’s clergy. Howard Cadle, who had built an 11,500-seat auditorium called Cadle Tabernacle, was an especially strong supporter, and his Tabernacle had a reputation for being a hotbed of KKK activity. The city’s congregations also expressed their support. For example, cross burnings were a frequent occurrence at Brightwood Congregational and served as a signal to all who passed by the church’s lawn that the KKK was welcome there. In fact, a church’s association with the Klan could prove very appealing to potential congre-
gants. For example, less than six months after Reverend Wilhelm, a known Klan supporter, joined Calvary Baptist Church, the church’s membership rose from 166 to 260. That this particular congregation’s sympathies for the Klan were common knowledge in the larger community was made clear when more than 2,500 people showed up at the church to witness the “unveiling” of the “illuminated cross.” No doubt many of these same people participated in the Klan’s parades, including one that took place in May of 1924 when more than 7,000 gathered at the Indiana State Fairgrounds and marched through the city’s black neighborhoods before finally ending downtown.

SACRED SPACES AND PUBLIC PLACES

Of course, the Protestant establishment housed diversity of its own. Some gravitated to the message of hatred generated by the KKK, and others embraced a more tolerant Americanism, embodied in the Church Federation, that made room for “Americanized” immigrants. In addition to confronting the forces that they feared, the Protestant community also attempted to fortify the civic-sacred connection by claiming the city’s public spaces for their religious celebrations.

Public celebrations like the Easter sunrise services on the Circle contain important clues about the societies that sponsor them. Through these public performances, a community celebrates its “common social identity,” both to affirm the ties that bind its members and to publicize these ties to the larger community. Equally significant, public performances provide an opportunity for a people to express non-verbally “look, this is how things should be, this is the proper, ideal pattern of social life.”

The sunrise Easter services held at the Circle for nearly forty years reveal much about Indianapolis’s mainline Protestant community. The decision to celebrate Easter Sunday, the most holy of all Christian holidays, in such a grand public fashion was hardly random. The fact that the mainline Protestant community chose the Circle as the site for this celebration makes clear its civic importance. This was a very public announcement of the city’s civil religion, and that religion was grounded in Protestantism.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Circle has been the most prominent of all public spaces in the city since the first settlers arrived in the city in the early nineteenth century. Because the Circle was literally the center of the city, public celebrations occurring there were identified with the city as a whole rather than with just a neighborhood. Events that took place on the Circle thus received widespread attention and gained a kind of civic legitimacy that was unequaled. And at a time when making use of public space was in effect making a kind of claim on the civic body itself, claiming the Circle for the Easter celebration was the grandest of all claims. The Protestant
establishment’s use of Monument Circle not only transformed religious beliefs and rituals into civic ones, it sacralized the Circle itself. The Circle and the war memorials that eventually moved up Meridian Street then over into Whitewater Park became important parts of the city’s emerging civil religion, though the explicit connection to Protestantism would gradually decline, leaving the patriotic and nationalist elements to stand for themselves.

Of course, not all of Indianapolis’s public life centered on the Circle and its evident symbolism. Mainline Protestants also took to the side streets and byways in their attempts to bring religion into the city. One of the first proposals considered by the Church Federation was an open-air evangelism campaign. This was not surprising since open-air revivals had long been an important part of the city’s life. In 1905 the German Methodist Church set up a revival tent at the corner of New York and Arsenal and invited people passing by to come in to participate. Thus, when the Federation set up a revival tent across the street from city hall and encouraged clergy to speak out on urban woes, there was little doubt about the religious claim on Indianapolis’s public space.≤∞

Catholics and Jews on the Periphery

Even as the Protestant establishment worked diligently to combine Protestantism and Americanism, Catholics and Jews struggled both to avoid Protestant evangelical efforts and to prove the compatibility of their own faiths with larger American ideals. The city’s smaller missions, such as the First Baptist Mission, designed to reach eastern European immigrants, and the Methodist Mission, directed at Italians, prompted particularly angry responses from the city’s leading Catholics who described these missionary endeavors as a “Protestant invasion.”≤≤ They strongly resented Protestant evangelistic overtures and rejected the notion that being Protestant was the only way to become fully American. Said the Indiana Catholic and Record,

Everyone who knows anything about Italians knows they are Roman Catholics. . . . If the Methodists are going to spend $15,000 on a new mission, they might well spend it on the alleged Methodists who don’t go to church and who leave Protestant churches notoriously empty. . . . Let our Methodist friends take care of their own. Millions of them who don’t go to church need care.≤≥

Drawing on America’s heritage of freedom of religion, these minority faiths directly confronted the emerging civil religion constructed by those who questioned their presence. When, for example, the cornerstone for St. John’s parish was laid in the summer of 1867, thousands of the city’s residents witnessed the day’s events, which began with a large procession. The city’s Catholics gathered at St. Mary’s and from there they marched to the
city’s other two parishes before ending at the site for St. John’s. The parishioner who led the parade held an American flag in his hand, and others holding flags representing the many countries from which Catholics had emigrated—including Ireland, England, France, Germany, and Spain—followed him. That not only the city’s Catholics observed this parade was clear from the large number who stood on the streets along the parade’s path. A reporter described how the streets were so crowded that people “eagerly struggled for places from which there was the faintest possibility of either seeing or hearing anything.” He concluded that this was “by far the largest crowd ever assembled on a similar occasion in this city.”

The procession makes clear how the minority Catholic community saw its place in the larger Protestant city. Even the decision to host such a grand procession was itself significant, as it demonstrated the Catholics’ belief that they should have equal access to the city’s streets to express their faith. Yet the fact that they knew that many in the community believed that Catholics were not fully American likely affected the decision to have a parishioner bearing an American flag lead the procession. Combining religious and civic loyalties was especially important for new immigrant groups struggling to prove that they too were a part of the larger body politic. When the cornerstone for the Slovenian Catholic Church Holy Trinity was laid on October 21, 1906, the parishioners proudly paraded through the Haughville neighborhood, waving both American and Slovenian flags. Once gathered at the site of the new church, they listened to services given in both English and Slovene. Even before the World Wars, those on the periphery knew that emphasizing the community’s common “American” identity was the surest way to mitigate religious or sectarian differences.

Much like the Catholics who established St. John’s, the members of Holy Trinity believed that they could maintain both their Catholic faith and their ethnic heritages without compromising their identities as Americans. For one day at least, members of St. John’s and Holy Trinity merged their religious, ethnic, and civic identities. In both cases they wanted to make it clear to all that they were no less American than the native-born Protestants who dominated the city. And because the boundaries of the parish extended far into the public streets occupied in their processions and into the civic arena itself, the issue of public space was extremely important to the city’s Catholics. To be Catholic was to claim all that lay within the parish’s boundaries.

The public processions accompanying the founding of churches provided one way in which Catholics carved out space in the public arena, but even more important were the many civic roles Catholics assumed, including the provision of a wide array of social and educational services to “their own.” In a society where Protestant leaders and city officials worked tirelessly, although often unsuccessfully, to infuse the public schools with re-
religious messages, Catholics took seriously the mission of parochial education. Each of the city’s parishes was expected to provide a primary school for its young boys and girls. As a result, schools were an integral part of parish life. It was not unusual that the parish school would be instituted within a short time of the founding of the parish. Even congregational parishes without much money, such as the heavily Slovene Holy Trinity, devoted a portion of its resources to the education of its youth. The *Indiana Catholic and Record* put the matter plainly:

We must have the Catholic high school where the Catholic child will not merely get the culture, refinement, and aesthetic conceptions of the modern paganism known as secular education, but where his moral conception of his relation and duty to his creator and his fellow man will make him a better and more useful citizen and a much happier man.

The desire of the Catholic community to protect the religious heritage of its children, an endeavor which Catholics saw as both religious and patriotic, also pushed the Catholic community to build one of the city’s largest social welfare networks. When Bishop Chartrand established the Catholic Charities Bureau in 1919, it comprised only a home for unwed mothers, a low-cost cafeteria, and emergency aid for the most indigent. By the 1930s, however, the staff of Catholic Charities had grown sixfold and had added important services such as foster care homes for dependent children and probation work for young offenders. Catholics recognized themselves as a minority people that needed to protect their youth from the larger society. But instead of isolating themselves, they often engaged with the larger society on their own terms. For example, in the 1930s Catholic Charities worked out agreements with the public welfare department to send all Catholic children needing care outside of their own homes to Catholic Charities. Catholic leaders even laid claim to public money by arguing that they, as citizens, were entitled to the public dollars filling the state’s coffers.

The large Catholic educational and social services network makes clear that even in those decades when the Protestant community felt confident that its vision of the city should predominate, other groups successfully created their own social and cultural spaces within the city and understood their right to do so in both religious and civic terms. Catholics were in many ways marginalized from the symbolic centers of civic life, but they responded by creating ethnic, cultural and social centers of their own. The strength of their institutions and the coherence of this mix of religious and civic responsibilities would have a profound effect on the whole metropolis as the religious and civic boundaries later began to change. Traditional religious differences remained important in the neighborhoods and smaller, more homogeneous communities; Americanism became the important badge of identity in the wider public, the coin of common citizenship.

Meanwhile, the much smaller Jewish community also worked diligently to
care for its own. Almost as soon as Jews began settling in the city, they began offering charitable services to the less fortunate among them. As early as the 1850s, when the Jewish community numbered fewer than 200 members, Rabbi Judah Wescslen encouraged the city’s Jewish women to establish the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society. It quickly became an integral part of Jewish life. And as the Jewish community grew in the early twentieth century, with eastern European Jews joining the German Jews who had immigrated a half century earlier, efforts to reach out to the new immigrants resulted in the founding of Nathan Morris House, a settlement house directed to Jews, and Shelter House, a home serving the needs of transient Jews. With the rapid expansion of Jewish charitable efforts, the city’s rabbis began to believe that some kind of coordination was needed. In 1905 Rabbi Morris Feurlicht led the effort to create the Jewish Federation, an organization that coordinated the city’s various Jewish benevolent enterprises and centralized their fund raising. Jewish leaders took pride in taking care of
“their own,” and they actively discouraged Jews from seeking support from other public and private sources. For most of the twentieth century, the Jewish Federation was the Jewish community’s most visible public presence.

It would be unfair to suggest that Catholics or Jews were relegated to ethnic ghettos in Indianapolis or that they had no public voice. At the same time he was helping to build an independent Jewish Federation to serve the needs of Jews, Morris Feurlicht was also working with the county’s juvenile justice system and serving as the president of the Children’s Aid Association. He was, in fact, the first Jew appointed to the State Board of Charities and Correction. When Bishop Chartrand founded Cathedral High School in 1918, he was paving the way for increased college attendance and participation in the city’s business community among Catholics. But both groups saw their activities as parallel to, but in many ways separate from, the city’s establishment.
The mainline Protestant community felt confident that its vision of the city was the cultural norm during the early twentieth century. Drawing on both religious and patriotic principles, they claimed that religious people needed to speak on civic issues and that the civic body would be healthy only if it embraced the city’s Protestant roots. Catholics and Jews responded by building their own communities on the city’s margins without paying much attention to the Protestants at the center of public life, and by making occasional but exceptional forays into the civic public. Catholics and Jews drew on both religious and civic principles, arguing that religious freedom was an equally significant part of America’s civic heritage and that they had a right and a responsibility to nurture and protect their religious communities in what was beginning to take shape as a multicentered metropolis.

ASSIMILATION AND REALIGNMENT

Well into the twentieth century, many Protestants questioned whether Catholics or Jews could fully assimilate; they questioned whether these faiths were compatible with American ideals of liberty and freedom. Said a 1908 editorial in the Indianapolis News, “the growth of new religious sects in Indianapolis has been so rapid that the adherents of straight and old-fashioned creeds wonder what will come next.” During World War I, concerns about how best to Americanize immigrants provided the larger context within which notions of American identity and patriotic concern were articulated. But the post–World War II era represented a sea change in this thinking because discussions about religion and citizenship came under the umbrella of a much larger global context, where fears about communism rather than immigrants predominated.

The 1950s have been noted as a decade in which religion thrived, with church attendance reaching an all-time high. Of course, scholars disagree about how and why religion had such appeal. Examining the larger cultural context, where conformity and anti-communism were prized, can help us understand this religious vitality.

One of the more notable developments of post–World War II religion was the rise of ecumenical efforts among Protestant mainline denomination even as the rift between the mainline and evangelicals grew. The story of ecumenical growth is a complex one that cannot be captured by any single narrative. However, an important part of this story can be revealed by looking at the ways in which the connections between religion and citizenship were redefined within the context of a nation joined together by a strong anti-communist spirit.

The new civic ideals that mainline Protestants celebrated allowed them to embark on ambitious efforts to bring religion into the public arena, and none was more successful than the Weekday Religious Education Associa-
tion. Hoping to avoid the problem of the separation of church and state which had plagued earlier efforts to bring religious instruction into the public schools, the sponsors of Indiana’s 1943 Religious Education Act called for “released time” from school, time during which children could go to a local church for religious instruction. The program, which had strong support from the Church Federation and the Lilly Endowment, was quickly noted for being “the greatest interdenominational effort in Indianapolis church history.” Ecumenism appeared to be the answer to finding unity within diversity in the evolving city. This fit not only the religious goals of the Church Federation, but the civic, centering goals of Lilly Endowment.

The number of children enrolled climbed quickly, reaching a total of 13,500 in 1953. Even more revealing, 85 percent of all fourth and fifth graders attended, 53 percent of whom did not attend any other kind of religious services. Twice a week, for sixty minutes each time, the children gathered at a local church for religious instruction.

From the beginning of the program, administrators were frank about their primary concerns with reaching the “unchurched children” and their conception of the program as a “missionary” endeavor. For example, a teaching manual distributed to teachers explained that religious education “is an important instrument of evangelism in reaching thousands of children with the Gospel message who would otherwise have had no Christian instruction.”

Why, in the 1950s, did the mainline churches become so concerned with bringing unchurched children into the fold? According to the director of the program, Dr. F. A. Pfeiderer, weekday religious instruction not only “buil[t] good Christian citizens” but it was the only way “we have of keeping the country from becoming a godless nation.” As anyone familiar with Cold War rhetoric knows, the world’s most feared godless nation was the Soviet Union. Administrators of the program were open about the fact that it was the uncertainty of the larger world that underlay their fears and motivated their actions. Supporters of the weekday religious program believed strongly that the church had a responsibility to provide the children with an “understanding of this confused and changing world.”

The idea that weekday religious instruction promoted good citizenship was accepted by all. And increasingly this “good citizen” was defined less by his or her Protestant affiliation than by his or her commitment to America. This reflected a shift from the early twentieth century when Americanism was viewed through a Protestant lens. The WREA determined the program’s impact by both secular and religious standards, although the secular standards were more important to many. For example, civic leaders commented frequently on the impact the program had had on the city’s delinquency rates and on family stability. Judge Harold N. Field of the Marion County Juvenile Court was only one among many who believed that the weekday program was valuable primarily because it had a “definite effect on the
reduction of the juvenile delinquency rate of the county.”33 Another one of the benefits about which religious education administrators spoke was that the children carried the religious messages back home and strengthened families that otherwise would have had no religious influences. It must be noted, however, that family stability was the goal and religion the means.

Unlike with earlier efforts to bring religion into the public schools, Catholics mounted no protests against it in the 1950s. The reluctance of Catholics to criticize the WREA might have reflected a fear of being labeled un-American or, even worse, pro-communist. They may also have felt little need to challenge the program because a large number of Catholic children attended Catholic grammar schools where they were both relatively unaffected and exposed to their own weekday religious education. Catholics in the city had worked hard to fulfill their mission to have all Catholic children educated in parish schools, an objective which became easier to achieve as the Catholic community prospered economically along with the rest of the society. This was a key to Catholicism’s massive church expansion and its programs following World War II, when new parish buildings more often than not included a new parish school.

Jewish children, most of whom attended public schools, faced a different situation. Jewish groups were reluctant to build Jewish schools because they had long believed that the public school system helped unite Americans of all faiths into a common civic body. For Jews who found their dual claims to their religious identities and American citizenship challenged, participation in the public school system was one way to affirm their loyalty to a larger American ideal. Of course, Jews did not participate in the weekday religious instruction that had become a part of the regular school day for most Indianapolis children. Instead, Jewish children had access to after-school religious instruction from the Jewish Education Association (JEA). The JEA had been providing after-school instruction since 1924, and even though the proportion of Jewish children who attended the program was far lower than the proportion of Protestant children who participated in the WREA, it nonetheless addressed the need for religious education of Jewish youth.

Although both Catholics and Jews were concerned about proving the legitimacy of their claim to the body politic, Jews proved their patriotism by attending public schools, while Catholics expressed the American ideal of liberty by creating their own school systems. That Catholics and Jews developed such different attitudes toward public education demonstrates the multiple ways one could negotiate one’s religious and national identities.

Even though the weekday program did not seem to upset Catholics or Jews, it should be noted that not all stood behind weekday religious education. When a state senator who belonged to Elkhart Presbyterian Church fought to repeal the Religious Education Act, he argued that it was clearly a violation of the First Amendment separation of church and state. Although his stand was not popular, reporters noted that there were several churches
where parishioners strongly supported him. Taking such a critical stand could be risky, however. At a time when the civil religion required good citizens to support any and all activities conducive to growing religious devotion, challenging religious instruction in the school could be viewed as proof that one was less than fully faithful, and by implication less than fully American. Worst of all, one could be accused of being a subversive, even a communist.

Fear of communism helped spur greater cooperation and conformity among mainline Protestants, but it also provided fertile ground for the nation’s evolving evangelical movement. Billy Graham rose to prominence during the years when the nation was gripped by anti-communist fear, and he frequently described his evangelical message as a response to the supposed threat of “godless communism.” For evangelicals strongly wedded to a premillennial vision, the rise of the Soviet Union served as proof that the world was anything but safe and secure. Evangelical ministers delivered sermons in which millennial themes predominated. Representative sermons include “One U.S. Coin Has the Emblems of the Beast of Daniel 7 and Rev. 13” and “The Crashing of the Political World. What Causes It? When Will It Be? What Follows?” Evangelicals who listened to these and other sermons could clearly identify with Billy Graham when he told a crowd of more than 12,000 at Cadle Tabernacle that Judgment Day “is almost upon us.” Of course it would be naive to reduce Graham’s appeal to his anti-communist message, but this does not lessen the fact that he spoke in a language that fit well into the larger culture and which no doubt drew some to him.

Although the city’s Catholics had little in common with Billy Graham, they too began to understand the church within the larger context of anti-communism. As historian David J. O’Brien asserts, Catholics seeking to prove their Americanism were drawn to anti-communist rhetoric because it provided them a vehicle by which to prove that they were loyal Americans. In Indianapolis, Catholic anti-communist sentiment also reinforced the community’s focus on the nuclear family as the basis for a stable, prosperous city.

Anti-communism’s impact on the nation’s glorification of the traditional, white, middle-class family has been well documented by historian Elaine Tyler May. May argues that in the 1950s, an atomic age when the future seemed uncertain, the family served as both a refuge from the larger world and the first line of defense against the subversive forces threatening the United States. Catholics were among those for whom the family gained grander public significance. For example, in 1950, the Indianapolis Catholic community held one of its largest public events, a Catholic family prayer rally at the War Memorial Plaza. Amidst the city’s cultural and civic restructuring, Catholics now shared the same civic and patriotic religious stage once dominated by the Protestant establishment.
Concerns about preserving and strengthening the traditional male-headed nuclear family also affected Protestants and became a public issue demanding a religious response. Concern about children was especially strong and lent support to the boom in recreational activities directed to them. Both evangelicals and mainline Protestants designed new programs including a wide array of sports teams and clubs. While religious-based youth activities were intended to serve the children and help them become both good Americans and good sons and daughters, married couples turned for help in increasing numbers to pastoral counselors who believed that one of their primary goals was to help each member of the family adjust to his or her expected roles and responsibilities. That the issue of family relations was recognized to be of public significance was made clear by the Church Federation’s “family life clinic,” where all aspects of family life were examined, from the sources of marital discord to the relations between spouses and in-laws. The program designers believed that the city would become a better place only if and when its families had been strengthened.

The Sunday closing campaigns that occurred in the 1950s were also affected by the larger society’s focus on the family. Hoping to appeal to the patriotic spirit accompanying the end of World War II, the leaders of the new Sunday closing movement decided to call it “C Day.” Unlike earlier movements, when legal bans were sought, the “C Day” supporters asked the city’s residents to comply voluntarily. “C Day” quickly gained support from business owners as well as churchgoers. Tellingly, they described Sunday as a day for the “family” rather than only as a day for religious observance.

Despite the excitement surrounding the “C Day” campaign, it was short-lived. By the late 1950s, most businesses acquiesced to the pressure to remain open on Sunday. The inability of the mainline Protestants to keep support strong for “C Day” suggests that the larger secular world — driven as it was by commercial interests — was having a greater impact on peoples’ lives even as church membership continued to climb. And the fact that “C Day” proponents justified their campaign by pointing to the family suggest that even they were influenced by the city’s rising secularism.

The failure of “C Day,” however, should not suggest that pressures to conform to the dominant cultural, social, and political values were disappearing. This was something that the Church Federation learned when it came under attack from the Columbia Club because it had hosted a celebration of United Nations Day featuring Louis Dolivet as the invited speaker. Dolivet was one of many Americans charged by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee with having subversive associations. Fearing that its role as a leading civic organization would be compromised by hosting such a speaker, the Church Federation issued a public statement that it was “unalterably opposed to communism, its materialism, its atheism, its denial of Christian ethics, its totalitarianism, its fallacious economics.” The women of the Church Women United, a group which in many ways paralleled the
male-dominated Church Federation, attempted to avoid such problems by issuing a “Christian Declaration of Loyalty,” which stated: “No body of citizens is more alert to the threat of communist thought and conspiracy both to the Christian faith and freedom than the Christian churches.” After this statement was issued, however, two arch-conservative political groups, “Let Freedom Ring” and the John Birch Society, charged the Church Women United with being less than loyal because they had recommended that the U.S. Congress streamline its investigations of subversive activities.

RELIGION AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

At the end of the 1950s, the city’s mainline Protestant community had good reason to be confident about its future. Church attendance was higher than it had ever been, weekday religious education had reached thousands of children, most of whom had not been involved in any other religious activities, and the newly found ecumenical spirit suggested not only that mainline Protestants of various denominations could work together, but that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews could cooperate as well. Gone, at least publicly, were the overt anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish sentiments of the 1920s and 1930s. Instead, the civic ideals which mainline Protestants celebrated were rooted in a more general, open religious faith, a faith that involved equal parts Protestantism and a more abstract Americanism. The 1950s saw the city’s first significant ecumenical efforts crossing the divides between the Jews, the Catholics, and the Protestants. In the post–World War II era, three different Catholics served as mayor in a city once dominated by a mainline Protestant establishment. The city’s multiple religions and multiple centers existed as pluralistic parts of a cooperative whole.

There were signs in the early 1960s that this would be a decade very different from the one that had preceded it. In 1961, for the first time since its founding, the Church Federation began to revise its understanding of the city as a single geographic and cultural entity over which it held moral guardianship, acknowledging the realignment caused by decades of outward movement. As the director of the Federation was forced to admit, “the city was slipping away as one community, it is many communities.” Although he did not explain where these communities were, or who lived in them, he no doubt was speaking of groups like African Americans, Catholics, and Jews, who had always been in the city but had operated on the margins in their own “centered” niches. Even as mainline Protestants began to reach out to Catholics and Jews, they were saddened by the fact that they no longer could speak as the city’s singular authoritative religious voice. For their part, Catholics, Jews, and African Americans appreciated that their communities were gaining greater visibility and acceptance.

Secular changes in the city during the 1960s further guaranteed that
religious life would be transformed. As whites left the city for bigger homes out in the suburbs, their churches often followed. Not surprisingly, other religious activity also left the city. The Holy Week celebration, one of the city’s earliest interdenominational events tied to the Easter sunrise services, offers a telling example. The celebration of Holy Week began in 1915 when downtown churches and theaters began holding daily religious services during Holy Week. The popularity of these events was made clear by the more than 7,000 people who attended religious services in 1936 at two of the city’s largest theaters. However, by the mid-1950s, those attendance numbers were well below one hundred, and the services were completely canceled in the mid-1960s.

The ending of the Holy Week celebration was but one of the many indications that the traditional exercises of religion which had previously taken place in the city’s streets and public places no longer had the same attraction, an acknowledgment that religious worship of this sort went on out in the city’s multiple communities. Many lamented this fact, including the members of Christ Church Episcopal, who in 1963 decided to celebrate their church’s 125th anniversary by sponsoring a ceremony where they would honor not only their church but the seven other churches that had at some point sat on the Circle. Men and women from more than ninety-six of the city’s churches participated in the service, which included a procession from the World War Memorial to the Circle, where Bishop F. Bayne spoke before a crowd reported to have numbered 5,000.

The procession clearly celebrated not the future but the past, marking the end of a Protestant establishment core and the beginning of civic religious pluralism. Among scholars of religion, the 1960s is often described as a decade of crisis, a time when much of what had been taken for granted was challenged. For scholars interested in urban religion specifically, attention has usually focused on those large white mainline congregations struggling to survive in the city’s changing landscape. For many religious communities, however, the 1960s inaugurated a time of hope and opportunity.

No group better demonstrates the vitality of religion in urban America than the African American ministers and laity who participated in the burgeoning civil rights movement. Having been denied full access to the promises of America, African Americans drew on the moral underpinnings of their faith to demand that the city end its practices of discrimination and segregation. One of the most visible and outspoken leaders was Andrew J. Brown, the Baptist minister whom we met in the preceding chapter and who had begun organizing the African American community even in the conservative 1950s. As the civil rights movement flourished nationally, Brown helped organize local chapters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Operation Breadbasket in addition to serving as head of many Indianapolis-based ministerial alliances. Although scholars interested in the civil rights movement do not usually look at Indianapolis, it would be
Fig. 3.4. Civil Rights Marchers, ca. 1960. Indianapolis Recorder Collection, C5772, courtesy Indiana Historical Society.
imprudent to ignore the efforts that were made and results achieved. For the first time in the city’s history, African American churches played a public role visible not just to their own congregants but to the city as a whole.

The more critical view of the city held by the civil rights activists demonstrated that the political conformity of the 1950s was fast withering away. Some mainline white Protestants soon joined the fray, including the women of the Church Women United, who in 1963, the same year as the Holy Week celebration ended, began sponsoring a “Come and See Tour” as part of a larger anti-crime crusade concerned with making the streets safe for women. The tours were also intended to expose the mostly white, middle- and upper-class women to the city’s poorer, neglected neighborhoods. The hope was that the women would learn about the problems people in such communities faced and propose solutions to help resolve them. As a result, the Church Women United began efforts to end illiteracy and counsel high school dropouts.41

Church Women United was only one of many groups that in the 1960s began to address the larger social, racial, and economic inequalities plaguing the city. In fact, greater awareness of the city’s problems not only led pre-existing groups to develop new strategies but also made possible the creation of new organizations, most of them ecumenical. For example, white mainline Protestants responded to the building of the city’s highway system, which displaced thousands of the city’s poorest residents, by establishing HOMES, Housing Opportunities Multiplied Ecumenically (later called the Inter-faith Housing Inc.). HOMES would eventually receive federal grants for its work in low-income housing ventures.42

The Christian Inner City Association (CICA), established in 1963 by James Pratt, was probably the most vocal critic of the city’s social and economic conditions. Always concerned with the rights of the poor, CICA worked to increase the minimum wage, end racial segregation, expand voting, and protect the rights of welfare recipients. Its most famous leader, Reverend Miller Newton, sought to democratize the War on Poverty program after political authorities sought to exclude the poor from their legal right to participate in the administration of programs.

African Americans and more liberal-leaning white Protestants saw the emergence of new religious voices with different and competing visions of the city as a democratization of the religious landscape. However, this democratization had limits, something that civil rights workers and social justice activists struggled with as they sought to challenge the city’s inequalities. Uncomfortable with open conflict, the city’s civic leaders consistently attempted to legitimate, even to endorse, more moderate protests while marginalizing those it saw as a threat. The most vocal civil rights activists were viewed as a threat.

While African Americans celebrated the changes brought about in the 1960s, the burgeoning white evangelical movement saw the 1960s as a
frightening time, when “traditional” values lost ground to civil disobedience and when hedonism ran amok. Historian William McLoughlin describes how many evangelicals “urged a return to the old ways ‘that made this country great.’ To do that, they say, we must wipe out all of the so called ‘liberal reforms’ of the twentieth century from welfare to ERA, and from labor unions to civil rights laws.”

On the national level, fundamentalists gained a public presence they had never had. Led by Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority received more media attention than any other religious movement of the day. Across the nation, fundamentalists became active in pockets of local politics, challenging the teaching of evolution and other practices deemed a threat to their vision of what was morally right.

Considering that evangelicals were becoming more numerous in Indianapolis, they, too, might have demanded a greater public voice in their city’s affairs. For the most part, however, evangelical churches did not become especially active in public life in Indianapolis. Perhaps this was because evangelicals never saw themselves far removed from the Protestant establishment, at least not until the ecumenical movement came to be increasingly linked to political liberalism in the national and international eye. The generally conservative political culture of the city did not seem threatening to evangelicals, most of whom were concerned primarily with individual salvation rather than the institutional arrangements of the larger society. In fact, one of the criticisms leveled against Reverend Greg Dixon, the state of Indiana’s Moral Majority leader and pastor of Baptist Temple, once the city’s largest church, was that he focused too much time on politics and not enough on religion. The fact that Dixon spoke weekly on both radio and television and advertised the Temple extensively led some within the evangelical community to ask, “Is the sheep sacrificed for the needs of the flock?”

Dixon fared no better among the mainline clergy. Bishop A. James Armstrong of the Indiana Area United Methodist Church stated that what most upset him about Dixon and his followers “is the arrogance of their statements. It’s as if to say if we don’t agree, we are outside the pale, unchristian, unpatriotic. . . . As if God’s word were only through the mind of right-wing fundamentalist ministers.” Rabbi Jonathan Stein, who was concerned about Dixon’s “authoritarian tendencies,” voiced similar sentiments. More specifically, Stein was bothered by his attempt to force his “specific theology, ethics, and political beliefs on an entire society.” When asked about what the mainline clergy as a group thought about Dixon and the Moral Majority, one unnamed mainline clergy stated that they viewed them “with contempt.”

Given that some clergy openly attacked Dixon, he could have directed his anger toward the establishment. But in general he reserved his ammunition for bigger foes, for “the liberals [who] thought they had America in their pocket.” According to Dixon, “liberals,” by which he meant political lib-
erals, had “seized control of our educational system, our economic and political system.”

Many of the city’s white evangelicals and fundamentalists, while no doubt sympathetic to many of Dixon’s political views, did not join forces with him. The weakness of evangelicals in the public life of the city speaks to the power of the mainline Protestant community. Over time it had triumphed because it had kept broadening its inclusiveness while successfully marginalizing those who might challenge its moral authority. This applied not only to those on the far right but also to those on the left. And in the case of Dixon, the mainline marginalized him by describing his congregation as “cult-like.” Even more damning, the mainline complained that Dixon’s desire for political influence allowed him to ignore the spiritual needs of his flock and focus instead on building membership and raising money.

RELIGION AND THE CITY’S PUBLIC GOOD(S)

The fact that both civil rights activists and the religious right consistently drew on moral discourse to offer their competing visions of the “good society” demonstrates that there are multiple notions of the public good, many of which are grounded in religion. Recent developments surrounding social welfare — especially President George W. Bush’s “faith-based initiatives” — have also made clear that there are still many different religious bodies with competing conceptions of the role religion should play in public life. For example, in 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (known as the Welfare Reform Act) brought religious people of various theological and social perspectives into public debate. When the bill was first crafted, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a leading social welfare expert, described the bill as the “most brutal act of social policy since Reconstruction.” A large number of nationally based religious groups, including the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations strongly opposed the legislation. In Indianapolis, Catholic Charities and the Catholic Conference, both of whom have long-established reputations as advocates for the poor, also expressed reservations. They joined the national leaders of the Catholic Church, who argued that the bill was fraught with risk. But in Indianapolis, Mayor Stephen Goldsmith — then a prospective advisor on urban affairs to future candidate George W. Bush — was already putting the faith-based ball into play. He began by using his “bully pulpit” to organize a Faith and Families initiative, modeled on a similar program started by Gov. Kirk Fordyce in Mississippi. The goal was to enlist congregations, find needy or at-risk families, and pair them so that the religious congregations could provide a supportive community, or even surrogate family, that the family
was imagined to lack. In Indianapolis, though, as in Mississippi, relatively few congregations—never more than twenty in Indianapolis—got involved. And those who did join found the going much tougher, more complicated, and more expensive than they had imagined.\textsuperscript{48}

Undeterred, the Goldsmith administration pressed forward with more structural reforms tied directly to the prestige of the mayor’s office. He developed the Front Porch Alliance, mentioned in the introduction, in the hopes that such an office would grease the skids for community-based organizations trying to find ways to improve their neighborhoods. Goldsmith hoped to focus on a few of the city’s inner-city neighborhoods—his seven “target neighborhoods”—already earmarked for development. Quickly, though, the FPA became the hotline for congregations and other religious groups hoping to get more involved.

The Front Porch Alliance not only provided assistance to groups wanting to get involved, it smoothed the road for faith-based groups in other arenas. Each year, the city got federal money in the form of Community Development Block Grants. During the FPA years, faith-based groups applied for and received this money in much larger numbers than before. The same could be said for the city’s Porchlight Summer Program grants, through which community groups got funds for summer youth programs. Again, faith-based groups took up a larger share than they had in the past. And this was prior to George W. Bush’s call for “armies of compassion” through faith-based initiatives. Indeed, the Indianapolis experiments were happening concurrently with wrangling over the 1996 welfare reform law. Nationally, critics of the new law and its inevitable trickle-down effect were concerned about strict new time limits for receipt of aid and smaller appropriations for job training and child care. The 1996 bill abolished the federally guaranteed Aid to Families with Dependent Children program and replaced it with state-controlled Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Under this arrangement, mothers with children would not be allowed to receive more than two consecutive years of aid, and would be limited to a total of five years of support over their lifetime. Some in the religious community feared that the potential upshot of these reforms might be the eventual end of federal government programs for the poor, leaving their care to the individual states.

Large charitable organizations such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Family Services—affiliated with but legally separate from their denominations—have a long history of contracting with public agencies for social services. However, both the “charitable choice” provisions and the current White House initiatives represent radical new departures. For the first time, religious organizations were receiving public funds while still maintaining their essentially religious character, meaning they did not have to create a separately incorporated body. The 1996 legislation suggested that such groups would not be required to abide by federal employment non-
discrimination laws, a point President Bush seemed determined to make in his new initiatives. The purposely vague language of charitable choice says that religious organizations dispensing federal money can do so without "impairing the religious character of such organizations."49 Of course, religious organizations cannot use federal money to evangelize. But they are legally permitted to "offer religious teaching, display symbols of their faith, and hire only those who agree with their doctrinal beliefs."50

The Bush administration has embraced these changes in the relationship between religious organizations and the federal government, and has made strenuous efforts to encourage smaller religious groups—especially congregations—to join traditional religious providers such as Catholic Charities in providing social services. From Henry Cisneros, secretary of HUD in 1996 during the passage of the original charitable choice clause, to President Bush today, there has been a prevailing sentiment that lasting change in social problems will come from changed hearts. Critics who see social problems as structural and institutional in nature continue to disagree.

Not surprisingly, some of the biggest questions are still about money. Recent attempts to encourage faith-based organizations to provide services have not included extra money devoted to social welfare. Instead, faith-based groups will have to compete with all other providers for the block grants the states currently receive. With less money and more providers, congregations that receive federal money might very well begin to view other congregations not as partners but as competitors in the funding game. In any event, Indianapolis is by no means the only city dealing with such issues, though it was in fact among the very first to develop a religious response to them.

Despite Indianapolis’s role in the forefront of these social experiments, uptake was, and continues to be, slow. Each of these proposed partnership efforts—the FPA's summer program grants, the juvenile court, the homelessness coalition—reached out to the entire faith community. In the end, only some sixty congregations, roughly 5 percent of the total field, responded by applying to any or all of the funding competitions sponsored by their prospective public partners.51 And these congregations were hardly a random sample. They were virtually all Protestant, primarily middle-class, and most likely to have African American members. Two-thirds of the applications in the congregational grant programs came from African American congregations.

Some of these new partners were among the biggest and best-off congregations. Eastern Star Missionary Baptist, the city’s one true megachurch, submitted one of the three grant applications to which the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention awarded a $150,000 grant. In its application, Eastern Star proposed a new partnership with city government concerning some vacant public housing near their church. The city was accommodating. This was not the first time Mayor Goldsmith had recog-
nized the role played by the big, consumer-oriented congregations at the city’s edges. In the early days of the Front Porch Alliance, he had pressured East 91st Street Christian Church to “give something back” to the downtown it had left years before. East 91st, a white church, built a new partnership with a group of African American churches in the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood, culminating in a new recreation center, Jireh Sports, that became a showpiece for the mayor’s new faith-based reforms.

But the bulk of the applications to the faith-based initiatives came from average-sized congregations of middle-class members who were hoping to make a difference in their own urban neighborhoods or, more to the point, were hoping to find additional funding for programs already underway. The typical profile of the new public partnership congregation was an African American church located in a distressed neighborhood, headed by an educated pastor, and filled with members who had historical ties to the neighborhood but who had moved further out of the city as their social class moved up the scale. The city and its congregations had come a long way from the days of prohibition, the old Community Chest, and the civil rights movement.

MOVING AHEAD

In 1971, the Indianapolis community all but ignored Mayor Richard Lugar when he suggested that the city reinstate its Easter Sunday services on the Circle. Most church members were satisfied with attending service in the privacy of their own congregations and were not concerned about celebrating Holy Week in a dramatically public fashion. Equally telling, by the 1970s, few expressed opposition to the Indianapolis 500 taking place on Sunday, even though as recently as 1963 the Church Federation had still argued against it, claiming that “traffic congestion ties up the entire metropolitan area, making it impossible for people to attend the services of their church at the accustomed time.”

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, it became increasingly difficult for religious leaders to claim moral authority over the whole city the way some had tried to do earlier in the century. Religious leaders spoke from the center of their particular communities and sometimes even spoke for those entire communities, but they knew they no longer spoke for or to all of Indianapolis. The religious community had become too diverse to speak with one voice, and neither minority faiths nor non-churchgoers were keen to accept the leadership of the liberal Protestants who for so long occupied the lion’s share of the public square. Religious diversity grew apace, out in the many communities that were pieces of the urban patchwork quilt. But that quilt was sewn together by more universally held cultural norms embodied in the patriotism of the war memorials, in the shared government that
kept its administrative distance from religion, in shared commerce that was religiously neutral, and in a growing identification of the city with the very secular realm of athletics, with the city imagined as a sports capital.

Increasing ethnic and cultural pluralism changed the way religion functioned at the city’s core. Indianapolis had always to look for new ways to manage differences among its residents; broadening the beliefs, values, and practices that defined good citizenship was the functional response. And in that broadening, other kinds of beliefs and practices—most notably evolving commitments to patriotism, government, sports, and commerce—took on a new public importance. It would be incorrect to say that this developing civil religion replaced the traditional faiths, because the faiths did not disappear. But it would be pointless to deny that in the context of urban realignment, the public role and location of faith was significantly re-aligned. What it meant to be a community, to have the sort of social capital on which the city as a whole could draw, was altered by these changes in urban structure and coextensive changes in religious culture. Even something as practical and applied as welfare reform stems from new ideas about where and how religious organizations function, preferring smaller, local groups over larger, more metropolitan ones.

Having considered large-scale cultural and structural changes in the city, including religion’s shifting role in civic life, it is now time to turn our attention to religion itself and ask what happened to religious life and practice in the city’s realignment. The next two chapters are concerned first with religion writ large—the denominations and faith traditions that make up the city—and second with congregations, the hundreds of smaller organizations that constitute the bulk of daily religious practice. Here we will see how urban realignment occurred not only between faiths, but also within them. It is only possible to understand what happened to religious life in the city, and to see how religious organizations have responded to the realigned city, when we understand those changes in the context of the wider urban changes already described.