

# VOICES OF FAITH



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS  
INTRODUCTION BY DAVID J. BODENHAMER PHOTOGRAPHS BY KIM CHARLES FERRILL

THE POLIS CENTER



## **VOICES OF FAITH: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS**

*With an Introduction by David J. Bodenhamer and Photographs by Kim Charles Ferrill*

As part of its Project on Religion and Urban Culture, The Polis Center examines the intersection of faith and community. Looking for answers to questions about the role that faith plays in creating a sense of belonging and common purpose in the neighborhoods of Indianapolis, The Polis Center facilitates dialogues between researchers and people who are involved in their communities. In *Voices of Faith: Making a Difference in Urban Neighborhoods*, The Polis Center presents twenty-six of the community heroes it has encountered in its research.

First in a series, *Voices of Faith* focuses on five urban neighborhoods that have undergone great change: Mapleton–Fall Creek, Martindale-Brightwood, Fountain Square, Haughville–Near West Side, and Near East Side. In presenting the stories, in their own words, of people who are building community, this book provides inspiring examples of service and commitment that are widely applicable. It also reveals the extent to which the work of these people is built on spiritual foundations.

Their stories reflect answers to such questions as: Does the creation of community extend beyond the walls of the church? Does faith make a place more neighborly? Do people of faith and communities of faith make a neighborhood a better place to live? The answers are revealing and uplifting, and the portraits by photographer Kim Charles Ferrill anchor the words to faces and surroundings.

Though it deals with specific neighborhoods in Indianapolis, Indiana, *Voices of Faith: Making a Difference in Urban Neighborhoods* offers people of faith and community groups anywhere a stimulating source for reading, discussing, and reflecting on the necessary elements of neighborhood and community.

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## CONTENTS

1	<i>Introduction</i>	65	<i>Near East Side</i>
3	<i>Fountain Square</i>	66	Bob Blazek
4	Helen Fehr	69	James Byrne
7	Tommy L. Glenn	72	John Hay
11	Estella Silas	75	Pearline Johnson
15	Mary Slattery	78	Dennis West
21	<i>Mapleton-Fall Creek</i>	83	<i>Near West Side</i>
22	Cliff Hatcher	84	Diane Arnold
25	Harry Huxhold	87	Melvin Jackson
29	Shedrick Madison	91	Douglas Tate, Jr.
33	Al Polin	94	Olgen Williams
37	Jon Walters	97	Sue Ann Yovanovich
41	Mae Woodson		
45	<i>Martindale-Brightwood</i>		
46	Frank Alexander		
49	Arthur Kelly		
53	Larry Lindley		
57	Mary Moss		
60	Walter and Elaine Walters		







## INTRODUCTION

The voice from the rear of the room was calm but firm. “Sure, we have problems. Drugs, crime, poverty, kids raising kids—you name it, we have it. But we also have plenty of folks who care about this neighborhood, folks who are building a better life in spite of the problems. You look at us and see ruin and despair. You don’t see our efforts at building a community here. You don’t see the hope. It’s all a matter of perspective. You see our glass as half-empty. We know it is half-full.”

With heads nodding in approval, cries of “amen, sister” applauded the diminutive, middle-aged woman as she took her seat. In this place, on this evening, for these neighbors, she spoke the truth. It was a message we at The Polis Center have heard repeatedly as we continue to examine the intersection between religion and community in Indianapolis.

We began our observations in five inner-city neighborhoods—Mapleton–Fall Creek, Martindale–Brightwood, Near Westside, Near East Side, and Fountain Square. The first three are majority black neighborhoods, while the other two are predominately white. By all measures, these areas face extraordinary challenges. Educational levels and per capita income are well below county averages. Crime, teen pregnancies, drug use, and other measures of a population at risk far exceed most parts of the city.

When we met with them, residents never denied their problems. The statistics reflect the awful truth of life for too many folks they know. But they didn’t dwell on this reality. Instead they told us stories about people who are improving the neighborhood, about individuals who are building community, about friends who care for their neighbors. In

almost every instance, these urban heroes worked out of a deep faith commitment. We soon came to understand the meaning of this consistent response: the grim numbers represented a neighborhood’s challenge; the stories represented its hope.

This book contains the stories, voices, and portraits of twenty-six women and men we encountered in our Project on Religion and Urban Culture. We chose them as representatives of a much larger number of community-builders we discovered in these five neighborhoods. They reflect a wide range of occupations, educational backgrounds, and life experiences, but they all share a deep and abiding concern for their communities and the people who live in them. Without exception, they all attribute their concern to the religious faith they hold. Their religious traditions, like those of their neighborhoods, are Catholic and Protestant. In other areas of the city, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist believers work with equal commitment to restore community.

The book is organized by neighborhood, although the themes do not vary from one place to another. What is unique are the voices. Their tones are real: honest, passionate, concerned, committed, angry, ironic. They reveal pain and frustration and disappointment; they avoid simple pieties and homilies in favor of more complicated truths. Yet always they speak of faith. And community. In doing so, they speak also of hope. We all should listen to these voices.

DAVID J. BODENHAMER  
*Director, The Polis Center*







## FOUNTAIN SQUARE

*Located on the near south side, the area that would become known as Fountain Square was first laid out in 1835 by Calvin Fletcher and Nicholas McCarty, on the site of a former Delaware Indian encampment. For some decades, the area remained sparsely settled, but for a few houses along Virginia Avenue. In mid-century Irish laborers arrived to build the first railroads in Indianapolis and soon thereafter were joined by an influx of German immigrants.*

*St. Paul's German Evangelical Lutheran Church served the German population, and St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church (soon to be rechristened St. Patrick's) hosted a largely Irish congregation. Methodist, Reform, and Baptist churches soon followed. Olivet Baptist Church was founded in 1867 to serve the area's small African American population.*

*The area derives its name from a fountain first erected at the intersection of Virginia, Shelby, and Prospect Streets in 1889. The fountain would be moved a number of times—at one point into Garfield Park Conservatory—before being restored to its original location in 1969.*

*In the early part of the twentieth century several theaters opened in Fountain Square, drawing patrons from around the city and making it a lively area. Population peaked in 1950 at 27,000 and then entered a decline that has continued to the present day. In the 1970s the construction of interstate highways cut through the neighborhood and destroyed a great deal of its housing stock.*

*The 1990 census placed the population at less than 14,000, about 94 percent of it white. Economic decline and population loss have taken their toll on the neighborhood's churches, driving several to close or relocate. Edwin Ray United Methodist Church closed in 1993, and in 1994 St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church moved to Perry Township. St. Patrick's, though lacking a full-time priest, offers the mass in Spanish, to serve a growing Hispanic population. Problems facing the neighborhood include a lack of employment opportunities, few social services, and few stores within walking distance.*





## “A NEED KNOWN IS A CALL”

Helen Fehr

Helen Fehr spent forty years, nearly half her life, as a missionary in foreign lands. She was born in Fountain Square in 1901 and attended Manual Training High School. Raised in the German Methodist Church, she dedicated her life to Christian service at the age of sixteen. In her youth, she also adopted a life-long motto: “A need known, with the ability to meet that need, is a call.”

After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from DePauw University in 1927, she spent twenty-eight years in India. “She taught the village people to read and write, developed educational programs and left not only with schools in place but a library as well,” according to the Rev. Mollie Clements, retired pastor of Calvary United Methodist Church, where Fehr is now a member.

Fehr returned to Fountain Square in 1955 to help care for her father and an ailing aunt. Four years later, she went to Pakistan, where she helped to develop a literacy program that was later adopted by the Pakistani government.

Fehr came home for good in 1971. The house where she was born had been destroyed to make way for Interstate

65, and the houses that remained in Fountain Square had deteriorated. She also sensed that people didn’t relate to each other the way they used to. “We were much more of a community,” Fehr said of the Fountain Square she remembers from her youth.

In the twenty-five years of her “retirement,” Fehr has started, assisted, or inspired many programs, including a community development project called Church and Community, which came about after Fehr walked around Fountain Square one day in 1986 and counted 114 abandoned houses within one square mile. She discussed the problem with the Rev. Clements, who was pastor of Edwin Ray United Methodist at the time. The church decided to pursue a housing project in which local churches bought abandoned homes, restored them, and sold them to low-income families. In 1993 the Fountain Square Church and Community Project merged with the Fountain Square–Fletcher Place Investment Corporation to become an organization called SEND, South East Neighborhood Development. It is still active in the community.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“WHEN I WAS GROWING UP,** Fountain Square was really a sub-city. I mean, everybody came to Fountain Square on Saturday nights. At one time there were three theaters here. You could meet almost anybody you wanted to meet. When I returned to the neighborhood in 1971 you could walk through this neighborhood and see a house wide open, doors open, and nobody there. You would see kids on the street and never know where they belonged. Sometimes I wondered if they themselves knew where they belonged. People moved in and moved out. Neighbors weren’t neighbors. I don’t know whether they even knew their neighbors if they met them on the street. There was no feeling of neighborhood. Everybody went about their own business, and stores didn’t have regular customers. It was slowly dying. It was just not a community at all.

“I knew immediately when I came back that I wasn’t going to leave Fountain Square, and I’m so glad that I didn’t. At the time that I came home from Pakistan, I must have had ten to twelve missionary colleagues who were in a missionary home, and it would have been the easiest thing to go there. That was when I really decided that my next missionary career would be to Fountain Square. I didn’t want to desert where I belonged. I think, really, that the inspiration to service was instilled by my father and mother. My parents were people who cared about the community and about neighbors. We always had neighbors who we were friends with. I think that’s where it starts—being neighborly.” ■

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when I came back that  
I wasn’t going to leave Fountain Square,  
and I’m so glad that I didn’t.”



# “WE CAN’T CONTINUE TO WALK IN THE PAST AND LIVE IN THE FUTURE”

Tommy L. Glenn

Pastor Tommy Glenn grew up in the projects in Kokomo, Indiana, and attended a Pentecostal church as a child. He attended Indiana University for three years, then transferred and received his bachelor of theology degree from Mt. Sinai Bible College in Kokomo. He began preaching “as a kid” and has pastored off and on since he was twenty-three. He worked at General Motors for thirty-one years, and he has been senior pastor at Emmanuel Christian Fellowship Center in Fountain Square since 1990. He used to commute from Kokomo to serve as pastor but moved to Indianapolis five years ago.

Emmanuel Christian Fellowship Center is one component of a broader organization called New Birth Ministries. They remain separate for legal and administrative purposes. The church has been in the Fountain Square neighborhood for only a brief time—since November of 1996—though it was founded in the early part of the century. It was previously located on North Central Avenue. The congregation moved to the new location in Fountain Square because it had the opportunity to buy a much larger facility—the former Gorman Boys’ Club, at 1400 English Avenue—that better accommodated the pastor’s vision for the future. The plant is more than 17,000 square feet. It was quite old and required extensive renovation. Church members spent a couple of months repairing and cleaning it before Emmanuel could begin holding services there.

Emmanuel is affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, a Pentecostal denomination based in Memphis, Tennessee. The church (and the denomination) consists mostly of African Americans, though Emmanuel is consciously trying to reach out and attract a larger white congregation, especially since its neighbors in Fountain Square are mostly white. One way the church is establishing itself and becoming a presence in its new neighborhood is through a program called “Friday Night Madness.” After the church’s Friday night service, they clear the chairs from the sanctuary—which was the gym when the building was a boys’ club, and still has backboards and hoops in it—and open it up to basketball. Downstairs, people can play pool or cards, and there is a VCR for movies. Also, there’s food for everyone. “Friday Night Madness” is open to both church members and the whole neighborhood, and it’s proved to be very popular for both adults and teens.

The church also recently opened a daycare center called Guardian Angel Child Care. The service is not limited to church members. Pastor Glenn believes that, because of recently enacted welfare reform measures, there will be an increasing demand for child care services as welfare recipients are forced to find employment. Emmanuel/New Birth Ministries offers a food and clothing pantry and a computer lab open to the community, and Glenn hopes to start a Christian school someday.



✠  
VOICES OF FAITH





**“A LOT OF PEOPLE JUST DON’T FEEL WELCOME IN ANY CHURCH.** To me, that’s an indictment against the church. Anyone should feel like they can go into any church. I think the church needs to do a little more getting out in the community and letting people know that the door’s not closed. In a lot of inner city churches, the members don’t even live in the neighborhood. They drive in. So the church needs to get out in the community and knock on doors and go down to the store and talk to people. I don’t think Christ, if he were on earth in the flesh, would be in the places that church people think he should be. When he was here, he had to be where people could meet him and get to know him. To a large degree, that’s what we need to do. Everybody’s not going to walk up and beat the door down. Jesus commissioned the church to go out. We’ve turned that around, and the church is sitting here telling people to come in.

“Our long-range goal for the ministry is to be a place where everyone can be welcome, everyone can participate. We want to be a strong church. I preach empowerment. We want to have a lot of people to come so that we can have a forceful ministry, so we can be viable in the community and promote a new life in Christ. We want to help people that need help. And when they get on their feet, we want to teach them to help someone else. That’s the goal. A holistic ministry, to me, means more than dealing with the hereafter. It also means provisions for now. Any student of the Bible, or even a casual Bible reader, will see that Christ provided necessities for people who were hurting. I think the church has to take that approach also. But we don’t want to make this a welfare program. Empowerment is what we preach here, spiritual as well as physical. We call this a faith-help organization. We’re trying to help people. All of it is to assist people who are trying to do better. See, a lot of people who are down, they just need a hand, someone to reach down and give them a pull up. A lot of people need someone to talk to, someone to listen. Welfare is a handout and no assistance, really.

“The church has one problem. The Bible says that the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and we take that to mean that we should hang on to the things that we’ve done in the past. We make those things divine. They start being doctrine, teachings of the church: ‘This is the way we did it in the sixties, this is the way we did it in the fifties.’ My interpretation is that Christ doesn’t change—his love for us, his divinity, his omnipotence—but everything on earth changes. So the church has to evolve. If the church is going to maintain its influence—and it will—and if it’s going to maintain the place that Christ predestined it to have, it’s going to have to make some changes, because culturally people are different. When I grew up, women stayed at home. Women are part of the workforce now, so you need child care. The church has got to keep up with the times. It’s a matter of vision. Are you looking at the things of the past, or are you looking ahead? I think you’re going to see an overturning of a lot of things in a lot of churches.

“To me, being in the service of the Lord is more than just coming in here on the night you have Bible study or worship. There’s more to it than that. The vision that God has given me is for today and for the future. We’ve





got long-range goals, and I know that if we're doing what we're supposed to be doing now, God is going to open up more of a vision for the future. People everywhere are tired of gangs, and violence, and drugs. They're tired of seeing people hurting and suffering. People are just tired of that. I found out one thing: people rally around those people who are hurting. People don't mind helping. They want to help. The church has got to step up and take its role. And with the government making cuts, it's a perfect opportunity for the church to be more. It's all based on vision. Some people don't see it. I'm not judging them as not being people of God, but I know one thing: we can't continue to walk in the past and live in the future." ■

“We want to help people  
that need help.  
And when they get on their feet,  
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That's the goal.”





## “FAITH IS THAT GLOW FROM WITHIN”

Estella Silas

The West Side Church of Christ parsonage where Estella Silas grew up attracted a steady flow of poor and homeless people asking for food. “When there were transient people wanting something to eat, they didn’t have to do anything but appear on the porch,” says Silas, one of nine children. “If I was frying a hamburger, I’d just wrap it up, because I knew where it was going. Daddy wouldn’t turn anyone away.”

The thing that impressed Silas more than the food her father gave away was his attitude. He helped people without making them feel foolish or inferior. “Giving people respect and not living a lie—that was his brand of Christianity,” Silas recalls. During the Depression, her father was a Church of Christ evangelist, traveling mostly throughout the South. He received little money for his efforts. Mostly, he bartered for what he needed. For example, a church would give him a ham, and he would go to a gas station and trade the ham for a tank of gas. He settled in Indianapolis in the 1940s, when he started having a family. He believed a minister should not be paid a salary, so he always worked another job. When he moved his family to Indianapolis, it was to take a job with International Harvester, where he worked for most of his life. He died in 1979.

It was her father’s ministry that first brought Silas to the Fountain Square neighborhood. Her father took the family along when he was a guest speaker at the Fountain Square Church of Christ. Years later, when Silas and her (then) husband bought a home in the neighborhood, her positive first impressions of the neighborhood were confirmed. “My neigh-

bors have been some of the best, most caring people. These are good people. Good, solid people.”

But not everyone sees it that way. People from other parts of the city would “cringe” when she told them where she lived. Silas, who has a master’s degree in library science from Indiana University and works as a computer systems analyst, decided to take up the cause of a neighborhood that wasn’t getting its due respect. For several years, Silas served as president of the Fountain Square Neighborhood Association. Her presidency was marked by her rather aggressive style of leadership.

As president, one of her main goals was to get new sidewalks for the neighborhood. “This is a walking community,” she says. “The people walk. I don’t care what time of day, what kind of weather, you will find people on the streets.” Her persistence brought Mayor Stephen Goldsmith to Fountain Square at least twice. “Some of these people were so shy,” Silas remembers. “Some of them had stained or callused hands and were embarrassed to shake hands with the mayor.” She encouraged them to be bold.

The hard lobbying paid off. Parts of Fountain Square got new sidewalks in the spring of 1994. A less tangible but no less important result of Silas’s presidency—which ended in 1995—were the home tours she organized with the help of the Fountain Square Church of Christ. “Home tours are usually reserved for what are normally thought of as rich neighborhoods,” Silas says. “People came down here and were pleasantly surprised.”



✦  
VOICES OF FAITH





**“WHEN I WAS A CHILD THE RACES WERE VERY, VERY DEFINED**—black and white did not mix. And a group led by a minister named Bobo, from the Fountain Square Church of Christ, decided that they would start going west and just stop at every Church of Christ and fellowship. When they got to our church, I remember a group of them being in the back. And my father said, ‘I see some of our white brethren in the back. Would you like to say something?’ And Brother Bobo got up and said that they didn’t believe it was going to be segregated in heaven, so they couldn’t see why we were segregated here on earth and they would like to fellowship. And my father said, ‘Well, that makes good sense.’ So, sometimes Brother Bobo would preach at our church, and my father would preach in the Fountain Square Church of Christ. When my father came here, he’d bring us with him. And I never felt out of place.

“When we were on the Near West Side, it was an area in decline. My father moved from a ‘better’ side of town, and took his daughters out of ‘better’ schools, and moved into that neighborhood. People wondered how he could put his daughters in the middle of that. But it was where his work was, and it was where his church was, and he came and became a part of the neighborhood. He basically built his church right out of the neighborhood.

“My father was very intent on the fact that everybody has dignity. When people came to our house and asked for a sandwich, my father never demeaned them. Never. When he got old and became senile, it was the people in the street who brought him home, because they didn’t want him hurt. Whenever my father gave something, he never asked for anything in return. When there were transient people needing something to eat, they didn’t have to do anything but appear on the porch. He used to take food to people in Lockefield Gardens public housing before it was all fancied up. He felt that if you were going to do good works, you didn’t wait for somebody to ask for help. You saw somebody who needed help, and you helped them. And he felt that there were a lot of people in Lockefield who needed help, so he would just go up and down the halls and give people food. That’s the way he was. Daddy never asked them if they needed food. Never asked. That, to him, was being a Christian. That’s the way I grew up—with the teachings of Christ, that you give because you can, because it’s needed. That’s the end of it. Your reward is that you were able to give the help. Somewhere up the road you may need help, but you don’t base it on that.

“I think my father created in his children a lot of little champions of underdogs. And there is built in me this instinctive resistance. When I feel people are being treated as less than what they are, I’m going to stand up and say something. When people are being programmed to think of themselves as less than what they are, I’m going to stand up and say something. I’ve been in this neighborhood a long time. I never perceived Fountain Square as being a bad place.





“You can preach all day long, but if people don’t feel good about where they live, the neighborhood will show it. It’s a terrible weight to put on an area, the kind of things people say about it: ‘It’s a poor area; it’s a bad area. It’s an area where there’s high crime.’ That’s a heavy rap to put on people. I know just about everybody up and down the street. I used to walk every day downtown and back, and I go anywhere in Fountain Square that I want to go. And then people tell me it’s a bad neighborhood. That really irritates me.

“Doing work in the neighborhood, I began to understand the true value of people and the beauty my parents saw in humanity. Faith is seeing beyond the sphere of one’s self and seeing the ability of people to transcend and strive for the higher plane. It is seeing youth helping the elderly without being asked. It’s seeing someone who has very little to share with someone who has still less. Faith is that glow from within that this world is as it should be, and that each of us in our own way can make it better.” ■

*Estella Silas remarried in 1996, sold her house in Fountain Square, and moved to the North East Side of Indianapolis,*

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and seeing the ability of people  
to transcend and strive for  
the higher plane.”



## **“EVERY PERSON HE HAS CREATED, HE WISHES TO BE SAVED”**

Mary Slattery

Sister Mary Slattery grew up on the Near North Side of Indianapolis, but her family had friends on the southeast side. They visited that area occasionally, particularly Garfield Park, where they had picnics. As a result, Slattery had some familiarity with Fountain Square as a child, long before she returned as an adult.

Sr. Slattery attended St. Agnes Academy in Indianapolis and then St. Mary of the Woods College. In 1973 she received her master's degree in theology from Spalding University in Louisville. In Indianapolis she taught at Cathedral and Roncalli High Schools. In the 1970s she spent six years working as the Director of Religious Education for the Indianapolis archdiocese. That position involved selecting textbooks for the Catholic schools and instructing teachers in how to use them. She then spent thirteen years caring for her aged parents. Six months after her mother died, she became pastoral associate at St. Patrick. She has been in that position since 1990.

St. Patrick does not have a full-time pastor because it doesn't have a large enough congregation to support one. Instead, a "parish life coordinator" does all the work of a priest, with the exception of sacramental duties. The parish life coordinator serves in that role for both St. Patrick and nearby Holy Rosary Catholic Church.

As pastoral associate, Slattery is responsible for helping organize the activities and outreach of St. Patrick. She chairs and serves on several committees at the church: evangelism, fundraising, liturgy, social. As part of the liturgy committee, Slattery organizes a program in which six lay eucharistic ministers deliver communion to the sick and shut-ins on a weekly basis. As part of the social committee she helps organize the parish's patronal feast, the St. Patrick's Day celebration, every year. She also teaches two classes. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is a class for adults who are considering becoming members of the church. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine teaches children the basic doctrines of the Catholic faith. Slattery also gives sacramental preparation for baptism, visits parishioners after the death of a loved one, distributes groceries to the needy, and gives the homily at St. Patrick on occasion.

Like many inner-city churches, St. Patrick has dwindled in attendance over the past few decades, as the middle class has moved to the suburbs. St. Patrick, traditionally known as an Irish parish, now has a large Hispanic population. Each week, from 500 to 600 people attend its Spanish language masses, which began in 1992. The parish continues to struggle, changing itself to meet the needs and preferences of a new population. For St. Patrick it is a matter of survival.



✠  
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**“THE SPANISH LANGUAGE MASS HAS BEEN A NEW MINISTRY.** With the influx of so many Hispanics, it has increased vastly. Recently, the archdiocese has made up a commission looking at the needs of the Asian community, the African American community, and the Hispanic community. There’s much to consider. We know what the sacramental needs are. We know they need to be visited in the hospital when they are sick and they need to be baptized. But would it be better for them to have their own church? Could we assign one of our churches to them? Is it better for them to pray in their own language even as their children are becoming bilingual and will be moving into the mainstream of American life? Sensibilities have to be gently met. This is a learning process for those of us who are used to working with white America. It’s a new way for us to grow, and we don’t want to take one step forward and two back, so we’re being very careful.

“This parish is what it always was—working people, senior citizens on fixed incomes. There are no real jobs in this area. It’s all little stuff. One indication of the economic level is all the rent-to-own centers located here. That says right away that these are people who can be taken. The housing has gone from owned property to rental property. The rent is way too high for what they’re getting. We have no competition for grocery stores. We are redlined by the banks, though they will not admit that. With their zip codes, our people cannot even get insurance. They cannot take out mortgages. It’s very simple: ‘You’re in the wrong zip code. We do not deal with you.’ Economically, this is how we’re looked at, which means that we have to stay at that level if we can’t get any help.

“I’m not sure that our churches help our people integrate their religious beliefs with their daily living. I’m not sure that we’ve related enough to help them on an ongoing basis. They go to church as a relief from all the stuff that bogs them down all week, then they go back to being bogged down. I don’t think we’ve ever given them enough help to work it out. In inner city parishes, our biggest task is to empower people to do stuff, to create a whole new power group that has a whole lot of know-how.

“I think the church keeps people sane and gives them hope. That’s what religion always does. Any contact with God helps us stay sane, see things in perspective, hang on when things are tough, and rejoice when things are better. We are also a source of real service. Small things. We have a St. Vincent DePaul food pantry here. We have an outreach Christmas dinner here. About 200 people attend, and we have a giveaway of winter items at that time. One lady moved away, and she wrote me this year and said, ‘My highlight of every year was your Christmas dinner. I don’t know if they’ll be having anything here or not.’ She was a dear old lady who didn’t have much. Whenever we have a rummage sale, it’s packed with people, because they know they’ll get good bargains. So, the number of people who are not parishioners, but that we serve, is remarkable.

“Our people come together to work on whatever’s going on. See, when this church burned in 1927 and it was rebuilt in 1929 and then the crash came, followed by the Depression of the 1930s—think of the hard time it was to get this place paid for. There’s a deep loyalty to this parish, even among those who have moved away years ago. The energy for service comes from the need. It comes from the pure joy of serving. People like to do what they do. I think it feeds on itself. It’s really a wonderful thing, and it’s not always the same people. That’s the wonderful part. It’s not the same people. No one has to give





all the time. So many things have been going on here for so long, and people just keep them going. I find that to begin something is easy; to sustain it is the test.

“The church is only people, and people fail all the time. It’s sinners who go to church. Saints—we don’t have any. We have loads of sinners. In fact, that’s all we’ve got. We have sinners who are working on it, trying to overcome and be better than they are. So many times the finger will be pointed at the Catholic Church or a Catholic priest or whoever. And I’m always grateful to God that there’s still enough idealism for people to say, ‘Isn’t it terrible that something that has such high ideals has people like that in it?’ Because otherwise, they would just dismiss the whole thing. That ‘fallen’ person would be no contrast to the ideal that is taught.

“It has been necessary throughout history for people to look for a greater power than themselves, and they’ve called that greater power by many names. God has revealed Himself in many ways to every person. Every person He has created, He wishes to be saved. No one who has been created is not wanted by God.” ■

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We have loads of sinners. In fact, that’s all we’ve got.”













## MAPLETON-FALL CREEK

*The area now encompassed by the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood was once two separate developments, the village of Mapleton on West 38th Street and residential subdivisions between Fall Creek Parkway and Meridian Street. In the 1870s, Mapleton was a streetcar stop along West Maple Road (now 38th Street). Ten years later about 300 residents lived in the area, which included a church, post office, school, general store, and blacksmith shop. Annexed by Indianapolis in 1902, Mapleton grew quickly as a residential suburb.*

*George E. Kessler designed Fall Creek Parkway as a scenic boulevard in the early 1900s. Affluent residents built homes near the parkway and motored to the city. Most homes were built between 1900 and 1930 and featured such architectural styles as Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, and Arts and Crafts.*

*Commercial nodes developed along the main thoroughfares, such as 38th Street, where restaurants and retail shops were constructed. Churches, including Trinity Episcopal, Tabernacle Presbyterian, Broadway Methodist, and Our Redeemer Lutheran also were built in the peak years of development and continue to play prominent roles in the community.*

*In the 1960s the Mapleton-Fall Creek area began to change as newer suburbs attracted residents and businesses. The racial makeup of the area changed as well. Two percent of the residents were black in 1960; by 1983, 87 percent of the approximately 12,000 residents were black.*

*Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association, formed in 1962, brought the two neighborhoods together by providing social services and a forum for residents to discuss problems. The group also cofounded the Mapleton-Fall Creek Housing Corporation with five area churches in 1988. The corporation sponsors home improvement programs, including handyman training for residents and rehabilitation assistance. Five mini-neighborhoods have been adopted by a partnership of churches and neighborhood groups in the corporation's Adopt-A-Block Program. Funds pay for low-interest loans to homeowners, neighborhood clean-up campaigns, and crime-watch programs.*



## “YOU CAN’T FEED A PERSON WITH A LONG-HANDLED SPOON”

Cliff Hatcher

Typically as Cliff Hatcher goes about his job as head custodian of Broadway United Methodist Church, a man from the neighborhood stops by for no particular reason. The two men have a cup of coffee, talk, and go their separate ways—not a big deal. The ritual is significant, though, for what it says about Hatcher’s role at the church. His official responsibility is to clean and maintain Broadway’s large physical structure: four floors, nine kitchens, twenty-three restrooms. Hatcher also spends a good deal of time just talking to people. Hatcher, who lives in Mapleton–Fall Creek, is clearly more than head custodian.

To children from the neighborhood, he’s “Uncle Clifford.” On weekdays, a group of students wait for their school bus in the church lobby. Hatcher sometimes makes them hot chocolate or feeds them breakfast. He always keeps an eye out until they board their bus. In the evenings, when parents can’t pick up their child on time, Hatcher hangs around the church until they arrive. He opens the church at 6:30 a.m. and doesn’t lock it some nights until 11 p.m.

Hatcher’s philosophy in working with children is that they will act the way they are treated. Show them respect and they will give back respect; expect them to act responsibly and they will. In his spare time, Hatcher helps the children with their homework, and he organizes cookouts, softball games, and various other activities, including a chess club.

Hatcher sees these kinds of activities as critical because he remembers that he “was involved with the church when I was very young because they had a gym here, they had Cub Scouts here, they had a kindergarten here, they had a free clinic here, and mostly everybody in this general area was involved with the clinic and the kindergarten.”

Hatcher hasn’t always felt the same sense of mission. A graduate of Crispus Attucks High School, he worked a variety of jobs before coming to Broadway in 1983: soldier, mechanic, assistant electronics instructor at Ivy Tech, apartment manager, tree cutter. He attended church all his life but didn’t take a particular interest in community service until January 1990, when he was diagnosed with cancer. His cancer is now in remission.

In the 1960s, when many residents moved out of Mapleton–Fall Creek, Broadway United Methodist chose to stay. Once a large and thriving all-white church and a vital part of the community, the question now is whether or not Broadway can survive in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. In recent years illegal drug activity in the neighborhood has swelled. Hatcher wonders whether church members, who return to the neighborhood only on Sundays and special occasions, can form meaningful relationships with local residents.

Hatcher understands the importance of the church’s





VOICES OF FAITH







presence in his neighborhood. As Broadway attempts to bridge the distance between itself and the surrounding community, his role as liaison is important to its success. In January of 1997 the church sent Hatcher to a leadership training conference in Chicago. When he returned he organized a Mapleton-Fall Creek block club. Its fifteen regular members, which include both Broadway members and nonmembers, meet once a week and sponsor events

such as neighborhood cleanups. As many as 200 people have turned out for such cleanups. The club plants flowers, tends gardens in the neighborhood, and helps senior citizens. It is planning to host gospel sings in the church parking lot, and also is organizing a Crime Watch program. Hatcher's goal is that the block club—like himself—will serve as a bridge between the church and its neighborhood.

**"I HAD IT IN MIND FOR A LONG TIME** to start some kind of neighborhood organization but didn't know how to go about doing it. I got in touch with a group of people and we started meeting, started discussing what we wanted from the neighborhood, started passing out fliers to the community. If I improve the neighborhood, and get the people in the neighborhood to begin to respect themselves, they may start coming to church, and that will improve the church program. You can't have a church without people, after all. This is only a building. We make the church.

"To help a person, you have to rub shoulders with him. You can do a lot of things for people sitting down at a desk, but until you get out there and find out what it's all about, you never really know. You can't feed a person with a long-handled spoon and still treat them as your friend. If you're going to be their friend, you sit right beside them and help them. You have to be willing to go into the community. That's what Broadway has been doing lately—we've gotten involved more with the neighbors, we've gotten the church to open up more. The church is open seven days a week, and the neighborhood has the opportunity to use anything they want here. We have a wellness clinic. We have violin classes, tutoring programs.

"I was diagnosed with cancer in 1990. I believe in my heart that it was God who knocked me down and slowed me down to make me realize that there was something more for me to do than the things I was doing. He gave me this second opportunity. I've been involved in churches all my life. But after my cancer battle, I opened my eyes and realized what it was all about. I knew there were some things the Lord wanted me to do. I think I was put back here to save the kids. I'm fighting a battle for the kids; I think that's what my battle's all about. Cancer strengthened me.

"Everyone is here for a purpose, and until you serve that purpose you're no good to anybody, not even yourself. I've asked the same questions all through my life. What am I here for? What am I supposed to do? And I keep getting this answer here lately: the kids. The children. Something's got to be done to help the children. Because if we lose this generation of children, we might as well call it quits." ■



## “SAVING A CHURCH IN THE CITY”

Harry Huxhold

Pastor Harry Huxhold came to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in 1965 with high hopes. He accepted the pastorate at Our Redeemer in Mapleton–Fall Creek because it “satisfied my real longing—to serve in a central city parish.” He moved to the neighborhood at a time when it was rapidly integrating, and he thought he could help the church do the same.

Huxhold wanted to pastor an urban congregation because, in the 1950s, he had watched white, middle-class America abandon the city for the suburbs. His conscience told him that was wrong. In the thesis he wrote for his Master of Divinity degree at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis he maintained that the church should be “color-blind.” “Some people thought I was a radical for that,” he says. “They had to change the professors who reviewed the paper so that I could pass.”

Huxhold graduated in 1947 and became pastor of a church in rural Wisconsin, moving to Chicago in 1949 to work for a Lutheran welfare agency. While at the agency, he helped found the Lutheran Human Relations Association, a group whose purpose was to “get the officials of the church to be aware of integration.”

In 1953 Huxhold returned to parish work as pastor of a church in suburban Chicago. He left the suburban congregation in 1960 to become a chaplain at the University of Minnesota, where he stayed until Our Redeemer called him in 1965. He moved into Mapleton–Fall Creek at a time when the neighborhood churches faced a decision: relocate to the suburbs, where most of their members were moving, or stay in the city.

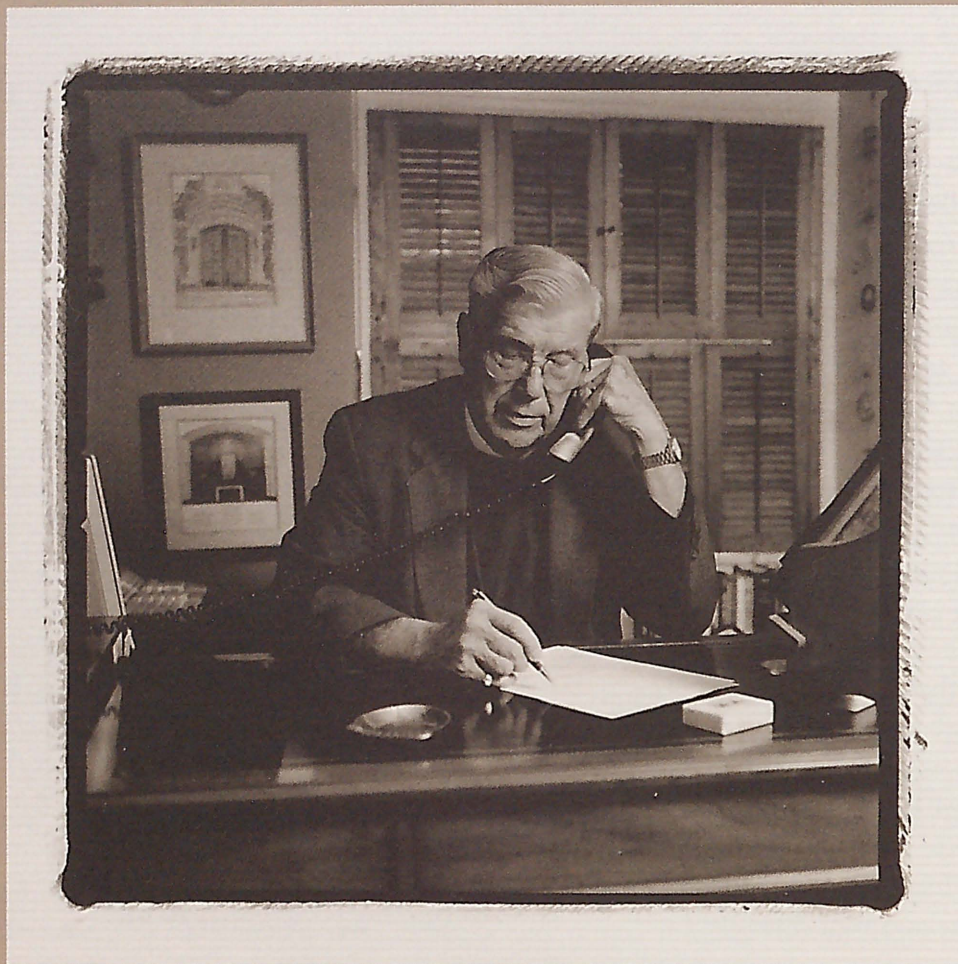
Our Redeemer, and most of the mainline churches in the area, remained. Since that decision, however, all of them have faced the same basic problem: how to attract members from the surrounding neighborhood. During Huxhold’s tenure, Our Redeemer tried to make itself attractive by serving as a sort of community center. Under Huxhold, Our Redeemer was also one of the founding members of the Tri-Church Council (now called the Mid-North Church Council), established in 1970 to assist needy residents of Mapleton–Fall Creek and improve the neighborhood in general.

Though Our Redeemer didn’t integrate the way he had hoped, Huxhold believes the church’s presence has made an important difference in the life of the neighborhood. In that, and in the spirit of Our Redeemer’s congregation, he finds solace.





VOICES OF FAITH







**“OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN WAS IN THE THROES** of deciding whether to build an additional building when I became pastor in 1965. The congregation faced a changing neighborhood. This had been something of a silk-stocking congregation. As they faced a change in the community, there was considerable anxiety as to what they should do—whether they should move from the neighborhood or stay. There were those people who simply wanted to move on and those people who felt obligated to stay. Some said it was immoral if we moved; some said it was immoral if we stayed. That challenge played on all of my social sympathies. I felt very much a calling to come here and to help the congregation make the adjustment. My inclination was that it was a good time for us to really make a run at saving a church in the city. We decided to stay, acquired more property, and built the addition in 1966 or ’67.

“If you had asked me about the future thirty years ago, I would have said that eventually I would be serving principally a black congregation. But that didn’t happen, and the only way to maintain any kind of ministry here was hold on to the white congregation. So, we did our best. My frustration has been that we weren’t more successful in bringing black members in. However frustrated we’ve been in achieving our goals, though, there is some stability here in Mapleton-Fall Creek because the congregations have remained stable and have been able to contribute. The encouraging thing is to find people of good will who want to continue to minister here. That’s a good thing—to know that there are people who have that kind of mind-set and heart-set. But simply because you say you’re going to stay, that doesn’t mean you’re going to be a winner, or that everyone will flock to the place. That didn’t happen. As the congregation ages, the future depends on how successful we are at integrating even more with African Americans. That’s where it’s at—having them involved in congregations.

“From a religious perspective, the impetus must come from seeing one another as God’s creatures and people who have been redeemed and forgiven through God’s grace. That means a great deal more than any other kind of glue that we can make. I think of the harassment we had in the early years—how many times we were robbed, how many times we had to answer the alarm, and how many crazy things happened. We’ve been without incident like that for a long time, and I just think it’s because the neighborhood sees this as their center. People see this as their center, even though it isn’t their church. And I think that’s been important.

“A couple of years prior to my coming, three local churches created the Tri-Church Council, now the Mid-North Church Council: Broadway United Methodist, Tabernacle Presbyterian, and Our Redeemer Lutheran. They formed this council in order to work together on what they thought were critical issues in the community. The goal was to encourage one another and be supportive of one another. We also developed common ministries. None of those churches has left here. The city will never be able to measure what the council did to sustain the neighborhood as well as it did. Most cities have suffered immensely when the old institutions have moved. The congregations in the coun-



cil have really given a lot of support to the neighborhood in terms of both time and money—a sizable amount.

“One time, we had a town meeting of the industries and offices and insurance companies along Meridian Street because it was really deteriorating. You can look at Meridian Street now and you’ll see how well it has grown, and that’s because we got a commitment out of those people to contribute and do something in our community. And they have. One of the things I predicted was that the city would rebuild itself from the inside out, and that has happened. It’s happening much faster than I expected. The renewal is spreading out. It’s not confined to just downtown. The continuing presence of the churches is very, very important in that transformation. That’s still the main thing, the continuing presence of the institutions. Look at the major cities of America. When the churches have moved out of the city, you see a greater disintegration in those communities than what we have witnessed here.” ■

*Harry Huxhold resigned from Our Redeemer Lutheran after thirty years as its pastor and accepted a position as associate pastor of King of Glory Lutheran in Carmel, Indiana.*

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## “THE POOR ARE ALWAYS OVERLOOKED”

Shedrick Madison

The Reverend Shedrick Madison, known locally as Big Red the Wrestling Preacher, knows something about loss and gain, exile and redemption—major themes in the Bible, the book he claims as his authority. For Big Red, those spiritual themes have had an earthly dimension in the world of wrestling, where good and evil are always clearly defined.

He was born on March 23, 1959, and raised in Indianapolis, growing up in the Mapleton–Fall Creek neighborhood at 33rd and Washington Boulevard. He graduated from North Central High School in 1978. After high school, he went to Boston College on a full football scholarship. There he earned an associate’s degree, but when his mother became ill in 1982 he dropped out to help care for her. She died later that year, and he never returned to complete his baccalaureate degree. Subsequently, he has attended the American Bible Institute in Kansas City, where he earned a theology degree; Ramma Bible College in Oklahoma; and the University of Illinois, where he took classes but did not graduate. In the meantime he had entered the professional wrestling world to earn money. He would wrestle in the evenings and attend the various schools mentioned during the day.

He was called to full-time ministry in 1987. In Toledo, Ohio, he converted a crack house into a church. In 1991 he returned to Indianapolis from Ohio and began doing outreach ministry, witnessing and passing out Bibles on the street. He hasn’t stopped since.

He estimates that he serves 150 families a week in his food pantry. “This neighborhood is just saturated with poverty. It’s one of the most overlooked neighborhoods in the city because it’s the poorest. The poor are always overlooked.”

Madison receives some regular support from a few sources: Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, for example, and the Promise Keepers organization provide funding. But that money doesn’t amount to enough to support the ministry, so it’s a hand-to-mouth operation. As Madison describes it, he takes the “shotgun approach” to raising money. “The kids go out on the street and collect money. We sell things, have barbecues—whatever is legal that we can do, we do it.”

Madison founded the Faith Teaching Church of Deliverance in 1991. Wanting to do more to reach children and teens, he also started a youth center. Both the church and the center are housed at 323 West 28th Street, having recently moved from Pennsylvania Avenue. They are just outside the borders of Mapleton–Fall Creek proper, though he continues to serve residents in that neighborhood.

He furnishes the youth center with video games and computers that children can use a certain amount of time each week, based on their school performance. He also runs a summer basketball league and winter basketball tournament, invites speakers to talk



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VOICES OF FAITH





about anti-drug or AIDS-awareness themes, and occasionally takes the children on field trips to recreational and educational sites.

Bad knees have forced Madison to retire from

wrestling, but he views his work as a preacher and youth leader as the same good-versus-evil dichotomy that once attracted fans to his professional wrestling persona. In this case, he's on a mission to clean up the neighborhood.

**“IF WE’RE GOING TO MAKE ANY CHANGES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD,** the churches are going to have to take the responsibility. The successful churches are going to have to funnel some funds down to the little store-front pastors like me. They’re going to have to take it upon themselves to say that there is a need here, and that there is hope. We provide hope for people who don’t have hope. We provide life to those who don’t have life. A young man comes to me in the dead of winter without a coat on. I put a coat on his back. That’s hope. He comes to me hungry, and I feed him. That’s hope. He comes to me and can’t read, and I find tutors for him. That’s hope. That’s empowerment. Next week we’ll be having a Bible class, and I’ll have a lady teach some of the young boys who can’t read how to read. Is that important? It most certainly is. If a person can read, he can change his life. If I wasn’t here, they wouldn’t have that opportunity.

“The ones who could help us the most, won’t. It’s easier to talk about Haiti than it is to invest in your own community. You don’t want to believe it’s actually happening to you. Until death touches your house, until the twelve-year-old who dies is yours, then it doesn’t matter. The successful churches don’t want to deal with the need, because urban ministry does not make money. This is an expensive endeavor. It’s an investment. It’s costly. It’s hard. It makes people nervous. They say, ‘Oh, that’s overwhelming.’ Baloney. It’s not overwhelming. It’s what I have to adjust to. You know what you have to do and you do it. We’ve got to come to a place where we understand that the urban pastor has the anointing of God to do what he does. I’m not against any other ministries. What I’m saying is that successful ministries need to tie into these ministries.

“There are a lot of misconceptions. One thing people are very wrong about is that poor people are lazy. People down here are not lazy. They may be misdirected, but they’re not lazy. There are some conservative people who have come down here and have seen me work, and boy have they changed their minds. That’s because when you come down here and see these children, you see they’re just like your children. You see they’re crying out for love and attention, and that they don’t want to be in trouble. But once they get into a system that tells them they are nothing, they’re locked into nothing. People want to lie and say that people down here don’t have a need. Our city government hasn’t got a clue about poverty. They know absolutely, positively nothing. They don’t come to us, they don’t listen to us, and they don’t deal with the needs of urban youth. They’re not interested in the poor youth. The government—the mayor and so forth—surrounds itself with ‘yes’ people, people who say exactly what it wants them to say. They’ll bring a guy in from the Hudson Institute to tell me what’s going on in my neighborhood.





“I’ve tried to defend government. I’ve tried to work with the government. The government is not interested in me. The government is not interested in the poor. It’s more interested in political gain and the camera and the wealthy. Politicians say to me, ‘Pastor, we like what you’re doing. We believe in what you’re doing. We’re going to give you a van.’ But the van never comes. They say, ‘Pastor, we believe in your work and we’re going to give you a certificate.’ I’ve got a bunch of certificates. That’s not what I need. I need volunteers to come down here and educate these young people. Ninety percent of the children I work with are from one-parent families. I’m competing with drug dealers, and I’m arguing with the system.

“The small church is the only hope that the poverty-stricken have. They can’t go in the big churches. They’re not received. Most of the people in our church were rejected by the big churches. They don’t have the money to give, so they don’t have status. They’re looked down on. Here, you come as you are. The kind of people who come to this facility are the people who live in this neighborhood. They don’t make enough money to support themselves, let alone the church. But they have a desire to pray. They work very hard trying to do whatever they can to help, but finances are an issue. So people laugh at this ministry and say, ‘Well, he’s not economically sound.’

“I’m not against the church. There’s nothing more powerful than the churches in any neighborhood. The church is my hope. I’m trying to make it understand: we deal with youth that nobody else can deal with. The issue is getting the body of Christ to understand its responsibility to show love. That’s what we’re talking about here—the body of Christ, baptized believers in Christ Jesus, coming together and working for the common good of saving our cities.” ■

“The small church is the only hope  
that the poverty-stricken have.”



## “EVERYTHING CENTERS ON COMMUNITY”

Al Polin

Al Polin grew up in a poor east side African American neighborhood in Indianapolis—very poor, as he tells it. “I know what it’s like not to have. That’s the advantage I have on a lot of people.” Polin was born September 9, 1937, in Indianapolis. His family didn’t have indoor plumbing, running water, or electricity. They often ate only one meal a day. Still, he graduated from Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis, and he received training in business from Kentucky State University and Indiana Business College, though he did not receive a degree from either institution. After spending five years in the military, Polin worked for General Motors in Indianapolis for twenty-seven years before retiring in 1992. While at GM, he received training in human relations and personnel, business management, technical writing, and labor relations. He put these skills to good use after retirement by beginning his own consulting business.

But Polin soon saw a need for his skills in his community. Believing that “there’s more to life than the dollar,” he quit his consulting work and invested himself full-time in community service. Today Polin is neighborhood coordinator for the Mapleton–Fall Creek Neighborhood Association. He also serves on the board and is director of both the Mapleton–Fall Creek

Housing Development Corporation and the Martin Luther King Multi-Service Center. In addition Polin serves on the boards of the 38th Street/Maple Road Development Corporation and the Raphael Health Center.

Polin doesn’t receive a salary in his position as neighborhood coordinator for the Mapleton–Fall Creek Neighborhood Association. Instead, he’s paid on a per-project basis. Currently he’s in charge of five projects for which the association receives block grant money from the city. One of his projects is Operation Jericho, a temporary marketplace set up on Saturdays at the corner of 30th and Central Streets. Neighborhood residents can come to this market and buy, sell, or trade. Other projects include a preschool academy, to help prepare young children to enter kindergarten, and a computer training class for adults.

Polin’s vision for Mapleton–Fall Creek’s future involves building a Martin Luther King Center on or near the present location of the MLK Multi-Service Center. The present facility amounts to little more than office space. Polin envisions a two-story, \$3 million, 26,000 square-foot complex that would serve a variety of functions: educational, athletic, and entertainment. Its central location on North Meridian would allow the center to serve several neighborhoods at once.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“THE MLK BUILDING IS SUCH A SMALL BUILDING.** Children need to have a place where they can go and make noise in a controlled environment. They need a place to ventilate. That’s where a new MLK Center would come in handy. We could set up a whole range of activities: swimming, chess, a library, a kitchen, a recreation area. They could play sports, have a study time. It would be a healthy environment—one building where they could have everything in a structured space. We don’t have that today. The kids don’t have anywhere to go. They do whatever comes to their mind because there’s no sense of direction.

“My concern is for people—what we can do for people. I feel like I have an obligation to God to give whatever I can to help those who are less fortunate. I was brought up to appreciate what you get in life, because tomorrow is not promised. I don’t put value on material things. I just consider myself as a person who’s no greater than anyone I meet. I can sleep on the street with a guy who sleeps on the street, and I can visit the guy who runs the city, and I’m the same person. People walking the streets, some of them are victims of the system, and some of them are victims of attitudes. They don’t care, because they feel like the system doesn’t care. We—the churches, the communities—have to look at one another straight in the eyes and create a dialogue of understanding. The churches, as well as the neighborhood associations, are the greatest part of making that happen.

“It seems to me that there’s something missing, either system-wise or people-wise. I don’t think people have put God into their lives, because if they did they would understand that we’re all equal in the eyes of God. If we understood that anything that happens here on this earth is going to affect every one of us, either directly or indirectly, then we would understand that we should work together. It’s all about giving and caring, and that goes back to faith in God. We’re all under one God, and we need to learn to respect one another’s cultural differences and religious differences. All the prophets I’ve read about talked about their travels among the people. They talk about being out among and with the people, the people out on the street. You never get to know them if you’re not out there with them.

“People want to pick on the less fortunate who have come to the welfare system. But it’s the system that has allowed them to become dependent on it. The system works the people, so the people work the system. People only do what the system lets them do. Dependency didn’t happen overnight. It comes about through systematic redlining—banks not loaning money, real estate agents not taking you to certain areas, keeping people down, not opening up.

“People have a tendency to think that if they move away from a problem, it goes away. I don’t believe that. I think that if you move away from a problem, you only allow that problem to grow and expand further, and it’ll catch you eventually. Christ stayed among the people that needed him most. He did not move away from them. He went to them, and he stayed there. The churches here have made a commitment to stay, and I think that is a





strong commitment. Maybe these churches felt a responsibility to be where the people needed them, and I think they have shown that they want to do something for the community. Everything centers on community and what's going on here. I've made a commitment to give back to the community whatever I can.

"Only one thing has been promised on this earth: that is, if you are born, you will die. Man is born to die, and what you do in between is totally your decision. There are so many things that people don't share because they feel like it's theirs and they don't want to give it to anyone else. But when they die, who's going to get it? If I die tomorrow, I hope not to take anything with me, because I want to leave anything I have, any knowledge that I have, back here to help others. That's the way I look at it." ■

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either system-wise or people-wise. I don't think  
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did they would understand that we're all  
equal in the eyes of God."



## “THE INTERNAL GNAWING TO GO AND DO SOMETHING IN THE CITY”

Jon Walters

Born November 17, 1939, in the deep South—Sanatorium, Mississippi, sixty miles south of Jackson—Jon Walters grew up in a rigidly segregated society where even members of the clergy and other religious leaders were often overt racists and segregationists. His parents were Methodists who cut against the grain in that culture because they didn’t believe that racism and segregation were right. The son inherited his parents’ beliefs.

Walters received a bachelor’s degree in music from Westminster Choir College and a master of music degree from Indiana University in 1970. He earned a master of divinity degree from Christian Theological Seminary in 1975. In 1968 he was serving as minister of music in a Methodist church and gave a voice recital at the church. Several of his black friends turned out for the performance, and for that the pastor forced him to resign: “I was in Clarksdale, south of Memphis sixty miles, as the minister of music. I did a voice recital, and the church had a little notice in the paper saying ‘Y’all come.’ When I got there to sing, half the congregation was people of color I knew—from talking to them on the phone primarily. And that’s when I got fired. That’s when I came to Indiana.” He enrolled in IU’s music program that summer, and, disgusted with the institutional church, he decided to leave it: “I had just had it with the institution, because it had taught me the idealism I had and then refused to practice that idealism. So I just decided there was no future working in the church.

Then I got into the academic world and had an experience that taught me it was as bad, if not worse.”

He had second thoughts and never did really leave Methodism, partially because the denomination put him in charge of a congregation in Bloomington while he was in school. He was not ordained: “There was no other locus for campus ministry. Those looking for worship came to my place. Over a ten-year period we attracted all sorts of people who were just unhappy with the traditional church. It was a mission-funded Methodist Church.” He served there from 1970 to 1980. Then he took the job as the executive director of the Indiana Interreligious Commission on Human Equality, which worked with Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in an effort to eradicate racism. In 1986 he went to work for the United Methodist Church on the program staff in Bloomington. He served there briefly, then he was the pastor of a church with a troubled history near Evansville for eighteen months. He left it for North United Methodist in 1988 and has been there ever since.

He uses his vocal training at North in a quartet of highly trained, operatic-level singers. He’s also a section leader in the choir. He preaches occasionally, too. His official title is Minister of Community Ministries, and though his responsibilities vary widely, he deals primarily with the constant stream of poor people who come to North looking for food or financial help.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“THE CODE PHRASE I GREW UP HEARING WAS** ‘Our historic way of life,’ which referred to segregation and slavery. If a minister got up and said segregation was wrong, that would be his last sermon. The idea that all people were equal was just unacceptable. Women weren’t equal to men—everyone knew that was in the Bible. Blacks were not equal to whites—everyone knew that was in the Bible. My parents would point out that Jesus ministered to everybody. They lived in the middle ground, questioning everything that someone said was right or wrong.

“Christianity is a way of understanding who God is, but it’s not the only way. I’m continually disillusioned with the Christian church. We gave you the Inquisition, and we virtually gave you World War I and World War II. Plus, we’ve been saying that women and people of color are worthy in God’s eyes—just as worthy as anyone else—but we don’t practice that by giving those people equal opportunities. I’m not militant about that, but when someone wants to know how I would change the church—well, we would just practice more of what we preach.

“The life of Jesus, for people like me, is what’s interesting. What did he do, and how did he act? We have to have some kind of model or paradigm. Ultimately the question is not a question of belief. It’s a question of lifestyle. What do I do now that I identify myself as a Christian? The reason I’m interested in doing this is that I can be a person of faith by trying to act in a way which mimics the way that I understand Jesus treated people and dealt with them.

“We say that Jesus came primarily to bring good news to the poor, but we are not interested in ministering to poor people by and large. The gospel message isn’t nearly as clear as the Wall Street message. The problem with our lives is that they’re just full of crap all over the place. After a while, it’s just dizzying how much stuff there is. To be an American means to do well financially so you can move up north somewhere where your kids can play soccer. And when the guilt really gets to you, you can send some money to some group to help downtown with the poor people that you left behind.

“If you look at the number of people in seminaries who are interested in urban ministry, it’s almost nonexistent. In the 1960s we had a lot of people interested. They thought that’s where the frontier of the church would be. It turned out that we’re not good at that. We’re very good at middle-class things, but we’re not good at urban ministry. It’s not seen as something that has value. There’s no future in urban ministry. The poor not only don’t have money, but they have bad habits. They’re alcoholics and drug addicts and they steal stuff from you. The Salvation Army is actually a lot better at helping them than most churches, so we’ve turned it over to them.

“And so what are pastors in seminary going to do, thinking about their careers? Well, they want a nice big suburban church just like everyone else. They’ve got kids. They want a church with 500 to 1,000 members where they can make \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year. So very few people have the internal gnawing to go and do something in the city.

“What about making sacrifices? Should I make the sacrifice to live in a neighborhood where there’s high crime? That works against our values in this society. Privacy—that means I don’t have to fool with you. What I want—what I’m taught I need—is the prestige of having a good job. Not only the privacy of distance but the prestige. Those are the values that we learn. We’re looking for the p’s in society—power, prestige, and privacy.





“Those values show up in little, simple things, like where you shop. I can buy gas over here at this station and pay the same price as at Shell. But it has all these people hanging around, and they’re African Americans. Shell has a credit card thing and I don’t have to go inside. If I buy gas from the other place, I’m forced to go inside. There’s no way not to. If I go to Shell, they’ve got it set up perfectly for the guy who doesn’t want any community. You just put your card in the machine, pump the gas, and drive out. The question is, what’s my obligation to form community with people? Should I be around people I don’t like? I mean, that’s in the gospel somewhere. We would like an idyllic state where there’s no conflict and the weather’s nice all the time, fruit trees are bountiful and there’s a place to swim. Those are the images that Disney and others have created for us. But most of us know that’s not going to happen on a long-term basis.” ■

“To be an American means to do well financially so you can move up north somewhere where your kids can play soccer. And when the guilt really gets to you, you can send some money to some group to help downtown with the poor people that you left behind.”



## “FAITH IS BELIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE CAN BE DONE”

Mae Woodson

Mae Woodson's views on gender roles could be described as deeply conservative. They're rooted in an interpretation of the Bible that says a wife should submit to her husband's authority. She considers herself fortunate in having had a husband who "demanded that I stay home and be a mother to his children. That was good for me. A woman's place is in the home, whether we like it or not," says Woodson, an active member of Grace Apostolic Church, 22nd and Broadway.

Yet Woodson, sixty-four, cannot be pigeonholed as a traditionalist. She's not timid. She's never been afraid to voice her own opinions. She began a new career after raising her eight children, working first for the city and then the state government.

In addition Woodson always has been an activist. She and her husband moved into Mapleton-Fall Creek in 1964 and joined the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association the same year. She served as the organization's president from 1990 to 1993 and is still a member. She also sits on the board of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center, a training center for neighborhood associations city-wide.

"I'm not a militant person, but there are times when you have to open your mouth," Woodson says. "I've always been a part of whatever community I've lived in." At Shortridge Junior High, for example, things were nearly out of control when her oldest daughter, Sheila, enrolled in the fall of 1967. There was great unrest because of desegregation. Students ignored teachers, fought in the halls, threw books out of windows. Someone kept setting fires in the building.

The problems might have worsened, but Woodson asked for the authority to come in every day and help establish order. The situation at Shortridge improved dramatically within a few weeks. When her daughter graduated, Woodson, a graduate of Crispus Attucks High School, gave the commencement address. It was titled "Only the Strong Survive." She used the opportunity to share her faith, telling the students that God should be "a part of our lives, giving us direction so that we might be a productive part of the community."

The same faith and spirit underpin her behavior as a neighbor. Woodson believes it takes each person looking out for others to build a strong community. Sometimes, that belief manifests itself in small actions, like buying flowers for the funeral of a neighbor. Sometimes, more is required.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“WE HAD BEEN LIVING HERE FIFTEEN YEARS** or so when neighbors moved in nearby. There were two girls and an older son, and the dad remarried and brought in a stepmother. She had a couple of kids, which created some problems. My three oldest sons and the boy became buddies. One night, I guess the young man was thirteen at the time, I heard his stepmother calling me. I could hear the anguish and the fear in her voice. I went to the door, and he had her between that tree out there and a big, big rock. She said, ‘Mrs. Woodson, he’s going to kill me.’ I said ‘Oh no he’s not.’ He said to me, ‘Yes I am going to kill her. I don’t like the way she treats my sisters, and I am going to kill her.’ I said, ‘No you’re not. Put the rock down.’ He finally came to himself and put the rock down. And I said to him, ‘That is the lady your father has chosen. If you cannot respect her as your stepmother, and you do not want to stay over there, you pack your clothes now and come on in this house.’ And that’s what he did. He left at twenty-one. And to this day, he’s just like one of the family.

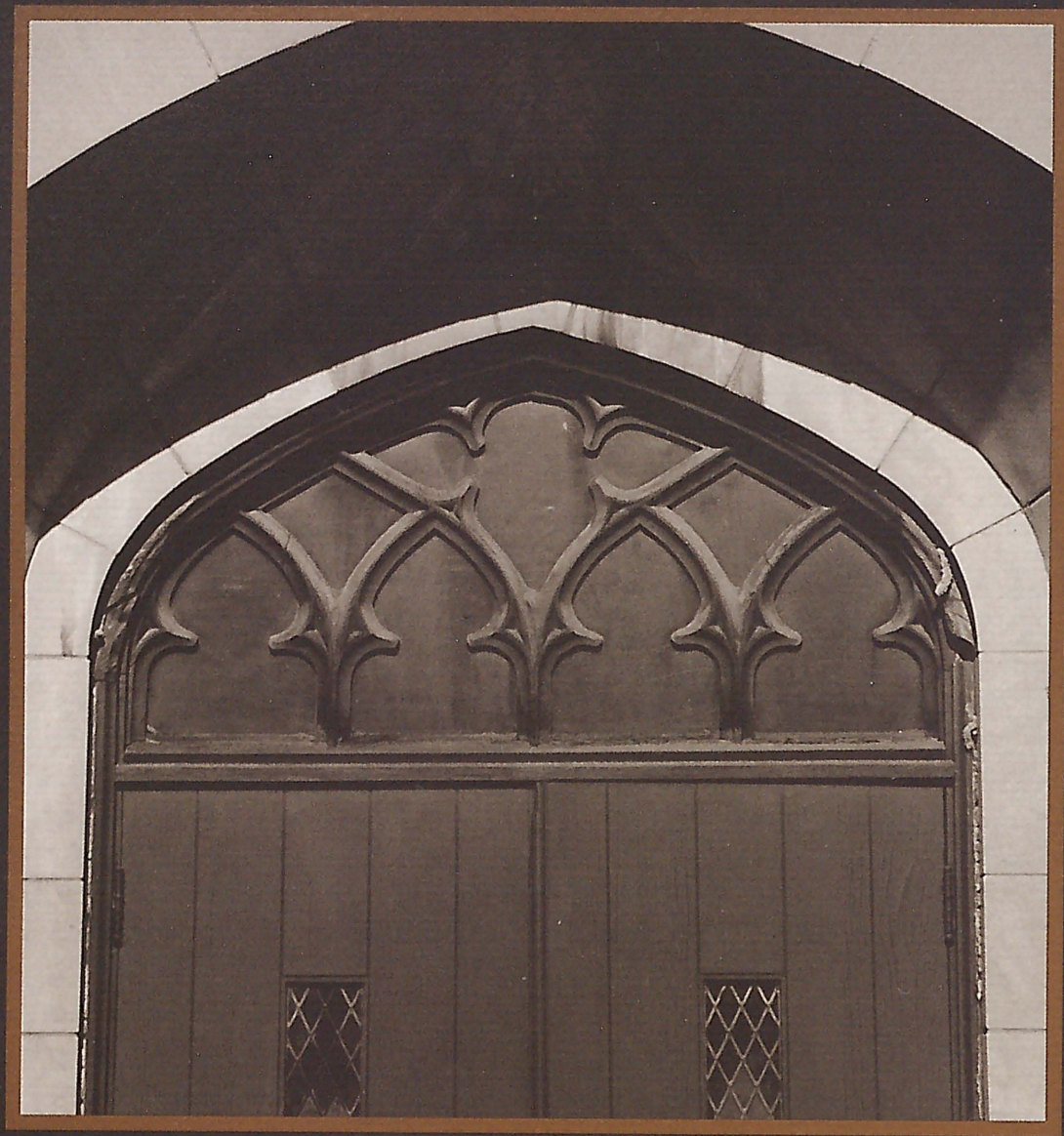
“I basically don’t think I’m a fearful person. You could call it faith in God—how he can order your steps and direct your steps where you need to be at a certain time. Just seeing a need and rising to the occasion. Faith is believing the impossible can be done through a good sense of direction that can only be given from God. Simple as that. I just feel when others say it can’t be done, there’s got to be a way. It can be done. Regardless of how limited the resources might be, you can do it.

“If all I had in this world was what another person can do for me, I’m thinking my world would be rather small. There are things that happen in our lives that you have to have something on the inside to brace you against the elements of life. I never dreamed I would be strong enough to find my husband dead and stay in this house. But if the Lord allows it to come my way, I’ll handle it with his help. I don’t believe in saying I can’t survive or I can’t handle it. I’m not superhuman. I have days of tears. But life goes on.

“I felt very much a part of the world when I was having children, cooking their meals—that gave me all the fulfillment I needed. As a parent, I’ve been instructed to raise my children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, to be an example in the home, to teach them reverence and love for themselves and the respect and love they are to show others. My house was like the house beside the road. I made my children stay home. I did not allow them to roam. So their playmates had to come here. And their playmates could come here as long as they could deal in peace, and I had very, very few problems with other children.

“This house by the side of the road has been a friend to mankind. We’ve fed people, clothed people. If we didn’t bring them in, we took it out to them. It isn’t all the monetary things that make you grateful. It’s the things you do in people’s lives. I’ve seen the sowed seed coming back now that I’m on a fixed income. People come by and do things that need doing. I’m not complaining. God has been good.” ■







## MARTINDALE—BRIGHTWOOD

*The Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood, situated on the near north east side, had its origins in the coming of the railroads to Indianapolis. In the 1870s, railroad workers on the "Bee" line settled Brightwood, which would soon become the railroad center of the city. The Martindale area was settled about the same time by workers drawn to the machine and manufacturing shops associated with the railroads.*

*From the beginning, Martindale attracted African Americans, while Brightwood was settled in large part by immigrant and first-generation Europeans, mainly Irish, British, and German. Both neighborhoods were solidly blue-collar, with a mix of skilled and unskilled laborers. The fact that most residents worked together in the railroad shops made Brightwood seem like "one big family," according to one observer.*

*Both neighborhoods continued to prosper into the twentieth century as more manufacturing moved into the area and the residents established neighborhood schools, parks, libraries, and other amenities. The parochial schools of St. Rita's in Martindale, and St. Frances de Sales in Brightwood, were centrally important to the respective neighborhoods, as were the public schools.*

*By World War II most of the railroads had moved out of the area, and after the war whites began moving to the suburbs, to be replaced by poorer blacks from other neighborhoods. Interstate highways cut through the neighborhood in the 1960s and 70s. Residents moved out; businesses closed. In 1967 Martindale was declared a "poverty target area." Today the neighborhood is plagued with crime, including drug and gang activity.*

*The busing order imposed on the city in 1971 had a particularly detrimental effect on Martindale-Brightwood, where the local schools had been central institutions. St. Frances de Sales school closed in 1983, and a number of public schools closed as well. However, community centers, many of them sponsored by churches, have a long history in the neighborhood. In 1913 Hillside Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) opened a free medical clinic to serve Martindale-Brightwood, and many other community centers opened in the following decades.*

*Today the neighborhood is home to over eighty churches. Many of them—Catholic, Baptist, AME, United Methodist, and Christian—have been active for decades. But storefront churches have become a common sight in what was once a thriving business district around Station Street.*





# “MY APPROACH IS VICTORY THROUGH LOVE”

Frank Alexander

Reverend Frank Alexander was born into a family of preachers, including his grandfather and several uncles. Throughout his teen-age years in Fort Worth, Texas, Alexander spent his leisure time involved in church activities. He spoke frequently to church youth groups. On occasion, he visited the United Bethlehem Community Center where he developed an interest in missions from the director, a Methodist missionary.

Despite his long-time interest in preaching, Alexander had no plans to become a minister until a summer night in 1964 when he was twenty-one. While taking his usual short-cut home from work, the words of a sermon seemed to tumble ahead of his steps. He knew God was calling him to preach, but it would be several years before he was ready for a pastorate. In 1965, an employment opportunity with the Job Corps brought Alexander to Indiana. By 1969, he was the Director of the Gateway Christian Center, a community center in Muncie. The center had recreational programs for youth, a preschool program, a senior program, and an indigent medical program.

In 1974, Alexander became the Director of the Edna Martin Christian Center in Indianapolis. He also began to

pastor at College Avenue Baptist Church at 14th and College, which in 1989 moved to 25th Street in Martindale-Brightwood and became Oasis of Hope Baptist Church.

Alexander has made Oasis of Hope both a place “where the community can come if it is hurting,” as well as a place where members can give to others. The church has a food pantry. At different times it has housed a tutoring program for people in the community and sponsored a child-development program, taking preschool kids from the neighborhood and bringing them to the church to teach the basics and prepare them for school. Alexander plans to build a Christian elementary school on church property to teach character and values and to validate the potential of African American children.

The congregation’s outreach also extends to the international arena. Oasis supports Missions to Rural Africa, an independent organization that Alexander helped establish. Dozens of villages in Liberia, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast receive financial assistance and essential items gathered by Oasis of Hope members each year. Alexander describes the church’s mission as “bringing individuals into a serving relationship with God.”





VOICES OF FAITH







**“ONE OF THE THINGS THAT I HAVE STRESSED TO THE CONGREGATION** from the beginning is that we are here to serve the community, not for what the community can do for us. There are some costs involved, but if we are ministering, that’s what counts. I want the church to be such an integral part of the community that the community would literally cry if we were to move out. So, that means that we should be meeting vital needs in the community. If there’s a need for a food pantry, if there’s a need for a community meeting, if there’s a need for those kinds of things, I just want it to be a place where whatever the community needs, they can always find it at Oasis.

“The white Christian community needs to realize that our school would be a valuable tool. If they supported an inner-city Christian school that teaches Christian values and foundations in the lives of people, that’s going to eliminate some of the criminals. It’s utterly ridiculous to suggest that education should be value free, and that’s what they’re trying to do in our school systems. I attribute the high crime rate, the decadence throughout our society, to the fact that we have pulled away from any value base. If there’s anything that’s needed in the black community, it’s getting back in touch with our values. And the public schools can’t do that. Parents will send their kids to Christian schools when they don’t even come to church themselves. So that’s really a good clue. The suburban churches need to realize that if a mother can get her child in an environment where he or she is taught godly values and respect for human life, that’s going to impact the crime rate.

“My approach is toward empowering the people that I work with. Racism is still real. We don’t like to talk about it, but it’s still real. Probably it’s going to be here when the Lord comes. It just has a camouflaged face. I’m not hung up on that. I really don’t care that much. I can’t fight it in my human power and abilities. Love is the only power that can conquer racism and hatred. Once I receive Christ, it gives me a better way of dealing with it. The problems are there, but my approach is not through hatred and getting even. My approach is victory through love. Real strength comes in knowing that my work and who I am are not predicated on whether society accepts me or rejects me, but on knowing who I am in Christ, what he has invested in me, and his purpose for my life. If I am living and operating in the vein of his purpose for my life, then I can move forward. I try to focus on helping my people to be who they’re supposed to be and who God created them to be, and to live out God’s purpose for their lives rather than looking to society to make room for them and open doors. That’s never going to happen. But there is room for me if I allow God to open the door.” ■

“It’s utterly ridiculous to suggest that  
education should be value free, and that’s what they’re  
trying to do in our school systems.”



# “I’LL GO TO THE END OF THE WORLD FOR YOU”

Arthur Kelly

Father Arthur Kelly came to Indianapolis in 1973 to be associate pastor of St. Rita Roman Catholic Church. Two months later, Martindale-Brightwood witnessed an unprecedented increase in gang activities and juvenile delinquency. As a response, Kelly organized the Rita Teen-Age Club, a city-wide ministry to youth, at the church.

By the end of August 1974, 500 young people had joined the club. Within two years, its membership was more than 1,200. Concerned that the church building was being overused, parishioners asked Kelly to abandon the program. Kelly was faced with a difficult choice. He reflected on his childhood in Jamaica. His parents, unable to provide for all twelve of their children, had placed him in a Catholic orphanage, where he was reared by the Sisters of Mercy. He understood well the needs and feelings of down-and-out youth.

Kelly also tried to imagine what Jesus Christ would do in the same circumstances. That decided the matter. With the help of friends, he leased a building at 1610 Roosevelt Avenue and renamed the club St. Nicholas Youth Ministry. In the church’s view, Kelly was being uncooperative, and the Bishop of Indianapolis revoked Kelly’s privilege to preach and teach at St. Rita.

Despite that setback, Kelly’s ministry at St. Nicholas grew. During the 1970s, Kelly met with 300 gang members annually. He mediated personality issues and conflicts over

territory. His intervention diffused tension between individual youths and reduced violence in the neighborhood. The Youth Gang Program has since become a model for other programs throughout Indianapolis and elsewhere.

In 1980 Kelly faced another real estate crisis. His landlord sold the building, which forced St. Nicholas to find new quarters. Kelly organized The Noble Order of St. Nicholas to raise funds to purchase an abandoned school building at 1644 Roosevelt Avenue. Kelly set up a chapel on the ground floor and prayed for the needs of his ministry. Lilly Endowment provided a four-year grant in the early 1990s to renovate the building and establish the Peer Role Model Program for young adults ages fourteen to twenty-one. To qualify for the program, members must “desire to respond in a positive and realistic way to the needs of their fellow peers.”

Peer role models progress through six levels of personal and social growth: seeker, scholar, leader, altruist, noble, achiever. At each level, activities help the participants build self-esteem and create opportunities for themselves to “interact with other peers in order to effect meaningful changes in their lives.” Such activities include neighborhood maintenance projects, yard cleanups, and supervising latchkey kids.

St. Nicholas also offers a Childhood Socialization Program, designed for children aged five to thirteen. The program is a proactive attempt to offer “counseling, guidance, and forms of social development that lead in the direc-





VOICES OF FAITH





tion of positive attitudes and behaviors.” It is divided into two clubs: the Reindeer Club for children ages five to nine, and the Cadet Club for children ages ten to thirteen. Peer role models are responsible for guiding both groups.

Over the past twenty years, St. Nicholas has served approximately 7,000 young people. Everyone who comes to St. Nicholas receives counseling suited to his or her individual needs. Kelly’s emphasis has shifted over the years, from dealing with gang violence to offering youth development programs. The center now sponsors a variety of programs designed to teach job skills, communication skills, and problem resolution skills. Kelly also leads field trips to places like

King’s Island. The center has about 360 kids on the rolls, ages five to eighteen. From seventy-five to one hundred children will show up for any given activity, Kelly says. The center opens at 9 a.m. every weekday, and any child from the neighborhood is welcome to come in and hang out there during the day. But the center’s main day for activities is Saturday.

Kelly’s purpose is to instill positive Christian values in the youth he sees. He does this with limited support staff and despite economic obstacles. Kelly reckons that his success has stemmed from his personal faith in Jesus Christ and from his belief in the potential of the youth of Martindale-Brightwood.

**“THIS WAS THE CENTER THAT DEALT WITH THE GANG PROBLEM** in the 1970s and 1980s. Everybody was afraid to deal with it, but they knew St. Nicholas was all about dealing with gangs. If anybody had a gang problem, whether it was a parent or a kid, this would be the place to come to. We had a weekend dance that attracted nothing but gang members. It was a kind of gathering point where conflict sometimes happened, or conflicts were brought to a head. It was really the only place in town—the common meeting place—for gang members. They were not wanted anyplace else. We used to have a lot of violence. We’ve had several deaths on the premises. Nonetheless, I think it all worked out for the good. You have to risk something, and St. Nicholas had to take the risk being the mediator and the risk of having that number of kids here, with the possibility that someone might get hurt. The good thing about it was that we knew where they were, and we always knew when there was going to be a problem, because we got wind of it ahead of time here in our meetings. We could call up the guys we knew were going to have a problem and sit and talk with them and say, ‘Hey, what’s going on here?’

“The kids were always respectful of me. In fact, very often I will meet these guys in the streets, and they always remind me of the times that guys would be fighting and disrupting a dance or a meeting, and I would charge up and grab them and throw them out. They always respected me for it; they never tried to fight me. I can’t attribute that to anything but God. If he didn’t give me the strength to challenge these kids, who was going to challenge them? The fathers weren’t going to do it, the mothers weren’t going to do it, teachers weren’t going to do it. Everyone was afraid, but they knew when they came down here that they had to deal with me.

“I’ve done a lot of praying, a lot of Bible reading, a lot of reflection. There are times when I get frustrated, but I often





think of my experience back home with the sisters and the Jesuit fathers. We had 300 kids at that orphanage, and there were times when there wasn't enough food to go around. But the sisters never gave up, the priests never gave up. They did whatever they could to make us comfortable. Because of their faith, they knew that eventually things were going to change. It's the same faith I have in what I do. After separating from St. Rita Catholic Church, I didn't give up. I didn't say, 'Well, I'm going to give up the priesthood because it isn't fair.' I said, 'Listen, I've got a job to do.'

"The only way we could have gotten through this is through God and prayer. We had a chapel downstairs that I used to say my mass in. I spent hours down there when the kids weren't here weeping and praying to survive, wondering whether it's worth it or not. I think God realized what I'm about, and that this was something he wanted me to do. Otherwise, He never would have helped me the way he has, with courage and perseverance to meet the challenges. I could have said good-bye to the priesthood and gone back to Jamaica, but I don't think the Lord would have appreciated that. I think He wanted me to make a difference in the lives of the 7,000 kids who have come through this center over the years. I know we have made a difference in many of the lives.

"Young people can't understand why I became a priest as a black person. I point out that there are many black preachers in this city, preachers who felt that there was a need to call people back to God. I'm a Catholic, and I became a Catholic priest to do precisely the same thing. The whole goal is to develop a relationship with God and do the will of God by turning to my fellow men and being a servant to them, helping them to pray, helping them to live right, helping them to attend church, and helping them to do good for others. Every kid I talk to, I talk to on a different level. But the basic message is that I am a personal representative of God in the church I belong to. Being a representative of God, I'm called to help others. It's the only reason I do what I do. That's the bottom line. If you are willing to let me help you, then I'll give you 100 percent. I'll go to the end of the world for you." ■

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I didn't give up. I didn't say, 'Well, I'm going to give up  
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I said, 'Listen, I've got a job to do.'”



# **“FAITH WITHOUT ACTION IS NOT FAITH AT ALL”**

Larry Lindley

Uncomfortable with the military aspect of his work at Naval Avionics—which was renamed the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division in 1992 and develops defense systems for all U.S. armed forces—Larry Lindley enrolled in Christian Theological Seminary in 1987 with a view toward full-time Christian ministry. He continued working at Naval Avionics part-time until 1989, when he was hired as the executive director at the Edna Martin Christian Center.

He took the job at Naval Avionics because, after he received his Ph.D. in math from the University of Washington in 1971, there were few openings for math teachers. Also, since he grew up on the southside of Indianapolis, he was returning to his hometown.

Lindley lives on the east side of Indianapolis now and has been director of EMCC since 1989. The goal of the center is to help the residents make their community a better place to live. The Edna Martin Christian Center was established in 1942. Its funding comes primarily from individual American Baptist churches (60 percent); from individuals, mostly American Baptists (20 percent); and from the American Baptist denomination and grants. Its work is divided into two categories: the center sponsors programs for people in the neighborhood, and it cooperates with other local organizations to rehabilitate the neighborhood's infrastructure and housing stock.

The first category involves an after-school program in which children play games, receive Christian education, and take field trips. EMCC pays for several of the children to participate in Tabernacle Presbyterian's soccer program. It also has a children's choir that sings in churches. Programs for senior citizens include: bowling on Mondays, regular card games, Bible studies, bingo, and occasional field trips. In addition, EMCC has a food and clothing pantry. The other aspect of EMCC's mission involves working with the Martindale-Brightwood Neighborhood Association, Martindale-Brightwood Community Development Corporation, and the police department to try to improve the quality of life “in a whole bunch of ways.”

Lindley teaches one class a semester at Christian Theological Seminary. In the fall he teaches a class called “The Church and the Urban Poor.” He spends half the class looking at urban ministry situations and half of it visiting various places in the community. His spring class, “The Church and Social Systems,” is “more sociological and looks at how society as a system does or doesn't work and how the church can be involved in trying to deal with some of those pathologies.”

He was ordained in 1991 as an American Baptist minister and commissioned as a missionary at about the same time. The Edna Martin Christian Center is considered his mission field, and he is an American Baptist missionary.





VOICES OF FAITH





President of the board at Community Development Corporation, Lindley also is the secretary of the Martindale-Brightwood Community Resurrection Partnership, an organization consisting of a group of ministers from churches in the neighborhood. Its purpose is to work with

the community development corporation on economic development projects. The hope is that it can bring together economic resources from different denominations and facilitate communication between churches and the wider community.

**“CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGIST TONY CAMPOLO** spoke at an American Baptist convention for junior high students when my wife and I were sponsors of a church junior high youth group at our church. He challenged everyone to simply ‘read the Bible.’ I did that and was amazed at how the Bible speaks about issues of peace, justice, and materialism in ways that the church seldom does. I had grown up in church and heard sermons in youth group, so I was very familiar with certain parts of the Bible, certain stories, certain kinds of things. But in just sitting down and reading it—if you read it and take it at face value, it comes across a lot differently than it’s usually interpreted. Like with the rich young ruler [Luke 18:18-27]. Jesus says what he lacked was giving all his goods to the poor. If you take that as it’s written, it’s pretty extreme. But we soften it and take the punch out. I think there was a sense in which Jesus advocated a kind of equality of material goods that we’re not just ignoring, but we’re totally in contradiction of. I think he really does advocate a kind of socialism. In the book of Acts, for example, everybody has all their goods in common. I think that’s a significant part of the message. I wouldn’t say it’s the whole message, but I think it’s a significant part of it.

“There are two ways to approach things. You can have the Bible as fundamental and interpret society in light of the Bible. Or you can have society as fundamental and interpret the Bible in light of society, which is what I see conservative Christians doing. Even as people claiming to take the Bible in a very literal and absolute way, there are things that they just flat ignore. I think part of it, too, is that there are ways of looking at the Bible that are as much personality driven as anything. I think some people look at the Bible as a book of rules to follow, and I look at it more as an explanation of what God’s universe is all about. The only real rule I see in the Bible is to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

“In 1980 my wife and I spent five weeks working in a Laotian refugee camp in Thailand. It impressed very clearly on me the tremendous needs of people in the world, the way that these needs are not being met, and the necessity of Christian people to be active in meeting these needs. These are people who are just as valuable and significant as we are, living in straw huts with lizards running up and down the walls. Some of the areas of Bangkok, where people are living in cardboard pieces that they’ve nailed together, were really more than I had expected. Seeing first-hand what living in a Third World country is like, what the consequences of the Vietnam war were, and the difference between living here, very comfortably, and living there—it made the issue of poverty, hunger, economics a lot more real to me. I was aware of the poverty in an intellectual





way but not in an experiential way. Looking at that from a Christian faith viewpoint is a little different than looking at it from any other viewpoint. A Christian sees every individual as created in God's image and as somebody who Christ died for, and I think that gives individuals a lot more value and significance.

"In a purely physical sense, the poverty one encounters here is mild compared to what one might see in Thailand. The poor here have a fairly solid roof over their heads, plumbing, television sets, automobiles. In a superficial way, there's a big difference. But from a spiritual and an emotional point of view, I think the issues are the same. In both situations, they're marginalized people—people who society does not take seriously. The differences are more apparent than real. They're still at the bottom of the society, and so it has pretty much the same effect.

"I want my students to take from my classes at CTS a fairly realistic picture of what urban ministry is all about, a concept that urban ministry is an important part of what the church does, and the idea that regardless of where they're pastoring, they need to be involved in some kind of urban ministry. Also, that a lot of the problems of society are not the result of individuals being stupid or bad. Rather, they are a result of the way society is structured.

"Faith is not just a system of belief, but is belief in action. James wrote 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.' I would go one step further and say that faith without action is not faith at all, but a mere intellectual game." ■

“A Christian sees every individual  
as created in God's image and as somebody  
who Christ died for, and I think that gives individuals  
a lot more value and significance.”



## “WE’RE GOING TO CHURCH NOW”

Mary Moss

Mary Moss started singing in church when she was five. She sang all through high school, in schools, churches, and colleges. She attended Kentucky State College in Frankfort where she studied music and business administration. She left after a couple of years and began singing in clubs in the Louisville area because she needed the money. While singing in a club in Louisville, an orchestra leader who owned a club in Indianapolis asked her to come and sing. She has been in Indianapolis since 1958.

Mary Moss is now administrative assistant to Thomas Brown, director of the Institute of Urban Ministries at Martin University. Brown is the son of Andrew J. Brown, long-time pastor of St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church and a well-known leader in the African American community in Indianapolis. Moss began attending St. John’s in 1978, but after Andrew Brown retired she switched to Thomas’s church, Ebenezer Missionary Baptist.

The Institute of Urban Ministries sponsors programs

on various topics: health, urban economics, principles of urban leadership, non-violence. It is part of the Urban Ministries Studies program at Martin.

In addition to her responsibilities as administrative assistant at the Institute, Moss works part time as a professional singer, singing both secular and sacred music. She works mostly private parties and weddings, although she does sing in jazz clubs around the city as well. In addition, she sings with her church choir at Ebenezer Missionary and assists with anything that needs to be done in the office.

Moss prides herself on the rapport she establishes with her audiences. “Sometimes people just need you to listen,” she says. She sometimes takes the time to visit individually with audience members who look as if they need someone to listen. She considers her singing to be a form of Christian ministry. The expression she sometimes uses when she’s getting ready to perform is “we’re going to church now.”





VOICES OF FAITH





**“PEOPLE HAVE A PRECONCEIVED IDEA** that you don’t do both secular and sacred music. You do one or the other—that’s how we have been programmed to think. But it’s wonderful to learn all types of music, because there are all types of people in the world. You never know where you’re going to be on what occasion. It’s not so much what you do, but that you do it with class and dignity. I am that kind of a lady. I carry myself that way, whether I’m standing in the presence of the congregation on Sunday morning or standing in the club on Saturday night. So I have no problem with it. I thank God that Dr. Andrew J. Brown accepted me and said ‘Come on in, Mary, and get in this church. Get in this choir. Sing, and don’t worry about what someone else thinks. It’s not how you come into this world; it’s how you leave the world.’ He helped me to understand that my voice is truly a gift from God. He did not make me feel that if I were to sing in clubs and sing in church that I would miss a blessing. He taught me how to deal with God on a one-on-one basis. Taught me the importance of tithing. Taught me the importance of growing spiritually, attending the Bible classes and Sunday school classes, and he taught me how to deny myself in order to absorb and retain the spiritual teachings of God—to clear my mind and become focused on God. He did not deny me being a member of his church. He was a forward-thinking man.

“If, through my singing, I can reach someone and they can feel my sincerity, this is what counts to me. God has given me the talent. Whether I’m singing the secular music or the religious music, it all has a message. Most of my songs are ‘message’ songs. You almost would have to be in the audience to understand the response I get from the people, because they can feel my love for them. It is not pretentious; it is real. I am what I am—honest and straightforward. I reach out to them musically, and I try to relate to them, because you never know where a person’s mind is and what their problems are.

“I had cardiac arrest in 1991, but God had other plans for me and let me live. Physically, there was minimal damage to my heart. But psychologically, I had to regroup and realize that God is in absolute control. All I can do is trust God and go out there. Whatever I try to do with faith in the good Lord, it’s done. Attitude plays a predominant role—how I think about whatever situation I’m in. I was at one time so preoccupied with dying that I ceased to live—afraid to breathe, afraid to do anything. My faith and trust and belief have been magnified. He made me, and there’s nothing I can do about when I’m going to leave. God spared my life and has allowed me to be here. God has allowed me to live to see this beautiful day. He has allowed me to live and to spread joy through song and my presence. He has blessed me and allowed me to continue to sing, and my musical career has truly taken off.

“Faith is absolute trust in God—this day, this moment. We can do all things through Christ. It’s not always easy to be consistent, because Satan is very strong, and he sometimes throws blockers in the path. I’m thankful to God for what I have and what he has allowed me to acquire spiritually. I’ve always been aware of his presence. God is the source and Jesus is the proof, and service is an expression of love. I know who loves me and who has given me this opportunity. If you ask him to order your steps for this day, that’s what is important. I’m happy to be living, and to God be the glory for the things he has done—for me, through me, and because of me. God is good.” ■



## “FAITH HAS EYES, EARS, HANDS, AND FEET”

Walter and Elaine Walters

Walter and Elaine Walters are a husband/wife pastoral team—he’s the head pastor, she’s the assistant. They have been at St. Paul American Methodist Episcopal Church on East 25th Street for three years. Walter was ordained in 1953. He has been heavily involved in numerous service organizations; currently he is president of the Martindale-Brightwood Community Development Council. Elaine was ordained in 1994, but she too has spent a lifetime in service, particularly working on women’s and children’s issues.

St. Paul A.M.E. houses or is involved with a number of neighborhood programs that are available to the entire community, regardless of church membership. There is a social worker at the church on Thursdays to serve as a source of information and referral regarding social services. The church advertises this service in the neighborhood through fliers and by word of mouth. St. Paul does not operate a food or clothes pantry since

other local churches do that and people can be referred to them. “We see no need to reinvent the wheel,” Elaine says, noting that too many churches and social agencies duplicate what others are already doing.

The church does have a substance abuse counselor, is involved with a literacy program, and offers computer courses at the church. Individual church members sponsor such groups as a sewing club and a parenting class.

One of the most important ministries of the church is the women’s ministry, which sponsors an annual ecumenical conference drawing women, usually between 150 and 200, from around the state. Nearby Martin University is a sponsor. “It’s an effort on the part of women to provide common ground where we might talk about our common struggles as mothers, wives, parents, single women. We like to look at it as a holistic project—it’s educational, it’s recreational, it’s very spiritually based.”





VOICES OF FAITH







**ELAINE WALTERS:** “**IN THE FALL, ONE OF OUR WORKERS IS STARTING A SEWING PROGRAM.** We’re finding that, unlike when I was growing up and learning to sew was part of the rites of passage, women today don’t know how to make their own dresses. And when you don’t have money, you need to know how to do these things. So, the group’s leader found that by bringing a group of women together, like in the old days, two things happened. One, they learned a valuable skill. Two, these women began to talk about issues, things that were bothering them. They can work through their frustrations about not having enough money to make ends meet. And it’s a wonderful resource exchange to help them learn about the social services that are available. Everybody feels like they’re a valuable contributor. Also, it teaches them goal setting. We’re getting a lot of positive results in terms of getting people to feel really good about themselves, and to value themselves again.

“My parents were not in the ministry, but they were a very vital part of the church. We were trained from a young age that we had a responsibility to give back. We were never, ever released from an understanding that with every increase in one’s blessings, there was a lot of responsibility to give even more. Philosophically, theologically, as I incline my ear to the word of God and listen for his voice, I hear God unequivocally commanding that we do these things. The church is about the only place in the world left where all are included and none is excluded. That certainly makes the church different from any other institution because every other institution has points of inclusion and strong points of exclusion. There’s no doubt in my mind that if I am to be who I say I am—if I am a follower of Christ—then I must walk in his footsteps. I must constantly ask myself what this Jesus that I follow would do in the same set of circumstances. The spirit of the Lord is upon me and he has anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives. How many ways are people held in captivity today? How do you begin to liberate them? I believe that if God was gracious enough to redeem me from my own potential self-destruction, then I have a responsibility to go and do likewise. Faith has eyes, ears, hands, and feet. That’s what I understand his word to be saying.”

**WALTER WALTERS:** “**WELL BEFORE THERE WAS A WELFARE DEPARTMENT,** well before there were ever social workers, there was the church. Farmers would go to church and pray to God for rain. They were close to nature then. But once we moved away from the church and believed that Big Brother or someone else is going to do it, people stopped praying, stopped trusting. Now that that’s been taken from them, and they can go to the government for subsidies, farmers don’t care if it rains or not, because they’re going to get a subsidy. What has happened is that we in the church have allowed these other entities to be where we get our help from. We have distanced ourselves from each other by allowing other groups to do what the church historically did. We used to take care of each other. That’s gone because we’ve allowed ourselves to think that these other groups can do it better. If we didn’t have the welfare mentality, we’d be a better people because we would learn to depend



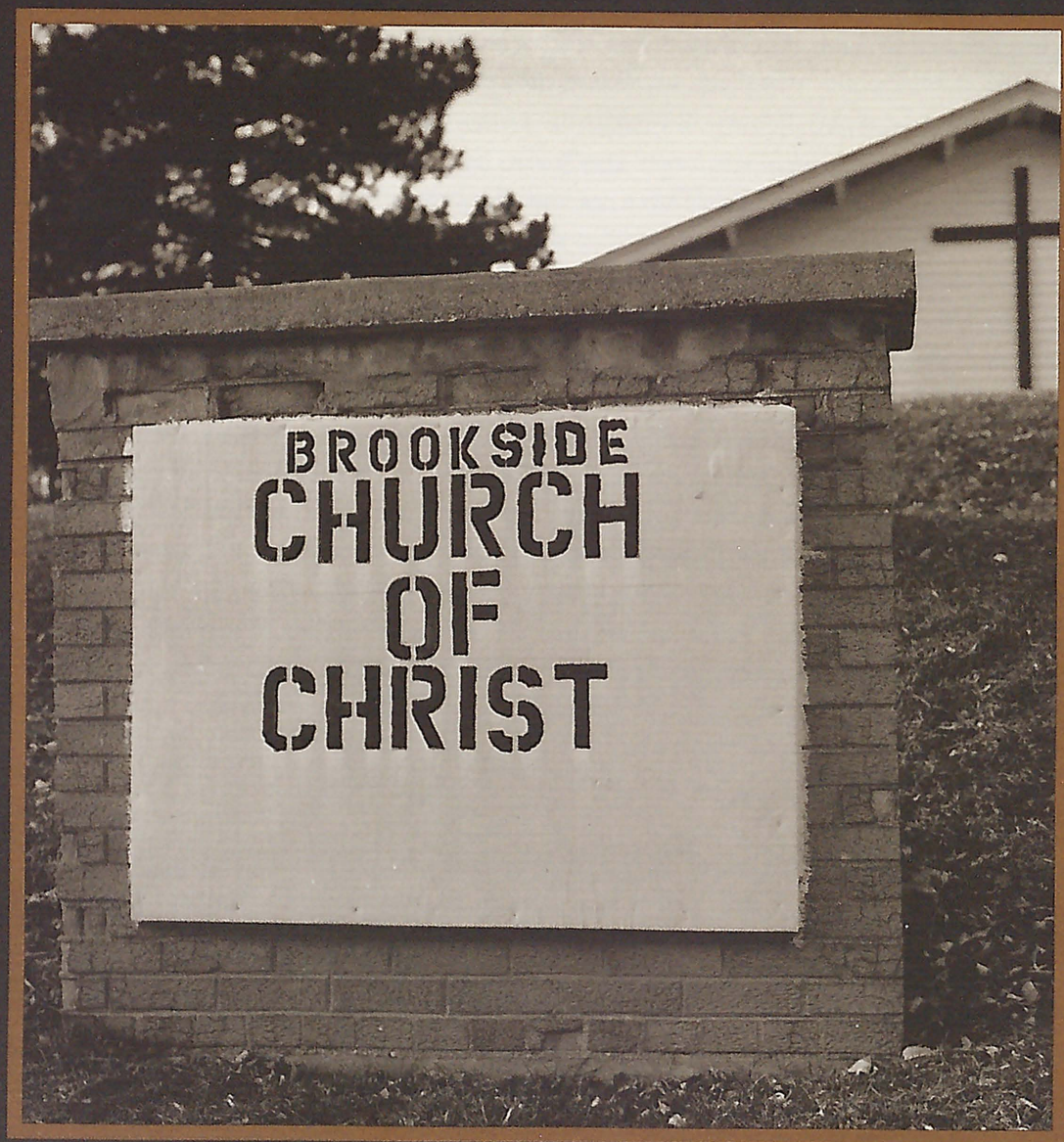
on each other. When I lived in this community as a child and you were having trouble, people in the community didn't have much, but what they had, they shared.

"The church, I think, could be the place for distributing social services if we would ever get off this business of Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholicism, all of that. If we can get away from the denominational baggage, I think we would be well on our way, but that's one of the larger hurdles we have. We think that we've cornered the market on this faith business, and we're the only ones who are right. That's not the case at all. If we could get people to understand that it's about respecting each other, it's about appreciating the fact that we are different, and the bottom line is that we're here, and now that we're here, what are we going to do about being here? What was Christ about? Christ was about doing good, loving, kindness, helping the neighbor. Being a follower of Christ, what it does for me is it helps me to love my enemy as well as my friend. It helps me to do good most of the time. Christ enables me to have a different mind-set. What is that mind-set? Though you may do evil against me, I'm not to do evil against you. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' He will repay.

"I don't get hung up too much on which group is right and which group is wrong. I try as best I can to get people to learn to respect each other, to love each other, and to do the best they can with what knowledge they have of a God concept. I believe that if I live right, as best I understand right, and I do justly, and if I live my life struggling to find why it is God allowed me to be in this world in the first place, I will be satisfied eternally. The bottom line is, how do I treat you as an individual? How do I live in community with you?" ■

“Well before there  
was a welfare department,  
well before there were ever social workers,  
there was the church.”







## NEAR EAST SIDE

*The Near East Side had its origin in a subdivision platted by heirs of Governor Noah Noble in 1849, which created 133 lots on farmland of the late governor. During the Civil War, the federal government established the United States Arsenal on Michigan Street, spurring development of housing for workers. Other institutions established in the area included the Indiana State Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, founded in 1850 at Washington Street and State Avenue, and the Indiana Women's Prison, built in 1873 on North Randolph Street—the first women's prison in the country.*

*The introduction of the streetcar to Indianapolis in 1864 encouraged housing development here and elsewhere beyond the central city. In the 1870s, Woodruff Place, near the newly created Brookside Park, came into being as an enclave for the wealthy. Meanwhile many workers' homes sprang up in the area now known as Cottage Home.*

*The growing number of Irish, Italian, and German immigrants in the area moved the Catholic Church to found the Parish of Holy Cross in 1895. In the early 1900s a number of churches were built in the area, including East 10th Street Methodist Episcopal Church, St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church, St. Paul A.M.E. Church, and First German Reformed Church.*

*The Near East Side has a tradition of community organization and activism that has served it well through its changing fortunes over the years. In 1909, when Wonderland Amusement Park proposed to install a "German Beer Garden," a coalition of neighborhood women's organizations blocked the way. In 1954 an alliance of residents overturned a city plan to sell Highland Park.*

*By the 1960s the neighborhood was in serious decline, as middle-class homeowners moved out to the suburbs, to be replaced by lower-income renters. In 1970 a group of clergy and civic leaders formed the Near East Side Community Organization (NESCO) as an umbrella organization for a number of neighborhood associations. NESCO has been instrumental in stabilizing the neighborhood, establishing programs to fight crime and drug abuse, and attracting government and private funds for economic and housing development. Perhaps most important, NESCO has given Near East Side residents a powerful common voice in deciding the future of their neighborhood.*



## “TO GIVE TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AN INDEPENDENCE AND A FREEDOM”

Bob Blazek

“Being a partner with God in sustaining the work of Area Youth Ministry for twenty-seven years would have to be my greatest accomplishment,” Bob Blazek says. Area Youth Ministry (AYM) on East Michigan Street is an interdenominational outreach ministry to urban teens. A large percentage of the kids who come to AYM live within twelve blocks of the center. Blazek is the executive director of AYM as well as the director of outreach at Calvary Lutheran Church. Since moving to Indianapolis in 1975, Blazek has been involved in numerous east side commu-

nity projects and in the Lutheran Church in the areas of Christian education and youth ministry.

Blazek and his brother were the first generation in their family to attend college. He graduated in 1964 with a B.S. in Education from Concordia College in River Forest, Illinois, and began teaching in Lutheran schools and participating in Lutheran youth ministry. In 1975 he moved to Indianapolis to accept a similar position at St. Peter's Lutheran Church. While there he became a board member of Area Youth Ministry. Shortly thereafter he became director.

**“I’VE BEEN BLESSED TO SEE THE LIVES OF TEENS CHANGED** as a result of ministry done at AYM. Occasionally, a thirty-five to forty-year-old person will stop by and say, ‘If it weren’t for you and your prayers for me, I would be dead by now.’

“Our programs span the range from teaching life skills in public schools to prevention of several types of abuse, nurture and encouragement of educational progress, as well as recreation and physical development. All AYM programming is focused on the total development of the youth as a person of God. Because we are working with youth and families who have little or no knowledge of Christianity, we must model Christian love through our programming before they will trust our words about Christ.

“A lot of folks look down their noses on Area Youth Ministry. But I’ve seen hundreds of programs come and go. Years later, we’re here and they aren’t. There are reasons for that. The difference is that we have expectations. If you genuinely love people, you will have high expectations for them. You will keep those expectations tempered by reason, but you will believe in the young people. You will believe that they have the capacity to improve.

“In my estimation, give-away programs teach people to be dependent, and we are not in the business of creating a larger group of dependent people. There are enough dependent people in our society right now. We would like to give to our young people an independence and a freedom because we believe what God says in his word: that when you’re baptized into





VOICES OF FAITH







Christ, when you're baptized into his death, you're also baptized into his resurrection, and out of that newness of life God can do whatever it is that needs to be done. We really believe that, and so we build our efforts around those kinds of hopes and visions. Anything else is destructive. With give-away programs, you're doing people in. You're not giving people anything. You have created a new class of slaves.

"We had a board member years ago who had grown up in this community. She said to us, 'We used to love to watch you do-gooders come in.' She was talking about when she was a kid. She said, 'We would watch you guys come in and we'd work you for everything you had—get a new pair of shoes, get this, get that. Pretty soon, you'd get tired and go away, and then we'd hang out and wait 'til the next batch of do-gooders came in. Soon as they did, we'd start working them again.'

"That taught me a lot about how we ought to organize the programming. It wasn't on the basis of give-aways. It was on the basis of this: what will cause the youth to grow, what will give them the impetus to grow, the opportunity to grow, the encouragement and nurture. For example, we're taking kids to Symphony on the Prairie. It's a hard sell. They don't want to go to the symphony. Why would we do that, then? So we can help them begin to see another element of life. Not that we expect them to suddenly become lovers of classical music, but just so they know that there is something out there besides MTV and the questionable values that are displayed there.

"Even though we may not have strong, dynamic, large churches, we still have a dynamic community of faith, with each person doing his or her own thing. That spiritual dynamic has made the east side a strong place. Nobody established an East Side Community Investments here because it was their job. Nobody started a multiservice center because they were a social worker and needed a position. People's Health Center didn't happen because some doctor needed a place to practice. Those all grew up out of the spirit of this place, and I believe that God's presence is in the spirit of this place. Quite honestly, the reason it works is that the people of God cared to make it work. If you begin to understand yourself as the hands and feet of Christ today—in this world, in this time, in this setting—then you begin to realize that you can make a difference, and making a difference is what we're called to do." ■

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## “WE ARE HERE TO SERVE”

James Byrne

As a young man growing up in Rushville, Indiana, during World War II, Father James Byrne used to car pool with friends to work at a war plant that manufactured wings for B-24 bombers. “I was nineteen years old, designated 4F in the army, and the place was so noisy you couldn’t talk to anyone, so I thought a lot about my future,” Byrne remembers. His “very traditional” Irish Catholic upbringing had instilled a deep religious faith. While working in the plant, the idea of becoming a priest came to him “so vividly” that he feels it was “truly the voice of God” speaking to him.

Byrne’s family was very close, particularly as part of a small community of Irish Catholics in a “very Republican, very Protestant” town. In those days and in his family, there was no greater honor than becoming a priest. Byrne’s ordination class at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in 1952 had forty-six seminarians. “Today they’d be lucky to have ten,” Byrne says.

In his first years after seminary Byrne served as an associate priest in several parishes, one in Bedford, Indiana, and two in Indianapolis. Then in 1968 he became pastor of St. Rose of Lima in Franklin, Indiana. He was there for only a couple of years before a phone call from his archbishop led him to a higher “calling.” In 1970 Byrne came to Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church on Indianapolis’s near east side and entered the battle to save a neighborhood.

Since the 1940s, the Holy Cross-Westminster neigh-

borhood had lost residents and businesses to the fast-growing suburbs, leaving a decided leadership vacuum in the community. Hoping to stem the tide and revitalize the community, concerned clergy from approximately a dozen churches in the area had, only months before Byrne’s arrival, helped to form the Near East Side Community Organization (NESCO). Byrne immediately involved himself in the organization, and over the years NESCO earned a reputation as one of the city’s most effective neighborhood associations.

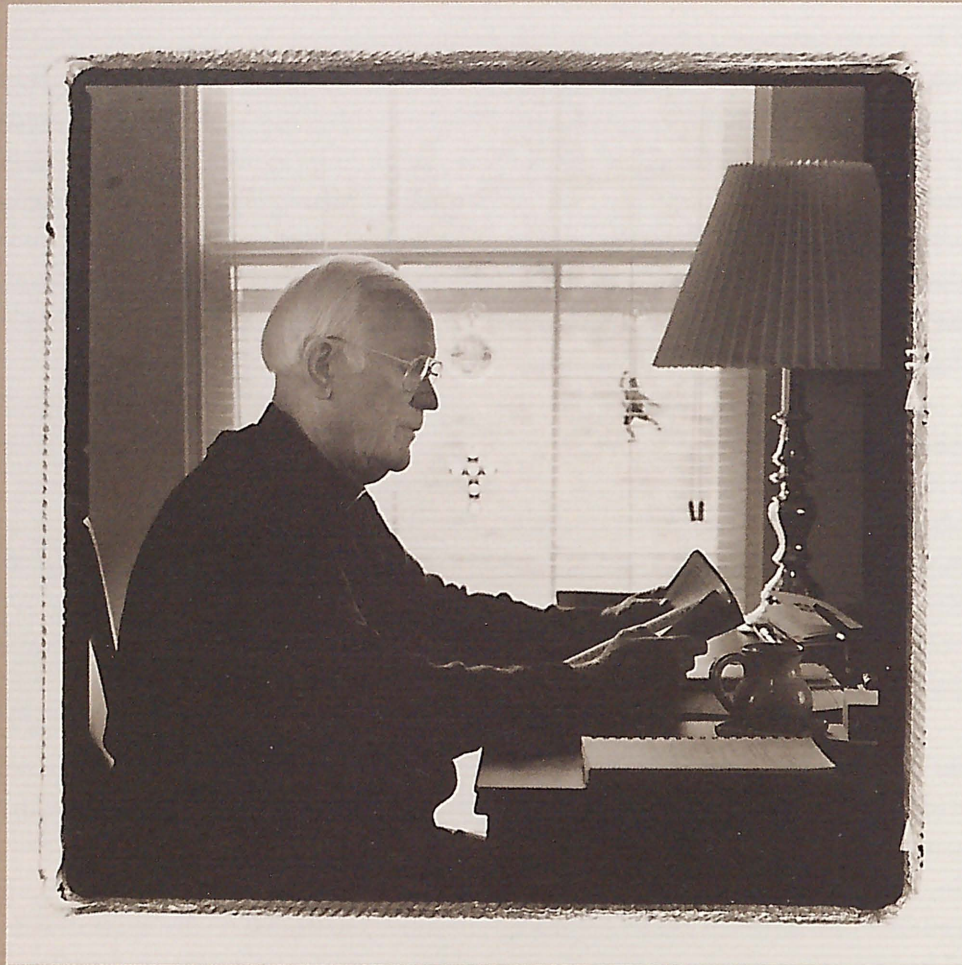
During his thirteen years at Holy Cross, Byrne saw NESCO expand to include a multiservice center, a health-care facility, and East Side Community Investments (ECI). A community economic development organization, ECI works to create jobs and stabilize housing in the neighborhood.

Byrne left Holy Cross in 1983 to become the priest at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in the Broad Ripple neighborhood of Indianapolis. He retired in 1995. He considers himself to be a liberal Catholic, more interested in social justice than in the internal affairs of the church. “Everything led me toward working with marginalized people in inner-city, poor neighborhoods,” Byrne remembers. As a graduate student at Catholic University he helped with a settlement house in one of the worst slums in Washington, D.C. He hadn’t realized that such poverty existed. “That’s where the church was really real to me,” adds Byrne.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“THE POPES, IN THEIR ENCYCLICALS,** have said that serving other people is integral to being a Christian. It’s very difficult—in our country especially—for the rich to share, because this country is built on each one’s freedom and independence. The attitude is, ‘I did it, so you can do it.’ Still, the church has had a great impact. It’s the conscience. But it goes through a cycle, and we’re becoming more conservative. We see it especially in our younger priests; they seem not as interested in these issues of social justice and more interested in ecclesiastical matters.

“You can’t let church law and structure ever prevent you from helping people. We are here to serve, not to be served. The Roman Catholic Church is highly organized and very law conscious. It has a whole book of canon law. But laws are made for people, not people for laws. Sometimes people in power forget that, and the law becomes the thing rather than the people that the laws are supposed to help. I think we ought to look at people and see where they’re at and help them stay in the church, and if that means that we have to bypass some laws, then so be it.

“I had a strong Catholic family, very close, permeated by a great faith. The church was one of the very essential parts of our family life, so I suppose I was influenced by that involvement. I came out of a very conservative background. Rushville, Indiana, is a very Republican town and very Protestant. Everyone knew everyone, and everyone voted Republican—all but the Irish Catholics, which was a very small group. There was a lot of prejudice, so your reaction against that makes you the opposite. In my case it did, anyway. The primary influence in my life has been the example of Christ himself—how he bypassed the rich and the powerful and always went to the poor and preached that the poor would have salvation, and that he had come to give them this good news. He established the church to carry on that message.

“The temptation is strong to not involve the local people in community outreach, especially those who don’t have college degrees. Sometimes they will feel intimidated by boards and people who have a lot of education, so that’s always a big job—to make sure the people involved are the people who will benefit. I think religious leaders, because of religion’s independence and because of its meaning to so many people, are able to be trusted. And because of that trust, they’re able to serve the common good in very effective ways. The trust level is high, and that’s very important. That’s what religion brings to the neighborhood. Trust. The government can’t do that, because politics doesn’t operate in the same idealistic atmosphere. The clergy and the church—that’s their whole basis of life, to be trustworthy and of service, to reach out to those in need.” ■

“That’s what religion brings to the neighborhood.  
Trust.”



# “PROCLAIMING GRACE AND DOING JUSTICE”

John Hay

As a freshman business administration major at Olivet Nazarene University, John Hay had what he calls “an existential reckoning.” His plan to become a successful business person suddenly seemed shallow and self-serving “in the face of deeper and greater spiritual and social issues.” Hay changed his major at Olivet and earned a bachelor of theology degree in 1981 and a Master of Divinity from Nazarene Theological Seminary in 1986. He is currently finishing his doctor of ministry (“dissertation in

process”) with the same institution.

Hay had been drawn to urban ministry since his undergraduate days, and that interest is reflected in his continued direction of a Near East Side nonprofit organization, the John H. Boner Community Center. He also pastors a west side nondenominational church. He describes it as “a church without walls,” meaning that the church is committed to being active in—rather than just located in—the community.

**“THE ISSUES OF THE HEART AND OUR CONCRETE RESPONSES** to them seemed to be the most important issues upon which I ought to focus my life. My calling came in the form of discomfort and agitation. I have since come to understand that the work of God as Holy Spirit is partly that of an agitator. At the time, the only thing I knew to do with this new-found calling was to prepare to become a pastor. But even as I did, I very much disliked the pat answers and stereotypes of ministry which were the common terrain of theological training in my tradition.

“I read somewhere that in order to believe greatly it is necessary to doubt greatly. I have taken that challenge repeatedly and have thus far come out with greater, if not easy, faith. The challenge of doubting greatly has required that I look upon my church and my native holiness/evangelical roots critically and continue to ask questions regarding the impact of political ideological agendas on the urban community.

“I don’t really know where I got the sense that, within my calling, I should let go of the formal, traditional ‘pastor box’ and attempt to explore something more direct. Perhaps it was an innate sense that much of pastoral ministry has become so much cultural care-taking. It has become ideologically and ecclesiastically co-opted. Author Nicholas Wolterstorff’s statement









that the primary question by which we should measure the legitimacy of any political, ideological, or economic practice should be 'what does it do to the poor?' has been formative for me. It is a haunting and challenging question.

"I describe faith in the words of Harvie Conn, author and professor at Westminster Theological Seminary. It is 'proclaiming grace and doing justice.' To me, these are the two necessary 'oars' which must be in the water and actively exercised for faith to be legitimated and have an impact in the lives of persons and communities. The doing of justice as an expression of the Good News is perhaps the most obviously missing part of the generally accepted agenda of the church today. Without it, the message of God's love—no matter how compellingly preached or decorated, no matter how many people come together in God's name—is hollow and flat." ■

"The doing of justice as an expression of the Good News  
is perhaps the most obviously missing part of the generally  
accepted agenda of the church today."



# “SEND SOMEBODY TO ME THAT I CAN HELP”

Pearline Johnson

She was born in 1929 and grew up on a farm in Texas. When her parents married, each already had children from previous marriages—her father had nine, her mother five. Together, they had four more children; Pearline was the oldest of those four. Her father died when she was seven, her mother when she was eleven. Pearline dropped out of school after the eighth grade to go to work. By fourteen, she was cooking and cleaning for a family in Waco, living alone in the servants’ quarters. She had her first child at sixteen.

At twenty, Pearline married a man from Indianapolis who was in the military. She has lived in Indianapolis ever since. She has lived in her current home, which is directly across from Brookside Park on the East Side, since April 1966. She and her family were the first blacks in the neighborhood. Soon after they arrived, the whites began to move out. Pearline had a total of seven children. Three of them and her husband have died. Pearline spent twenty-three years as a cook and waitress in Mona’s Cafeteria on the South Side of Indianapolis. She retired in 1979.

Given the struggle and the griefs it is remarkable to hear

Pearline say that she has had “a wonderful life, and there is nothing I would change.” She loves to walk around her neighborhood and gets in about two miles a day, weather permitting. She says she knows everyone in the neighborhood because she’s out so much. One neighbor calls her “the mayor of Brookside.”

She is the “captain” of the Brookside Bunch neighborhood organization, a position that involves various responsibilities. One of them is to be the club’s welcome committee, greeting any new people who move into the neighborhood. She is also a trustee at Gold Bell Baptist Church, and she’s served on the board of the Near East Side Community Organization for a decade. She volunteers for East Side Community Investments, identifying houses in the neighborhood that are for sale and are in need of repair. In addition, Pearline keeps tabs on her elderly neighbors, helping them with whatever needs to be done. For the Brookside Bunch, she leads groups of children on neighborhood improvement projects—planting trees and cleaning up alleys. She also collects used clothing from people all over the city, washes, irons and then packs it up for pick-up by a charity to distribute.





VOICES OF FAITH







**“MY MAMA WAS A WIDOW WHEN I WAS SEVEN.** If it hadn’t been for the people in the neighborhood helping us, I don’t know how we would have made it. She did housework and made \$2.75 a week, and we paid seventy-five cents a week for rent. Everything I learned was from my mother’s teaching. She taught us never to lie, never to steal, to respect our elders, never to be disobedient. Her death really affected me, because I was the oldest at home at the time. When she died, then I came out of school, and they paid me \$1.50 for cleaning and cooking. I knew how to do it all because on Saturdays (my mother would never work on Sundays) I would go and help her. On the farm and going to school, we lived next door to Spanish people. We used to trade our dinner for their dinner. Even in Texas, I was used to everybody being equal, because we were all neighbors together. We were all poor; we lived in a poor neighborhood—whites, blacks, and Spanish—and the houses were nothing but shanties. So we all got along.

“I’m not stingy, but I’m thrifty. God gives me enough for me and to give something to somebody else. I constantly pray, ‘God, send somebody to me or send me to somebody that I can help.’ My mother always told us that’s what God put us here for—to help one another.

“If you know God, you can go through anything and be of good cheer because he has a reason for everything that he does. God don’t make no mistakes. We don’t understand it, but he’ll show you. All you have to do is trust him. I’m poor right now, but I’m happy. I’ve got a place to stay, my bills are paid, I’ve got clothes to wear, so what do I need money for? I’d rather have one good friend than a million dollars.

“Working with children, I really love it. I guess that’s what I’m good at. I view it as a gift from God, and I’m glad he gave me that gift. See, God has something for all of us to do. And he tells us whatever we do, do our best. My house is the neighborhood hangout. If they get into a fight over at the park, they know to come here. Or if I see a fight, I go over there. When they’re hungry, they’ll come in and ask for a drink of water. I know they really want Kool-Aid or a sandwich, so I always keep something that I can give them.

“I babysit my great-grandbabies and for anyone else in the neighborhood. I enjoy it. I enjoy every bit of it. I just love people. All the kids—white, black, blue or brown—call me Grandma Pearl. In the summertime, I yell ‘Hey, come on over’ to kids in the park, and we have Bible study. My favorite book of the Bible is Proverbs, so I read it to them. It tells what will happen to you if you do this or that. I just pick out different scriptures and read to them. You have to take time with children.

“People who grew up with my children, they still stop by here. Even those that have grown up and moved out of town, when they’re in town, I get a call and they come by to see me. They called my house the United Nations, because when I was home, the whole neighborhood was here. I think they’ve always felt welcome. Spanish, German, black—you name it, they were here. A mixture of colors. Color doesn’t make any difference, because we’re all God’s children. I brought my kids up that way.” ■



## “ACT IN FAITH; ACT IN COMMUNITY”

Dennis West

“When you’re young,” says Dennis West, “you think that there’s probably some project that is so great, or so enormous, that once you’ve accomplished it you’ll cut a ribbon and walk into the sunset. What you begin to understand as you’re around longer is that creating opportunity involves a lot of subtle victories.”

Subtle victories have marked West’s life of community service. West was born in Indianapolis and graduated from Howe High School in 1971. As an undergraduate at Hanover College he had considered law school, but after his junior year he did an internship with the city of Indianapolis. He decided that he could really make a difference in that arena. Consequently, he pursued a master’s in Urban Affairs at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

After that West worked for both the city of Indianapolis and the city of Bloomington and as a private consultant. Then in 1984 he became director of East Side Community Investments in Indianapolis, a community

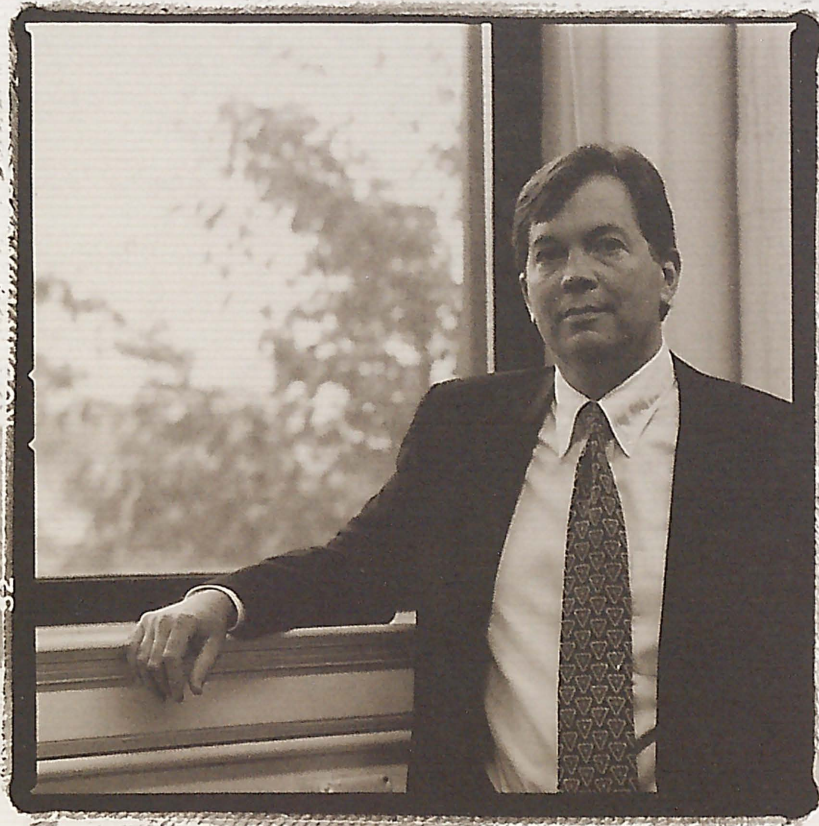
development corporation “with a focus on people.” West describes it as “one of the most comprehensive economic development corporations in the country.” ECI is involved in day care, real estate development, property management and maintenance, small business lending, home ownership and volunteer operations.

At ECI West found the leadership role he had hoped for. He worked with a neighborhood directly to empower its residents. West sees East Side Community Investments as a “convergence of a number of people’s spiritual journeys.” A member of Westminster Presbyterian on the east side, he readily admits to praying on a regular basis for courage, strength, and guidance in his work. He says his father, a postal worker, was the greatest influence in his life. “My father was a quiet doer,” West says.

West’s extensive list of community service affiliations on the east side suggests that his style of doing may not be exactly “quiet.” But he is quick to define “community” as he sees it.



✦  
VOICES OF FAITH







**“WHEN I TALK ABOUT COMMUNITY,** I’m really not talking about a physical place or geographic space. I’m talking about interdependent relationships of people, people who are not necessarily bound even by a statement of being something together, but by mutual trust, mutual respect. These small groups of people begin to share values and are able to act on those values because they trust each other. I guess I’ve never really subscribed to the notion that a whole land area like the near east side is one community. Within it are hundreds of communities of people who, for various purposes, bind together for common enrichment, support, and insight.

“Many people in society feel estranged or socially isolated. I think all of us are striving to find community. Some of the most significant contributors to the near east side don’t live here, and haven’t lived here. Yet they’ve adopted it as their community. And because they’ve adopted it as their community, they do wonderful things in connection with people who are part of this community. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with that; in fact, it’s good. Because the alternative is, if you’re socially isolated, you’re probably something less than whole.

“We’re all in need of struggling to reflect, to discern what God has out there for us. And one of the ways that you discern and listen is in community. I don’t think great acts are done in isolation. They’re done because people are gaining insight by being able to listen and understand and share and be supportive. I think that captures the struggle of all of us—to try to discern what role God is playing in our lives, and then try to discern how to act and support and lift up people who are on this journey with us. We must act in faith and act in community.” ■

*Dennis West resigned from ECI in 1997 after accepting a position with a community organization in Michigan.*

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## NEAR WEST SIDE

*The Near West Side is defined by 16th, Tibbs, and Washington Streets and, most important, by the White River to the east. Historically, the area was composed of three distinct communities: Haughville, Stringtown, and Mt. Jackson (present-day Hawthorne).*

*The White River effectively cuts the neighborhood off from the rest of the city, though Washington Street, with its bridge, has always been a connector and an important business district. The earliest settlers were mainly English and German, who moved to the area in the 1830s to farm and set up small shops.*

*Railroads were built through the area in the mid-1800s, and with the railroads came heavy industry. Foundries drew large numbers of Slovene metal workers; by 1900 Slovenes composed almost half the population. Holy Trinity Catholic Church was founded as a national parish in 1906, and became the center of Slovene community life.*

*World War I brought white and black southern Protestants into the area, seeking work. To the area's considerable ethnic strife was added an element of racial conflict. Nonetheless it was a prosperous and vibrant neighborhood in the 1920s. There were a number of thriving churches in the area, including Christian, Methodist, Missionary Baptist, and Nazarene congregations.*

*The Great Depression in the 1930s hit the working-class neighborhood hard. World War II revived its fortunes, and with the postwar boom many of the better educated young people began moving out of the neighborhood. They were replaced by further immigrations of Appalachian whites and southern blacks, who lacked the resources and institutions of longer-established residents. A number of neighborhood institutions, including schools, libraries, and churches, began closing their doors.*

*The worst blows came in the 1960s, with the closing of several large industries, and the building of public housing on sites that had once provided good jobs. Residents displaced from other areas by the building of Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis and the interstate highways moved into the Near West Side. Crime and poverty increased dramatically.*

*The area has begun something of a turnaround in recent years, partly as a result of government funds pouring into the area. But it remains plagued by social problems, due in large part to the loss of its economic base.*



## “THE FENCE AT THE TOP OF THE HILL”

Diane Arnold

Diane Arnold, baptized at West Park Christian Church in Hawthorne, never expected to follow in the steps of its first pastor, Reverend C. G. Baker, who founded Hawthorne Community Center in 1923, or those of her mother, Marie Kenley, who became the center's second executive director.

Arnold—then Diane Kenley—grew up in the Hawthorne neighborhood. She was in elementary school when her mother started volunteering at the center. At fifteen, Diane became a program worker, helping with crafts and other recreational activities after school. She taught dancing; in preparation for a teaching career, she also taught preschoolers. After college graduation, marriage, and a year's employment at a parochial school, Arnold returned to Hawthorne Community Center as its Social Development Director in charge of child care and youth programs.

In 1986 when her mother decided to retire, Arnold prayed for guidance, applied for the vacancy, and was given the position. Under Arnold's leadership, the services of the center have expanded. Participation in child care and

preschool programs has multiplied. At last count, each program served 120 children and 75 children, respectively.

More than a decade after her mother's departure, Arnold continues to think long-range about the center's future. Her motto is, “We want to be the fence at the top of the hill, not the ambulance at the bottom.” Focus groups for children, teens, senior citizens, parents, and other adults are in the planning stages. Arnold also wants to provide programs for the growing Hispanic population.

Despite Arnold's eye on the future, the Hawthorne Center, like its community, remains “old-fashioned.” Folks pitch in to help one another in times of joy and tragedy. When the police brought a lost child into the center, for example, Arnold concluded that he had probably been out looking for “someone to play with.” The boy also needed clothing and nourishment. Arnold supplied both and, of course, helped locate his parents. Now he attends the center's preschool, where he has plenty of friends to keep him company.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“THE HAWTHORNE COMMUNITY CENTER** is a place where you don’t walk down the hall without getting hugs or consoling kids. It’s just that kind of a loving, nurturing environment. And that’s important to me. It’s important to me that everyone—from the very youngest client to the oldest senior citizen—be treated with respect and dignity and love. This is the kind of place where we’re able to do that. It has always had a reputation for taking good care of the people in the neighborhood. I didn’t start that. That came about because the center was started by people in the neighborhood themselves. There was always a great neighborhood commitment. It was always just a place that people could depend on.

“God has a plan for everybody. Some people listen to what He says and do it, and some people fight it their whole lives. I never thought about becoming director of the Hawthorne Community Center when I was young. I wanted to grow up and be a teacher. I loved this place, but I never really thought about it. It was like a bolt of lightning when my mother first announced she was going to retire, because I never thought about her not being here. And I never thought about being director. I just assumed that eventually I would go back and teach, because that was always my love. When the time presented itself, though, I knew that this was my mission in life.

“My mother taught me a lot of values. She always taught me about treating other people with respect and dignity and how important that is—that everybody deserves whatever it is that we can do for them. That was very important for me. She was rough. It wasn’t easy. I remember that when I became director, I had never planned a budget, and at that time they were not done on computers. It was all done manually. I remember being at her house—I went over there because I wanted her to be able to answer questions—and there were times I would struggle. She wouldn’t tell me the answers. She made me work through it until I could get it to balance. I can remember being frustrated to the point of tears, and she wouldn’t do it for me. That was very valuable, and that’s pretty much the way she is. She puts a lot of emphasis on honesty and doing the right thing.

“I don’t think you can ever completely separate your spiritual life from your professional life. I don’t see how that is possible. I live by the Golden Rule of treating others like you want to be treated. I am not a strong believer in the idea that the members of one denomination are going to be in heaven and everybody else is going to be out. I was raised in a Christian family and went to church in the neighborhood, but I went to several churches. I finally joined the Disciples of Christ and was baptized when I was twelve. Prayer is a big part of my life. Some days I pray a lot more than I do others. Spirituality helps, because we see some really horrendous things—sexual abuse with kids and bad situations that are really difficult day in and day out. I believe that the work we do here is a mission. There are different kinds of mission fields. I believe it is not any different than if I went into South America and went into a village and tried to do it. This is my village. You don’t have to go far away to do good things and help people. You can be a missionary in your own community, and that’s kind of what I feel: that this is where God put me and this is very important work. If I can make things better or help people get their needs met, I’ll do whatever I can.” ■



## “A PRACTICING CHRISTIAN, NOT A CLOSET CHRISTIAN”

Melvin Jackson

The Reverend Melvin Jackson's love for people and his hatred of oppression have shaped the direction of his life. Until June of 1995, Jackson was associate pastor of Christian Faith Baptist Church in Haughville. He has since become the senior pastor of Christian Love Baptist Church in the United Northwest Association neighborhood adjacent to the Near West Side. But Jackson's full-time job is manager of Concord Village, a 200-unit public housing project in Haughville.

Jackson was not looking for work in 1992 when he went to see Phyllis Griffith, executive director of Indianapolis Public Housing, to discuss the latest drive-by shooting and his new Answering Elder Program. The program was based on the Book of James—specifically James 5:13—which instructs church elders to pray for the sick. Jackson regarded the offenders as spiritually sick. He wanted permission to circulate a leaflet about his program at the housing projects. The worst project, Griffith observed, was Concord Village. It needed a qualified manager like Jackson who cared about people. He took the job.

Jackson's first priority was to eliminate drug dealers from nearby streets. He went door to door to meet more than 185 residents of Concord Village. “I want you to work with me,” Jackson said. Most were enthusiastic when he organized a cleanup and beautification plan. He also orga-

nized a “graffiti paint-off.” To Jackson's delight, even a few troublemakers turned out to help. By midsummer 1993, Jackson had helped turned the community around.

Jackson's success at Concord Village was no accident, because he is no stranger to activism. He came to Indianapolis in the late 1970s from Dayton, Ohio, where he was director of a Community Action Agency. He viewed the agency as a proactive vehicle for change as opposed to a service organization, a tool to empower people rather than simply “help” them. That goal put him in conflict with politicians who intended the Community Action Agencies to be passive service organizations. The Nixon administration attempted to dismantle them. Jackson was involved in defending them in federal court. He and his colleagues won the court battle; the judge ruled that President Nixon had exceeded his authority.

Prior to his Dayton experience, Jackson spent time in Chicago under the tutelage of Saul Alinsky, the “father of community organizing.” He also worked occasionally with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. While in Dayton, Jackson organized a group called FORCE, Freedom Opportunity Rights Citizenship Equality, an umbrella organization for civil rights organizations in the Dayton area. Jackson came to Indianapolis in the late 1970s as director of CASA,





VOICES OF FAITH





Community Addiction Services Agency, which received and distributed federal funds for drug and alcohol treatment programs. He later became director of a Head Start program.

Jackson was born in Florida and ran away from home at the age of eleven to join a minstrel show that toured the South. From there he joined a circus for about a year and did a stint as a migrant worker. At fifteen Jackson lied his way into the military. He got his GED while in the Army. After getting out of the military, Jackson was troubled, adrift. "I wanted to meet some of life's challenges head on, but I really didn't know what to do." He went to Dayton, where his brother lived, and worked and tried to go to school. He

held a variety of jobs. He worked as a busboy, in a foundry, repairing railroads, migratory work, factory work, sold shoes, washed windows, did construction and worked in a paint factory.

As the years passed, Jackson recalls that he "began to feel the call to Christianity more and more and finally, in the late 1970s, I began to surrender my life to Christ. It was the best thing that has ever happened to me. I had the call to preach then but wouldn't hear it. I can clearly see that now. I answered the call in the early 1980s to a preaching ministry." His first pastorate came in 1990, when he became the pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Indianapolis.

**"I WAS A VERY ANGRY INDIVIDUAL AS A YOUNG MAN.** People talk about racism today. I consider there to be a difference between individual racial prejudice and institutional racism, where all the systems—even the church—were involved in a system that segregated blacks and whites. We were still attached by some strange umbilical cord to the slave era. I had endured some very harsh things in my brief lifetime under the system of segregation and I had a lot of bitterness. I had an outright hatred.

"I was drawn to Dr. King. I didn't really understand why he would talk nonviolence and teach nonviolence and endure a nonviolent strategy. It's fair to say that I didn't understand strategy at all. For a guy to subject himself to physical violence without retaliating was something I didn't understand. And it made me even angrier. I really despised that part of Martin Luther King. But I got to meet him in the mid-1960s and had the opportunity to talk to him, and he took the time to share with me what was going on in a way that no one had ever explained to me before. I really began to get some vague sense of how things worked in an organized way either for or against you.

"I try to position myself to be a positive influence in the lives of people here in this community. I am a practicing Christian, not a closet Christian. While I certainly work hard to avoid proselytizing on my job, I don't try to hide the fact of faith and my devotion to Christ Jesus. I perceive my role as a person who is able and should lead an exemplary life in the presence of the people here. I have tried to position myself outside of my work responsibilities to help in whatever ways I can.

"From my perspective in the community, I'm very much concerned with the breakup of the family unit, the disintegrating of the family unit. I'm convinced that God left three institutions to humankind—the family unit, the church, and





human government. To the degree that one succeeds or fails, so go the others.

"We have a second and perhaps even third generation of youngsters now who have been raised without the benefit of the church, and so there are fewer things around which to unite. If we look to our past, the church was a great uniting factor. The church used to be the center of community life. When we really rooted ourselves in the church as a nation, we were much healthier. We were prosperous, and America was a clean place to be. I don't know whether that's true anymore, when you consider the morality of our country today.

"There is power to resist a lot of the things we succumb to today with a commitment to the church. Since I am a Christian, I am referring to the Christian commitment to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, through which there is power to overcome whatever problems befall you. People can and will continue to overcome if they hold true to a commitment. The problem is that so many people are now so distant from church life that they really don't have a good concept of what the church is meant to be.

"There is a great deal of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the role of the church today. In my view, the church is not and should not be viewed as a community organization. I think the role of the church is to evangelize. We do not spend enough time with personal counsel, with personal guidance, with personal support. We spend too much time in a crisis mode. We sometimes focus too much on programs and allow our spiritual development to suffer. Pastors get caught up in the material needs of people, and sometimes we overrespond and spend too much time as activists and not enough time as messengers." ■

"I'm convinced that God left three institutions  
to humankind—the family unit, the church, and human government.  
To the degree that one succeeds or fails, so go the others."



## “LET ME WITNESS TO SOMEONE TODAY”

Douglas Tate Jr.

Tate Barbershop is a “blessing and a ministry,” says owner Douglas Tate Jr. The shop has changed little since his father, the Rev. Douglas Tate Sr., opened it in 1964 just a block and a half east of its present location on 10th Street in Haughville. Tate Jr. has been cutting hair there since 1980. The shop, which serves a large percentage of the neighborhood, including men, women, and children, has become something of a community center.

As a boy, Tate was employed at the shop to shine shoes, and as a teenager, his peers teased him about being a shoeshine boy. Nevertheless he proudly remembers always having money in his pocket. He never intended to be a barber, but he obtained his barber’s license while at Wood High in Indianapolis with the idea of always being able to supplement another income. In 1979 he attended Indiana State University, where he took business courses. Word spread about his excellent hair-cutting skills, and soon he was so busy cutting hair that he had little time for studies. He decided not to ignore his natural talent. A year later, he left college and returned to the barbershop to work side by side with his father.

In 1984 Tate Sr. sold the business to his son. The following year, Tate Sr. took ill. Tate Jr. followed him to the hospital. Wheeling his father down a hall, he believed he heard the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to him. The voice told him to look at his weakened father, a man in whom Tate had

placed all his faith. He saw for the first time that God could take his father’s life in an instant. With that realization, Tate put his faith in God.

His father’s illness passed, but Tate Jr. was left with a feeling that he should have been happier than he was. He had family, friends, his own home and financial security, but he felt a void in his life. He realized that he missed his fellowship with the church. Once again, he believed he heard the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The voice told Tate about the believers praying at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church. Tate had not gone to church in several years, but that night he went. From a back pew he watched others kneel and thank God for help throughout the previous year. The voice of the Holy Spirit told Tate that he had been “out of place.” Tate agreed and got on his knees to pray, too. It was New Year’s Eve.

Tate began sharing with barbershop customers what God had done for him. “Sometimes it would move from a one-on-one conversation, and I would have the opportunity to talk to everyone in the barbershop. I was real careful not to do that too often because I didn’t want to run anyone away with the gospel, but I didn’t want to be ashamed of the gospel either. I prayed ‘Lord, whenever you give me the okay, let me witness to someone today in the business.’ And I still do that.”

By 1986 Tate was feeling a call to preach more formally.





VOICES OF FAITH





He began attending the Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Indianapolis part time. That same year, Tate became the associate pastor at Psalms Missionary Baptist Church, where his father is the senior pastor.

For Tate, life's purpose is to seek God's will. For the moment, that means he will keep his barbershop and continue witnessing to the community while offering local residents a place to gather.

**"I CAN REMEMBER SHINING THE GENTLEMEN'S SHOES** and hearing them discuss things and the discussion escalating to an uproar, and everyone having their own opinions. It was a real good atmosphere for me and the other young boys. They would discuss religion, politics, sports. It was always a clean discussion—never any cursing or offensive words, but just good, clean, loud discussion. That's my earliest recollection of the barbershop. It was a good time for me. It gave me some early exposure on how men—black men especially—how we can communicate and get along together and serve one another and just enjoy one another instead of destroying one another. Tate Barbershop is a business that has been looked to by the community at large as a focal point for information, guidance, togetherness. It's not just a common barbershop. It's been a place of camaraderie for the whole community.

"It's been a blessing ever since I took it on. I thank God over and over for it, because it's also somewhat of a ministry for me, being able to witness to the customers whenever the Spirit gives me permission to. You don't want it to turn into church, but we like to try to encourage some of the customers as they come in and sit in the chair.

"As I went to work after dedicating my life to Christ, I began to share what the Lord had done for me. A lot of times when I've had the privilege to preach at a church, some of the young people will come up and commend me on how well they can understand the message, how they can relate, how they appreciate what was said, and how they are going to try to apply what was said. I've had a lot of parents come up after I've finished preaching to give me their phone number and ask me to call their young adult or college-age children because they feel that their children might be moved to do better if someone my age would talk to them.

"In the barbershop, too, I've had people come to me with their personal problems and ask for my help. I feel they come to share things with me because of the life they see me living. We have a back room where my father has a bookstore, and I call that my praying ground. A lot of times when a situation is real serious, after I've finished cutting a patron's hair I'll ask him to come to the back room with me and we'll have prayer. Because of that, many customers have come back and said 'Will you have prayer with me?' without even wanting a haircut. And I'll take them in the back and have prayer with them.

"So, God has placed us in a position where we can really help the community and do things for others that will help their lives. It's been my faith in God that has given me the desire to want to help as much as I can." ■



# “THERE’S STILL A FIRE BURNING”

## Olgen Williams

“Jesus fed the five thousand, and after he sat them down and fed them, he gave them a sermon.” So says Olgen Williams, executive director of Christamore House since 1996 and chairman of West Side Cooperative Organization (WESCO).

Williams has lived in Indianapolis since he was eleven. A graduate of Shortridge High School, he is very active in his west side community, sitting on the boards of numerous organizations. He also serves as an elder in his church, Victory Tabernacle of the Apostolic Faith, where he is Sunday school superintendent.

Williams converted to Christianity in April of 1972. Before that he was involved in the black power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, advocating the violent overthrow of the U.S. government and destruction of the white power structure. He says that Jesus took all that hostility away from him, that it “died in the water” the day he was baptized.

Williams didn’t become immediately involved in community work, however. He worked at Marathon Oil Refinery as a shift foreman for sixteen years before the plant closed in 1993. He then went into business for himself doing yardwork, minor repairs, and garage and yard cleanups before an injury in 1995 made that kind of work impossible.

Around the same time that the refinery closed, Williams remembers that one of the senior citizens from his neighborhood came into the barbershop one day. She asked some of the young men to get involved with the Haughville Community Council. “So I went to a few meetings and got involved,” Williams says. He hasn’t looked back.

Of all his many involvements, Williams considers his church work to be the most important, followed by his WESCO chairmanship and his position at Christamore House. WESCO is a neighborhood umbrella association that works with three west side neighborhoods—Haughville, Hawthorne, and Stringtown. Christamore House is one of fourteen multiservice centers under another umbrella, the Community Centers of Indianapolis. Established in 1905, Christamore House provides various services including counseling, a hot lunch program, a preschool and after-school program, and a food pantry.

While Williams is deservedly proud of the work at Christamore House, he doesn’t want to do it indefinitely. “My number one desire is to work in my church full time. I’m not a pastor, I’m a helper. I’m a helper in the community. I’m a helper of other people. The more I do it, the more I love it. I like to see results and see people accomplish great things for themselves.”





VOICES OF FAITH





**"I FEEL IT'S MY JOB AS A CHRISTIAN TO TRY TO HELP MY COMMUNITY** and to help those who perhaps don't have the ability to help themselves. I love inner-city neighborhoods. I'm a person that believes that people can make a difference in life if they get involved in their own destiny. I believe there's hope and the opportunity to build strong neighborhoods and to create a healthy and a safe neighborhood for the residents here. Even though the press may have written us off, or the corporate sector may have written us off, there's still a fire burning.

"Faith is the number one thing in my life. That's the foundation of my life—my faith in Jesus Christ and Christian teaching. It changed my life. It's one reason I got involved in community work—because of the compassion and love that Christ taught. My motivation for community work came twenty-five years ago, when I became a born-again Christian and Jesus took me off the streets of Indianapolis and took me from the drug culture and the criminal elements and I became a new person.

"I live and work in this neighborhood. I feel like that's one of the keys. So many church members don't live in the neighborhood that their church is located in, and they have no attachment to it. So they don't care about it. My greatest concern is the lack of church involvement in the community. You don't see the church in a visible role out in the community as you should. If each church on each block would get out and minister on their block, we wouldn't have a drug problem.

"We don't have churches lined up at the door helping us, but a majority of the people that I work with are people of faith. They go to some church, they're active in church. As far as this community, people of faith are the key. Without people of faith, this community would be nothing." ■

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on their block, we wouldn't have a drug problem."



## “YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE IN PEOPLE”

Sue Ann Yovanovich

Sue Ann Yovanovich wanted to return to God what she believed God had given her. Her chance came with the search for a new director of the Holy Trinity Community Day Care Center & Kindergarten in Haughville. Yovanovich, a member of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic parish and a trained educator, had grown up in Haughville. She offered her services full time, eager to put faith into action.

Holy Trinity Day Care, though nonsectarian, is sponsored by Holy Trinity Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Yovanovich had always been interested in education. As a sixth grader, she helped Sister Rosemary Moews with first-graders at Holy Trinity Catholic School. She continued this involvement through eighth grade.

Yovanovich later attended Marian College, where she majored in English and minored in education. She was able to student teach under the supervision of her mentor, Sister Rosemary. Yovanovich then enrolled in the master's program in special education at Indiana University. In 1971 she enrolled in Michigan State University's doctoral program in special education and educational administration, receiving her degree in 1986.

In 1979 Yovanovich moved back to Indiana to become a special education administrator in Kokomo,

which allowed her to return home on weekends and retain her membership at Holy Trinity. Then in 1988 she became Director of Holy Trinity Community Day Care Center & Kindergarten. Since she came, she has helped Holy Trinity Day Care grow. It now serves the needs of 125 children ages three to ten. Older children use the center during school vacations. Almost 90 percent of the children come from single-parent families. Yovanovich spends part of her time counseling the very young parents with children in the school.

When Yovanovich was young, the Holy Trinity area was an all-white neighborhood, mostly Slovenian. By 1988, when she became director of the center, the neighborhood was predominantly black though the church was still Slovenian. It became an important part of Yovanovich's job to encourage the mostly white parish to become involved with the mostly African American clients of Holy Trinity Day Care. She also has encouraged the children to learn about African American heritage.

Yovanovich attributes her accomplishments to the influence of her parents, who taught her to accept all people, and to the importance of God in her life. She believes that her faith gives her courage and strength to accept the challenges involved in serving her community.





VOICES OF FAITH





**“I THINK MY POSITION AS DIRECTOR OF THIS DAY CARE** speaks probably the loudest about my dedication and my belief in God. This is definitely a ministry for me. A lot of people question why I’m doing this when I have a Ph.D. and could be making five times as much money. It goes back to the way I was brought up. I was brought up here at Holy Trinity with parents who had a strong faith. My mom was raised a Catholic and my dad was raised Eastern Orthodox. When I was growing up the church was family. All of our neighbors belonged to the church, and that was just our extended family. I think that’s where I got my roots.

“When I was going to come back here to the Haughville neighborhood, I know my dad was a little concerned that I wouldn’t be making money and wondered why I would want to come back. Yet he and my mom were probably my biggest supporters. They were volunteers here for me. Until my dad passed away, he was always coming over here fixing something.

“When I came here we started a group of volunteers. The retired parishioners would come here and baby-sit for the children once a week so that we could have staff meetings. Prior to that time, the day care was kind of a separate thing and the members of Holy Trinity didn’t get involved in it. The priest and I decided we wanted this to be a ministry of our parish. The first year we had about twenty-four people who would come and be a part of the group. And since then it has flourished. They have seen this as a ministry for them, and they’ve been involved.

“I guess my belief in God and my giving stems from my childhood and from my parents, from Holy Trinity and from my culture. I think that’s why I feel so strongly about helping our children here at the day care center learn about their culture, because that was a big part of my growing up. I became familiar with my Slovenian heritage and it was an important part of who I was. So when I came here, one of the first things we started doing was teaching the children about their heritage. It was interesting because some of the black staff members said they were too young, but I said, ‘No, this is when they should start.’ We’ve planned a black history program, and it’s been interesting to see how the black teachers have learned so much. One of my goals is to make the children aware of black role models.

“You have to believe in people. Don’t give up on them. Find the positive things about your community and dwell on that. Put the positive aspects to work. Don’t dwell on the negative issues, but rather try to find positive programs to take their place. Keep God in your heart and mind and let Him be the center of all you do.” ■





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