



## Congregations and Economic Development

Congregations—along with schools—have long been considered the cornerstones of American communities. But in modern America, their importance has often been viewed as spiritual, the moral force that holds communities together. They have been seen as existing side-by-side with commerce and economic development, but separate.

In the past few decades, however, congregations have most often been the channel for economic growth, especially in inner city neighborhoods. Congregations have come to see that role as part of their missions, and they have become intentionally active in developing their neighborhoods. Whether through individual or collective efforts, congregations can be crucial players in turning communities around, especially in the areas left behind by suburban flight.

According to a recent survey conducted by The Polis Center, about 43 percent of congregations sponsor or participate in programs that supply emergency assistance to people in the form of food, temporary shelter, or cash assistance. But more than 20 percent of congregational programs are designed to produce long-term benefits for recipients—counseling; health and legal services; mentoring, tutoring and job training; and permanent housing. Of these programs, congregations are most commonly involved in developing housing for low-income residents.

Home ownership, a major stabilizing factor in communities, is beyond the reach of many. According to a recent study by the Center for Housing Policy, nearly 13 million Americans live in severely dilapidated housing or devote more than half their income for housing. Of these, 3 million are moderate-income families who work the equivalent of a full-time job. For congregations, meeting the needs of the poorly housed is both a mission and a community development issue. Local congregations are tackling the challenge in a number of ways.

### **WORKING WITH CDCs**

Many congregations in Indianapolis first got involved in economic community development in the 1960s and '70s, when they were instrumental in forming community development corporations, or CDCs. These grass-roots organizations sprang up in former middle- and working-class neighborhoods that were becoming rundown and boarded-up. Their notion was that residents—rather than government—could best develop their communities.

In Indianapolis, CDCs emerged downtown and in the adjacent residential neighborhoods, where departed industries and businesses had left solid blue-color communities in a distressed state. In most cases, both pastors and lay leaders were among the most active members of CDC boards.

John Hay, an ordained minister and Executive Director of Horizon House, a homeless day services center in Indianapolis, is a former director of the John H. Boner Community Center on the near eastside of Indianapolis. That neighborhood is home to Eastside Community Investments, one of the nation's earliest and

most prominent CDCs. Hay says congregations' involvement with CDCs reflects their recognition that community development is both pragmatic and a calling.

"The church isn't going to survive without other infrastructure, other initiatives in the neighborhood," he says. "At the same time, we see that the vitality of a place, this sacred place, is as important as what we are doing within our own congregational life. Our attitude is that this is a place to be *saved*, not just a place to rescue people *from*. It's a broader definition of urban ministry, part of pastoral care."

Congregations work in various ways with CDC's, from buying and renovating houses to forming credit unions so residents can obtain loans to purchase their homes. These projects involve large geographic areas and require deep pockets, and are most often undertaken by large, wealthy congregations. But small groups can also have an impact, especially if they work together.

The xxx, members of Immanuel Presbyterian Church on east 38th Street paint about two houses in the neighborhood each year. That's all their budget and volunteer base allow, but the mission is important to them. The houses usually belong to elderly people who make enough money to disqualify them for public aid, but not enough to enable them to keep up their homes. "It's really important to keep the older adults' houses fixed up," says Phil Tom, Immanuel's pastor. "Most of the housing code violations reported in the city are from older adults who can't afford to fix up their property. Then it drags down the neighborhood image."

Tom's congregation keeps its efforts small out of necessity. But they can make a much larger impact by working with others. The United Northeast Neighborhood Association, whose offices are next door to Immanuel Presbyterian, sponsors "Paint-Up Day" each year, which involves volunteers from across the neighborhood, including many from congregations. "There are two staff people next door with \$100,000 to fix up 12 houses this year, and there are 22,000 housing units in this neighborhood [that need fixing? Or total?]," he says. "That's why volunteer projects are important."

## **BUILDING BRIDGES TO OWNERSHIP**

Some congregations have bigger projects in mind. Such was the case with Oasis of Hope Baptist Church in 1988. That's the year the church celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary; Frank Alexander, its senior pastor, delivered his vision of the future to the congregation. Among other goals, he proposed building 50 housing units to be part of a program to strengthen families and improve the community. The church would provide social service programs to help families with the skills they need to be self-sufficient, and work with them to become homeowners.

It was a grand vision, but the church did not have the money to fund it. Twelve years later, however, Oasis of Hope is launching its program—but with 185 units instead of 50. The opportunity came through the city, which offered the units after the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development closed a public housing complex. The church jumped at the chance, even though it still could not fund such an undertaking. Funding came through Wynnewood Development Co., LLC, of Indianapolis, with experience in developing low- and moderate-income housing, in addition to market-rate homes. Oasis of Hope had planned to support the social services program through the rental payments; renovation costs proved to be much more than estimated, however, so the church is seeking funds to help support the program.

Scheduled to open in June 2001, the housing project, named New Bridges Apartments, has already had a positive impact on the community. Described as "crime central" by Gary Merritt, president of Wynnewood, the former public housing units stand within a block of both the church and Jireh Sports, a youth recreation facility that is supported by Oasis of Hope, among other congregations. By evicting troublesome residents and requiring those remaining to apply to be admitted, the program has improved life for the remaining residents. "People were afraid, but they had no place else to live," says Merritt. "We sometimes think, 'Why don't they just move?' But it isn't that easy. Plus, this is their neighborhood."

The congregation, which recently constructed a large, new church in the neighborhood, feels it is gaining from the project, too. "It is an opportunity to minister to our community," says Alexander. "When you strengthen families, you are building up the community."

With renovation and construction on a new recreation center on schedule, Alexander is optimistic about the project and its potential: "If it works, I hope others will take on a similar challenge, because the need is out there."

## **“REVERSE” DEVELOPMENT IN THE RILEY AREA**

Poor neighborhoods are not the only places in which congregations are working to provide affordable housing. Downtown Indianapolis has seen an economic revival that few people would have imagined 20 years ago. Area congregations—some of them among the city’s oldest—have seen their neighborhoods go from prosperous to ramshackle to chic. Roberts Park United Methodist Church is in the Riley Area, which encompasses Lockerbie Square Historic district as well as Massachusetts Avenue, home to restaurants and theaters. The Riley Area Development Corporation (RADC) was instrumental in the economic revival of the neighborhood through renovating homes and encouraging business investment, but one of its goals as a CDC is to provide low-income housing for neighborhood residents.

Until recently, the neighborhood also was home to more of the city’s public housing projects than any other single neighborhood. By the late 1990s, most had been closed or sold to private investors. The remaining HUD building, known as the “Hoosier,” was home to elderly residents.

Kevin Armstrong, former minister of community ministries at Roberts Park, is also senior public teacher with The Polis Center. “Our congregation grew increasingly concerned about the Hoosier apartments, which are located directly behind the church,” he says. “Businesses were complaining about the crime associated with the building, but we knew it was more a matter of bad management than bad people.”

Management, says Armstrong, was not providing appropriate security, and was allowing a criminal element to use the building unchecked. Two murders in close succession made security concerns urgent. The church hosted meetings with Hoosier residents and HUD, which resulted in HUD’s selling the building. This sale opened the way for market-rate housing—an improvement, but not the result Roberts Park or the RADC wanted. “As several other public housing structures had already gone in that direction,” says Armstrong, “we protested by writing letters, calling the mayor, and—one rainy Sunday—holding a prayer vigil outside the building.”

Finally, the church and the RADC formed the Riley-Roberts Park Partnership, in which the church’s role is one of “partner of conscience” rather than financial partner, according to Bill Gray, executive director of the RADC. The partnership successfully lobbied the city to keep a mixture of affordable and market-rate apartments, with the first floor to be combination of commercial development and a community center. The building, now known as the Davlan, is set to open in September 2001.

Roberts Park’s role in the partnership was essential to the plan’s success, says Gray. The church, a neighborhood presence for more than 150 years, had a record of community involvement. Its request that commercial development in the Davlan be compatible with the community—no lottery ticket sales and no bars, for instance (although a restaurant with a liquor license would be permissible)—gained it the support of the business community, as well as residents.

“I’d like to think that this is an example of a long-time neighbor looking out for other neighbors,” says Armstrong, “neighbors reaching out to one another in an effort to bring stability to the place we live. In this case, the neighbors are not all residents. They are business people, as well.”

## Community Development Resources

The Christian Community Development Association, founded with 37 members, now comprises more than 500 member organizations in 32 states. Board chairman John Perkins is editor of *Restoring At-Risk Communities*, which contains a large guide to resources. Contact the CCDA at 3827 W. Ogden Ave. Chicago,

IL 60623, (312) 762-0994 or visit its Web site at [www.cdda.org](http://www.cdda.org).

A "State of the Cities" report and other information is available from HUD USER, the information service sponsored by the Office of Policy Development and Research of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Contact HUD USER at P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20849, (800) 245-2691 or visit its Web site at [www.huduser.org](http://www.huduser.org).

Recent reports from the Urban Institute include "Section 8 Mobility and Neighborhood Health: Emerging Issues and Policy Challenges," a review of mortgage lending discrimination, and a national survey on homelessness. The reports are available from the Institute at 2100 M Street N. W., Washington, DC 20037, (202) 833-7200. Information and highlights from the reports are available on the Web site at [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org).

## Holy Trinity

### The tide that lifts many boats

Kenneth Jensen, a self-ordained bishop of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, admits that community development was not a primary objective in the congregation's decision to purchase and reside in the houses that surround the church building. Holy Trinity is in a heavily industrial neighborhood on the southwest side of Indianapolis. When the move began in the late 1970s, he says, "we were young families who wanted to develop our own community, within walking distance of our church.

"A secondary motivation was that, by our stability, we would make it possible for the people who live around us to live better."

And that is what has happened. Although many of the houses are still boarded up, others boast fresh coats of paint and neat flower beds. A newly built elementary school is just one block away from the church.

Church membership is down now, from 500 to 260. The church's decision to move from independence to communion with the Orthodox Church in America was not embraced by everyone, Jensen says. Ownership of surrounding homes is down, too, from a peak of 75 or so, to no more than 50. But church members have left their mark on the neighborhood.

In the 1980s, when IPS the public school district wanted to shut down two neighborhood schools, Holy Trinity members turned out in force at school board meetings. They not only kept the schools open, but they got two new school buildings. They fought to keep open the neighborhood post office, and a new library counts three Holy Trinity members among its employees. The church recently bought one city block where a fellowship hall will stand.

Church support for the neighborhood has been "amazing," says Joy Massy, deputy executive director of daily operations for the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center. Church members collect food for the center's food pantry, and pitch in for Christmas programs there. One of the church's pastors almost always sits on the center's board. In a neighborhood populated by small, nondenominational churches with few resources, Holy Trinity's efforts stand out. "A lot of time, inner city churches don't 'live' in the area anymore," Massey says. "But this church lives here."

Still, church involvement in the community is "more of an individual thing," says Beth Gibson, wife of one of the clergy at Holy Trinity and board president of the neighborhood's community development corporation. "It's grass roots. It is a matter of working out of individual people's faith."

Jensen believes community development works best when people have that personal stake in it. "We're not do-good sociologists, coming in from somewhere else. I don't mean to be unkind. But we're just trying to survive. Our kids go to schools here.

“Our values are different. Our paradise is our friendships. We’re not out to make a pile of money and then move someplace else.”

## Fresh Currents A New Mission for Business

Two Indianapolis congregations have taken their missions to the streets by establishing them as businesses. Not only do they help the neighborhoods by sprucing up dilapidated buildings, but they provide badly needed services and employment to local residents.

The Rev. Melvin B. Girton, pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church, had driven by the vacant strip mall at 29<sup>th</sup> Street and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive countless times. But one day, he says, the Lord spoke to him: “He said, ‘Buy that building.’” And so he did.

Girton’s church took out a bank loan of more than \$300,000 and breathed new life into the tattered neighborhood. Two years later, the church runs a laundrette, an ice cream parlor, and a restaurant in that location, and it has leased space to a young man from the neighborhood who operates a car wash and car repair business.

For the 600 members of Girton’s church, located two blocks from the strip mall, community development is a “call from the Lord,” he says. “The Lord said to us, ‘Help me make this boy or girl into a man or a woman.’”

His church fulfills that mandate by providing interpersonal and job skills to neighborhood teens who work in the church-owned small businesses. More than merely dipping scoops into cones, the young people run the whole operation: they order the ice cream, wait on customers, keep the books, and clean up after closing.

It’s a mandate that goes back to the 1950s, when the church opened at its present location. Since then, the congregation has supported a House of the Second Chance for women who are making the transition from prison to society, and a printing school for young people to learn the trade.

In addition to the strip mall, the church also supports a day care center for children in the church building. Recently, it funded the construction of a basketball court, because kids were playing in the street, Girton says. Plans are to add a senior day care center at the strip mall.

Few of the church members actually live in the neighborhood. Yet they see their presence and effort there as mission work, which they have defined on the mall brochure as “to save and revitalize the neighborhood.”

But it is also economic development, Girton says. “We feel we can be an inspiration to other blacks who would like to establish businesses here again, but are afraid of theft, robbery or drugs.”

So far, there has been no trouble. The ice cream parlor is named “Your Ice Cream Parlor” for a reason, Girton says. “If robbers want to steal from us, we want them to know, ‘This is yours.’”

The relationship between church and mall is a close one. Those who might miss the spiritual connection need look no further than the name of the laundrette—Flowing Waters Wash and Dry Laundry—or the restaurant, O Taste and See, taken from Psalms 34:8.

Besides the bank loan, money came from church coffers, from individual donations, and by holding bowl-a-thons and selling Christmas cards. The church is paying back the bank loan at \$4,600 a month.

Although the mall is nowhere near making a profit yet, there has already been a purchase offer, from a chain of beauty supply stores. But Girton says the church won’t sell. “We are a part of the community,” he says. “This is our neighborhood.” Any profits they make someday will go into scholarship and mission funds.

“Nourishment for the stomach and the soul”



A few miles to the east, at 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Central Avenue, sits the Unleavened Bread Café, a cheery sight on an otherwise shabby intersection. Four years ago, it opened as a ministry in within the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood. The area surrounding the café is known as “Little Vietnam” because of the number of murders, drug deals, and robberies within its boundaries.

Elease Womack, one of the founding partners, says she had a vision of a Christian business in the neighborhood in 1986, but before it could be realized, God “put me through some grooming.” Telling others in the community of her vision led to a meeting one evening at the Allison Center across the street from Tabernacle Presbyterian Church. “It was all white people with Ph.D.s”, says Womack. She told them of her desire to reach out to people who were spiritually broken, who needed a place to go, people who may not go to church. “A lot of people feel rejected by church,” she says. Her listeners, members of Tab, were interested enough to give their support.

Community members embraced the Unleavened Bread from the beginning and made it their own. When Womack and her volunteers began cleaning up the building for renovation, people from the neighborhood “just showed up and starting working.”

Besides serving breakfast and lunch Tuesdays through Saturdays, the café operates a food and clothing pantry and serves as a community center, hosting Bible study, worship services, domestic violence victims’ meetings, and a legal clinic. The last Saturday of the month the café provides the Supper of Hope for families whose food stamp allotments don’t stretch far enough to cover their needs.

“The café has become a focal point of the community,” says Dave Metzger, a member of Tabernacle Presbyterian who helps support the café. “It is a safe place to run—literally.” He tells of a woman who ran into the café one morning: “She was scared to death, being chased by a man, and she knew she could come there and be safe. Drunks can come in and sleep it off, if they leave their bottles outside.”

Food sales allow the café to break even—just barely. Donated building materials from businesses have helped keep the operation alive, along with cash gifts and volunteer services from several congregations. But its presence has had a “ripple” effect, some believe.

Before the Unleavened Bread opened, the only businesses in the area were a laundrette and a small variety store, according to Lena Steffansen, who works in the cafe. She and her husband, Einar, who is one of Womack’s partners, are members of Tabernacle Presbyterian. She says that some people, including other Tab members, “thought we were crazy” for getting involved in such a neighborhood—even though it is only four blocks from the church.

Now, she says, some of those skeptics come for meals, and the café is spurring other activity in the area. A young musician has bought a building in the next block, with plans to open a recording studio, a barbershop, and a women’s hair salon. Steffansen herself is attempting to raise enough money to renovate the two-story Aqualine building across the street from the café as transitional housing for women. “It has been the catalyst for activity,” she says. “People always want to be where something is going on.”

## CONGREGATIONS AS COMMUNITIES

Strictly speaking, religious congregations are communities of believers who gather to worship and share the faith. It is a rare congregation, however, that limits itself to so narrow a definition. Depending on their resources, needs, and even theology, congregations offer a range of services and activities to members. These may be social and related to worship, as with the coffee hour after Sunday morning services, or they may have no obvious connection to a religious mission, as when a congregation offers computer classes.

Some congregations, indeed, have become “full-service” communities, meeting the needs of their members not just for worship and fellowship but for such things as recreation and entertainment. These are mainstream congregations for the most part, not sects withdrawn from the world. In offering these services—whether to attract new members or to provide an alternative to an increasingly coarse secular culture—they

often succeed in creating a sense of community where one is lacking.

East 91<sup>st</sup> Street Christian Church in Indianapolis recently opened its new Community Life Center (CLC), featuring extensive facilities for recreation and fellowship. The CLC has a snack bar, kitchen, gymnasium, game room, a lending library, and numerous activity rooms. Members are encouraged to form their own groups around activities such as exercise classes and pitch-in suppers. The center has a children's area with two staff members on duty. For adults, there are aerobics and weight-lifting groups, support groups for those overcoming addictions, and groups that meet to discuss values and work on relationship skills.

"At the library we have a lot of Christian books and magazines, so people wanting to read those would be more likely to find them here than at the public library," says Page Rupert, coordinator for the CLC. "We have a lot of books on life issues—parenting, marriage, dating. The things we offer are wholesome and informed by moral values. If your children check out videos, you know that they won't come home with something rated 'R.'"

The CLC offers a safe, non-threatening environment, says Rupert. "Everything is free or low-cost—we aren't in it to make money. It's not a commercial transaction. We hope that people will come here to play basketball and find a community of people that they want to join. We call it 'friendship evangelism.'"

William Mirola, assistant professor of sociology at Marian College and research associate at The Polis Center, says that churches are under increasing pressure to provide such services to maintain membership.

"There is a growing expectation that churches will do more and more," says Mirola. "People have these needs and expect the church to step in. It's rather like the situation in public education, where it's less about teaching today than about meeting other needs."

According to a national survey conducted by Mark Chaves, sociologist at the University of Arizona, about 70 percent of congregations offer "general fellowship activities." Larger and more affluent congregations, he says, offer more activities and services. East 91<sup>st</sup> Street Christian, for example, with 5,000 members, is one of the largest in Indianapolis.

Theology also plays a part. At one extreme, says Chaves, "groups that preach a theology of the elect or an elite are likely to build high walls around themselves," while more liberal churches reach out more. Evangelicals, he says, seeing the world as sinful, generally prefer that members live within the confines of the group.

Northside Baptist Church hosts an "alternative" Halloween celebration for its children, in part out of concern for their safety, but also because, for religious reasons, members find the darker pagan aspects of the holiday offensive. "The kids come in costume," says staffer Gale Deckard, "dressed like cartoon characters or princesses—but nothing scary—no witches or skeletons." Rather than demanding treats under threat of tricks, the children bring candy to the party as the price of admission, and the adults divide it evenly among them.

Deckard, who has raised three children, says, "For our family, the church is the center of all that we do."

According to Chaves, 10 percent of congregations he surveyed offer support groups or services. These can range from allowing an AA group to meet in the basement, to professional counseling such as that offered by The Counseling Center at The Church at the Crossing in Indianapolis, affiliated with the Church of God, Anderson.

The Counseling Center serves a mix of community and congregation members, says coordinator Barbara Brandt. All counselors have professional credentials at the master's or doctorate level, and each specializes in particular areas, such as grief, depression, adolescence, or marital problems. The Center attracts those who wish to address their problems within the terms of their religious beliefs. The counseling offered at the Center "definitely has a Christian orientation," she says.

The Church at the Crossing also sponsors a ministry for single adults. Maxine Jones, singles pastor, leads the Fellowship of Christian Adult Singles (FOCAS), most of whose members are in their 30s and 40s. Members perform community services and get together for social activities such as trips to the symphony. For some, FOCAS is an alternative to dating services or meeting people in bars.

“It’s a good, healthy, decent place,” Jones says, “but I never want it to become just a place to meet other singles. Sharing our faith and service to others are central to what we do. The fun comes from being part of that fellowship.”

Congregation Beth-el Zedick in Indianapolis sponsors a full range of activities, including a grief support group, Adult Education classes, and an early childhood center. A book discussion group meets on Sundays, and there are groups devoted to klezmer music and Jewish folk dancing.

Historically, living as a minority in larger, often antagonistic, cultures, Jews have relied on their own institutions to sustain them. “Traditionally, the Jewish community is mutually supportive,” says Rabbi Sandy Sasso. “We have burial societies, schools, homes that care for the elderly. At one time in Indianapolis there was even a loan society.

“The synagogue has three names,” she says: “Beth Kneset, meaning house of gathering; Beth Midrash, house of study; and Beth Tefillah, house of prayer. The very essence of gathering at the synagogue is that we nourish our personal and communal health by being together. Judaism is not just a religion but a civilization. When we sponsor a klezmer band, or bake challah for a fund-raiser, we are sharing our skills to preserve a cultural tradition.”

Elfriede Wedam, a sociologist and senior research associate at The Polis Center, has been conducting research on congregations as part of the Project on Religion and Urban Culture. She confirms that Conservative congregations such as Beth-el Zedick are indeed social centers for the Jewish community as well as places of worship. She notes that Catholic churches serve a similar function in their communities, with the difference that the community is defined territorially.

“The Catholic parish tradition, in the American context, translated into churches becoming the social center for Catholic immigrants,” says Wedam. “The social center model was more important in the United States than in predominantly Catholic countries. Religion helped acculturate immigrants into American society, both by preserving their old culture and easing their way into the new culture.”

A number of parishes in Indianapolis still sponsor ethnic festivals. Holy Trinity hosts the Slovenian Festival; St. Joan of Arc, the French Market; and Holy Rosary, the Italian Festival. The newest of these, representing the recent wave of immigrants from Mexico, is the Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, held annually at St. Patrick Catholic Church.

Wedam says that some Protestant churches are becoming more parish-like, declaring themselves community-based and responsible for everyone living within their territory. “In UNWA”—the United North West Area—“the black churches are moving to claim the space around them,” she says.

Mt. Paran Missionary Baptist Church has embarked on a building program, buying up property around the church. Mt. Paran operates several community outreach programs, and is looking to reach out to Hispanics. Pastor T. D. Robinson hopes to develop “cradle to grave” service for members, particularly sports and youth programs, seeing it as the only way to attract and keep young people.

Suburban congregations find it particularly necessary to fill holes in the community fabric. John Hay, Jr., an ordained Church of the Nazarene minister, is executive director of Horizon House, a homeless day services center in Indianapolis. An advocate of citizen involvement in planning on both the neighborhood and regional levels, he says that in the suburbs, congregations become focal points of activity because there is no main street or community center.

When he was a pastor in a suburban church, Hay says, he found that “people come to your congregation not because they’re Presbyterian or Nazarene, but because you fill a void or provide a center or help them meet people in the community.” Suburban congregations develop sports leagues, daycares, schools, and after-school programs. They put on concerts and plays. “In a suburban community,” Hay says, “there are basically two poles: church and school. Suburban congregations do these things because there’s a vacuum in the community infrastructure. If I had to mark the coordinates of my community—Avon—the dead center would be the Lowe’s parking lot.”



Wedam concurs. “It’s amazing how little there is for suburban kids to do,” she says. Her teen-age daughter attends Young Life, an independent organization that meets at Second Presbyterian. Young Life has a playful, active orientation. “For suburban kids, it’s important that they be *doing* something,” Wedam says. “At Young Life they don’t get preached at or evangelized, but they do talk about taking care of the spiritual side of their natures—and kids want to hear about that.”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), more commonly known as the Mormons, is perhaps unique in the degree to which religion encompasses almost every aspect of members’ lives.

Jan Shipps, professor emeritus of religious studies and history at IUPUI, and senior research associate at The Polis Center, is one of the nation’s foremost scholars of Mormonism. Other groups take care of their own, she says, but Mormons take a systematic approach unlike any others. “About once a month, two priesthood leaders—Mormons have a lay priesthood—will call on a family to see how they are doing. Women from the Women’s Relief Society call on women. There is no stigma attached to it,” says Shipps. “Everyone receives these visits.”

Initially, she says, the Mormons had a communal structure, with everyone living together. “Those patterns of caring have carried forward to today. Caring for other members is a religious duty.”

Lowell Tynsmeyer of Indianapolis, a retired research physical chemist, has held the office of branch president in the LDS. The Church, he says, is concerned with the economic as well as the spiritual well being of its members. Men in the priesthood are charged with teaching families, and inquiring after their welfare, short of prying.

“Our ward is currently working with two member families, remodeling their houses,” he says. “In one case, the family is deaf. In the other, the people let their house get rundown, and let themselves get rundown.”

The LDS church maintains storehouses of food, clothing, and household supplies in cities all over North America, including one in Indianapolis. The church operates a farm north of the city. Members contribute work, and if in need may draw from the storehouses.

“Salvation for us is not a one-time event, but a life’s work,” says Tynsmeyer. “When people join the church they understand that the fellowship of Christ means that you are part of a community. If they don’t understand this, or if they chafe under the closeness of the community, they drop into inactivity. In general, people who join the church are seeking intimacy, and respond with warmth, knowing that ‘someone cares about me.’”

William Mirola says that religion creates a support system for meeting human needs—and that social and emotional needs are often met in church bowling leagues or by serving in the altar guild. “For those whose faith is their community, church and family are the two institutions that matter,” he says.

“Emil Durkheim, the sociologist and theorist of ‘functionalism,’ noted that at one time the church was the social order—religion, law, learning, art, and culture.” says Mirola. “Once the church lost that status, it had to compete with other forces in society. In the end, Durkheim said, what’s important is that people’s needs are being met.”

## An Active Presence Mapleton-Fall Creek Congregations

In Indianapolis, clergy and lay leaders have often been instrumental in creating community development organizations. The history of the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood on the city’s near north side shows how strong congregational involvement contributed to the revitalization of a threatened community.

Bounded by 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Meridian Street, and Fall Creek, Mapleton-Fall Creek was once home to many of the city’s prosperous middle-class citizens, as well as some of its largest and wealthiest congregations. But after World War II, large numbers of neighborhood residents began to move to the suburbs, in part to escape

racial integration. Many established churches remained in the neighborhood, however. North United Methodist, Trinity Episcopal, Broadway United Methodist, and Our Redeemer Lutheran all added to their imposing facilities, a visible sign of their commitment to the area.

As poor and working-class blacks moved into the neighborhood, several congregations implemented active ministries for their new neighbors. Broadway United Methodist offered after-school and evening programs for youth and adults, as well as a health clinic, food pantry, and thrift shop. Tabernacle Presbyterian greatly expanded its youth athletic programs to serve all neighborhood children, and North United Methodist started a legal clinic.

In 1962, concerned residents, including church leaders, formed the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association to combat deterioration of the neighborhood. Its first task was to stem white flight and encourage residents to commit to an integrated neighborhood.

In 1970, North United Methodist, Our Redeemer Lutheran, and Tabernacle Presbyterian formed the Mid-North Church Council to pool resources and to coordinate programs for the benefit of the community. Broadway United Methodist joined in 1973, Trinity Episcopal in 1981, and St. Joan of Arc Catholic in 1986.

The Council cooperated with the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association (MFCNA) to sponsor social services and self-help programs. It created a Home Help program for seniors and a job start program for youth. In 1982, the Council participated in a symposium that brought together 100 city, business, neighborhood, and religious leaders to discuss urban neighborhood problems. Issues included housing, the elderly, education, employment, crime, and health.

Following a housing survey by Trinity, neighborhood leaders made improved and affordable housing a top priority. The Council established and funded the creation of the Mapleton-Fall Creek Housing Development Corporation in 1985, which provides low-interest loans for home improvements and purchases property to renovate and resell to middle- and low-income families. The corporation is overseen by representatives from all the Mid-North Council churches and the MFCNA.

Neighborhood volunteers finished the first rehab project in 1986. In 1988, MFCHDC drafted a five-year plan, hired a full-time director, and began more extensive projects such as job training and winterization programs, along with providing low-interest loans and grants. The Mid-North churches funded the MFCHDC during its early years, and Our Redeemer Lutheran housed its offices. Other monies came from Lilly Endowment Inc. and the federal government. In addition to its work with the MFCHDC, the Council formed an "Adopt-a-Block" program, whereby each church was assigned a certain area in the neighborhood to help residents through the process of purchasing a home.

Today, the MFCNA has become known as one of the strongest and most active neighborhood associations in the city, and the Mid-North Church Council has been important in its success. The Allison Community Center, which opened in 1992, indicates the Council's continuing commitment to the neighborhood. While Tabernacle Presbyterian owns the building—previously a dentist's office—MFCNA has offices there. Mid-North and MFCNA both sponsor social services and programs out of the building, including a food pantry, legal clinic, medical clinic, and a youth group.

## Fifth Annual Spirit & Place Festival, Nov. 3-12

Three nationally-known authors—educator Jonathan Kozol, theologian Martin E. Marty, and naturalist Terry Tempest Williams—will come to Indianapolis for Spirit & Place 2000. The writers will be featured at the festival's keynote event, a public conversation on the theme of "Growing Up," to be held at Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University on Sunday, Nov. 5, at 4:30 p.m.

This year's festival will feature 53 programs—concerts, plays, films, conversations, and more. The Polis Center manages the festival with participation from 60 community partners.

## **FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE**

### Helping Kids Succeed: A Public Dialogue

Sunday, Nov. 5, 1:30 - 3 p.m., Washington Middle School. Activist/child advocate Jonathan Kozol and Indiana University dean of education Gerardo Gonzalez join local educators for a discussion about how we can make sure our most vulnerable children succeed.

### Spirituality in the Workplace

Thursday, Nov. 9, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Marian College. Consultant Ian Rose presents an interactive workshop on the value of maintaining higher aspirations in our work lives.

### Mock Trial: Rites of Passage

Saturday, Nov. 11, 4 - 5:30 p.m., Indianapolis Art Center. You are called to jury duty as federal Judge David F. Hamilton and a team of lawyers try this hypothetical case about mandatory community service.

For a complete guide to Spirit & Place, visit <http://www.thepoliscenter.iupui.edu> or call 274-2455.

Next year, the theme for Spirit & Place (to be held November 2-12, 2001) will be "Crossing Boundaries." Please contact Anne Laker at 278-2644 if your organization would like to be a partner.