

**THE CHURCH AND THE CITY: DETROIT'S OPEN HOUSING  
MOVEMENT**

by

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AELC	American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish)
AULA	Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI
BHL	Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI
CCR	Commission on Community Relations
CCHR	Coordinating Council on Human Relations
DCC	Detroit Council of Churches 1919—1962.
DHC	Detroit Housing Commission
DDHC	Division of Defense Housing Coordination
DPL	Detroit Public Library, Burton Collection
DREB	Detroit Real Estate Board
FCC	Federal Council of Churches
FWA	Federal Works Agency
GDCFHP	Greater Detroit Commission Fair Housing Practices
HOLC	Home Owners Loan Corporation
IPUMS	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series
JCLU	Joint Commission for Lutheran Unity
LCA	Lutheran Church in America
MDCC	Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches 1962 to 1976
MCOO:CC	Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience
MIC	Mayor's Interracial Committee
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCDP	National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing
NLC	National Lutheran Council
NCCCUSA	National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA
UCLA	United Lutheran Church in America
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

## TIME LINE—MAJOR EVENTS

1701	Founding of Fort Ponchartrain, later named Detroit.
1808	Importation of slaves banned, but illegal trade continues.
1825	Erie Canal completed.
1827	Michigan required all African Americans to have a valid certificate of freedom from slavery.
1837	First constitution of Michigan forbids slavery.
1850	Michigan rejects “Equal Suffrage for Col’d Persons”.
1855	Michigan enacts “personal liberty law”: County jails may not be used to imprison refugees from slavery.
1863	President Lincoln issues “Emancipation Proclamation”.
1866	Federal Civil Rights law makes racial discrimination in sale/purchase of housing illegal, but provides no enactment.
1867	MI legislature enacts law prescribing racial equality in MI school districts.
1868	Fourteenth Amendment enacted making African Americans full citizens.
1870	Fifteenth Amendment enacted.
1882	St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church organized.
1885	MI enacts Act 130 known as Civil Rights Act.
1896	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> U.S. Supreme Court decision approves “separate but equal” doctrine of Act 130.
1899	Detroit’s first auto show.
1900	Detroit population: 285,704...4,111 African Americans.

1901	Detroit's street railway and interurban operations consolidated into privately owned company
1904	Detroit Auto Industry is World's Largest.
1904	St. Peter's moves from East Side to Vermont and Caroline.
1910	Detroit population: 465,766...5,741 African Americans.
1914	Ford's \$5.00 per day wage begins.
1916	Detroit Urban League organized by Forrester Washington.
1918	John Dancy succeeds Forrester Washington as head of DUL.
1920	Detroit population: 993, 678...40,838 African Americans.
1922	Detroit's streetcar operation taken over by Department Of Street Railways.
1925	Mob attacks Ossian Sweet home on Garland Street.
1926	Mayor John Smith creates Mayor's Interracial Committee.
1926	Sven Jorgensen installed as Pastor of St. Peter's.
1930	Detroit population: 1,568,662...120,066 African Americans.
1937	First sit-down (vs. walk off) strike against cigar industry.
1940	Detroit population: 1,623,452...149,119 African Americans.
1940	Davison freeway....first US urban depressed freeway.
1941	Roosevelt issues Executive Order 8802 prohibiting discrimination and established the FEPC.
1941—42	Sojourner Truth Housing Project
1943	Detroit Race Riot.
1948	<i>Shelley v. Kraemer</i> ruled restrictive covenants illegal.

1948--1951	Schoolcraft Gardens Housing Project.
1950	Detroit population: 1,849,568...300,506 African Americans.
1954 Court	<i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> U.S. Supreme decision rules racial segregation in public schools illegal.
1955	MI enacts Fair Employment Practices Act.
1955	St. Peter's relocates to Pembroke and Greenfield.
1957	Howard Christensen installed as Pastor of St. Peter's.
1957	Joint Statement by Roman Catholics, Jews and Protestants Re: Housing Discrimination.
1958	Detroit's CCR hosts conference on "Churches Role in Neighborhood Changes".
1960	Detroit population: 1,670,144...482,229 African Americans.
1960—1963	NCCCUSA's Southern Project, Will Campbell, Director.
1960	Grosse Pointe "Point System" Uncovered.
1961-62	Michigan Constitutional Convention.
1962	Merger creates Lutheran Church in America.
1963 (Jan. 2-3)	Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience.
1963 (Jan. 16-18)	Chicago Conference on Race and Religion.
1963 (June 23)	Martin Luther King, Jr. leads Freedom March in Detroit "I Have A Dream" speech.
1963 (July)	Jim Garrison installed as Pastor of St. Peter's.
1963 (Summer)	MDCC creates Commission on Race and Human Relations.
1963 (Aug 28)	DC Freedom March...King's "I Have A Dream" speech.

1963 (October 3)	Michigan Attorney General rules Civil Rights Commission the sole authority to enforce civil rights in housing.
1963 (October 6)	Detroit Common Council defeats Patrick/Ravitz resolution on Open Occupancy, 7 to 2.
1964	MI establishes Civil Rights Commission.
1964 (Sept. 1)	Detroit passes Homeowners' Rights Council Ordinance... never enacted, declared unconstitutional.
1967 (July)	Blind pig raid initiates week-long riot.
1967 (Dec)	Hood's Open Housing ordinance blocked by 100,000 Signatures.
1968	Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated in Memphis, TN.
1970	Detroit population: 1,511,482...660,428 African Americans.
1972	Peter Thomsen installed as Pastor of St. Peter's.
1973	Coleman Young elected Mayor of Detroit.
1980	Detroit population: 1,203,339...777,916 African Americans.
1982	St. Peter's merges with Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Berkley, MI.

## ABSTRACT

### The Church and the City: Detroit's Open Housing Movement

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The church is an integrating feature of the city, and both are important for each other. The withdrawal of white congregations from Detroit's racially changing neighborhoods following W.W. II created a moral crisis. Detroit's post WWI population growth had created new demands for housing and intensified the practice of racial discrimination against African Americans in the sale and purchase of housing. With open occupancy initially included with New Deal Housing Programs, opposition to public housing programs spawned attention to the extensive practice of racial discrimination and segregated housing. Having been silent against racial discrimination Detroit's religious community and Detroit's Commission of Community Relations joined together in hosting the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: A Challenge to Conscience in 1963 to address the issue of racial discrimination Without the Conference creating a joint program to continue attention and action, the Detroit Council of Churches combined the conference recommendations with their ongoing programs, and sought additional funding for additional staff and program support from its member denominations. Unable to secure additional funding or achieve an institutional ecumenical consensus, member

denominations combined conference recommendations with their own and sought to make them operative within their member congregations.

The net effect of the church and city engagement against racial discrimination was the assignation of continued action to denominational member congregations in their neighborhoods. The issue was to be addressed by congregation and neighborhood. St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church was enjoined in these efforts through their pastor and their denominational affiliation. A parish organized by and for Danish immigrant to serve the Danish immigrant population in Detroit, St. Peter's was a city-wide parish with a scattered membership through-out metro Detroit. Failing in its attempt to reach out and engage the neighborhood surrounding its facility on Pembroke and Greenfield, congregational opposition to racial discrimination was channeled through the activities of the clergy with the approval of the congregation. The clerical and denominational emphasis on a prophetic ministry for social justice contrasted with the congregational priority for a pastoral and educational ministry to the widely scattered second and third generation membership. Neither was rejected, but in 1982 St. Peter's left Detroit to merge with a Scandinavian parish in suburban Berkley and continue its purposeful ministry to its second, third and fourth generation Danish residents in the Detroit area.

## INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing was a serious social issue in metro-Detroit when we arrived to assume the pastorate of a newly organized suburban parish. Detroit was a city of single-family dwellings and a well-paid industrial work force, with an increasing number of residents leaving the city for suburban communities. Protestant and Roman Catholic parishes and Jewish synagogues were both newly established congregations and also had relocated from Detroit to these suburban communities to provide religious ministries to the growing suburban population. African American residents in Detroit found it very difficult, if not impossible, to join the exodus from Detroit in pursuit of suburban housing. From restrictive covenants to direct intimidation, African Americans faced almost insurmountable obstacles in acquiring suburban housing.

This practice of racial discrimination raised important questions for us. What role does a suburban parish have in its surrounding community, and beyond in the metro-area? What are a parish's social responsibilities? How does a parish exercise its witness to basic human and social justice? How does a religious organization join with the community's political structure to establish justice?

Pastoral duties in the suburban parish I had been called to serve included conducting biweekly Sunday afternoon liturgies at the nearby Danish Old Peoples (sic) Home. Built by the Danish Brotherhood for elderly Danish residents, it provided an

avenue for inquiry and information about the Danish experience in Detroit. Quiet, unassuming, self-effacing, kind, hard-working, apolitical, patriotic, and modest with jovial wit, their stories about life in Detroit were engaging journeys into Detroit's history.

At the same time, my participation in Detroit Council of Churches activities and Synodical affairs exposed me to conditions of personal and congregational life in Detroit. Seeking a greater understanding of these social issues, including the causes and effects of congregations leaving the city of Detroit, and the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing which had extended to our parish's involvement in Open Occupancy Covenant Cards, I concentrated on St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church and the Open Housing Movement for extended research. A single congregation and a single issue would provide the sharpest focus on the interdependence of the city and the church. To that end I collected the stories and anecdotes we had heard from the residents of Danish Old Peoples Home, filed all the minutes and notes from both the Detroit Council of Churches and Synodical meetings I attended, and kept notes of related conversations.

Focusing on St. Peter's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church directed my inquiry and attention to issues related to its congregational life and its history. How could a nineteenth century religious practice, established by a national religion more rural than urban, provide an organizational and theological structure that could survive in twentieth-century industrialized Detroit? How could a church transfer congregational life from one nation to another? How important was the use of language in the practice of faith and the formulation of text?<sup>1</sup> What practices in confessional religion and their congregational

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<sup>1</sup>. Edward Ayres, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). An exhaustive depiction of life in the South following the Reconstruction, an important theme in the book is how religious faith and language formed behavior. In essays "The Civil Rights Movement as Theological Drama" by Charles Marsh; "Beacon Light and Penumbra: African American

life would persist from one context to another?<sup>2</sup> Does a confessional religion reflect the prevailing norms of the society in which it is located, or does it present unique and particular norms for society that create new congregational structures? What I sought was to discover how a parish could engage itself in the social issues of the city?

I was permitted unrestricted access to all St. Peter's files and record from 1872 to 1982 when St. Peter's merged with a suburban Lutheran parish in Berkley, immediately north of the city of Detroit. Personal interviews with St. Peter's three clergy from 1958 to 1982, the four lay presidents of the Congregation serving from 1956 to 1982, numerous members, and the daughter of St. Peter's Pastor from 1925 to 1957, provided a broad account of St. Peter's life in Detroit. Following the merger of St. Peter's in 1982 and the transfer of their congregational files to the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, I used the very accommodating services of the Bentley Library staff to continue this research. The Bentley Library also included the files of the Michigan Synod, LCA, the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, New Bethel Baptist Church, Second Baptist Church, St. Matthew and St. Joseph Episcopal Church, The Detroit Urban League and its Director, Francis Kornegay from 1936 to 1977, and the papers of Henry Hitt Crane, C.L. Franklin, Charles A. Hill, and Sidney Fine.

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Gospel Lyrics and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" by Keith D. Miller and Linda Reed's "Fannie Lou Hamer: New Ideas for the Civil Rights Movement and American Democracy" in Ted Ownby, ed., *The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South*, (Jackson, The University Press of Mississippi, 2002) the language and terms of black religion in the South are basic vehicles of ideas, inspiration, courage and hope. Chas Marsh has expanded his discussion of the role of faith in the formation of social justice in *Wayward Christian Soldiers: Against the Political Captivity of the Gospel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and in *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from Civil Rights Movement to Today*, (New York: Basic Books, 2005). For the members of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church the continued use of the Danish language for worship was essential to their identity.

<sup>2</sup>. Lutheranism regards itself as a confessional church. When the Reformers were requested to explain their religious convictions before the Diet of Augsburg in June, 1530, the document they prepared, the Augsburg Confession, became the normative definition and description of Lutheranism. Joined with five other documents into the Book of Concord, these Articles of Faith summarize the Christian faith for all Lutheran bodies.

Equally helpful were the volunteers that staffed Danish Archives and Collections at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, the Danish Museum, Kimballton, Iowa and the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. The Danish Lutheran congregations in Greenville, Marlette and Manistee, MI also provided corroborating details regarding Danish Lutheranism in Michigan.

As a member congregation of the Michigan Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) St. Peter's Lutheran Church provided unrestricted access to all the files and records of the Michigan Synod at the Synod Office in Detroit. I also used the Archives of the ULCA, located in suburban Chicago, to research the history of other ethnic-specific congregations. The Archives provided a broad review of Lutheran congregational life, including individual congregational histories, all the official documents of the ULCA and the minutes and proceedings of all its Boards, Commissions and Committees, as well as the relationship of the ULCA to other Lutheran bodies and the ecumenical bodies in the United States and throughout the world,

In *Origins of the Urban Crisis* Sugrue had claimed that congregationally controlled congregations gave little attention to the exhortation of the Detroit Council of Churches to remain in the city.<sup>3</sup> It was important that the policies and polity of congregations be carefully examined. It was also important to recognize the distinction in church governance and polity between Roman Catholic and Protestant parishes that played a major role in the relocation of white parishes from the city. The Roman Catholic Church emphasized place and space as the definition of a parish, and thus as a geographical unit that contrasted sharply with the Protestant concept of parish, and more particularly with the Lutheran definition of a parish that consisted of those baptized

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<sup>3</sup>. Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton University, Princeton, NJ): p.192

individuals who were members of it. This meant that when a Lutheran parish relocated, it left an area and ended the direct mission and ministry of that parish in that community. In the Roman Catholic practice, a parish might be closed, but the responsibility for that geographical area would be assigned to a neighboring congregation to continue the ministry and mission of the church in that neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> In a direct way, a Roman Catholic parish could have its members (the congregation) move from the city, but the church would remain. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit did close some parishes and Protestant Churches did relocate from the city, but only the Protestant Churches would be included in “white flight” as Sugrue had stated. In the early 1950’s, Protestant congregations and Jewish Synagogues had begun purchasing land to relocate from Detroit to suburbs and maintain closer proximity to their members. New congregations were established around the outer edges of the city as church attendance soared and both membership and population increased.<sup>5</sup> The increasing tempo of whites moving to the suburbs and outer edges of the city and transferring parish membership left those congregations more centrally located with declining memberships and reduced

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<sup>4</sup>. In John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), the Roman Catholic emphasis on place/space as the definition of parish played a major role in the formation of resistance to the integration of an Italian community in Chicago. James T. Farrell’s trilogy of novels, *Young Lonigan*, *The young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* and *Judgment Day*, offer a richly detailed picture of life for a lower-middle class Irish family on Chicago’s South Side, the role of the Roman Catholic parish, the oppression experienced by Irish families and their oppression of others, especially the blacks. Alan Ehrenhalt’s *The Lost City: Discovering the Forgotten Virtues of Community in the Chicago of the 1950s*, (New York: Basic Books, 1975) also adds details to Chicago’s neighborhood life.

<sup>5</sup>. This was part of the Post-World War II revival that swept the nation. Between 1940 and 1950 church membership increased from nearly 45% to more than 60% of the population. Church attendance increased from 35% to more than 50% of the membership. By 1965 the value of new church construction exceeded \$1 billion. In the Michigan Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America, and the Michigan District of the American Lutheran Church, several of the new Lutheran congregations established in the city were relocations of parishes within the city itself, or core groups from a parent congregation establishing a new mission in another part of the city to later serve as the primary parish. This information was compiled from the annual Minutes of the Michigan Synod of the United Lutheran Church in America from 1950 to 1992 in my possession.

revenues. Residences previously occupied by whites were now occupied by African Americans, and beginning in the very early 60s, the exodus of whites to the suburbs was no longer regarded simply as suburban growth, but increasingly viewed as a flight from the city.<sup>6</sup> Most often called “white flight”, a colloquial term for white people moving from increasingly and predominantly non-white areas, it described the actions of both white members and congregations that chose to leave the city of Detroit instead of remaining and forming integrated neighborhoods.

St. Peter’s did leave the city of Detroit in 1982 but racially changing neighborhoods were not the only reason used to explain the flight of other Protestant congregations. Agreeing with Sugrue’s observation that “congregational control” of parish life approved and facilitated this exodus, it was important to document the origin and development of “congregational control” in Lutheranism and how it was exercised in the decisions of St. Peter’s. Knowing how the concept of congregations and their practices of polity developed in Lutheranism, as compared to Roman Catholicism, would clarify how congregations confronted with such social issues as racial discrimination and segregated housing could respond.

Again, the Archives of the ULCA, and its successor body, the Lutheran Church in American (LCA) provided extensive archival material on the development and practice of congregational polity in the Lutheran church. Including copies of the first constitution composed for the first Lutheran congregation in the United States as well as succeeding constitutions and resolutions relative to church governance, I could trace the continuous use of congregational governance. Research on this development in Lutheranism’s

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<sup>6</sup>. Beginning in 1961 reports from the Detroit Council of Churches Department heads would include names of churches that relocated from the city to surrounding suburbs. Some were acknowledged as part of denominational growth and others were considered “flight” from the city.

congregational life clearly showed that Lutheran congregations had the constitutional power and authority to make decisions regarding the exercise and use of their property, but it was a decision that could only be made at the conclusion of a definitive review of the congregation's basic ministry. My research in St. Peter's archival material made it equally clear that their decision to leave Detroit was a profound moral issue and not just a constitutionally mandated exercise. St. Peter's merged with a suburban parish to maintain a direct ministry with the increasing members of the second and third generation Danish families. How St. Peter's decided whether that was right or wrong was a choice they made, but it was a choice rooted in theological and moral responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

I began my research into the Open Housing Movement by reading the historical documentation of the establishment of Fort Ponchartrain in July 1701, and continued with its development into the city of Detroit. The historical records of the Burton Collection in Detroit's Public Library, its City of Detroit files,, and especially its extensive collection of Detroit newspapers and city directories, and the collections and papers in the Reuther Library at Wayne State University were important resources. Especially valuable in the Reuther Library were the files of the Detroit Council of Churches, which included the archival material of the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy, the papers of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations, Human Rights Department, the City of Detroit Interracial Committee, Civil Rights Congress of Michigan, the Detroit Industrial Mission, NAACP, CIO Housing Committee, Detroit Urban Renewal Project and the Grosse Pointe Civil Rights Organizations. The individual collections of Mayor

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<sup>7</sup>. A recurring subject at clergy meetings has been the "open door" practice of congregations. Members join and enter the front door, and within a short time, leave through the back door, with little interference at both the entrance and exit. Retaining second and third generation family members were a high priority for St. Peter's Lutheran Church.

Jerome Cavanagh, Congressman Charles Diggs, Richard V. Marks, George Edwards, Jr., Charles A. Hill, Donald C. Marsh, Rose Kleinman and Greater Detroit Fair Housing, Leonard Woodcock, Canon Malcolm Dade, Rosa Parks, Beulah Whitby, and Councilman Mel Ravity also provided extensive material relative to the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing in Detroit.

I conducted interviews with clergy and laity<sup>8</sup> in addition to research in the Burton Historical Collection, the Reuther Library, the Bentley Historical Library and the Archives of the ULCA and the LCA. Especially helpful beyond the clergy and laity related to St. Peter's Lutheran Church were interviews with Mel Ravitz, member of Detroit's Common Council from 1962 to 1990; the Rev. Nicholas Hood, member of Detroit's Common Council from 1966 to 1990 and Russell Peebles, member of Grosse Pointe's Unitarian Church.

Blending together the research from the various Library Collections with the interviews, personal material collected over the years and material gleaned from a collection of books about Detroit,<sup>9</sup> a documentation of both the life and ministry of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Detroit and the Open Housing Movement was compiled.

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<sup>8</sup>. The complete list is included in the Bibliography.

<sup>9</sup>. Other books about Detroit include the following. John Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations, Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999). Hartigan's study of whites as a new minority in Detroit presents a major shift in the study of racial identity, and shows how class shapes white "racialness". Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2000). Their chapter on "The Evolution of Racial Segregation" was especially helpful, along with their conclusion that "differences in income, occupational achievement, and educational attainment account for only a small fraction of residential segregation in Detroit or elsewhere" (p. 164). They also asserted that "some segregation results from the large difference in income, but if residents were assigned to their neighborhoods on the basis of income, metropolitan Detroit would be thoroughly integrated" (p. 165). The authors also insist that Sugrue overstated the economic condition of Detroit when he described Detroit as being transformed from a market of opportunity to a reservation for the poor. What was missing in this book for my research was any extended treatment of segregated housing and the efforts of the community to both change it and keep it so. Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001). A

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published U. of M doctoral dissertation, Thompson, a Detroit resident, brings Detroit's labor movement and especially the revolutionary labor union movement into the larger context of politics, city and nation. Thompson includes a brief treatment of housing segregation without references to the Open Housing Movement, but provides a valuable overview of Detroit's labor movement in a broader political history of postwar Detroit. Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying, A Study in Urban Revolution*, (New York, St. Martin's Press 1975). The book that initiated Thompson's in-depth study of Detroit, Georgakas and Surkin presented detailed accounts of events taking place in Detroit's auto-plants during the 1960's. A valuable book for its personal accounts, it does not provide the kind of documentation that makes it stand alone. Thompson's book is a valuable resource in confirming its accounts. Joe T. Darden, Richard Child Hills, June Thomas and Richard Thomas, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1983). The authors, all associated with the Urban Affairs Program at Michigan State University, have documented how race is the primary issue in the "uneven development of Detroit". Including many statistics and maps of Detroit, the book is part of the Comparative American Cities series documenting America's urban areas in post-World War II era. It traces the trajectories of investment and disinvestment, economic growth and decline, housing segregation and city politics. The chapter on "Interracial Conflict and Cooperation: Housing as a Case Study" is a rich resource for the study of segregated housing, but makes no references to the role of religion and the institutional church in either support or opposition to housing segregation. Elaine Lutzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes, An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967*, (Detroit, Wayne State University, 1994). This is a valuable resource for the personal experiences and remembrances of life in Detroit of more than two hundred African American men and women. A project of the Detroit Urban League, it includes a chronology of African-Americans in Detroit. The only references to housing include testimonies about the Brewster Housing Project and the Virginia Park Community. Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City. The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1989). An exhaustive and detailed account of Detroit's political fabric prior to the 1967 Riot, Fine concluded that the riot was more spontaneous than carefully orchestrated, but represented the impulses for dramatic changes in the political community. While included in the themes of discontent, segregated housing is treated less as a primary cause for riot and more as an accompanying issue. The 1968 Detroit Free Press poll of Detroit listed "affordable housing, or the lack thereof" as a fundamental concern for black Detroiters, and second only to police brutality in contributing to the riot. In 2000 Sidney Fine's *Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights, Michigan, 1948-1968*, (Detroit, Wayne University Press, 2000), featured extensive treatment of efforts for fair and open housing in Detroit. Both books remain carefully researched and reliable accounts of both the 1967 riot in Detroit and the formation of Michigan Civil Rights Act. Lynda Ann Ewen, *Corporate Power and Urban Crisis in Detroit*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976). This is the only Marxist-Leninist analysis that I know of Detroit. The urban crisis of Detroit is not a recent development, but the logical outcome of social planning and control by the elite who seek to maximize profit at all costs. One of the more interesting chapters in the book is on Detroit's wealthiest families, and the kinship chart that shows how eight of the twelve wealthiest families in Detroit in 1860 were directors of the largest firms in Detroit in 1970. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace, A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit, Wayne State University, 1990). A straightforward history of Roman Catholicism in Detroit it serves well as a reference resource. A personal acquaintance with a number of priests active in integration and anti-war efforts makes omission of their actions in the book cause for disappointment. Robert Conot, *American Odyssey, A Unique History of America Told Through the Life of a Great City* (New York, William Morrow and Company, 1974). A book that traces the historical development of Detroit through the experiences of families from one generation to the next, it reveals the consequences of political, economic and social actions on personal and family life. Conot presents the "American genesis" as rooted in laissez-faire government, but his accounts of personal and family life that include poverty and unemployment, are hardly sterling examples of life's well-being and success. Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit, Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York, Oxford Press, 1969). Pingree, mayor of Detroit, 1890-97, presided over a period of rapid growth and change in Detroit. A business man, elected as mayor, he set out to reform Detroit's politics. His failure, however, to gain control over the traction (street-car) industry, set in motion the expansion of Detroit that would have profound effects on its future. The last street-car disappeared from Detroit's streets in the 1950's and reliable public transportation, the back-bone of every vibrant urban area, was replaced with private automobiles and a limited public transportation service. David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto, Black*

New questions directed me to new areas of concern relative to the role of the church in the city. What mission did St. Peter's adopt for its ministry in Detroit? What would be a legitimate mission that transcended defined neighborhoods? How would this mission defined by a confessional church differ from other Protestant congregations in the city? How did the city of Detroit influence St. Peter's ministry? What did St. Peter's contribute to Detroit? Did St. Peter's and the city join in any collaborative programs against racial discrimination? What was St. Peter's relationship to other Protestant congregations? Was St. Peter's confessional theology an obstruction to social changes regarded as just and right? Could a single parish create a moral witness to the city in which it exists? What did St. Peter's do about racial discrimination and segregated housing? These questions and others were assembled in the major research for this paper to a specific focus. Specifically I wanted to establish how St. Peter's responded to the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing in Detroit, and how St. Peter's joined with Detroit's religious and political communities in addressing racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing.

I began this research with the acknowledgment that an individual congregation would serve as my primary focus on religion and that racial discrimination in the sale and

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*Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1975). Michigan abolished slavery in 1837, but racial distinctions were included in Michigan law until the adoption of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, and then continued in practice into the twentieth century. Katzman shows how black history moved from slavery in Michigan to the ghetto in Detroit. Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999). This is a history of Detroit's unique contribution to the world of music, Motown. Born in, developed and promoted by the black community of Detroit, it unfolds the relationship between the artists and composers and life in Detroit. Motown's hits and beat arise out of Detroit life on the streets. Segregation, discrimination, Black Bottom, Brewster Housing Project, Black Power, Paradise Valley...and many more basic concerns for Detroit's black community are addressed in lyric and melody by Motown. Johannes F. Spreen and Diane Holloway, *Who Killed Detroit? Other Cities Beware!* (New York, Universe, Inc., 2005). Police Commissioner for Detroit from 1968 to 1972 and Sheriff of Oakland County, MI from 1973-1985, Spreen asserts that the automobile industry, migration of blacks, housing segregation and the rise of radical groups have killed Detroit. More self-serving than analytical, it should not be dismissed lightly, for it does present judgments and opinions of one given great responsibility for the well-being of Detroit.

purchase of housing would serve as my primary focus on Detroit's culture. Chapter One begins with what I believe to be the seminal moment of Detroit's realization of serious racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing and follows the city's unfolding response. I devote this Chapter to racial discrimination in Detroit from the 1920s to 1943 in order to locate and trace the beginning public opposition to racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing.

It was not until Roosevelt's New Deal policies joined with the city of Detroit in providing housing for low-income residents, including African Americans that part of Detroit's religious community was actively involved in both support and opposition of such housing, and that community's moral crises exposed.

Support and opposition existed on several levels. The Sojourner Truth Project was actively supported by the African American churches and the white Central Methodist Church. It was opposed primarily by St. Louis the King Roman Catholic Church.

Moral crises included the division between the African American religious community and the white religious community, and at the deepest level the absolute separation between Protestant and Roman Catholic faith communities.

What was most visible in this exchange was not the religious community taking the high moral ground, but fallible human institutions engaged in internal dissent.

Chapter 2 opens with the significant work of the Mayor's Interracial Committee, formed in 1943 following the race riot of June, 1943. In the "silence" of Detroit's religious community it was this committee that directed opposition to racial discrimination and housing segregation. Supporting basic city policies that maintained racial segregation was the Detroit Real Estate Board and its Code of Ethics that prevented

realtors from introducing any race or nationality that would create a negative presence in a neighborhood. The public disclosure of the “point system” used by Grosse Pointe realtors to screen out prospective home buyers, and especially African Americans, intensified public reaction to racial discrimination and segregated housing. The immediate response to this practice was directed by Michigan’s Attorney General and the Corporation and Securities Commission. While an Open Housing committee was created from a Unitarian congregation’s Human Rights Committee, and served as a concept for a broader, community-based response, it was Detroit’s Commission on Community Relations that introduced the idea of a city-wide conference to directly address racial discrimination and segregated housing.

Chapter 3 details how the practice of racial discrimination and housing segregation was openly confronted by the Jewish, Roman Catholic and white Protestant religious community, joining with the city of Detroit in the sponsorship of the conference named “The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience” in 1963. The Conference, conceived and nurtured to promote the practice of open housing, provided the event and the texts that featured the interdependence of city and church, congregation and neighborhood, and addressed racial discrimination and segregated housing.

That event created the moment when Detroit’s religious community joined together with the city in a specific attack on racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. The text of the “Summary Statement on Conclusions and Recommendations” of Detroit’s Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy provided the format for the joining together of city and church in redressing segregated housing. The exclusion of

African American churches in the planning and hosting of the conference exposed the deep fault line in Detroit's religious community. The failure of the conference sponsors to create a continuing organizational structure that joined city and church together in addressing racial discrimination and segregated housing was a key factor in the ultimate loss of momentum and attention to these issues. The separation of the religious community from the city in unified opposition to racial discrimination divided the sacred from the secular, and deprived the religious community and the city of that exchange of critique and content most representative of ultimate values and purposes. A serious moral issue for the religious community and the city, the subsequent unilateral actions of each were only part of the whole, and mostly ineffective. Equally serious was the theological and moral failure of Detroit's ecumenical community to transcend institutional differences and exhibit a premoral<sup>10</sup> conviction of life that true religious faith creates.

Chapter 4 traces the journey of Danish immigrants to Detroit and the formation of St. Peter's Lutheran Church with its self-defined mission and ministry. Included are the religious and social developments that created the "Danish identity" the immigrants brought to Detroit and the adaptations they made for their life in the new world.

Chapter 5 focuses directly on St. Peter's ministry from 1957 to 1982 and its efforts to secure a neighborhood base at its third location in the city of Detroit. Its direct engagement with the Open Housing Movement was facilitated through clergy participation in demonstrations against urban renewal projects and synodical programming. Synodical programming focused on denominational direction and relationship rather than participation with the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches.

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<sup>10</sup>. A premoral good is not directly considered a moral good because it has not been given a moral quality, but it has been acknowledged as worthy to consider and therefore important to any theory of ethics.

Unable to maintain a viable ministry and relationship with the increasingly scattered second and third generation Danish immigrants, St. Peter's merged with a suburban parish in 1982.

Important for this research were the values, beliefs, orientations and assumptions composing Detroit's community in which St. Peter's participated for nearly one hundred years. Equally important was the development of Lutheranism's application of theology and doctrine to social issues, including racial discrimination, and ecumenical relationships. Both Detroit's inattention and attention to civil rights helped identify the evolution of issues that merged into the Open Housing Movement and raised other questions. Lutheranism's expanded understanding of social responsibility empowered congregational actions and clarified state and church responsibilities. The separation of the African American churches from the white Protestant community, the separation of the religious community from the city in post-Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy activities and the failure of the white Protestant community to transcend doctrinal and institutional issues for a united ecumenical witness prevented a full application of religion's perspectives and witness against racial discrimination.

Sugrue's paragraph on churches moving from racially changing neighborhoods was a reminder of the issues, hopes, concerns, disappointments, the brief moments of limited success, and the enduring obstacles the city of Detroit and institutional religion experienced in the quest for a more just society. Four decades later some questions remain unanswered. Would different structures and policies of congregational governance have prevented "white flight"? Will ecumenical religion succeed in transcending denominational doctrinal and institutional policies?

Detroit's African American population has remained as concentrated as ever. Urban renewal and freeway construction deliberately routed through the African American population center displaced thousands and little or no effort was made to provide replacement housing. Where and how does institutional religion intercede on behalf of those so discriminated against? How do the theological and moral issues of a divided religious community affect public action? Who speaks for those whose voices have been not only silenced, but whose very presence has been challenged? Eli Weisel has said that every human being is a story, and each story must be told. The story of churches moving away from racially changing neighborhoods in Detroit is a story of people, and a city in which it happened.

Sugrue set a new standard for analyzing roots of urban crises in demonstrating how deindustrialization, suburbanization, and governmental policies restructured jobs, housing, and politics. In his focus on the reciprocal relationships between the people at the social bases of politics and large-scale structural transformations, he expanded the historical critiques of the "urban underclass".<sup>11</sup> What Sugrue analyzed in only a limited way was the role of religion in Detroit's unfolding urban crisis and more particularly, the relationship of institutional Christianity to "white flight". What is missing in Sugrue's

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<sup>11</sup>. Michael B. Katz, (ed.), *The Underclass Debate: views from history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The stratification of American society by class has acknowledged the various levels, but recent efforts to give a more complete conceptual definition to underclass, includes such work as Katz's *Underclass Debates*. Katz builds on the theories of Wm. Julius Wilson that suburbanization and deindustrialization created and isolated a "black underclass" in America's inner cities. Essays in the first section deal with the roots of ghetto poverty; Part Two with the transformation of American cities; Part Three with families and ethnic relationships and Part Four reviewing political responses/actions to poverty. Beyond its wide ranging essays, it underscores the need to give more attention to the existence of the underclass, however problematic the term might be, and the causes for it.

landmark work is a deeper analysis of “church flight” and more importantly, the role and praxis of churches<sup>12</sup> in Detroit’s unfolding urban crisis.

Neither isolated references to separate faith communities nor the summary conclusion of churches moving “quickly from racially changing neighborhoods” can begin to explain the role and praxis of religion in public life. Sugrue is not alone in this omission. Except for articles and extended sections in recent works on the role of African American churches in Detroit’s urban life, the role and praxis of white churches<sup>13</sup> has been neglected.

True as it is that many white churches did leave the city of Detroit following World War II, and that many of them left in the midst of changing neighborhoods surrounding their places of worship, the equation of changing neighborhoods equaling white church flight is not applicable in every situation. Nothing is ever as simple as it might appear, and again, it may not be as complicated as we want to make it. Basic theological affirmations, structures of church governance and polity, group dynamics, and individual morality, infected by racial discrimination and prejudice engaged the city

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<sup>12</sup>. The use of the word “churches” rather than “religion” is deliberate. Religion was defined by Martin Luther, and later by Hegel, Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr, as the “ultimate trust” of humanity, or that in which humanity places its ultimate trust. While this would generally be interpreted as a “trust in God or a Supreme Being”, humanity could express this trust in other powers, such as authority, money, politics et al. In *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2003), Robert H. Nelson asserts that “the laws of economics have replaced the Word of God” and that humanity has placed its ultimate trust in such issues as “material accumulation, financial security and economic well-being”. He further notes that “economists have replaced theologians in guiding thoughts and actions.” Religion, as ultimate trust, plays an important role in culture, and could be claimed as the most distinctive element in human cultural activity, but it would require extensive differentiation to more precisely identify its role. The general category of “religion” would not include more specific creeds, doctrines and sacramental practices/worship that would be included in the term “churches”. In this research it is not religion in general that is being questioned or reviewed, but rather the doctrines and practices of specific churches or communities of faith.

<sup>13</sup>. The distinction between “black churches” and “white churches” is somewhat awkward, but I know of no other “shorthand” way to mark the distinction between those churches whose membership was composed of African-Americans and whose involvement and support of the Civil Rights Movement was distinctively different from those churches whose membership was composed of Caucasians.

of Detroit in a struggle for social justice. This research is about the church, St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, and the city, Detroit, and their response to the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. St. Peter's did leave the city but long after the issue of Open Occupancy had commanded the brief attention of both the city and the church.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Detroit Awakened to Racial Discrimination**

Racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing in Detroit revealed its presence in the summer of 1925 when Dr. Ossian Sweet, and his wife, Gladys, returned from Europe and purchased a home in a white neighborhood. Dr. Sweet had completed post-graduate studies in Vienna and Paris and sought housing outside of Black Bottom. Unable to obtain a house through a real estate agent, they responded to a referral and purchased a home from what appeared to be a conventional white couple. The couple took advantage of the Sweets' dreams and dilemma, increased the price of the house by \$5,000 and assured them that the neighborhood was safe for African Americans and that there were no Klansmen in the area.<sup>14</sup>

To own and live in a single-family dwelling was the sign of a successful and secure life. Home ownership stabilized neighborhoods and fostered maintenance and improvements. But demand for housing had always exceeded supply in Detroit, at least until 1970 when Detroit's population began to decline. In and of itself, this shortage of housing was not unique, but it became a serious issue with the practice of racial discrimination and housing segregation which surfaced visibly in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Racial discrimination and its accompanying practices of segregation in employment, public intercourse, and personal relationships exploded in Detroit's

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<sup>14</sup>. Kevin Boyle brought the story together of Ossian Sweet and the trial of the eleven men charged with killing a man in the mob gathered outside the Sweet home in protest of the Sweets moving into a white neighborhood in *Arc of Justice*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

housing market in the early 1900s, and remained a major social and political issue until the late 1960's.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace racial discrimination and segregated housing in Detroit's assimilation of its rapid foreign-born population growth until 1943 and the formation of the Mayor's Interracial Committee. Detroit's automotive industry had been a magnet for foreign immigrants, and national labor migration and the dramatic population increase intensified a housing shortage in a housing market that included ethnic and class divisions in which segregation and discrimination were routinely practiced. Housing programs guided by federal and city politics controlled by whites did little to meet the increased need while racial discrimination and housing segregation became more widespread. Individual voices and isolated groups spoke out and supported open and fair housing but were unable to lift public understanding of race beyond blatant racialization.

The engagement of the religious community with the issue of racial discrimination in housing was sharply divided between African American churches and the white Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. White Protestant churches formed the Detroit Council of Churches in 1919 but the Council was not actively involved in social issues other than opposition to gambling, drinking and businesses open on Sundays. Except for the African American churches, and the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, pastor of Central Methodist Church that organized support for the Sojourner Truth project, and St. Louis the King Roman Catholic Church that organized extensive protests against the project, Detroit's religious community was silent on the practice of racial discrimination and segregated housing. In the next chapter I will follow the trajectories of racial

discrimination in housing and the formation of the Open Housing Movement as they meet in a direct confrontation that creates the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience. The ultimate purpose and focus of this research is to describe the context in which St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church understood, fashioned and exercised its mission and ministry against the social injustice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing.

Detroit's African American migration had come in two waves, with the first one in 1916-17 and the second following World War I and the passage of restrictive immigration legislation. According to the Detroit Urban League, the vast majority of immigrants came from Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Mississippi, South and North Carolina, and lesser numbers from Kentucky and Florida.<sup>15</sup> The Detroit Urban League had been established in 1916 by the National Urban League,<sup>16</sup> to assist African Americans moving from the rural south adjust to life in urban centers. The needs of the growing African American community for more education, health services, welfare assistance and housing were major concerns for this agency.

The 1920 survey of conditions for Negroes in Detroit conducted by the Urban League and its executive director, Forrester B. Washington, included the reasons for leaving home. The replies could be divided into two categories, social and economic. The social included "unbearable conditions", "oppression", "threats" and "education".

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<sup>15</sup>. The Executive Director's report to the monthly meeting of the joint committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes, January 19, 1917, in DUL-MHC, box 11, folder [11-0].

<sup>16</sup>. Columbia sociologist George Haynes had founded the Committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes in New York City in 1910 which then became the National Urban League on Urban Conditions among Negroes, and later, the Urban League. In Detroit, Eugene Kinkle Jones, Haynes' assistant, met with the white Associated Charities, and persuaded Henry G. Stevens, vice-president of Associated Charities, and a wealthy Detroit citizen, to fund an office of the Urban League in Detroit. The Detroit Employers' Association, which had been a founding group of the Americanization committee, agreed to fund the new Urban League's employment bureau.

Economic factors were low wages, health, flood and death in family. Nearly ten percent of the replies were “vague”.<sup>17</sup> Only one made reference to the well-documented Mississippi flood in 1915 which destroyed a major portion of the cotton crop in Mississippi, and no one made reference to the dramatic drop in world prices for cotton and the devastation caused by the boll weevil infestation in the south.

There was a slump in migration during 1918, but by 1920, the rate was higher than ever.<sup>18</sup> A Detroit Urban League employee would meet three big trains every day which brought the majority of migrants. On one day during the summer of 1919, one train arrived from Birmingham, Alabama with a total of 600 African Americans. Most were farm laborers which was unusual in that previous train loads had included both rural and urban Laborers.<sup>19</sup>

Detroit’s Urban League report of 1920 stated that less than half came directly to the city from the South. A chief reason was that transportation paid by labor agents were to such places as Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. Detroit was not a railroad center, and was regarded as a “repository city”; those who came to Detroit were intent on staying. The report concludes “a great many are coming directly to Detroit from the

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<sup>17</sup>. Forrester B. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit, A Survey of the Condition of a Negro Group in a Northern Industrial Center during the War Prosperity Period* (Detroit, 1920), Chapter V, DPL.

<sup>18</sup>. In 1924, a student revolt at Fisk University, a premier school for African Americans in Nashville, over the policies of white President Fayette A. McKenzie to invite white industrialists to contribute to the school with the promise to change the curriculum from liberal arts to a vocational type of education, ended with the resignation of President McKenzie. W. E.B. Dubois, a graduate of the school, invited to speak at the graduation of his daughter, called for a return to the liberal arts education originally provided at Fish, but also came to the conclusion that the South would not offer many opportunities for African American improvement. He called for African Americans to “go north”. It would be impossible to calculate how many responded, but Dubois was an influential spokesperson for African Americans, and his call would certainly have reinforced whatever decisions African Americans had made earlier about going north.

<sup>19</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*, p.25.

South, as they have heard from friends and relatives of the better opportunities in this city than elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup>

The industrialization of Detroit initiated massive changes in population distribution and established its African American ghetto. Newly arriving Northern European, British, Scandinavian and even Eastern European immigrants were able to obtain rental housing wherever available, African American immigrants were de facto limited to the scattered concentrations of African Americans on the near east side of Detroit. In 1917 George Haynes had counted six areas of African American settlement<sup>21</sup>, and three years later Forrester B. Washington had defined thirteen areas for African Americans.<sup>22</sup> According to Haynes, African Americans were living largely in the “crowded Negro district which had been formed before their influx in the Old Saint Antoine Street district of the east side where Black hotels, restaurants, barbershops, and other Black business were”. He continued that the African American district

expanded north to about Rowena Street and south to about Macomb, within about twenty city blocks—some of the blocks are small compared with the size of a usual city block. They were overcrowded in this district. They overflowed toward the North beyond Brady Street, toward the south below Lafayette Street, toward the east beyond Rivard Street and toward the west to about Beaubien Street. They share the neighborhood with kindly Jews. Toward the north end of the district Jews predominate. Going toward the East they have pushed into an Italian neighborhood.”<sup>23</sup>

Three years later Washington reported that this small area had tripled in size. It was estimated that 70% of the African Americans living in Detroit in 1920 lived in this area.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit.*, Chapter V. no pagination

<sup>21</sup>. Haynes, *Negro in Detroit*, pp.8-9.

<sup>22</sup>. Forrester B. Washington, “*The Negro in Detroit*, part 1 of section, “The Environment of the Negro in Detroit: The Physical Environment.”

<sup>23</sup>. Haynes, *Negro Newcomers in Detroit*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*, part 1.

It requires no imagination to acknowledge a serious housing shortage for African Americans during this time. Three and four families to an apartment was the rule, and Washington reported that “75% of the Negro homes have so many lodgers that they are really hotels. Stables, garages, and cellars have been converted into homes. Pool rooms and gambling houses charge for the privilege of sleeping on tables over night.”<sup>25</sup>

Detroit’s political and industrial communities disregarded the social and communal needs of the burgeoning African American community<sup>26</sup> and concentrated on the African American laborer as an industrial asset. Forrester B. Washington, Detroit Urban League’s first Executive Secretary, had included housing for African Americans as a major concern but John Dancy, who succeeded Washington as Executive Director, dropped the matter because “Negroes are all native-born, full American citizens, whose entire culture is derived in America, and it was not deemed proper to imply in any degree that the Negroes were not all Americans.”<sup>27</sup>

Detroit’s political climate had been charged in the summer of 1923 with continuing rallies organized by the Ku Klux Klan that spread their message of anti-unionism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism and racism. A special election for mayor pitted the Klan with their candidate against the alliance of African Americans and foreigners that had elected the previous mayor. With the Klan candidate defeated by the disallowance of improperly marked ballots, the stage was set for increased Klan activity in the regular mayoral election in the following year, and racism was the chosen subject

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<sup>25</sup>. Washington, “*The Negro in Detroit*”, part 1.

<sup>26</sup>. In 1922, James Couzens, as mayor of Detroit, suggested that Detroit float a \$5 million five-year bond issue to build housing for workers. It was quickly dropped when his legal staff persuaded him that the city could not go into home-loan business without drastic changes in the state constitution. Henry Ford believed that his wage scale provided workers with adequate funding for housing.

<sup>27</sup>. Annual Report, March 31, 1920. Americanization Committee of Detroit (Ann Arbor: Michigan Historical Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan) 1974.

of issue. The stage was set for Detroit's confrontation with its segregated and volatile nature.

On the Sweets' first night in their new home, a crowd gathered both on and across the street to protest their presence. A larger crowd returned the second night and amidst the noise, thrown stones, and menacing gestures of the encircling crowd, shots were fired from the Sweet house killing a man across the street on his porch.

Ossian Sweet and the ten other men who joined him on the second night in protecting their home were charged with murder and brought to a trial that drew attention nationwide. Assisted by the newly formed NAACP in creating a defense team including Clarence Darrow, the jury was unable to return a verdict after 46 hours of deliberation, and the presiding judge, the Honorable Frank Murphy, who would go in his political career to become governor of Michigan, US Attorney General and Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court, declared *The People vs. Sweet* a mistrial.<sup>28</sup> A second trial, *The People vs. Henry Sweet*, ended with a "Not Guilty" verdict after less than four hours of jury deliberation. No further charges were filed.

Following the trial of Ossian Sweet, and having been elected to his own full term of two years, Detroit's mayor, Johnny Smith, appointed a special commission to address Detroit's racial problems with Reinhold Niebuhr, pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church, as chairman.<sup>29</sup> Niebuhr's sermon against the Ku Klux Klan's endorsement of

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<sup>28</sup> Boyle, *Arc of Justice*, p. 299.

<sup>29</sup> Niebuhr had arrived in Detroit in 1915 immediately after his ordination in the Evangelical and Reformed Church, to assume the pastorate of the newly organized mission. An additional assignment was to help the E and R church, a German denomination, adapt to its ministries in the United States. His ministry in Detroit shaped his theological framework that included a strong social ethic. When the A.F. of L. scheduled its annual meeting in Detroit, the Chamber of Commerce labeled them communistic and pressured churches inviting them to speak to cancel these invitations. Niebuhr was one of very few that did not cancel the invitation. He wrote that "the incident vividly portrayed the irrelevance of the mild

Smith's opponent in Detroit's mayoral contest in 1925 had been featured on the front page of Detroit's *Free Press*, and when Smith won the election by a slim thirty-thousand vote margin, he put Niebuhr's name on a list of those who would be useful to him in the future, a circumstance which occurred within a very short time.<sup>30</sup>

The Mayor's Interracial Commission, composed of six African American and six white members, gathered data detailing the discrimination African Americans faced in health care, housing, employment, and criminal justice. The report,<sup>31</sup> presented to the mayor in March, 1927, was much like the report that Forrester B. Washington had prepared in 1920, and rightly so, since he had served as consultant to the "Niebuhr Commission".

An important development was reported in the section on "Housing" wherein the number of vacant houses and apartments for African Americans had increased substantially from the 1920 report prepared by Washington. Where no vacant housing was available for African American newcomers in 1920, there were a significant number of vacancies in African American communities by 1926, due to house-building programs by Detroit realtors and construction companies for whites. One important development for the African American community was on 8-Mile Road-Wyoming on land acquired from Henry Stevens, the President of Detroit's Urban League. The land was divided into smaller lots and sold to African Americans, but, unable to obtain loans and mortgages, they pooled their resources and built what they could afford.<sup>32</sup> When the Works Progress

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moralistic idealism, which I had identified with the Christian faith, to the power realities of our modern technical society".

<sup>30</sup>. Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr, a Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) p.91.

<sup>31</sup>. Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, *The Negro in Detroit*, (mimeographed copy, 1926), BHC, DPL.

<sup>32</sup>. Burneice Aveery, "The Eight Mile Road. . . Its Growth. . . 1920-1953" 3, BA 1, Folder 1. DPL. On the founding of the Eight Mile area see also John C. Dancy, *Sand Against the Wind: The Memoirs of John C. Dancy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 57-58 and *Michigan Chronicle*, April 22, 1944.

Administration and Detroit Housing Commission conducted the 1938 Real Property Survey of Detroit, the residents of this Eight Mile area were among Detroit's poorest and more than two-thirds of the houses were substandard.<sup>33</sup>

Niebuhr's committee had spent a great deal of time examining the claim that African Americans depressed property values. A residential area on Harding Avenue, not far from Ossian Sweet's house on Garland, was studied. Several African American families had moved there. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that any white person, whether he sold to an African American family or simply left, or whether he sold early or late, had received less money than might have been offered under more normal circumstances. In fact, the committee was able to provide information that the opposite was true: African American buyers were willing to pay more.<sup>34</sup>

Included in Niebuhr's report to the Mayor as Appendix I, was the copy of the letter written to the Board of Directors of the Detroit Real Estate Board by the Committee on Race Relations that had been authorized to make an "investigation of the Negro situation in this city." Their first question was the effect of the great ingress of African Americans. They emphasized their desire to have African Americans be able to "live with their own people according to their various stations in life, but without causing racial disturbance by moving into established white districts." The Committee wanted the African Americans to remain in their areas, and to have the Caucasians objecting to African American residents move to a "white district in another location." The Committee concluded their report with the belief that "the courts of this State have upheld instances that property may be restricted against use or occupancy by persons not

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<sup>33</sup>. Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis, Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) p.40.

<sup>34</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*, sect. 5, *Housing*, pp.46-58.

of the Caucasian race providing the conveyances relative to the transfer of same include such restriction.”<sup>35</sup>

The report of the Mayor’s Interracial Commission did not provide any definitive recommendations other than the mild request that whites be fairer in dealing with their African American neighbors. This was unlike the Niebuhr who severely criticized Henry Ford in his “How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?” in the *Christian Century*<sup>36</sup> with the assertion that “every social worker in Detroit knows that the Ford wage places Ford workers in the ranks of social liabilities.” He noted that “Ford’s disavowal of philanthropic intentions in the institution of the five-day week is like the assurances of a spinster that her reputation as a flirt has been grossly exaggerated.”<sup>37</sup> Niebuhr wrote six months later in the *Christian Century* that an industry “which develops such distressing social consequences should nevertheless still be heralded as a model of humane industrial strategy speaks volumes for the incompetence of the social conscience of our age.”<sup>38</sup> In his personal diary, published as *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*” he would write in 1926 that “we are all responsible. We all want what the factory produces and none of us is sensitive enough to care how much in human values the efficiency of the modern factory costs.”<sup>39</sup> It was, however, in his unsigned article in *Christian Century* later that year that he wrote that the housing shortage for African Americans is the “crux of the race problem in every city.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>. *The Negro in Detroit, Appendix I.*

<sup>36</sup>. *Christian Century*, December 9, 1926.

<sup>37</sup> *Christian Century*, December 9, 1926...

<sup>38</sup>. *Christian Century*, June 9, 1927, p 714.

<sup>39</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves From the Notebook of A Tamed Cynic*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957) p. 100.

<sup>40</sup>. *Christian Century*, “Race Prejudice in the North”, May 12, 1927, pp. 583-584.

The report from the Mayor's Interracial Commission should not have been a surprise. Washington's report of conditions in the black community in 1920 had already documented the urgent need for three times as many homes as were available to "shelter the Negro population".<sup>41</sup> Niebuhr's report extended this documentation by including twenty cases of segregation, discrimination and racial violence experienced by African Americans seeking to move out of their segregated communities. In a summary analysis of these cases, the commission reported that the neighborhoods were mainly on "high class residential streets", and that the properties were kept in "as good a condition or better than that of the white neighbors". It also stated that nineteen of the twenty families owned their places and only five of the nineteen lived in their homes for less than three years, and the rest from four to eleven years.<sup>42</sup>

Niebuhr's report to the Mayor was released in 1927 and received with benign neglect. In the midst of a national presidential campaign which presented a Roman Catholic as the Democratic candidate for president, the layoff of 60,000 thousand men from Ford Motor Company, the accompanying expansion of Detroit's welfare rolls by forty-three percent, and increased under-world criminal boot-legging activity by Detroit's Purple Gang, Detroit gave its attention to other issues. The Detroit Council of Churches' Department of Social Action "stressed strict law enforcement, particularly against the liquor business, and the suppression of prostitution and other forms of vice in the city" and acknowledged Niebuhr as "the most out-standing voice the Council has had

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<sup>41</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*. Section 11 "Permanent Relief". DPL.

<sup>42</sup>. Washington, *The Negro in Detroit*, , page 41

on the all-important questions of industrial relations,”<sup>43</sup> but made no reference to the Mayor’s Report.

Niebuhr had spoken often about the race issues to both secular and religious groups, including a four forum Sunday evening series at Bethel Church in January, 1927. Advertised in oversized print in Saturday’s newspapers, he entitled one talk “Where Shall the Negro Live?”<sup>44</sup> For Niebuhr the problems Detroit’s African Americans faced included overcrowded housing, usurious rents, opposition from financial institutions for home mortgages, police brutality, failure of white churches to assist African American congregations, even within the same denominations, etc. Race was a complex issue for Niebuhr and in a diary entry a year after the Mayor’s report was released, he wished “that our romanticists and sentimentalists could sit through a series of meetings where the real social problems of a city are discussed. They would be cured of their optimism. A city built around a productive process which gives only casual thought to its human problems is really a kind of hell. Thousands in this town are really living in torment, while the rest of us eat, drink and make merry. What a civilization.”<sup>45</sup> Niebuhr also wished that those who hated Detroit’s mayor so much because he didn’t conform to their rules and standards could appreciate how “superior his attitudes and viewpoints on race relations were to those held by most church people”. It was “unfortunate that we must depend on the ‘publicans’ for our social consequences while ‘saints’ develop their private virtues

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<sup>43</sup>. G. Merrill Lenox, ed. *Christian Unity and Mission, A history of the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches, 1919-1969*. MDCC Collection, Reuther Library, Box 1.

<sup>44</sup>. Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr, A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) In his chapter “Henry Ford is America”, Fox covers Niebuhr’s years in Detroit from 1925 to 1928, including Niebuhr’s service on the Mayor’s Interracial Commission.

<sup>45</sup>. Niebuhr, *Leaves*, p.168-169.

and let the city fry in its iniquities.”<sup>46</sup> Niebuhr’s report changed nothing and racial discrimination and housing segregation continued.

There is no simple explanation for the failure of the Mayor’s Interracial Commission report to ignite a concerted city and church action against racial discrimination and housing segregation. The Commission had been created to gather data reflecting the condition of race relations in Detroit. It had not been commissioned to create programs addressing these conditions. Niebuhr was rarely in Detroit for any extended periods. Traveling for the pacifist Fellowship of a Christian Social Order (FCSO) on a half-time schedule, churning out editorials and articles for the *Christian Century* and a popular speaker on college campuses for his denomination, Niebuhr’s time available for the church of which he was the pastor<sup>47</sup>, for the Detroit Pastor’s Union and the Industrial Committee of the Detroit Council of Churches, both of which he chaired, was limited. More important was the general consensus of optimism in both the cultural and religious arenas that reliable and trustworthy data regarding the true nature of race relations and racial discrimination would motivate and lead Detroiters in resolving this conflict between reality and their ideals. Niebuhr had never shared this optimistic confidence in humanity, but his pacifist commitments rejected the use of force, and he had no alternatives to reason and trust in the building of community. Civilization needed religion and Christians needed passion, daring and sacrifice. But this did not translate into aggressive programs against racial discrimination in Detroit in 1926. Instead, he wrote

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<sup>46</sup>. Niebuhr, *Leaves*, p. 169.

<sup>47</sup>. YMCA Evangelist Sherwood Eddy gave \$2500 to Reinhold Niebuhr in 1923 to cover travel expenses and provide for an assistant pastor at Bethel Church in Detroit. Eddy tried often to enlist Niebuhr as a traveling evangelist for the YMCA. For more on this see Richard Fox’s *Reinhold Niebuhr*, pp.81-93.

that “we cannot put God back in society without much cross-bearing”.<sup>48</sup> But in 1927 he wrote that “the basis of brotherhood is equality of opportunity and uncoerced cooperation. Is the church ready to advocate an ethical idea as thoroughgoing as that?”<sup>49</sup> Niebuhr failed to take account of this realization in 1926 that the battle for an ethical society demanded more than a more robustness. What was needed was the taking of sides in a concrete political, social and ethical struggle. Niebuhr’s report had not demanded the taking of sides. It had gathered data for information and Detroit’s religious community did not oppose what the report had presented but supported the city’s response. In the next chapter I will follow the re-formation of the Interracial Committee following the riot in 1943 and its successor, the Commission on Community Relations, which will use the 1926 Interracial Committee report in developing a response awakening the engagement of religion in addressing the critical issue of racial discrimination and segregated housing.

On March 4, 1929, Herbert Hoover was inaugurated president of the United States. Detroit produced more than 5,337,000 cars and trucks during the year. On Tuesday, October 29, 1929 the stock market crashed. Recorder’s Court Judge Frank B. Murphy was sworn in as Mayor of Detroit on September 23, 1930 and the census for Detroit counted 120,066 African Americans and 1,440,141 whites.<sup>50</sup> By October, an estimated 123,200 of the city’s 689,566 workers were unemployed. By December the number had risen to 178,000, to 223,489 in January, 1931, and auto production was down to 3,363,000. The casework director for the Department of Public Welfare estimated in

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<sup>48</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr, “Our Secularized Civilization,” *The Christian Century* (April 22, 1926), 43, 508-510.

<sup>49</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Does Civilization Need Religion* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), p.209.

<sup>50</sup>. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population II* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census), p. 788

November, 1932 that more than 350,000 or more than 50 percent of the total wage earners in Detroit were without regular work, and that of the remaining number many were only working part-time.<sup>51</sup> Henry Ford blamed the depression on the poor. In March, 1931 he said that “these are really good times, but only if you know it . . . The average man won’t really do a day’s work unless he is caught and cannot get out of it.”<sup>52</sup> Ford refused to pay into any unemployed fund.

Murphy had made unemployment and its relief a major issue in his campaign for mayor, and his Mayor’s Unemployment Committee formed avenues of help, including food distribution centers, gardens for the unemployed, municipal lodging centers and direct relief payments. Murphy’s programs created a debt load for Detroit that by 1933 was absorbing more than 40 percent of tax revenues, and prompted one businessman to blast “the open-handed, come one-come all welfare policy” that was allegedly attracting “derelicts from all parts of America.” An anti-Murphy councilman insisted that “local welfare policy was creating a “glorious time for a lot of people who have never worked in their lives and never will work.”<sup>53</sup>

The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president of the United States and his program of recovery gave hope to millions of Americans. In a period of one hundred days Roosevelt hoped to reconstitute the economic and industrial strength of the nation, and for Detroiters this was first conveyed in the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) that was designed to provide low-cost loans to owners facing eviction. In design it was the forerunner of the modern mortgage system with its small down payment and

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<sup>51</sup>Sidney Fine, *Frank Murphy, The Detroit Years* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), pp.232-233.

<sup>52</sup>. Maurice Sugar, *The Ford Hunger March* (Berkeley, CA: Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>53</sup>. Fine, *Frank Murphy, the Detroit Years*. p. 305.

monthly costs covering longer-term mortgages.<sup>54</sup> Developing a national profile, it made property assessments and color-coded them green, blue, yellow and red, for best, next best, likely to decline and prices dropping. Working with the consensus that property values would fall in neighborhoods with African American residents, the HOLC colored red every Detroit neighborhood with African American residents.<sup>55</sup> There is no evidence that the HOLC used these color codes to deny financial assistance to African American applicants, but with the vast majority of African American residents in rental housing, the program was of little help to the black community.

Spurred by the national scope of welfare needs and the passage of state housing boards in twelve states, Congress authorized the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to make loans for self-liquidating projects for the sole purpose of providing housing for families of low income or for reconstruction of slum areas.<sup>56</sup> When Detroit's Common Council applied for a \$3,000,000 loan as the first step in a municipal housing program, the Detroit Housing Commission was formed on Nov. 22, 1933 to carry out this program. They adopted the fundamental principle involved in the work of relocation, namely "that the character of no neighborhood in the City of Detroit shall be changed as a result of the removal of families from a district under consideration for rehabilitation. This includes both Welfare and Non-Relief families."<sup>57</sup> Two areas were chosen for clearance and the

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<sup>54</sup>. Provisions for five-year mortgages were included in the original bill.

<sup>55</sup>. Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), P.149. The concept of color coding neighborhoods to illustrate value was later used by the financial and insurance communities. Often called "redlining" it has been ruled illegal, but many believe it still used today.

<sup>56</sup> *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics* "Recent Developments in Low-Cost Housing and Slum Clearance Programs". Vol. 10, No. 1 (Feb. 1934) pp. 99-101.,

<sup>57</sup>. *First Annual Report of the Detroit Housing Commission*, DHC files at Detroit Public Library. In *American Odyssey* Robert Conot related how the Urban League and NAACP wanted to employ public housing to break down racial segregation, and were opposed to either an all-white or an all-black project along the Woodward corridor in the mid 30s. Jo Gomon, director of Detroit Housing Commission called

construction of low-cost housing, Parkside and Brewster, which provided housing for three thousand families. Plans were also made to construct a major highway bisecting Detroit that would pass through the middle of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley.

In its Seventh Annual Report, the Detroit Housing Commission acknowledged the desperate condition of African American housing. “The Real Property Survey of 1938 revealed that more Negroes were living in unsafe, insanitary (sic), or overcrowded dwellings than lived under satisfactory conditions. 50.2 percent of all dwellings occupied by Negroes were found to be substandard, while only 14 percent of the white dwellings were substandard.” The Commission also acknowledged that “in 1937 12,431 colored families have applied or registered for project homes. Only slightly more than half of these twelve thousand families have reached the stage of formal consideration.”<sup>58</sup> The Housing Commission concluded its report with the note that “many more are in need of housing and constitute a market for low cost private development.”<sup>59</sup> Free market capitalism would be expected to meet the housing needs of the African American community.

Segregation was not limited to housing during pre-World War II years. Beginning in the early 1920s, African Americans had joined various unions for laundry workers, laborers, bricklayers, carpenters, streetcar men, garbage truck drivers et al. Vigorously opposed to unions, the automotive industry used the assistance of the Urban League<sup>60</sup> and African American churches<sup>61</sup> as their referral source for workers, and as

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John Dancy and two dozen of the city’s black leaders together and told them bluntly, “either we have a segregated project, or we won’t have any. So make up your minds.” After a day-long debate, the participants voted for an all-black project, p.363.

<sup>58</sup>. *The Seventh Annual Report of Detroit Housing Commission*, p. 19-20, DPL.

<sup>59</sup>. *The Seventh Annual Report.*, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup>. This was a serious division between the Urban League and the NAACP. John Dancy and local black clergy could write letters of reference for blacks and the automotive industry would employ them. The

long as African American workers were hired through these channels, they joined in opposition to the organization of labor in the automotive plants. When an African American local of the International Moulder Union shifted to the United Auto Workers (UAW) in protest over specialized treatment to skilled workers, the UAW created a subcommittee for the Organization of Negro Workers. The policy of racial equality adopted by the UAW-CIO was met with varying degrees of opposition and support, but Ford's raw paternalism and absolute and ruthless opposition to unionism and the obvious economic gains and the greater measure of job security the UAW achieved for its members drew increasing support from the African American community.<sup>62</sup>

The aggressive attention to civil rights within the UAW-CIO which had created a social institution for African Americans was tested in November 1939 when Chrysler Corporation hired African American strikebreakers at the Dodge plant in Hamtramck. The Rev. Horace A. White of the Plymouth Congregational Church, the first African

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NAACP criticized this practice and sought instead to have the black community be more assertive of its rights to full employment and wage parity. In October, 1935 the National Urban League sent a representative to Detroit to educate blacks in trade unionism. A meeting was scheduled in the YMCA, but the YMCA cancelled the meeting and it was moved to the black YWCA. Only a handful attended the meeting and the proposed Negro Workers Council fell apart. Many considered its failure to materialize as the work of the black Ford interests that prevailed in the leadership of the black community. For more of this see Lloyd H. Bailer, "The Negro Automobile Worker," *The Journal of Political Economy* 51 (October 1943): p. 425.

<sup>61</sup>. Henry Ford cultivated closed relations with Detroit's black clergy and used them as his "job agents". The Rev. Robert L. Bradby of the Second Baptist Church and Father Everard W. Daniel of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church were especially preferred, and a letter of recommendation from either of these two clergy assured the black applicant of employment in Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford contributed to both churches and the St. Matthew's parish house was a gift from the Fords. What has never been established and would be impossible to do, was the number of men who joined either of these two parishes in hopes of employment at Ford's. This accommodationist relationship between key black churches and Ford Motor Company was an important factor in the slow development of the automotive unions.

<sup>62</sup>. Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us is What We make It, Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp.277-304. The strong position adopted by the UAW on racial integration was important. When UAW Local 235 hosted a party at the Book Cadillac Hotel and several black families arrived, only to be told that the hotel did not allow interracial dancing, the Hotel management corrected the host local and said they had no policy against it. The Executive Committee of UAW Local 235 adopted a strong policy statement in response to this event in which it disallowed any discrimination on the basis of religion, race, creed, color, political affiliation or nationality. Adopted in 1937, it was reported in *The Detroit Tribune*, October 30, 1937.

American Congregational Church in Michigan,<sup>63</sup> and the Rev. Charles A. Hill of Hartford Avenue Baptist Church were joined by State Senator Charles Diggs in preparing a leaflet that stated “Negro workers must not allow themselves to be used by irresponsible leaders.”<sup>64</sup> Chrysler prevailed in its use of African American strikebreakers, but the UAW-CIO won its objectives for the strike. On April 2, 1941 seventeen months later, the UAW-CIO called for a strike at Ford Motor Company and 17,000 African American workers struck the company. The strike ended eight days later, and the NLRB election held in May gave the UAW 58,000 out of 80,000 votes cast.<sup>65</sup> The irony of this significant accomplishment for the UAW-CIO was that Dearborn where the Ford Motor Company was headquartered remained an “all-white” city and racism was alive and well.

Meanwhile, the east side of Detroit was especially vulnerable to racial tension. Polish and German immigrants to Detroit had settled on the east side and as the population increased, the German and Polish neighborhoods expanded northward. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were more than 48,000 residents in what was known as “Poletown”.<sup>66</sup> With the southern edge of Poletown bordering the northern edge of Detroit’s concentration of African Americans, some of the increasing African American population expanded into the Polish neighborhoods. Polish and African American workers had the lowest echelon of heavy industry jobs. With the limited number of African Americans competing for these jobs, there was no serious threat to the

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<sup>63</sup>. Detroit’s Plymouth Congregational Church was organized in 1919 by nine African American Congregationalists from Alabama. The Rev. Horace A. White began his ministry at Plymouth Congregational in February, 1936 and the bank foreclosed on the mortgage in July, 1936. The congregation bought the mortgage in December, 1937. The Rev. White died in 1958 and was succeeded by the Rev. Nicholas Hood, who was later elected to Detroit’s Common Council. The current pastor is the Rev. Nicholas Hood, II.

<sup>64</sup>. *Michigan Chronicle*, November 27, 1939.

<sup>65</sup>. B. J. Widick, *Detroit, City of Race and Violence*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp.73-87.

<sup>66</sup>. Jeanie Wylie, *Poletown, Community Betrayed*, (Chicago: University Press, 1989), p. 1

Polish laborers, but as the number of African American migrating to Detroit increased competition for these jobs intensified.<sup>67</sup>

The decision of the Dodge brothers to build their automobile plant in a peaceful German-American farming community a few miles north of Detroit with a population of 500 in the early 1900's, changed Hamtramck forever. Hamtramck was located on the north side of Detroit's Poletown. Between 1914 and 1920 Hamtramck's population grew from 3,335 to 46,615 and was the fastest growing community for that period in the United States. Polish immigrants and Polish families moving from Poletown to Hamtramck were joined by southern whites and a community mindset was taking form that felt threatened by the gathering African American population. The issue was more economic than social.<sup>68</sup> The majority of Hamtramck's population worked in the automotive industry within their immediate area, including Dodge Main, Packard, three Cadillac plants, Studebaker, Hudson and Hupp Motor Company, and there were only so many opportunities for their level of skills.<sup>69</sup>

By 1930 there were 79,274 southern whites in Detroit.<sup>70</sup> When the Rev. Frank Norris was called as pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Detroit he "informed the readers

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<sup>67</sup>. One Detroit Pole who agonized over the poverty and inhumane working conditions experienced in Detroit was Leon Czolgosz. In 1901 he shot and killed President McKinley and newspapers reported that his grievance was that the President had promised prosperity and there was no prosperity for the poor man. Quoted in Jeanie Wylie, *Poletown, Community Betrayed*, (Chicago: University Press, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>. Lloyd H. Bailer, "The Negro Automobile Worker", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol 51, No. 5 (Oct. 1943) pp.415-428....quotes from Glen E. Carlson, "The Negro in the Industries of Detroit:" (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan unpublished doctoral diss. 1929), p. 139; From his interviews of, Negro workers and U.A.W.-C.I.O. officials in Detroit, February 14, 1940, he concluded that "The Negro-white income differential has not been as large as might be surmised from a study of the Negro's occupational status. With few exceptions, the industry's policy has been "equal pay for equal work". In 1939, the average annual income of white and Negro employees amounted to \$1291 and \$1092 respectively. This race differential was smaller than in any other manufacturing activity except4 the leather industry. p. 419.

<sup>69</sup>. Bailer, "The Negro Automobile Worker", p.2. An important issue for the Detroit laborer was transportation. Not all areas of the city were served well, and many laborers walked to work because public transportation was not available.

<sup>70</sup>. Elmer Akers, *Southern Whites in Detroit* (1936: reprint Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1977).

of the *Fundamentalist* in 1934 that ‘there are over 200,000 southerners in Detroit’<sup>71</sup>.

Many had settled in neighborhoods throughout the center of Detroit within the Grand Boulevard area, which provided the general contours for the “inner city”. For native Detroit whites, the southern whites shared many characteristics of the southern African Americans---speech, diet and lifestyle, and challenged their racial stereotypes.

“Hillbilly” was the name given to southern whites not assimilating nor respecting northern cultural norms.<sup>72</sup> “Hillbillies” were unwanted because their mores and behaviors confused what once had been a stable caricature of the differences between whites and African Americans.

By 1940, when it was apparent that Detroit was again in need of a huge labor force, the political, economic and industrial landscape had changed. The New Deal created a host of programs, including unemployment compensation, old-age pensions, insured bank deposits, a minimum wage, price supports for the agricultural community, and, important for the theme of this research, public housing that validated interventionist government. The Depression had challenged the utility of individualism and self-help as well as the inevitability of progress and limited government. Class barriers had been breached, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that many in the middle and upper classes were not immune to the “hard times” of years past, and racial segregation could be

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<sup>71</sup>. D. L. Curlew, “They Ceased Not to Preach” (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2001), p.237

<sup>72</sup>. John Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations, Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.28. Hartigan spent several years in the southern white community in Detroit known as Briggs in researching the racial identity of whiteness. He argues that race is a local matter, intra as well as inter, that white racial identity is constructed in relationship to other whites as often as it is constructed in relationship to blacks. The term “hillbilly” in one context would be an insult, and in another term, not. What must be always considered is the total context of discourse. Intra-racial distinctions are just as important in constituting racial identities as are interracial oppositions. The term “hillbilly” has a history from 17<sup>th</sup> century Ireland through Scotland to the United States, and most often was used as in a derogatory manner.

challenged. What Detroit had not anticipated was the increasing number of African American and southern white migrants.

Using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series ( IPUMS)<sup>73</sup> developed by historians at the University of Minnesota, it has been calculated that in 1940 there were 102,158 African Americans and 197,162 whites who had migrated to Detroit to make a total population of over 1,621,781. They were part of what has been called the “Great Migration” and these figures correct the general assumption that African Americans constituted the majority of newcomers to Detroit from the south. The Great Migration included African Americans and whites and their arrival in Detroit stressed the city’s dwindling supply of housing to breaking point. And one would have to be very charitable to consider all of Detroit’s housing “livable”. Some historians have suggested this influx of newcomers at the beginning of the fourth decade as the beginning of “white flight”, and included not only flight from African Americans, but southern whites as well.<sup>74</sup>

Few whites fled from Detroit at the beginning of World War II, but one would not want to describe Detroit’s mood as hospitable, friendly or neighborly. The nation’s

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<sup>73</sup>. IPUMS draws together data from every surviving United States Census from 1850 to 2000 and converts them into a consistent format. I frankly do not understand the program, but acknowledging its survivability in a highly critical environment, I believe their statistics can be trusted.

<sup>74</sup>. In “Disgrace to the Race: Hillbillies and the Color Line in Detroit, in *Appalachian Odyssey, Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*, ed by Phillip J. Obermiller, Thomas E. Wagner, and E. Bruce Tucker, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000), John Harttigan, Jr. describes how white Detroiters loathed the *hillbillies* from the south, because the whites from the south represented exactly what the northern whites did not want to be. His book, *Racial Situations, Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) presents a shift in the study of racial identity. Hartigan’s book is only one of an increasing number paying careful attention to Southern white migration to Detroit. James N. Gregory’s *The Southern Diaspora, How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) was one of several, including Chad Berry’s *Southern Migration, Northern Exiles*, (Urbana, Ill., 2000), Phillip J. Obermiller, Thomas E. Wagner, and E. Bruce Tucker, eds., *Appalachian Odyssey, Historical Perspectives of the Great Migration* (Westport, 2000); and William w. Philliber, *Appalachian Migrants in Urban America: Cultural Conflicts or Ethnic Group Formation?* (New York, 1981

demands from Detroit's industrial machine and the increasing density of population which created massive housing shortages stretched conventional practices, polices, and emotions to the breaking point. African American and white newcomers to the city competed for housing with African American and white residents living in substandard housing. With a vacancy rate registered less than 1 percent, combined with the number of substandard dwellings exceeding one-sixth of the city's more than 400,000 housing units, inter and intra-racial fights erupted at the areas of change as newcomer African Americans and whites contested with native African Americans and whites.

It had always been an uneven contest between African Americans and whites in Detroit's housing market, but the influx of "southern whites" to Detroit following WW I had added a new dimension to Detroit. Southern whites were culturally different from white Detroiters, and often denied housing in white communities, they joined in pursuit of housing potentially available to African Americans. In the absence of human rights leadership and civil rights laws the intensified mixing of immigrant African Americans and southern whites with native Detroit African Americans and whites created new tensions and issues for the city and the churches. In *Origins of the Urban Crisis* Sugrue called race and housing in the 1940s "Detroit's Time Bomb",<sup>75</sup> and it did not take long to explode.

### **SOJOURNER TRUTH HOUSING PROJECT<sup>76</sup>**

Shortly before the war began, Roosevelt, an unorthodox administrator who controlled his executives by dividing and blurring their authority, placed the Division of

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<sup>75</sup>. Sugrue, *Origins*, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup>. The name "Sojourner Truth" for Detroit's housing project in the Seven Mile—Fenelon area was offered by the Rev. Horace White, the only black on Detroit's Housing Commission. Sojourner Truth was an ex-slave, abolitionist and feminist. Accepted by the Commissioners of the DHC and affirmed by F. Charles Starr, USHA regional director, the project was known as Sojourner Truth Homes.

Defense Housing Coordination (DDHC), under the Federal Works Agency (FWA).<sup>77</sup> In January, 1941 the FWA issued an executive order forbidding discrimination against African American defense workers in emergency war housing.<sup>78</sup> In May, 1941, DDHC issued its first report for Detroit and recommended 1,000 government-financed and 10,000 privately built family units for the workers that would be needed to fill the 84,000 new jobs in the metro area. The Detroit Housing Commission had applied for a \$3,000,000 loan in 1933 as the first step in a municipal housing program which included the demolition and reconstruction in the low-cost housing field of Detroit's East side slum area. In consultation with the Detroit Housing Commission and the pressing need for African American housing, in this new program DDHC assigned two hundred of the total one thousand units for African American occupancy.

Controversy erupted immediately over the choice of sites on Detroit's east side. Opposition to the site, and in truth, to the entire idea, came in large measure from the pastor of the Polish parish, St. Louis King Catholic Church, who charged that African Americans would reduce property values, threaten the safety of white girls and generally ruin the neighborhood. Rudolph G. Tenerowicz, who had served as mayor of Hamtramck before resigning for accepting bribes from brothels, was serving now as the Representative of the First Congressional district in the House of Representatives, and reversed his position on African American occupancy. Confronted by irate Polish constituents he began a campaign for exclusive white occupancy. Hamtramck was also

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<sup>77</sup>. Philip J. Funigiello, *The Challenge to Urban Liberalism: Federal-City Relationships During World War II* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1978), 80-83.

<sup>78</sup>. Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door, Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), p. 66. Meyer adds the cryptic note that discriminatory hiring practices meant few blacks would find employment in war industries. Many filled non-defense jobs vacated by whites to work in higher-paying defense jobs and thus did not qualify for emergency war housing.

reversing its amiable and peaceful coexistence with African American residents, and with the growing number of white Southern newcomers, feared African American association and competition. Considered by many others as lower class, first and second generation Poles and white southern immigrants united against the lowest-status group of all: African Americans.<sup>79</sup>

Rather than changing the policy of segregated housing for African Americans and reducing the increasingly charged emotions in the African American community, the Detroit Housing Commission publicly announced in 1941 what they had originally adopted in 1933, that the DHC “will in no way change the racial characteristics of any neighborhood in Detroit through occupancy standards of housing projects under its jurisdiction”.

Protesting changes proposed for shifting occupancy from African American to white, the African American community organized the Sojourner Truth Citizens Committee, with the Rev. Charles A. Hill, chair. Sunday mass meetings were held to raise money, churches and community agencies were gathered together, leaflets and newsletters distributed, sermons preached in African American congregations, and attendance at these meetings grew from three hundred to three thousand.

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<sup>79</sup>. In “The Negro Automobile Worker”, *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol .51, No.5 (October, 1943), pp 421ff, Lloyd Bailer reports the comments of a white Packard worker who said that “about 40 percent of the workers here are Polish. There are also a lot of southern whites. Both of them are very prejudiced. . . . Not long ago, a black man was going to start work in my department. Most of the men here are southern white. They said, “I’ll be goddammed if I’m going to work with a goddamm black nigger.” Bailer also included the remarks of a Packard official who said that “we employ a large number of Poles here. The younger generation of Poles seems to hate the colored as much as the southern whites. The Poles got so fed up with being called “Polacks” when they first came to this country that now they’re trying to take it out on the Negroes.” All of this takes on extra significance because the Packard plant was located adjacent to Hamtramck and many of the workers walked to the plant. The housing project was threatening both their home and their work.

The Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, pastor of Central Methodist Church, was the only clergyman speaking openly from the white religious community, in support of housing for African Americans. He addressed the issue both from the pulpit and in the weekly church bulletin. When the DDHC and FWA announced on January 15, 1942 that the Sojourner Truth Homes would be for whites only and promised African Americans another project, he created an eight-member Action Committee of the Inter-racial Commission, including the Rev. Chas. A. Hill, to oppose the action and sponsor inter-racial information meetings. Crane's public efforts on behalf of the integration of the Sojourner Truth Housing project were the first to come from Detroit's white religious community and were widely opposed by other white clergy and church members from both the immediate neighborhood and the city.<sup>80</sup> The prominence of Central Methodist Church and the stature of the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane in the Detroit community made both him and the support of Central Methodist significant symbols of religion's engagement in cultural issues.

Confronted by an aggressive campaign of the "Black Cabinetees",<sup>81</sup> the UAW, the Detroit NAACP, Crane's Action Committee, Detroit's Urban League and its parent body, the National Urban League, and a telegram from Mayor Jeffries stating that saving Sojourner Truth for whites would "be tantamount to saying to the Negroes that there is no

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<sup>80</sup>. Henry Hitt Crane Collection, Bentley Library. Box 16, Sojourner Truth folder. Crane's public support for the Sojourner Truth Project made him the "lightning rod" for the religious community's opposition. The pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, located in the immediate vicinity of Sojourner Truth, wrote Crane a scathing letter opposing the project following a meeting he and sixteen members of his parish attended, but to which they had not been invited. Crane replied with a detailed letter of explanation and apology for the lack of invitation. The pastor replied with a profuse apology for his letter and begged Crane's forgiveness for his actions. A similar letter from a Methodist pastor included the same litany of opposition that the pastor of St. Louis the King parish had created. There was no apology for his letter included in Crane's folder.

<sup>81</sup>. Roi Ottley, *New World A-Coming: Inside Black America*, (New York: Arno Press, 1968), p. 254ff. This was a little known group of highly intelligent blacks holding key positions in Washington. A liaison group, they were sometimes called the "Black Brain Trust", and functioned as racial advisers to government heads. It was opposed to everything that even hinted at segregation.

place within the city of Detroit where they can have new housing”,<sup>82</sup> the DDHC/FWA reversed their decision again, and declared that two hundred units were reserved for African American occupancy.

Representative Tenerowicz predicted that rioting would follow this reversal, and pickets marched day and night in front of City Hall. The Roman Catholic priest, Father Coughlin and Gerald L.K. Smith reviled the decision for African American occupancy. Detroit police officers were sympathetic to white rioters and in an investigation of possible violence, concluded that whites had planned none. In February, 1942 federal agents found no evidence of whites having violated civil rights statutes. Of the nearly 220 persons arrested for rioting, half were released immediately, and of the 109 held for trial, mostly for carrying concealed weapons, only three were white.<sup>83</sup>

Mayor Jeffries insisted that the Federal government was responsible for their safety, and the Federal government insisted it was a local issue. When the first tenants moved in on April 30, 1942, they were protected by 1,750 police officers and army troops.<sup>84</sup>

## **FEDERAL HOUSING POLICIES AND CITY PROGRAMS**

The Sojourner Truth Homes project was supported by advocates of government-funded public housing and opposed by homeowners who supported government subsidies for private ownership. It was more than an issue of location. It was a battle between two different visions of New Deal housing policy and city programming, and its outcome established housing policy for another decade.

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<sup>82</sup>. Detroit. *Free Press*, Jan. 31, 1942.

<sup>83</sup>. Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), pp. 98-99 This is a very detailed account of the Sojourner, giving almost an hour by hour account of events.

<sup>84</sup>. Conot, *American Odyssey*, p.375.

Responding to the failure of the private market to provide both adequate and good quality housing for African Americans, Roosevelt searched for alternatives to include in his New Deal legislation. The goal was to replace the inferior housing of the poor with subsidized developments throughout the city. One feature of this goal was public housing, which would include the clearance of slums, provide a measure of social engineering and offer new affordable rental housing for the poor. A second feature would include subsidies or loans for the private purchase or construction of homes as well as loans for their improvements. The New Deal included the HOLC for these loans and the FHA to guarantee long-term mortgages from private financial institutions.

The New Deal agencies worked closely with local officials and allowed them final decisions regarding programs, location and construction type, but both the FHA and HOLC funds were administered by regional, state and local offices responsible to their Washington headquarters. Labor organizations, city planners and liberal pro-housing advocates supported public housing while homeowners opposed it. Both wanted to attain one New Deal goal or the other: public housing or private homeownership.

The switching of decisions regarding African American occupancy in the Sojourner Truth Homes reflected the pressure exerted by the advocates of either homeownership or public housing. Homeownership advocates were critical of the effect black occupancy would have on their mortgages. The FHA had refused to insure any additional homes in the area surrounding the Sojourner Truth Homes. Area residents believed that financing would no longer be available to construct homes on the remaining vacant lots. Public housing supporters emphasized the responsibility of government to redress the hardships endured by almost a third of the nation's population.

The most important public housing advocacy group was the Citizen's Housing and Planning Council created in 1937. One of many similar organizations in cities across the United States, it included social workers, business leaders, planners, and architects. While it supported public housing, its primary goal was the improvement of living conditions in slums by eliminating crowded, dirty and substandard housing. Public housing would replace slums.

Those opposing public housing were the real estate developers and brokers, housing developers, and homeowners, many of whom were organized into neighborhood associations. With few exceptions, Detroit's elected officials supported homeownership rather than public housing. Business leadership also supported homeownership and considered public housing interference in the free market economy. The business community considered public housing a threat to private enterprise.

The New Deal housing programs illustrate well the opposing issues contained in national and local cultures. Home ownership was important to one's personal and cultural identity but capitalism did not distribute its wealth without prejudice, and profit preceded justice. Detroit's industrial community supported whites over African Americans, efficiency over personal well-being, productivity over social responsibility, expediency over long-range planning.

The industrial community emphasized personal initiative and personal responsibility. It equated economic well-being and home ownership as signs of that personal effort, and considered the absence of these signs to be indicative of laziness and lack of initiative. It was one's own fault if one were not working or not able to provide for home and family.

This industrial “mindset” fit well with the general theme of progress and improvement. Sometimes called “liberalism”, this theme emphasized the ultimate perfectibility of life through the application of education, commitment and economic growth. The industrial community was the key player in this economic growth and its continued success through the years, thwarted only by the Depression, was the path to that social order all were seeking. Roosevelt’s legislation providing support to the poor African Americans and whites was considered not only misguided but the industrial community regarded as destructive of basic American values.

Detroit’s political community had turned from the practice of politics in the tradition of the Founding Fathers to the “politics of culture”. There was a growing distance between the ideology of democracy as written in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States, and compliance with the social values and goals of the community. City officials were directed by “crowd-oracy”, by the groups that expressed their demands most loudly and in the greatest number. Detroit politics were no longer the internalized dynamic of a democracy with its moral categories of justice and equality, but right or wrong were decided by voice vote. The injustice of right or wrong by voice vote in Detroit was the absence of the voice of the African American population. The future presence of African American voters would change the practice of Detroit politics.

Like the industrial community, Detroit’s political community was immersed in the social dynamic of liberalism.<sup>85</sup> The political machine was to provide the basic

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<sup>85</sup>. In 1938 the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, was commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation to conduct a survey of the United States. Publishing his opus work of over one thousand pages, *The American Dilemma*, he presented optimism in the United States of a general confidence in economics and education to resolve all racial issues. His report, published in 1944, had more effect after W.W. II, but his assessment had been claimed by many liberals before then. Racial issues would take care of themselves if only the black community had jobs etc....and the general progress of the US would provide that. What Myrdal failed to acknowledge, and here it certainly is obvious that he was out of touch with his native Sweden’s

services for communal well-being and the progression of life supported by a strong economy, and education would ultimately solve the ills of society. There was an undying confidence in the ability of money, commitment, and hard work to overcome all obstacles. Welfare recipients were looking for “the dole”, the unemployed were not trying to find work, and the poor were not working hard enough. The ill and infirmed were not practicing the established routines of health. Wherever individuals and families were destitute, living in substandard housing, unemployed, etc., nothing more was needed to improve their lot than personal initiative and more effort.

### **SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION FROM THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

It was, however, in Detroit’s religious community that the encasement of religion with the social and political fabric of the city was most visible. This can be observed in a theological analysis of the religious community during the events surrounding the Sojourner Truth Home project. The African American churches had centered their history and life in their experiences of slavery. The biblical story of the Exodus was their story of deliverance from slavery. The white churches had centered their history and life in the American experience, with God bestowing grace and blessing on their industry and faithfulness. Both the African American and white churches were bound within in the traditions that had created their identities, and their theological reifications of Christianity reflected their historical contexts. The theological analysis of Detroit’s religious community in this event is a story of oppositional themes within the Christian community of faith. One theme is represented by the religious community of African American

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Lutheran heritage, the capacity of humanity to do evil. A basic teaching of Lutheran theology is the predisposition of humanity to serve itself at the expense of others. Reinhold Niebuhr always insisted that humanity must be compelled, forced (use any word that implies a power charge) to do justice and serve humanity well, because humanity is not inclined to do so by its own will.

clergy and churches, and the other is represented by St. Louis King Parish Church, a parish in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit, and its pastor, the Rev. Constantine Dzink

The African American community had a strong religious base that was centered in the church. At the turn of the twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois had written that “the Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.”<sup>86</sup> Racial discrimination and stratification shaped the formation of African American churches. The religious justification of slavery was a major influence in the ultimate separation of the African American church from white Protestantism. Originally rooted in the major Protestant denominations, African American churches retained the primary theological doctrines of Protestant Christianity, but gave them a direction and application unique to their historical experiences in the United States

The formation of the African American church<sup>87</sup> has been described as an emphasis of two major roles for Christianity in the African American community. E. Franklin Frazier saw the African American church as the institution providing the means of escaping the brutal realities of life in the United States. The church’s proclamation of justice and the gathering of God’s people in the kingdom of heaven directed the hearts

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<sup>86</sup>. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: Fawcett World Library, 1961), p. 142.

<sup>87</sup>. Harry Stout and D.G. Hart, ed. *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) devotes the chapter “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks” to the formation of the African American church. For Stout and Hart, the African American church today includes the following denominations: African Methodist Episcopal Zion; National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; African Methodist Episcopal; Christian (Colored) Methodist Episcopal; National Baptist Convention of American, Unincorporated; Progressive National Baptist Convention and Church of God in Christ. This does not include the growing number of independent and unaffiliated churches that serve African Americans.

and minds of African Americans away from their enslavement to a future glory.<sup>88</sup>

Gayraud Wilmore and others considered the church as embracing the role of an agent for political action. The combination of these major roles was exercised in the African American church through the pastoral and prophetic leadership of the clergy.

For Detroit's African American community this leadership was especially visible in 1934 when the Reverend Charles Hill and the Reverend Malcolm Dade of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church formed a city-wide committee to coordinate support for the defense of the nine young African Americans charged with the rape of two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama. For the Reverend Hill, this was his public engagement in "oppositional politics",<sup>89</sup> in which he coupled the Social Gospel with his activities. "The church can lead the fight for democratic rights; all we have to do is use it. That's what we are doing here in Detroit".<sup>90</sup> Other African American clergy were also active in this prophetic and pastoral leadership. In February of 1940 the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, was the guest speaker for Black History Week in Detroit and urged the capacity crowd to move "eternally forward, and avoid becoming a self-contained element."<sup>91</sup> The Reverend Robert L. Bradby, pastor of Second Baptist Church actively recruited African American workers for Ford Motor Company, and the Reverend Horace A. White, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church supported the efforts to unionize Ford Motor Company. To require a sharp distinction between a "this worldly" and an "other worldly", or a prophetic and a pastoral ministry would be to blur the theological

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<sup>88</sup>. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (1963; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

<sup>89</sup>. Angela Denise Dillard, *From the Reverend Charles Hill to the Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr.: Change and Continuity in the Patterns of Civil Rights Mobilizations in Detroit, 1935-1967* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, U. of M. Ann Arbor, MI, 1995) p.72.

<sup>90</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>91</sup>. Quoted in Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 13 from *Tribune*, 2 March, 1940, 3.

acclamation made in Christianity's proclamation of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity. It is virtually impossible to separate pastoral and prophetic ministries from sociopolitical issues.

The energy the African American community poured into their struggles of liberation was birthed in their faith, nurtured in their worship life, and expressed in their ideas, language, support of, and commitment to each other in their quest for justice and freedom. It was in every way the story of their life and heritage. It did not emerge from essentially human aspirations. This makes the question "how do theological ideas function in a people's struggle for freedom" important. We can never suggest they are unimportant, nor can we imply their theological claims have no credibility.

The African American church, not opposed to the ecumenical creedal confessions used by major Christian bodies to describe who they are, but only to acknowledge their participation in the Christian community of faith, established its theological foundation in what Karl Barth called "the strange new world within the Bible." It was in the life and struggles of the Israelite community called through Abraham and completed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the African American community established their way and will.

The Baptist content of African American religion emphasized "God is love, and because God is love, Christ is love. . . that God is just because Christ is just. . . that God is merciful, because Christ is merciful."<sup>92</sup> There were specific and particular ways of thinking about God, Christ, Holy Scriptures, and the Church that directed and contained the direction, strength and assurance, of those who stood up against the injustices of the

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<sup>92</sup> . Interview with the Reverend Charles Adams, March 10, 2006, Round table discussion with the Reverends Ken Harris and Michael Nabors, October 10, 2006.

white community. These theological affirmations were rooted in the fertile soil of their concrete social settings, and acknowledged the solidarity the African American church community has consistently exhibited in their social settings. There were shared values, hopes, desires, needs, and experiences in their history, including the abolition of slavery, breaking down the walls of separation in public accommodations, anti-lynching, etc.

It was at the weekly worship services, both morning and evening, that the African American clergy outlined the pastoral and prophetic ministry for the African American community. The sermons were expositions of biblical texts rooted in experience and were something far more than clever ideas. This is not to suggest they were not carefully crafted because they were, with the African American clergy taking special care to combine structure, rhythm, cadence and poetry. The traditional biblical story of Israel's deliverance from enslavement in Egypt was for the African American church the story of their ultimate deliverance from enslavement in America. Joel's prophesy of "the great and terrible day of the Lord" was fulfilled in the event of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The cross of Christ was the symbol of confrontation with evil at its worst and holiness at its best, and the empty tomb was love overcoming evil and death.

It wasn't just the story of Good Friday and Easter that validated their faith, it was *the event* of their faith. There was an Old Order that was going to end, and a New Order arising for the chosen of God, and this was no longer a promise from Scripture, this was a fact delivered by God in Christ. As Isaiah had foretold, "they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>. Isaiah 40:31.

Many sermons in the African American church were part of an oral tradition and were passed down from one generation to another. It is not likely that any clergy will preach Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" sermon, but it is well-remembered. One sermon that has moved through generations of African American clergy is the sermon entitled "The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest". There is some confusion over the author of this sermon, but it has been repeatedly used since its first appearance in early nineteenth century. C. L. Franklin, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit, delivered this sermon many times in his guest appearances through out the mid-west, and enjoyed "standing room only" at services that featured this sermon. "The eagle was a symbol of God, of his care and concern for his people. History was one big nest, and God stirs to make man better and to help us achieve world brotherhood. This stirring might cause great pain, but pain is redemptive. . . .and as the eagle exposed her older offspring to harsher material, so God has to do that for us sometimes. . ." <sup>94</sup>

Sometimes referred to as "the beloved community" to prevent misunderstandings in the secular world, the Kingdom of God was the New Order God was bringing in through Christ. And this Kingdom was not reserved for hereafter; it was the reality of faith here on earth. To give it a more concrete expression of earthly reality, the Kingdom of God was also called, often in song, "the great camp meeting". This meant, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer would later write, that Christian faith and practice "puts us into many different dimensions of life at the same time." <sup>95</sup> In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer would write "there are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which

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<sup>94</sup>. Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005). Chapter Four, pp.79-105.

<sup>95</sup>. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1972), p. 310.

became manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. Sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world . . . a Christianity which withdraws from the world is victim to the unnatural and the irrational, to presumption and self-will.”<sup>96</sup>

The Reverend Charles Hill encouraged the members of Hartford Baptist Church to be politically active. Addressing the congregation both before and after his sermons, he would give political directions. Unlike other African American clergy born and raised in the South, Hill was born and raised in Detroit. Hill was not given to great emotionalism in his sermons. His people got something else. “They got a man who was holistic in his theological view. His Christianity demanded activism in society on behalf of the oppressed, the underdog.”<sup>97</sup>

For Detroit’s African American religious community the church building itself was used for their community and political activities. Often the only building totally owned by the African American community, it served as the gathering place for religious, educational, social, and political events. Hartford Avenue Baptist Church, with the formal approval of the Reverend Charles Hill, was the center for the activities of the African American union local 600, chartered in 1938. The Reverend Hill explained that “if they met in a regular union hall, then some of the spies from Ford would take their automobile license numbers and they lost their jobs. By holding it in a church it would be difficult for them to prove we were just discussing union matters”<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup>. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, translated by Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1978) pp197-200.

<sup>97</sup>. Interview with Charles Adams in Robert H. Mast’s *Detroit Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple Press, 1994), p.248.

<sup>98</sup>. Dillard, From *the Rev. Charles Hill*, p. 119.

The theological affirmation that God works in the world was not unique to the African American church, but was less emphasized in the white churches. The African American church proclaimed the church as the Body of Christ, along with Paul who wrote to the Galatians that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>99</sup> The stumbling block to this epic event created by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ was not racial division in the United States, but division in the Church. When the Church is true to its nature, there will be no disunity or division. This meant that the mission of the Church was activated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and empowered the people of God to resist. The mission of the African American church was no longer the salvation of individual souls but to represent and present that free space in the world where reconciliation with God and others can be enacted. For the Reverend Charles Hill it was clear what he had to do. “I believe that I must expose the damnable hypocrisy of white America and the white Christian church, so called – which cries ‘Let us be brothers and have unity,’ and yet fosters and harbors the best instrument that denial has to prevent the kingdom of God coming here on earth, which is racial hatred through the claim of white supremacy.”<sup>100</sup>

The opposition to the Sojourner Truth project organized by the Reverend Constantine Dzink, pastor of Saint Louis the King Parish Church, was equally encased in Detroit’s unfolding “immigrant” life. Organized in 1923, Saint Louis the King Parish Church was composed of first and second and the beginning of third generation Polish immigrants who had come to Detroit for the possibilities of employment, and more

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<sup>99</sup>. Galatians 3:28

<sup>100</sup>. C. E. LaReau to Hill, March 20, 1942 and Hill to LaReau, March 24, 1942, Hill Papers, ALHUA. Box 1

specifically, work in the Dodge plants in Hamtramck. Saint Louis the King Parish was assigned a specific geographical territory, and in this neighborhood the social networks revolved around the church. In *Parish Boundaries* John McGreevy describes Roman Catholic parish neighborhoods as “created, not found”.<sup>101</sup> In the manner of virtually all Roman Catholic immigrants, the members of Saint Louis the King depended on the parish and its priest for guidance of their financial, social, educational and cultural affairs. “Yale sociologists investigating Newburyport, Massachusetts, in the 1930s professed amazement at the ability of priests to ‘define norms of everyday social behavior for the church’s members.’”<sup>102</sup>

Home ownership was an important goal for immigrants and “working-class immigrants were often more likely than middle-class Native Americans to own their homes in the urban North”.<sup>103</sup> Home ownership represented success, stability, and permanence. Perhaps less obvious, but equally important, was the concept of the Roman Catholic parish territory which comprised the parish church’s membership.<sup>104</sup> Roman Catholic parishes were assigned specific territories and were thus “immovable”. Priests encouraged their members to purchase homes to create parish stability and permanence. Yet, in a larger dimension, Roman Catholic priests depended on Roman Catholic theology which emphasized that individuals would come to know God in specific places and spaces. The Reverend Karl Rahner, S.J., explained in “The Theology of the Parish” that a parish with a defined territory boundary actually became the Church in the context

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<sup>101</sup> John Greevy, *Parish Boundaries*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). His first chapter on “A Catholic World in America” is an excellent overview of the place of the parish in the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>102</sup> Greevy, *Parish Boundaries*, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Greevy, *Parish Boundaries*, p. 18.

<sup>104</sup> Roman Catholic Canon Law holds parish membership to be due to being “domiciled within the parish boundaries. A person belongs to the parish because he lives there. Code of Canon Law, Rev. 1983.

of the Roman Catholic Church's liturgy, just as Christ became specific in the Eucharist.<sup>105</sup>

In this amalgam of basic Roman Catholic theology, immigrant dreams of home ownership and permanence, Polish identity<sup>106</sup>, and neighborhood preservation, one must also include the Ku Klux Klan's splinter group, the Black Legion, which exercised great influence in Detroit's Police Department, the unionizing activities of the Communist Party in the automobile industry, and the inflammatory rhetoric of the Reverend Charles Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith against the New Deal which emphasized white supremacy.<sup>107</sup> The Reverend Dzink did not rely on the Scriptural narrative in the manner of the African American churches, but relied on the Polish religious and social climate of Detroit to develop his opposition. In a letter to a Mr. C. F. Palmer, the Reverend Dzink wrote that the Sojourner Truth project "would mean utter ruin for the many people who have mortgaged their homes to the FHA, and not only that, it would jeopardize the safety of our white girls".<sup>108</sup> It was a secular ideology wrapped around a religious medium that outlined the economic, social and criminal issues perceived by white Detroiters in racial relationships.

A member parish of the Detroit Roman Catholic diocese with its well-defined creedal statements, constitutional documents and episcopal hierarchy, Saint Louis the

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<sup>105</sup>. Karl Rahner, S.J. "The Theology of the Parish", in *The Parish: From Theology to Practice*, Hugh Rahner, S.J., ed., Robert Kress, trans. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1958), 25-32.

<sup>106</sup>. Detroit's Polish church community within the Roman Catholic Church was a source of continuing turbulence for the Diocese. Beginning with establishing a separate Polish Seminary to provide Polish Priests for Polish parishes, the Polish congregations were more congregationally independent. The Diocesan experience with St. Albertus, the original Polish congregation in Detroit, the construction of Sweetest Heart of Mary without Diocesan approval and the Diocesan effort to divide the parish with the construction of St. Josaphat, which created the "Canfield Trio" continue to this day as a monument to the failure of the Diocese to rend monolithic episcopal authority over the Polish community.

<sup>107</sup>. White supremacy asserted African American inferiority, physically, intellectually and temperamentally, and was cause to avoid integration which would lead to miscegenation. African Americans were destined to subordination by whites.

<sup>108</sup>. To Mr. C.F. Palmer from the Rev. Dzink, March 28, 1942. Hill Papers, ALUHA, Box 1.

King Parish Church, and its pastor, the Rev. Constantine Dzink were not organizationally permitted to unilaterally plan strategies and responses to the Sojourner Truth Home project. Yet, the parish organized the protests, including the organization of the neighborhood association, The Seven-Mile Fenelon Improvement Association, against the selection of the Nevada-Fenelon site for the Sojourner Truth Home project. The Reverend Dzink engaged in basic racialization which John Hartigan, Jr, defined as “ideological, institutional, interactive and linguistic practices that support a particular construction of Difference.”<sup>109</sup>

Father Dzink’s inflammatory statements were not representative of the Roman Catholic Church in Detroit but his superiors did little to silence him. Detroit’s Jesuit University of Detroit had demanded an end to discriminatory practices in campus-area restaurants in 1934 when the university had six African American students, but there were few other signs of change in the Roman Catholic community. Ethnic rivalry between the Irish leadership of the Diocese and the Roman Catholic Polish community surrounding Saint Louis the King Parish Church were factors not to be ignored in diocesan oversight. Father Dzink’s assertions that “blacks would ruin our neighborhoods, destroy our way of life, threaten the safety of white girls, and reduce property values” were his and not supported by the diocese. When Archbishop Mooney was pressured to make a statement he replied that “black leaders are naïve in their belief in the effectiveness of a word from me and utterly unaware of the complications an injudicious word might cause as well as the difficulty of being both positive and judicious in the

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<sup>109</sup>. Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations*, p.13. John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries, the Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) reviews the role of the parish in maintaining the homogeneous nature of neighborhoods in which the Roman Catholic parish is located.

circumstances.”<sup>110</sup> Archbishop Mooney had considerable sympathy for the Poles, whose parishes often carried heavy mortgages, and he noted how Poles are “by temperament never phlegmatic and are just now heavy-hearted over what has happened to the homeland and in Russia.” He added “before making any statement I must consider that any declaration of mine which might have a general apologetic value for the Church among the Negroes would most certain[ly] have a disastrously disturbing effect on the more than two hundred thousand Polish Catholics who are a large part of my direct responsibility.”<sup>111</sup>

Robert Wuthnow has asserted that to take religion seriously is to recognize that the distinction between the sacred and the secular is blurred.<sup>112</sup> For Roman Catholics this blurring of distinction was most clearly demonstrated through the organizational structure of the institutional parish church. Roman Catholic doctrine presented the Church’s institutional organization as the expression of the theological affirmation made by African American churches in their understanding of the church as the Kingdom of God on earth. Roman Catholic parishes were assigned specific territories, within which lived the members of the church who were baptized and committed in faith and witness. The parish church was the center of communal activity for Roman Catholics and even more so for ethnic parishes. The parish church was spatially contained and institutionally subordinate to the diocese. The parish church was the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in that assigned space. And the Roman Catholic Church was the Kingdom of

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<sup>110</sup>. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace, A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit*, (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1990), p.513.

<sup>111</sup>. Tentler, *Seasons of Grace*, 513.

<sup>112</sup>. Robert Wuthnow, “Understanding Religion and Politics,” *Daedalus*, 120 (Summer 1991), 1-20.

God on earth. St. Louis the King parish was the Kingdom of God on earth in that particular parish territory in Hamtramck.

St. Louis the King parish was the Church, and it was the expression of that truth. The church must be the Church! Ethics are to be understood ecclesialogically and ecclesiology must be understood ethically. The church cannot merely be a reflection of opinions that prevail. And that was the striking difference between the white and African American churches. Instead of being the confessional witness to the chosen people of God, redeemed and forgiven, St. Louis the King parishioners, led by their priest, gathered their prevailing cultural caricatures of African Americans and used them in their witness to the world. Much less a failure of basic Roman Catholic theology and doctrine than the exercise of Father Dinzk's leadership, St. Louis the King used prevailing culturally exercised racialized opinions instead of the confessional presence of God's chosen people called through baptism in Christ to create their response.

Equally striking was the parish's emphasis on the personal rather than the systemic fault lines in the social practice of the United States. St. Louis the King parish directed its accusations toward the people of color, while the African American church directed their accusations of injustice toward the value systems of society. The African American church wanted to change the system that oppressed them. St. Louis the King parish dehumanized and denigrated those by whom they felt threatened.

The actions and statements of St. Louis the King's parish priest illustrated how racial formation is rooted in historical movements and developments, shifts in economic structures, and spatially is defined. Archbishop Mooney's refusal to discipline Father Dinzk was prompted by his dependence on the support of the Polish membership in the

diocese. The loss of support from the Polish congregation, both economic and political, was of greater consequence for the continued existence of the Archdiocese than the gain that might be achieved from the African American community. The failure of the Roman Catholic Church to exercise its institutional supervision and authority over the disingenuous and racialized teachings and actions of a parish priest marked a division between the African American and the white practices of religion and fueled a continuing separation between Detroit's African American and white communities. What the members of St. Louis the King Parish were not encouraged, empowered, and supported to see and understand was that their own experiences were akin with those they were shamefully directed to reject. Their priest failed to delineate Christianity's basic affirmation of humanity's oneness in Christ which transcended race and class. Their priest failed to show that their relationship through Christ to their brothers and sisters in the African American community would correct cultural and political faults. Instead, their priest held them captive to a religion encased in its cultural context.

### **THE EIGHT MILE-WYOMING AREA**

The issues which created the eruption of violence in the Seven Mile-Fenelon area produced another series of conflicts in the Eight Mile-Wyoming area. On acreage beyond Detroit's city limits, African Americans were denied access to construction loans for new housing and instead built housing with their limited economic resources. Targeted by Detroit's Housing Commission as one of the city's slum areas to be cleared with grant money from the United States Housing Authority, the modest African American community was considered blight on the area, and was regarded by the FHA as an obstacle to government mortgages and insurance. Joining the Federal agencies in this

attempt to “clean up” the area, Detroit’s Planning Commission proposed the purchase of the area for a city airport. Equally important was the planned development of the first suburban mall in the United States by J.L. Hudson’s located just west of this African American community. Not to be ignored was the fact that Palmer Woods and Sherwood Forest, south of the African American subdivision, were two very exclusive neighborhoods with residences for Detroit’s elite.<sup>113</sup>

The Eight Mile Road Community had been one of the first “targets” for the Citizens Housing and Planning Council organized in 1937, which authorized a study of the area. A report of the study was distributed as a pamphlet entitled “Be It Ever So Tumbled—The Story of A Suburban Slum,”<sup>114</sup> was distributed to government officials, planners, and corporate leaders. One conclusion of the report and its recommendations was that private development would drive out poor residents who could not afford the rents demanded by private developers. The CHPC also recommended that the land be sold to white buyers who could maintain the quality and character of the surrounding neighborhoods, and that the African American residents should be relocated to an area closer to their center of employment.<sup>115</sup>

The recommendations of Detroit’s Citizens Housing and Planning Council, the Detroit Housing Commission, and the plans of the United States Housing Authority initiated action in the African American community to lobby the Roosevelt

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<sup>113</sup>. When a real estate developer purchased the vacant land, immediately west of the African American community, for white development after World War II, the financial institutions directed him to build a wall, to separate the African American community from the proposed white community. The wall still stands today. During the past year the wall has been decorated with artwork, supervised by the Motor City Blight Busters. The wall is located less than two miles directly east of St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church and remained unknown to the majority of its membership.

<sup>114</sup>. Marvel Daines, “Be It Ever So Tumbled—The Story of A Suburban Slum” (1940), 6-10, CHPC, Box 48.

<sup>115</sup>. Daines, “Be It Ever So Tumbled” Box 48.

administration for an extension of housing benefits to their neighborhood. After applications for loans to the HOLC and FHA for home improvement were rejected, the residents organized two community groups, the Carver Progressive Association and the Eight Mile Road Civic Association. A school teacher and daughter of one of the first families to settle in the area spoke for the residents' desire to own their homes at a meeting sponsored by Detroit Common Council and attended by Raymond Foley, the Michigan Director of the FHA.<sup>116</sup> Foley reported to the City Plan Commission after visiting the community and praised the reclamation of the Wyoming-Eight Mile Area.<sup>117</sup>

Support for the "rehabilitation" of single family dwellings in the African American community with government funding was compromised by the need for emergency housing for southern African Americans searching for work since the outbreak of the war. The UAW and especially its Local 600, with its majority African American membership, spoke about the need for temporary public housing, but did not recommend the demolition of the existing African American community. The Rev. Horace White, a major participant in the Sojourner Truth Home project, supported a planned development for the area, but also encouraged the residents to resist being used as pawns in the fight between private builders and public housing advocates.<sup>118</sup>

A compromise was achieved and backed by FHA and city officials that would construct six hundred temporary housing units and allow loans for single-family homes in

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<sup>116</sup>. Burneice Avery, "The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth...1920-1952," 3BA, Box 1, Folder 1. Ms. Avery compiled the history of the Eight Mile Road community. For a picture of the wall she describes see Burneice Avery, *Walk Quietly Through the Night and Cry Softly* (Detroit: Balamp Publishers, 1977), 190. By the early 1950 blacks had moved into the previously all-white neighborhood on the other side.

<sup>117</sup>. Avery, "The Eight Mile Road," 8, 10: Detroit City Plan Commission Minutes, vol . 11 (1942-43), 118. DPL

<sup>118</sup>. In September, 1943, UAW Local 600 spoke in favor of temporary war housing. City Plan Commission Minutes, vol. 11 (1942-44), 117,, DPL. Memo Concerning Eight Mile-Wyoming Area, March 10, 1944, CHPC, Box 58.

the Eight Mile-Wyoming area. The African American community became a model area of African American home ownership and by 1950 more than one thousand five hundred new single-family homes had been built. Ten years later, in 1960, 88 percent of these homes were owner-occupied

The participation of religious groups, both African American and white clergy and churches, was conspicuously absent in the Eight Mile—Wyoming proceedings. The experiences of segregation, discrimination, and rejection were more personal than communal. There were no churches, white or African American, in the immediate area, and residents attended churches in adjacent neighborhoods. The strong leadership of Burneice Avery provided the African American community with an articulate voice, and filled the role that had been occupied by African American clergy in previous housing encounters with the white community in other sectors of Detroit. Speaking against the desires of the African American community were city and federal agencies, rather than white residents from the nearby neighborhoods. With some open land space between the white subdivisions and the African American community the issue was more a matter of city policy than an immediate neighborhood threat.

It was during this time that Detroit experienced a disastrous riot that began with an African American and white confrontation on the Belle Isle Bridge leading to Detroit's favored island park. While the immediate cause was never established, the riot gathered the smoldering resentments of African Americans and whites living in a war-time economy of restrictions, rations, distrust, and animosities.

Five days after this disastrous riot in 1943, Mayor Edward Jeffries appointed a committee of twelve to serve as a municipal "interracial peace board". The request for a

federal investigation of the riot was never acknowledged, and the committee was never given status as a functioning organization in the city structure. It was officially closed on December 31, 1944 at the conclusion of Jeffries' second term.

This broad review of Detroit's housing patterns and needs, beginning in the late 1800s when Detroit's African American population was very small, and continuing through the years in which the African American population expanded to the 1940s and the racial balance of power began to change, has revealed housing programs guided by federal and city politics, controlled by whites, and supported by Detroit's business, industrial, retail and religious communities (except the African American churches).

Individual voices and isolated groups courageously spoke out and supported open and fair housing, but were unable to lift the political community and the city's understanding of race beyond blatant racialization. The call for fair and open housing did not emphasize integrated communities. If Detroit had been listening, they would have heard African Americans calling for the exercise of the free choice that whites esteemed and valued. It was a call for the exercise of freedom and equality in their pursuit of decent and affordable housing. Had that call have included self-segregation, it would have been no different from the formation of the ethnic communities that flourished in Detroit. White Detroit did not hear what the African American community had said. It only heard its own preconceived judgments formed by past experiences and shaped by current fears of economic, social and personal insecurities. The injustice of Detroit's community life was a denial of personhood to African Americans and an exercise of selective and discriminatory economic and social formation consistently practiced in housing and employment.

With the exception of Central Methodist Church and the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, who publicly opposed the practice of racial discrimination and segregated housing, Detroit's white religious community did not express itself in opposition to the prevailing practices of Detroit's public order. It is the nature of religion, and more specifically, of Christianity, to provide an alternative social worldview; comparable to any other society in its functions but qualitatively different in its principles. The failure of Detroit to make justice operative in the sale and purchase of housing and the absence of any objection from Detroit's white religious community, except from Central Methodist and Dr. Crane, placed religion in support of city's practices without being directly engaged with them. With the exception of Central Methodist Church and its pastor, the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, the absence of any challenge or objection from Detroit's white religious community against the widely accepted practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing clearly indicated its support of that practice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **City Commission Influences Churches' Response**

It is the very nature of a movement that makes it difficult to narrate or unfold. When the dynamic quality of a movement is lost, the movement has either evolved into another social form or it has disappeared. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the gathering of issues, experiences and events into a strategy culminating in the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience. Jointly planned and hosted by Detroit's religious community and the city's Detroit Commission on Community Relations, the conference was the only city-wide event to specifically address the issue and to create recommendations and programs for ending racial discrimination and segregated housing in Detroit.

If the conference as the zenith of the Open Housing Movement, the formation of the Mayor's Interracial Committee in 1943 was the beginning of the attention given to the racial discrimination and segregated housing that created the conference. This attention included MIC's efforts to end racial segregation in Detroit's housing policies, activities of realtors and the Detroit Real Estate Board in the exercise of their professional responsibilities, the growing consolidation of the religious community in opposition to racial and housing segregation, and neighborhood opposition to racial discrimination.

Taking the role traditionally assigned to religion, the Mayor's Interracial Committee (MIC) formed in 1943 following Detroit's race riot of June, 1943, and succeeded by the Commission on Community Relations (CCR) in 1953, was called the

“Conscience of a City” at its fortieth anniversary celebration. In the absence of leadership and an organization of resources by the religious community, Detroit’s City Council established a bi-racial committee to “prevent and eliminate elements of friction between the two races.”<sup>119</sup> Where Detroit had previously relied on community groups usually formed after race relations had become violent, in 1943 it created the Interracial Committee that “constituted the first public agency, financed with on-going committees and a full time staff.”<sup>120</sup> It “was a decidedly new development in municipal operations, not only in Detroit but in the nation as well. Prior to the 1943 riot, no effective machinery of interracial cooperation existed in local government.”<sup>121</sup> What was not envisioned was the role it would play in focusing city-wide attention on the fundamental issue of housing and civil rights.

Tilley’s fortieth anniversary epithet for the MIC as “the conscience of the city” described the leadership more than the moral role it exercised. It was not its “conscience” that was unique to the city, but rather its official position, responsibility and organizational composition that made it the best equipped part of Detroit’s community to address and correct the practice of racial discrimination and housing segregation. It provided what the community had assigned to it, namely organizational, representational and functional attention. In the generic definition of morality, MIC was no more moral

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<sup>119</sup>. Tyrone Tilley, *The Conscience of a City: A Commemorative History of the Detroit Human Rights Commission and Department, 1943-1983* (Detroit: Human Rights Department, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>120</sup>. Tilley, *The Conscience*, p. 4. The Detroit Council of Churches had accepted responsibility for scheduling the meeting of representatives from civic organizations, faith communities and races, but the desire of the group to have a racially balanced committee excluded the Council of Churches from composing the committee because its membership did not include many black churches and was not representative of the religious community.

<sup>121</sup>. Tilley, *The Conscience*, p. 4.

than any other agency or group of Detroit, nor were any of Detroit's other agencies or groups less moral.<sup>122</sup>

Included in this chapter is the fundamental flaw in Christian ecclesiology that prevented Detroit's religious community from exercising leadership in the formation of MIC. This flaw was exposed in the divergent responses to the Sojourner Truth project, and in the silence of the white Christian community at the Wyoming-Eight Mile Road Area hearings and the Oakwood and Dearborn housing battles. The more responsibility the white Christian community itself assumed and received from society as well, the more it became vulnerable at the core of its being to its disruptive, schism-threatening passionate disagreements at work in its midst. Specific attention to specific issues in different denominations created differences in understanding, style, and purpose. Biblical mandates were subjected to general creeds, which in turn were challenged by church doctrines and then subjected to congregational policies for support. When the institutional church was unable to adequately profess and proclaim the presence of the sacred Deity in society, its members developed secular avenues for their witness and ministry. The Detroit Council of Church's inability to achieve full consensus about the issues involved in the practices of racial discrimination and housing segregation created a silence and an arena in which the moral fiber of the community expressed itself through secular agencies.

This is not to devalue the role of MIC, but rather to acknowledge and recognize the representation and presentation of other community values that played a role in

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<sup>122</sup>. This could be debated either way, but it was George Schermer, the chair of the MIC committee, that spoke most forcefully in support of open occupancy. There is no record of opposition to his position in the committee minutes, but there is no record of any strong support either. When George Schermer resigned in 1953 MIC quickly endorsed the position supported by the Mayor that greatly moderated open occupancy.

Detroit's attention to the practice of racial discrimination and housing segregation. The continuing theme of decreased property values and the right of personal choice made the real estate industry a major participant in this social issue. The failure of the religious community to provide leadership in the formation of the MIC did not include relinquishing its concern, and limited neighborhood opposition to racial discrimination did develop.

It is these segments of Detroit's community and their involvement in Detroit's pursuit of open and just housing that I will trace in this chapter from the formation of MIC in 1943 to the Metropolitan Conference on Race and Open Occupancy in 1963. This will include MIC's efforts to end racial segregation in Detroit's housing policies, activities of realtors and the Detroit Real Estate Board in the exercise of their professional responsibilities, the growing consolidation of the religious community in opposition to racial segregation and housing segregation, and neighborhood opposition to racial discrimination.

The activities of these separate segments of Detroit do not exhibit a declining of basic morality. MIC's existence as a political agency, real estate's exercise of basic capitalism and a free market economy, the commitment to social justice in Detroit's religious community, and individual efforts to fight racial discrimination in neighborhoods were rooted in a belief in democratic liberalism that reason, progress, checks and balances, and pluralism could solve the problems of human society. What separated one from another was the objective toward which their moral actions were exercised. MIC's responsibility and commitment to the political community, the efforts of neighborhoods to moderate racial discrimination, and the striving of the religious

community for social justice were services which benefited the greater Detroit community. The real estate community's quest for continued free market capitalism was of a more limited value. The exercise of morality was the same except that the real estate community served fewer people.

There was more to the failure of Detroit's religious community<sup>123</sup> than just an inability to exercise a racially balanced leadership role in establishing justice in the arena of human rights. Protestant Christianity in the United States had developed its moral composition as a form of guidance to help individual believers conform more completely to their beliefs. This was only slightly tempered by the recovery of the social significance of the Gospel in the social gospel movement. It was assumed that the exercise of basic individual morality would also be connected in one way or another to the exercise of social justice. By remaining focused on individual morality Protestant Christianity neglected the gathering together the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. By remaining focused on the individual, Protestant Christianity disregarded the community which the individuals were called to become.

Christian morality, most particularly in the exercise of social justice, did not begin with strategies for social justice, but rather with the formation of a community or society shaped and informed by the character of the God revealed in the stories of Israel and Jesus Christ. The nature of these stories required the church to be a community of discourse and interpretation to proclaim and share these stories and form human life in accordance with them. The failure of Detroit's Protestant community during the

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<sup>123</sup>. It was the Detroit Council of Churches that had been unable to provide leadership for the formation of MIC, and thus the failure of Detroit's religious community referred to here would be the Protestant churches comprising the Detroit Council of Churches. The Roman Catholic Diocese did not participate in the Detroit Council of Churches before the end of the twentieth century, and then only as associate members.

formative years of the Open Housing Movement was a failure to establish its storied roots in the whole community of God's people, beginning with the children of Israel in the calling of Abraham. This failure was a theological fault that dramatically muted the witness of Detroit's Protestant community to the practice of racial discrimination and segregated housing.

Especially significant for the formation of the Mayor's Interracial Committee was the failure of Detroit's white Protestantism to represent a racially balanced community. The Detroit Council of Churches was a council of white Protestant churches. African American churches were not included in Detroit's ecumenical organization, and white Protestantism could not provide the very racial balance the city sought. Whatever moral codes of conduct Protestantism had espoused in creating community it had not succeeded in becoming that kind of community itself. This would not prevent it from addressing the injustices of racial discrimination and housing segregation, but whatever the white Protestant community might say would be the pronouncements of a religious community that had itself not yet arrived at the place it should be.

#### **THE MAYOR'S INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE**

As early as 1946 the Mayor's Interracial Committee adopted and implemented statements of policy on housing and civil rights. It called the shortage of housing "one of the most serious obstacles preventing an improvement in race relations."<sup>124</sup> In his survey of Detroit four years later, Wayne State University sociologist, Arthur Kornhauser found Detroiters ranked the most pressing problem and race relations were a close second.<sup>125</sup> In gathering data on general feelings toward African Americans, over half of all

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<sup>124</sup>. Tilly, *The Conscience*, p. 7,

<sup>125</sup>. Kornhauser, *Detroit*, p. 75.

respondents, 54%, did not favor their full acceptance as next door neighbors.<sup>126</sup> Yet, Kornhauser was able to establish that while there were serious differences between whites and African Americans, contacts with African Americans living in the same neighborhoods created more favorable attitudes on the part of white residents. The greatest anti-African American prejudices prevailed in those districts where African Americans were completely excluded.<sup>127</sup> An obvious strategy for improving African American and white relations would be to create housing patterns that would include African Americans and whites living in the same neighborhoods.

Public housing had been introduced in Detroit in 1934 when the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration of Roosevelt's New Deal program had initiated the Parkside and Brewster projects for Detroit. Brewster had been designated as "Negro" and Parkside as "white" with the approval and support of Detroit's Housing Commission. No objections were recorded to the segregated policy or to the allocation of sites on the basis of the ratio of white and African American in Detroit's population in 1934, which called for nearly 4,700 units for whites and less than 1,000 for African Americans.<sup>128</sup>

A primary objective of the Interracial Committee since 1946 had been the implementation of its policy statement that opposed the Detroit Housing Commission's practice of racial segregation that did "not change the racial pattern of a neighborhood".<sup>129</sup> It was the position of MIC that "all governmental activities and services . . . should be conducted without discrimination on account of color, national

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<sup>126</sup> . Kornhauser, *Detroit*, p. 84.

<sup>127</sup> . Kornhauser, *Detroit*, p. 92ff.

<sup>128</sup> . Kornhauser, *Detroit*, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> . "Analysis and Recommendations Regarding the Racial Occupancy Policy and Practice of the Detroit Housing Commission", *Mayor's Interracial Committee* (City of Detroit, 1952), p.6. Box 2, AULA.

origin or religious belief.”<sup>130</sup> George Schermer, MIC’s executive director, explained in his address to the Booker T. Washington Trade Association on May 9, 1951 why this was important when he said that the answer to what is good for both white and African American is the answer “of the creeds we believe in, of our Judeo-Christian philosophy, of the Constitution of the United States, of our American tradition.” The basic unit of value is the person. Whether we are Jewish, Catholic or Protestant we believe in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and we believe that the individual person is somebody.<sup>131</sup> Schermer also stated that “approximately 140,000 new dwelling units have been produced in the metropolitan area” with “nearly all moderately priced with FHA type financing.”<sup>132</sup> With only a small down payment and modest monthly payments, there are “literally thousands of Negro families who can afford these homes. They are paying more per month in rent today for much poorer homes than the monthly payments require. But only 1,500 to 2,000, about 1%, of those homes have been available to Negroes. Yet Negroes constitute 14% of the population and perhaps 25% of the housing need of the city.”<sup>133</sup>

With the earning power of African Americans greatly increased following World War II, lending institutions interested in making loans to African Americans and with legal support for racial restrictions removed, Schermer suggested that the solution to the housing shortage was more possible through the development of private enterprise than through political activity. “We’ve got to take this whole field of race relations as far out

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<sup>130</sup>. MIC, “Analysis and Recommendations” p. 6.

<sup>131</sup>. “A Dynamic Approach to Better Human Relations for Progressive Business Men”, George Schermer, Speech to the Booker T. Washington Trade Association, May 9, 1951. Detroit Commission of Human Relations, Box 2. AULA.

<sup>132</sup>. DCHR, “A Dynamic Approach”., p. 5.

<sup>133</sup>. DCHR, “A Dynamic Approach”, p. 5.

of the area of protest, of complaining, of picayune argument and debate as we as we can. We have to put it on high, fine, admirable level.”<sup>134</sup> For him this could be accomplished by an African American corporation that would buy land, build and sell or rent homes on a racially non-restricted basis. Schermer would build on this idea three years later when he reported to the Housing Commission that the solution to the “Negro housing problem” was the expansion of the private market and not slum clearance, redevelopment, and public housing. It was an idea that later became the central feature of the Open Housing Movement. It represented a shift in emphasis from public housing to privately owned housing, and reflected the growing buying power of African Americans in Detroit. In a series of articles, the premier weekly newspaper for the African American community, the *Michigan Chronicle*, believed that “private housing has become the means of bringing the Negro housing problem nearer solution, with every indication that ultimately it will solve the whole problem of the ghetto.”<sup>135</sup>

The opposition of MIC to the segregation policies of the Housing Commission was repeatedly transmitted to the Housing Commission and reaffirmed at its March 17, 1952 meeting with a presentation planned on March 24, 1952. The policy of the Housing Commission to relocate families from clearance sites to segregated projects meant that a white family applying for a dwelling could expect one in three to six months, while an African American family would wait over 35 years.<sup>136</sup>

George Schermer, MIC’s executive director, rejected the revision of supplying more units for African American applicants in his March 24, 1952 presentation to the

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<sup>134</sup>. DCHR, “A Dynamic Approach”, p. 8.

<sup>135</sup>. *Michigan Chronicle*, February 28, 1953. This, with other articles on black Detroit are reprinted in Charles J. Wartman, *Detroit—Ten Years After* (Detroit: Michigan Chronicle, 1953).

<sup>136</sup>. MIC., “Analysis and Recommendations”, p. 3.

Detroit Housing Commission. The wide gap between only 770 units available for African American families and the 7,230 African American applying for them was used only to illustrate how the Housing Commission's policies in public housing are "inequitable and unworkable".<sup>137</sup> The issue had long been assumed by the Housing Commission to be "Negro vs. white", but MIC insisted that the real issue was "whether government should practice discrimination on the basis of race."<sup>138</sup> MIC further insisted that "slum clearance, redevelopment, and public housing should not be regarded as the solution to the "Negro Housing problem", but as a relief for families of low income.<sup>139</sup> It was MIC's conclusion that the practice of holding vacant public housing units in "white" projects until eligible white families can be found is morally wrong and unethical. . . .It is in contradiction to every principle of building sound interracial and community relations. It is the one point at which the government of the City of Detroit contributes most to racial discrimination and prejudice."<sup>140</sup>

Under Schermer's leadership, MIC joined with the UAW-CIO to construct the privately-funded Schoolcraft Gardens Cooperative on Detroit's far Northwest side. Schoolcraft Gardens Housing Cooperative was a 400-500 unit, 70-acre integrated, housing development. It drew the venom, ire and political tactics of opposition of every one from city administration to individual homeowners. The UAW and MIC, fought against Detroit Real Estate Board's vigorous campaign, the editorials of newspaper editor Floyd McGriff in his suburban newspapers, and the Tel-Craft Association homeowners group near Telegraph and Schoolcraft which desired to have the project remain "all

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<sup>137</sup> . MIC. "Analysis and Recommendations", p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> . MIC. "Analysis and Recommendations", p. 7.

<sup>139</sup> . MIC. "Analysis and Recommendations", p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> . MIC. "Analysis and Recommendations", p. 7.

white”. The UAW and MIC hoped that the integrated nature of the project would serve both as a testing ground for racial relations and a model for future developments. The Detroit Council’s rejection of the Tel-Craft Association’s petition to withdraw zoning approval for the Schoolcraft Garden’s project was reversed when Council President and future mayor, Louis Miriani, granted the Tel-Craft Association a second hearing before the Common Council. With these last-minute tactics, the Common Council granted the multi-use zoning to the project only to have Mayor Cobo veto it two days later.<sup>141</sup>

Sugrue called this defeat of the Schoolcraft Gardens project the “opening battle in a two-decade-long struggle against liberal advocates of open housing.”<sup>142</sup>

George Schermer resigned as director of MIC in 1953 and for good reason.

Composed to hold community-wide tensions in check following the 1943 riot, MIC had created an educational program for a better understanding of racial antagonism. It moved on to formulate and initiate goals for removing discriminatory practices in public and personal life, and was deeply engaged in creating a community-wide program to effect democratic ideals and practices. In 1951, the Legislative Research Committee, backed by a neighborhood association group, had called for the dissolution of the MIC and charged its director, George Schermer, with creating racial animosity in the city. C. Katherine Rentschler, chair of the Home-Owner Civic and Improvement Associations called for Mayor Cobo to give neighborhood associations a voice in city programming. In May, 1953 the Common Council enacted the ordinance to create the Commission on Community Relations (CCR), replacing the MIC. Consisting of fifteen members, all would be appointed by the Mayor and could be removed with cause. Subsequent

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<sup>141</sup>. 1950-1999 Timeline. Detroit African American Project, Wayne State University  
<<http://www.daahp.wayne.edu/1959-1999.html>.

<sup>142</sup>. Sugrue, *Origins of Urban Crisis*, p. 224.

appointments, including two white neighborhood association members, assured the CCR's support of the city administration's political responses to homeowner associations.<sup>143</sup> The CCR remained a political agency, but it no longer represented the inter-racial composition of the community as it had been mandated and its support of open occupancy had been severely compromised.

The CCR inherited ten years of operational practices and policies from the MIC, but rather than continuing MIC's focus and attention on housing needs for African American families, CCR joined with UAW-CIO leaders and the Michigan Committee on Civil Rights in reviewing discrimination in restaurants and bars, and gave more attention to MIC's preliminary studies of discrimination in hospital and medical services. CCR also became a major support organization for the passage of a Fair Employment Practices Law by the Michigan legislature in 1955. One could not ignore discrimination in any of these arenas of Detroit, but the momentum that MIC had established in meeting the housing needs of African American families had been checked, and the pressure that had been applied to the city's administration for decent and affordable housing for African Americans was removed. What was not removed, or even checked, was the growing tension and unrest in the different sectors of Detroit where housing needs for African Americans were being more aggressively displaced by federally supported programs of slum clearance, super-highway construction and the upgrading of police and fire departments.

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<sup>143</sup>. Home-Owner Civic and Improvement Associations, "Memorandum to Home Owner Presidents," March 13, 1953, Civic Association Folder, box 1. Detroit Archives—Mayors' Papers, 1953; C. Katherine Rentschler, "Request to Abolish the Present Mayor's Interracial Committee and to Refrain from Authorizing the Proposed Commission on Community Relations," April 7, 1953, *ibid.*

It is impossible to measure the effect the Mayor's Interracial Committee, and its successor, the CCR, had on Detroit's practice of segregation. Organized more for political purposes than for substantive change, frequently challenged for control, and never enjoying the full support of the mayor and his administration, in 1956 secretary-director John H. Laub believed that Detroit's interracial progress was basically sound. Mrs. Beulah T. Whitby, assistant director, did not share Laub's assessment, stating that Detroit had "regressed in race relations. Evidence of tension grows. Competition for living-space, rumors spread by both whites and Negroes, have heightened hostility."<sup>144</sup>

The article in *U.S. News and World Report* on May 11, 1956 shared Mrs. Whitby's assessment. Entitled "A Northern City Sitting on Lid of Racial Trouble" it described "an unmistakable resurgence in organized resistance to Negroes based upon color prejudice."<sup>145</sup> A key element was the media policy to "severely restrict their coverage of Detroit's racial problems," and only include positive news stories depicting racial harmony. It was a policy developed after the 1943 riots when they "decided that it was bad business to publicize racial troubles—it only builds up tension."<sup>146</sup> The causes for the increasing tensions included the growing political voice of the African American population that began exercising its presence in community affairs and against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations and housing. The African American community was also gathering increasing evidence of a failing public school system and a medical community that severely restricted services to the African American community and disallowed African American medical doctors an affiliation in white

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<sup>144</sup>. *Detroit Free Press*, May 15, 1956. "Is City Easing Race Tension" by Evelyn Seeley Stewart

<sup>145</sup>. U.S. News and World Report, "A Northern City Sitting on Lid of Racial Trouble", May 11, 1956. pp. 34-40.

<sup>146</sup>. U.S. News and World Report, "A Northern City", p. 35.

hospitals except in very rare instances. A related factor was the growing economic power of the African American community which was estimated to be over “250 millions dollars a year or more”, and drew white attention but effected no change in African American status. The article concluded that there was “a mounting awareness of the difficulties in absorbing a big and growing Negro population—and an uneasy feeling among Negroes and white that Detroit’s racial problem, once thought to be safely buried, is back to haunt this city.”<sup>147</sup>

It was an article in the July 18, 1953 issue of *Saturday Evening Post* that presented a picture more hopeful than real of Detroit’s racial tenor and mood. It included a photograph that presented as a typical integrated neighborhood African American and white children playing together and African American and white neighbors talking with one another on their lawns. It was an exception and not the rule for life in Detroit. Undoubtedly meant to inspire and encourage, the article only hinted at issues unresolved.

Written by Walter White,<sup>148</sup> executive secretary for the NAACP since 1931, the article was his appraisal of Detroit’s setting an example in eliminating hostilities between whites and African Americans. White’s stature, both in the African American and white communities, made the article especially noteworthy. Citing instances of African American and white neighbors joining together to create a welcoming community, White described the kind of community he wanted Detroit to be. Even Detroit’s Police Department was praised in his article with a quote from George Schermer, the former director of the Mayor’s Interracial Committee, that “no matter what section of Detroit a

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<sup>147</sup>. U.S. News and World Report, “A Northern City”, p. 40.

<sup>148</sup>. Walter White was well acquainted with Detroit. A member of NAACP’s national staff, he had been sent to Detroit in 1926 to arrange the defense of Ossian Sweet and his ten co-defendants charged with murder. He made many trips to and from New York, and according to Kevin Boyle, author of *Arc of Justice*, “knew just about everyone worth knowing” (p. 210).

Negro might move into, the police would maintain law and order, and we would not have the kind of situation that occurred not long ago in Cicero, Ill.”

Behind the stories and pictures of Detroit’s “example in eliminating hostility between white and Negroes” was White’s more somber warning and conclusion to his article citing the sudden resignation of George Schermer as the director of the Interracial Committee when his efforts failed to obtain more official status and support from the city administration. “Unless Mayor Cobo changes his attitude and gives it more support than has been true in the past, the commission may not be too effective. That remains to be seen.”<sup>149</sup>

### **DETROIT REAL ESTATE BOARD**

Detroit’s residential population was in a constant state of motion following World War II, powered by an economy that had provided many high paying jobs for both laborers and management during the war which had also delayed the spending of its wealth. From every economic level, Detroit’s population sought to improve living accommodations, and when the expansion of population created new suburban communities, old neighborhoods were changed and new ones created. This would be a normal part of growing cities, except for the fact that many whites in Detroit did not want African Americans to live next door. The real estate agents of Detroit were directly involved in this maintenance of separation.

In 1891 the Detroit Real Estate Board (DREB) was organized by real estate agents to provide an identity, professional standards, public understanding, and protection to both the agents and the public to be served. Its very association as the Detroit Real

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<sup>149</sup>. All of the above quotations are from Walter Whites’ *How Detroit Fights Hatred*, The Saturday Evening Post, July 18, 1953, 26-27. ALUA

Estate Board carried the potential to effect changes in entrenched societal norms and practices including fees and commissions and real estate legislation. In exchange, the DREB accepted public scrutiny and a measure of control by the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission. This public scrutiny and control was primarily exercised through the licensing of real estate agents and the subscription of real estate agents to the code of ethics of the National Association of Realtors. Violators of this code would be expelled and their licenses revoked.<sup>150</sup>

The DREB maintained internal control over its membership that excluded African American and Jewish real estate agents, and was restricted to principals and their associates engaged in buying, selling, exchanging, leasing, renting, appraising managing or financing real estate for others for compensation. The DREB directed its attention to the economic opportunities that the Detroit market presented. The designation “Realtor” was copyrighted property of the National Association and used only by its membership which included the DREB. Protecting the Detroit real estate market was the highest priority, and this included not only the entire housing market from construction to financing, but also the community itself. Having denied membership to African American and Jewish real estate agents, the DREB also sought to exclude their presence in the market itself.

A prevailing feature of Detroit’s housing market was the belief that African American ownership in white neighborhoods resulted in a devaluation of remaining

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<sup>150</sup>. Jewish Community Council, Series I Box 69, Folder: Negro/Jewish Relations, Detroit Real Estate Board, Reuther Library; Arthur Austin, “Real Estate Boards and Multiple Listings Systems as Restraints of Trade,” *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 70, No. 8 (Dec. 1970), pp. 1325-1364; A.D. Theobald “Real Estate License Laws in Theory and Practice,” *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May, 1931), pp. 138-154; “Code of Ethics Enforcement A Member Benefit” [http://www.jcar.com/COE\\_Enforcement.htm](http://www.jcar.com/COE_Enforcement.htm).

properties. Once an African American family purchased a home in a white neighborhood, it was believed that the value of the remaining homes was dramatically reduced. The vast majority of whites believed that housing segregation was necessary to retain the value of the homes they had purchased. Racial discrimination and housing segregation was not a social issue but an economic necessity. For the DREB it was important that the housing market be protected from any deleterious influences, and public opinion had established the negative influences that African American presence exerted in white neighborhoods. Restricting white neighborhoods for white home ownership was viewed as a protection of home ownership, a basic American value, and sound market development.

Detroit realtors had asserted that “Negro penetration of white areas does depreciate the value of property”<sup>151</sup> as early as the mid-twenties, when Detroit’s African American population was growing very rapidly due to migration from southern states. To confirm that statement included in the Mayor’s Report on Race Relations in 1926, a letter from the Greater Detroit Realtors Committee was distributed that warned the citizens of Detroit “if our city is deluged by this black flood of colored immigration it will decrease the value of Detroit real estate to the extent of \$2,000,000,000.”<sup>152</sup> The report continued with the acknowledgment that “members of the Detroit Real Estate Board (DREB) are not allowed to sell to Negroes in a strictly white neighborhood”.<sup>153</sup> And it further stated that all members of the Real Estate Board were honor bound to subscribe to Article 34 of

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<sup>151</sup>. Mayor’s Committee on Race Relations, *The Negro in Detroit*, (mimeographed copy, 1926), BHC, DPL, p. 25

<sup>152</sup>. CRR, *Negro in Detroit*,, p. 26.

<sup>153</sup>. CRR, *Negro in Detroit*,, p. 28.

the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Real Estate Boards which read as follows:

A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, member of any race or nationality or any individuals whose presence will be detrimental to property values in that neighbor-hood.<sup>154</sup>

Kenneth L. Moore invoked Article 34 of the Code of Ethics in his letter to the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane in 1942 to explain his absence from Crane's Inter-Racial Council meeting at Central Methodist Church planning support for the Sojourner Truth Project. Citing a homeowner who was denied a license to operate a rooming house and threatened to sell the home to an African American family, Moore was told that this was "abetted by the Society for the Advancement of Colored People". As a member of DREB he was committed to "oppose the introduction of families in any neighborhood where the new element is unwelcome or incompatible with those who have been living in the community for whatever reason of race, nationality, creed or reputation". But he was "strongly opposed to such action where it is brought about by such circumstances . . . where it is used as a threat and secondly as a form of retaliation." He did believe that "colored citizens should occupy the Sojourner Truth Project" but he was unwilling to serve on a committee that was seeking to help African Americans while some of them were seeking to "break down residential neighborhoods and stir up race friction." He concluded his letter by asking that the committee do something to stop the practice.<sup>155</sup>

The letter illustrated both the moral clarity and the confusion involved in the intermingling of society and religion. By its own definition of membership and

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<sup>154</sup> . CRR, *Negro in Detroit*, p. 28.

<sup>155</sup> . Kenneth L. Moore to Rev. Henry Hitt Crane, April 24, 1942, *Henry Hitt Crane Collection*, Box 16, Sojourner Truth Project Folder. Bentley Library.

community, the DREB had concluded that Jews and African Americans would either be “incompatible or unwelcome” as a “new element” in any neighborhood. The DREB code of ethics protected that judgment, and submission to that code prevented any realtor’s opposition to it. But Protestant Christianity presented a different definition of membership and community, and Moore recognized its conflict with DREB’s definition. Moore’s solution was to move away from both the secular and religious definition of community and to concentrate instead on the homeowner’s violation of the State Supreme Court decision on restrictive covenants and the supposed complicity of the NAACP. His conclusion that the Inter-racial Commission must do something to stop the illegal practice effectively shifted his responsibility for moral activity to the Commission’s responsibility to uphold the law.

Crane’s archival material does not include his reply. One can infer from Crane’s two statements distributed at Sunday morning services at Central Methodist Church in February and May, 1942, his letter of invitation to the participants, and his presentation at the organizational meeting of the Inter-Racial Council in March, 1942, the purpose of the Inter-Racial Council. The Inter-Racial Council was formed to validate the fundamental principles of democracy and to demonstrate the spirit of unity and brotherhood. The protracted controversy over the Sojourner Truth Housing project had attracted world-wide attention and was used by “Axis’ propagandists as evidence of American hypocrisy, intolerance and racial prejudice”.<sup>156</sup> The issue was far more than segregated housing. “It has become an international symbol of our inability to practice the principles of democracy we profess to be fighting for all ‘round the world.”<sup>157</sup> “If we refuse to obey

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<sup>156</sup>. Crane, “Democracy on Trial”.

<sup>157</sup>. Crane, “Democracy on Trial”.

the law of our land and deliberately and repeatedly resort to mob violence to gain our ends, our war effort is in vain.”<sup>158</sup> “Our appeal is not that we may debate the issue in terms of the local claims but that we shall see clearly the significance of the major values that are already recognized around the world.”<sup>159</sup>

For Crane, the ultimate arbiter for the values recognized around the world would be Public Opinion, and the task of the Inter-Racial Council was to “take upon itself the business of marshalling, informing, and articulating Public Opinion”. The Inter-Racial Council, “thoroughly representative, without being politically official”, was “to demonstrate our faith in democracy which will strengthen the morale of the entire nation, not by just making implements, but by implementing justice.”<sup>160</sup> Crane had enlarged the “community” in which he believed the practice of segregated housing was judged and found it wanting without making any reference to religion’s transcendence. The difference between the DREB Moore subscribed to and the world-wide Public Opinion Crane espoused was created by those served and not by basic principles,

The National Association of Real Estate Boards, near the end of World War II when housing issues were increasingly the subject of attention, announced the formation of a special committee to work on a housing program for African American. It stated that “facts on hand indicate that the Negro is a good economic risk, and that many who can afford to purchase or rent good housing are unable to do so because it is not provided by the market.”<sup>161</sup> The next step for the Association was to urge its members to utilize

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<sup>158</sup> Crane, Letter of invitation to form Inter-Racial Council, March 12, 1942.

<sup>159</sup> Crane, “Preliminary Inter-Racial Council Meeting” March 17, 1942.

<sup>160</sup> Crane, “Defending Democracy” and Letter of Invitation.

<sup>161</sup> News Service, No. 65, June 14, 1944, National Association of Real Estate Boards. Quoted in “Racial Problems in Housing”, *American War-Community Services Bulletin* # 2, National Urban League. October, 1944., p. 22

the war housing priorities available for African American housing. But not to be misunderstood, it clearly stated that the Association was not establishing any national formula or suggestion as to the location of African American housing. “These are problems which must be solved by each community . . . our task as a business man is to find the best economic solution under the circumstances that exist.”<sup>162</sup> It was a policy that defended and strengthened the local attitude of Detroit realtors which had blocked any solution to the housing shortages for African Americans. It was free market capitalism at work and African Americans could be included in the U.S. market economy, but the final decision regarding their inclusion was still in the hands of the DREB.

Much as the DREB hoped that their emphasis on economic integrity and code of ethics would maintain residential segregation. Their exclusion of Jews and African Americans from membership in the DREB created the arena wherein radical methods were used to arrange the purchase and sale of housing between whites and African Americans. Jewish and African American real estate dealers were often the agents of change, not being bound by the DREB code of ethics,. African American real estate dealers formed the Detroit Realist (sic) Association and supported African Americans in their efforts to live wherever they chose. Less scrupulous real estate agents exploited economic advantages whenever possible by matching the deep desires of African Americans to own homes with those of whites who feared the economic losses in waiting too long to sell in changing neighborhoods. Others engaged in “block-busting” using various tactics to instill fear in white homeowners afraid of African American “invasions”.

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<sup>162</sup>. News Service, “Racial Problems”, p. 22

The Code of Ethics to which both DREB and the Detroit Realist Association subscribed was designed to protect the basic features of free market capitalism, to establish that arena of mutual trust in which any and all practices damaging to the public or to the dignity and integrity of the real estate profession would be eliminated. The basic error for DREB was the narrow definition and description of the public they deemed to serve, with the consequence that their morality was deeply flawed by its limitations.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD RESISTANCE**

Covenants prohibiting sales or occupancy of homes to racial, religious or ethnic groups were most commonly used to maintain neighborhood homogeneity, but after World War II, it became increasingly clear that covenants based on racial restrictions would be ruled illegal. Federal and city policies circumvented the covenants of racial restrictions with mandating the use of federal funds for public housing that would not change the predominant racial character of the neighborhood. Covenants with racial restrictions were replaced with covenants restricting number of residents in a home, architectural style, landscaping, garages, etc.<sup>163</sup> Sociologist Harold Black, in his survey of subdivision deeds in Detroit, found that over eighty percent of the properties in Detroit outside the inner city contained restricting covenants.<sup>164</sup> Neighborhood associations were formed to enforce these covenant restrictions, such as the Northwest Civic Association which worked with the Detroit Realty Association to maintain compliance. In *Origins of*

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<sup>163</sup>. In Robert C. Weaver: "Race Restrictive Housing Covenants," Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics, Aug., 1944, he suggested that occupancy standards be substituted for restrictive covenants: "If instead of restrictions on account of race, creed and color, there were agreements binding property owners not to sell or lease except to single families, barring excessive roomers, and otherwise dealing with the type of occupancy, properties would be protected during both white and Negro occupancy."

<sup>164</sup>. Harold Black, "Restrictive Covenants in Relation to Segregated Negro Housing in Detroit" (M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1947), 6, 47.

*the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue reported that at least 192 neighborhood associations were formed in Detroit since 1943.<sup>165</sup> Detroit's city administrations from 1943 onward worked with these neighborhood associations, often using them as points of contact for political and administrative purposes. From 1954 onward, when the Housing Act required American cities to show evidence of citizen participation before Federal Urban Renewal assistance would be granted, these associations were available for immediate compliance with the Federal program. In an interview with Mel Ravitz, former member of Detroit's Common Council and liaison to neighborhood associations, much as he opposed their stand on segregation and deplored their tactics against integration, the positive benefits outweighed the negative in the city's relationships with neighborhood associations for urban renewal and neighborhood conservation.<sup>166</sup>

It would be unfair to assert that all real estate dealers in Detroit knowingly engaged in practices exacerbating African American/white tensions and capitalized on these tensions for their own gain, but real estate sales following World War II to lower-income African American families often exceeded their financial capacity to meet mortgage payments and support ongoing property maintenance. With real estate sales to African Americans often limited to older homes, repairs and regular maintenance costs were "hidden costs" that often pushed them to the brink of insolvency.<sup>167</sup> To meet their monthly obligations, property repairs and maintenance were often deferred, rooms combined into smaller apartments and additional residents brought into the home for

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<sup>165</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, p. 211

<sup>166</sup> . Interview with Mel Ravitz, November 20, 2006.

<sup>167</sup> In the National Urban League's Bulletin # 2 on "Racial Problems in Housing", p. 13, it was reported that "the result of America's obeisance to technology and neglect of social welfare is that there are over 16,000,000 occupied dwellings with plumbing deficiencies and in need of major repairs. OF that number, non-whites occupy 2,500,000 representing 83 percent of the total units housing the non-white group."

additional income. It was a downward spiraling circle for all families without steady employment, with economic and social consequences for all involved, from families to neighborhood to city.

Determined to preserve their neighborhood and protect it from the downward spiral that would end in slum conditions were such people as Jens and Gundrun Nielsen,<sup>168</sup> members of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church. Their neighborhood was immediately north of the area known as Briggs, into which southern whites from Appalachia had moved and where landlords had turned the once-stately single-family mansions into rooming houses that were quickly overcrowded. The housing, already old by the mid -1940s, deteriorated rapidly as too many people crammed into too little space. By 1950 southern whites had moved northward from Briggs into what had once been known as the "Scandinavian Ghetto",<sup>169</sup> with many of them living in the same type of absentee landlord, absentee management arrangements typical of the Briggs neighborhood across Grand River Avenue.

The Nielsens had purchased their home at 1753 W. Hancock, only three blocks from St. Peter's Lutheran Church, in 1943. Shortly afterward they purchased three more houses, making them into studio rooms for a folk-dancing center and apartments. They converted the shop in the back of their home into Dannebo Hall, which also served as the

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<sup>168</sup> . Mel Ravitz praised the work of Gundrun and Jens Nielsen for their support in Detroit's organization of block clubs. Responsible for this program in Detroit, Ravitz said that it would be the Nielsens of Detroit that would save Detroit's neighborhoods.

<sup>169</sup> . It was called "The Scandinavian Ghetto" because of the concentration of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish residents, which were served by three separate Lutheran churches, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, within four blocks of each other. These three Lutheran congregations were member parishes of separate national judicatories until 1992, when all three were received into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

home for Detroit's Little Symphony,<sup>170</sup> and created a playground for neighborhood children where no fighting, cussing, stealing or use of racial epithets was allowed. At the beginning of racial change in the neighborhood, Gudrun Nielsen joined with her neighbor, Mrs. Seaborn Hall, a Negro homeowner in keeping interracial peace, and started the Poe-Jefferson Neighborhood Association.

The Niensens had created the studio apartments for Wayne State students, but slum- making landlords moving in from the western end of 12<sup>th</sup> street, turned students away. The playground died because an absentee landlord and absentee manager had thirty-seven people move into the house that backed up to it. Charged \$90 a month for the house, the manager took in \$700 from the occupants. When the roof burned off the house because the family living in the eaves used an uncapped gas pipe for cooking, the Niensens housed 16 of the refugees and for several days fed all 37 in shifts. They purchased the house and cleaned and re-made it into modern studio units, charging rents no greater than the slum landlord had charged the absentee manager. In the May 31, 1956 Detroit Free Press article profiling the Niensens, written by Evelyn Seeley Stewart, her final paragraph illustrated the tragic condition into which the Nielsen neighborhood has fallen. "This is where we are" Mrs. Nielsen said, "We've joined every civic organization. We have appealed to every city department or commission that could help us. Nothing new has happened. Things have only grown worse." The Niensens discussed moving, but they thought of the old family at the corner, and the people across

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<sup>170</sup>. Detroit's Little Symphony was composed of non-professional Scandinavian musicians. Formed in 1930 it used the Danish Brotherhood Hall as its home. In 1944 it presented a concert featuring the famous Danish tenor, Lauritz Melchior, and celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a tour of Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

the street, the Danish-American Sportsman's Club that wouldn't stay unless they did. They stayed. "Only a fool or a stubborn Dane would stick it out".<sup>171</sup>

There were others like the Nielsens scattered throughout the city, determined to create an open and stable environment for African Americans and whites. In his *Saturday Evening Post* article, Walter White included the ministry of the Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Mr. Sissel, who hosted meetings and made pastoral visitations to allay fears, and successfully slowed down the exodus from the parish as "colored and white neighbors began to know each other." Mrs. Gustav Taube enjoyed the stories her son shared about his good friend Gordon, but "jumped a mile when she saw that Gordon was colored." It motivated her to become a den mother for a Cub Scout pack that included two African American dens and three white dens. White also repeated the story told by a member of Central Methodist Church about the man who informed the pastor, the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane that he wanted to express his objections about African Americans in the congregation to the board of trustees. Mr. Crane said he would permit that, but after he had related his objections, Mr. Crane would insist that the board pray that "the prejudice poisoning him would be extirpated and that he would become an honest-to-goodness Christian." Whereupon the objector said, "well, if you didn't want me to bring it up, why didn't you just say so."<sup>172</sup>

In spite of efforts by the Nielsens, Mrs. Gustav Taube, Mrs. Seaborn Hall, clergy like the Rev. Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, the Rev. H. B. Sissel, and many others unnamed but of kindred spirit, defiant racism and open hostility to the movement of African Americans

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<sup>171</sup>. *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1956. All the quotes above are from the third articles in a series written by Evelyn Seeley Stewart reviewing the progress of Detroit's eight year old "Master Plan" that was part of Detroit's "City Plan" adopted after World War I. The purpose of the plan was to prevent slums, check blight and rebuild the inner city.

<sup>172</sup>. See n. # 29.

into white neighborhoods continued unabated and unchallenged by a united religious community. Individual congregations and clergy did challenge and oppose segregation and speak and preach against racial prejudices and practices, and were targets of attacks varying in degree from shouted epithets and withdrawal of financial support to loss of memberships and destruction of property, both personal and congregational. Equally true, individual congregations and clergy refused to integrate neighborhoods and welcome African Americans into membership and chose instead to relocate from changing neighborhoods, joining what was called “white flight”. Conspicuously absent was a united religious community that spoke with one voice and acted together in full harmony against racial discrimination and housing segregation.

#### **DETROIT COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE**

Following the pattern of Christian denominations which had composed the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) in 1908, the Detroit Council of Churches (DCC)<sup>173</sup> was organized as a formal body in 1919 to perform those tasks which could be achieved through united action. It was composed of Protestant and several Orthodox congregations and denominations, including the Second Baptist Church, one of the few African American congregations in Detroit. Doctrine and polity prohibited Roman Catholic membership. At the first quarterly meeting of the DCC, the Commission on Missions presented extensive plans to “deal with downtown districts, rescue missions, mission work among the Negro population, and the location of churches and missions.”<sup>174</sup> The clergy of Baptist congregations in Detroit’s growing African American population

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<sup>173</sup>. Organized as the Detroit Council of Churches, it was later reconstituted as the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches to reflect both its suburban and city membership and all archival materials in the Reuther Library are listed under MDCC.

<sup>174</sup>. G. Merrill Lenox, *Christian Unity and Mission, A History of the Advance and Achievement of the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches*.(MDCC: Detroit, 1969), p. 4..

following World War I organized the Council of Baptist Pastors as a separate body that did not affiliate with the MDCC.

Detroit's Protestant ecumenical activity followed the national pattern of Protestant ecumenism which had been composed as the FCC for "coordinating the churches in the interest of wider and larger service for America and for the Kingdom of God."<sup>175</sup> Forty two years later, when the FCC evolved into the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (NCCUSA) similar expressions of promise and responsibility were made. These expressions were rooted in the belief that the "American Churches of which the Council is one of the visible symbols, are in their true estate the soul of nation" and the NCCUSA would be the "organ through which the will of God may become effective as an animating, creative and unifying force within our national society."<sup>176</sup> The United States could not have an established, legally recognized church, but the NCCUSA claimed and accepted its role as a national establishment. In 1908 the FCC included thirty-three denominations with seventeen million members, and in 1950, the NCCUSA included twenty-nine denominations with thirty-three million members. In spite of America's pervasive Protestant tone, both the FCC and NCCUSA were always regarded as one part of a larger Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish religious establishment.

Unlike the FCC which had succeeded in expressing a united position in several arenas of public life during World War I and immediately following, the NCCUSA was successful only in accessing centers of public affairs inaccessible to individual

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<sup>175</sup>. Elias B. Sanford (ed.), *Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America: Report of the First Meeting of the Federal Council, Philadelphia, 1908* (New York: Revell Press, 1909), 207, 321-1, 12, 508.

<sup>176</sup>. *Christian Faith in Action: Commemorative Volume: The Founding of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America* (National Council, 1951), p. 151.

denominations or congregations. Both the FCC and NCCUSA rejected any considerations of denominational doctrines, politics and worship, and were denied any authority over their constituent memberships where doctrines, politics and worship prevailed. Their organizational structures made timely statements on public issues almost impossible.

Reflecting on its origin in the Social Gospel, the FCC had established a Department of Race Relations in 1922, but did not provide a full-time executive until the appointment of Dr. George Haynes, an African American scholar and founder of the National Urban League, to that position. The establishment of an annual Race Relations Sunday with accompanying educational materials was one of the department's most visible activities.<sup>177</sup> Generally speaking the FCC had sought to develop race relationships more expressive of justice within the existing pattern of racial segregation, but in 1946 declared:

The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America renounces the pattern of segregation in race relations as unnecessary and undesirable and a violation of the gospel of love and brotherhood. Having taken this action the Federal Council requests its constituent communions to do likewise.<sup>178</sup>

A number of Protestant denominations had issued similar statement prior to the FCC statement of 1946, and had joined in creating a climate of opinion which made it increasingly obvious that segregation could not be justified on the basis of any Christian principle.

Following its formation in 1950 NCCUSA issued a statement renouncing segregation that included these sentences:

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<sup>177</sup>. For a detailed description of the Race Relations observances see George Edmunds Haynes "Changing Racial Attitudes and Customs" in *Phylon*, Vol. 2, # 1 (1<sup>st</sup> Qtr. , 1941) pp. 28-43.

<sup>178</sup>. Quoted by John Bennett in *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 10n.

Above all, the principle of segregation is a denial of the Christian faith and ethic which stems from the basic premise taught by our Lord that all men are created the children of God. The pattern of segregation is diametrically opposed to what Christians believe about the worth of persons and if we are to be true to the Christian faith we must take our stand against it.<sup>179</sup>

The actual release of this statement was delayed three months by southern churchmen who insisted on “more time for study”. Following the action of Abyssinian Baptist Church with the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell as pastor to secede from the NCCUSA, and the resolution signed by seventy-five clergy of the African Methodist Episcopal Church calling for “reconsideration”, the statement was released as originally worded.<sup>180</sup>

Statements adopted in national assemblies do not always transfer well to state judicatories or associations and individual congregations where opposition can be more intense, but through its Department of Public Affairs and the Department of Planning and Research, DCC congregations were encouraged to support the national statement opposing racial discrimination and to support Detroit’s review of discrimination in medical services and facilities conducted by CCR. DCC congregations were also encouraged to join with the executive director, the Rev. Merrill J. Lennox and the Departments of Public Affairs and Planning and Research in support of passage of the Fair Employment Practices Act.

The installation of the Rev. G. Merrill Lenox as the executive director of DCC had marked a new beginning for the Council which included greater participation in the national programs of the FCC and NCCUSA, and increasing denominational membership. What the FCC and the NCCUSA had expressed as the duty of

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<sup>179</sup>. *The Church and Segregation*, (New York: Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, The National Council of Churches, 1952), p. 3.

<sup>180</sup>. James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle, The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement 1950-1963*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.17ff.

Protestantism the DCC also endeavored to “challenge its members and the leaders of political, economic and cultural life with moral claims that transcend national, racial or class self-interest”.<sup>181</sup> The question was how. Was it through direct or indirect action? Was it through the membership of its constituents or was the DCC the conduit for proclamations of consensus? In his *Christians and the State* John Bennett observed that direct political action by churches was counter-productive. “The most important type of impact of the Church on society or the state is indirect.” But he also acknowledged that the distinction between direct and indirect is not absolute.<sup>182</sup>

Five months after the murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi, and several weeks after the acquittal of the murderers by an all-white jury in September, 1955, Oscar Lee, executive director of NCCUSA’s Department on Race and Cultural Relations presented a strong statement of condemnation to the General Board which had just passed a resolution that only indirectly referred to the Till murder because it did not want to criticize the jury’s verdict. Lee’s statement was referred to a sub-committee. It was in this “climate” that Ralph Smeltzer, an official in the Church of the Brethren, urged NCCUSA to host a series of national conferences on Race and Religion to encourage and strengthen local parishes in their struggles against racial segregation.

In 1956 the DCC addressed the social issues of Detroit with a special Statement Committee appointed by Dr. Samuel Weir, president of DCC, charged with preparing a statement on the subject of racial integration. Drawing together members from the various religious organizations, including past presidents of DCC, presidents of the Detroit Pastors’ Union, Protestant Men, United Church Women, and the vice-president of

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<sup>181</sup>. William H. Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times, The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900—1960*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 125.

<sup>182</sup>. John Bennett, *Christians and the State*, (New York: Scribner’s, 1958), pp. 278-281.

the Detroit Council, the statement spoke with “virtual unanimity” for the Protestant and Orthodox denominations representing the DCC. “Grieved at the conditions which have been revealed by a chain of tragic events recently occurring in this land”, it expressed Christian concern and compassion. It also “acknowledged that violations of human rights are not confined to any one section of the country”, and confessed that much needed to be done in “our beloved city”. It called upon the churches to “examine themselves in the light of Christian teaching”, and believed “that a firm stand for justice will not only advance the cause here”, but “enhance the influence of our nation which has suffered greatly in the eyes of other nations by the violations of brotherhood which have taken place here.”<sup>183</sup>

. On September 25-26, 1956 the Detroit Council of Churches’ Departments of Public Affairs and Research and Church Planning hosted a conference for over 100 Church Extension and Christian Life and Work officials from 10 denominations serving in the Detroit area. The purpose of the conference was to share methods used and successes and failures encountered in congregational ministry, specifically addressing segregation and integration. Several reported “ministering successfully as inclusive churches to families of all racial backgrounds in their local communities”.<sup>184</sup>

Recognizing the late arrival of the religious community in the struggle for racial peace, the conference acknowledged that most ministries addressing racial issues had been developed since 1950. Mel Ravitz, consultant to the Detroit City Planning Commission challenged the religious community, emphasizing its “grave responsibility to help Detroit

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<sup>183</sup>. “Churches Explain Stand on Race Relation”, *The Detroit Church Newscaster*, June, 1956. MDCC, AULA

<sup>184</sup>. “Detroit Churches Report on Successful Integration”, *The Detroit Church Newscaster*, October, 1956, MDCC, Box 17, File 17-21, ALUA.

choose between racial ghettos and genuine neighborhood integration.”<sup>185</sup> In the address by the Rev. Alfred Karamer, Associate Director of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA (NCCUSA), he reported on the growing experimentation in several cities with local church adoption of a “commitment to an open fellowship” based on denominational policy statements. Several years later, this suggestion was adopted in the distribution and use of the “Open Occupancy Covenant Card” by supporting congregations in the metro Detroit area.

The General Council of the Lutheran church had been a founding member of the FCC, but withdrew to a “consultative relationship” four years later, and remained so until it participated in the organization of the NCCUSA in 1950. In Detroit the territorial judicatory of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), the Michigan Synod, joined in a consultative relationship with the DCC in 1947 and then became a full member in 1952. St. Peter’s Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was a member congregation of the Grundtvigian Danish Lutherans, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, and became a member of the DCC after its merger with the ULCA in 1962. There was no official relationship between Detroit’s ecumenical church community and St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church until 1962.

There is no record of St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church having been either called or sent a letter inviting them to support Mrs. Ethel Watkins when she planned to move into her newly purchased home on Cherrylawn, two miles east of where St. Peter’s had completed the construction of their new sanctuary following their relocation to Greenfield and Pembroke in 1956. Mrs. Watkins had telephoned the Detroit Urban League with her plans, and the League contacted the Detroit Police Department, the

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<sup>185</sup>. MDCC, “Detroit Churches Report” p. five.

Commission on Community Relations, the Detroit Round Table, the Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, the Jewish Community, and the Detroit Council of Churches and asked for each organization to scan their membership lists and invite them to support and help the agencies informed of any association activity. Meetings were held at Temple Baptist Church on Grand River to plan neighborhood responses and an association was formed, street supervisors elected, and negotiations authorized with real estate agent, Mr. Del Rio, to purchase the home from Mrs. Watkins. The continuing street demonstrations and the delegation calling on Mrs. Watkins' employer seeking her discharge did not prevent Mrs. Watkins from taking possession and moving into her home.

Nearly three weeks after Mrs. Watkins had purchased the house, thirty people living within a mile radius met at a home on Ewald Circle to discuss a successful solution, and agreed to visit and welcome Mrs. Watkins to the neighborhood, call on their spiritual leaders, and ask for public statements, and have the Commission on Community Relations make mass mailings of literature. Early in March faculty members from Wayne State University and the Detroit Round Table hosted meetings with films and discussion. The Detroit Council of Churches hosted two small meetings with area clergy and selected laity to encourage individual churches to provide opportunities for discussion. The young assistant priest at St. Bridgett Roman Catholic Church was invited to take a leadership role but declined. A meeting with St. Bridgett's priest, the Cardinal of the Archdiocese, and the chair of the Diocesan Social Action program produced no results.

It was in March, two months after Mrs. Watkins had purchased and moved into her home on Cherrylawn, that Edward Cardinal Mooney, the Roman Catholic

Archbishop of Detroit, Rabbi Morris Adler of the Jewish Community Council, and the Reverend G. Merrill Lenox of the Detroit Council of Churches issued a joint statement saying that the “denial of the right to home ownership to any reputable citizen because of race or creed represents a basic violation of the religious spirit as well as of fundamental democratic principles.”<sup>186</sup> Ministers, priests and rabbis throughout the city were asked to speak on the subject of this appeal from the pulpit and make copies of the tri-faith statement for distribution to their congregations.

The statement is important both for what it said and what it did not say. The denial of home ownership to any reputable citizen on the basis of race or creed represented a basic violation of “the religious spirit and fundamental democratic principles” but no reference was made to its being a basic violation of the law. Violence was considered shameful and unpardonable, but was not regarded as criminal and subject to prosecution. Home owner associations were responsible for unchecked violence either through their indifference or their acquiescence to such outbreaks, but such associations should include all the residents of a given neighborhood urging them to “take an active interest in maintaining the home character of their district”. This included working against multiple family occupancy because this blights an area and “turns it into a slum”. Where municipal legislation was not sufficiently strong or not enforced, neighborhood associations had the right to work for enforcement or better legislation. The statement indirectly charges weak enforcement and poor legislation for the creation of “unscrupulous landlords and dealers in real estate”.

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<sup>186</sup>. “Joint Statement,” March 8, 1957, MDCC, Part I, Box 8, Folder: Press Releases—Civil Rights, 1952-64.

The statement made no correction to the widely held beliefs that any change in the racial nature of a neighborhood would devalue its properties. It made no direct reference to either the political or economic entities in public life that wielded direct influence on the ordinances, covenants, real estate practices, financial arrangements, et al influencing the purchase and sale of houses. It did not acknowledge the limited options for African American home ownership created both by legal and illegal acts. The statement did not urge the citizens of Detroit to higher acts of justice, greater obedience to existing legislation for equal rights, and the need of additional legislation for open housing. It did not criticize the police department for lack of enforcement. It did not call upon the political and economic communities to address, let alone correct, the racial issues in the city. It only urged “all who are members of churches and synagogues to wield their influence on the neighborhoods and neighborhood associations, in behalf of the prophetic ideals of equality and brotherhood.”

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure the influence of this statement which I consider more representative than prophetic. The distribution of this public statement was restricted to a small leadership network but it represented a major step in the formation of an ecumenical community in Detroit who recognized the limitations of their public acceptance. Churches were to preach love and humility, and the ecumenical community had been silent through the years on such fundamental issues as racial justice, open housing, industrial democracy, economic well-being, etc. The ecumenical community had no reservoir of public regard and respect for its larger commitments to the public good. To pursue the political resolution of racial segregation was to become a political instrument rather than a church body. Yet there was very little hope for change

without political action. The challenge was to identify those political actions all could accept which would be effective for change. The statement rested less on its stated contents than on the prestige granted to the ecumenical community by public opinion. In essence it was somewhat of a circular process. The ecumenical community was needed to assist in solving the problems of social injustice, but it could not make any direct assertions without a consensus from its membership. The statement was shaped by the very bodies to which it was being addressed and well marked the distance from the religious hegemony that had once prevailed.

In a more specific focus, the Detroit Conference of the Methodist Church joined with their Lexington Conference to host a workshop on “Housing” at a conference planned by the Commission on Social and Economic Relations of the Methodist Church. While not a member of the planning and sponsoring committee, the DCC distributed a discussion summary and “Suggestions for Local Church Meetings”<sup>187</sup> to the clergy and congregations affiliated with the DCC.

Beginning in the early 1950s the individual denominations composing the membership of the DCC, as well as the Archdiocese of Detroit and the synagogues in the Jewish faith community experienced increasing membership relocations from Detroit to the suburban communities. Often described as “white flight”, many whites left Detroit churches and joined the suburban congregations established for them. During the ten years between 1950 and 1960 the Michigan Synod of the ULCA and the Michigan District of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) developed twenty-one new congregations in the suburban communities surrounding Detroit. Many of them were organized with members living in suburban areas who were from Detroit parishes that

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<sup>187</sup>. DCCR. “Work Shop No. 2” Box 17, Part 3, Folder 17-8 “Religion”.

remained in the city. Even with the addition of three new congregations organized at the outer limits of the city, the net effect of membership transfers from city parishes left Detroit with a greatly reduced Lutheran presence.

### **GROSSE POINTE POINT SYSTEM**

It was in 1960, when African Americans began to seek housing beyond the city limits, that one of the most blatant acts of racial discrimination in the housing market was exposed in Grosse Pointe, MI. Immediately northeast of Detroit in Michigan's heavily-populated Wayne County, it consisted of five communities with a population of upper and upper-middle-class families.<sup>188</sup> It was one of America's most renowned suburban areas and the site of large baronial estates owned by the Fords and other top ranking automobile executives. Secretly used for fifteen years before exposed<sup>189</sup> by Michigan's State Attorney Paul Adams in 1960, the Grosse Pointe Brokers Association<sup>190</sup> used a "point system" to rate prospective residents. A rating sheet was used by private investigators in their reports on prospective Grosse Pointe residents, with each question given a numerical value.<sup>191</sup> The screening process was not required for persons of

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<sup>188</sup>. Grosse Pointe is often referred to as a single unit but is politically divided into five communities, including Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, Grosse Pointe Shores, and Grosse Pointe Woods.

<sup>189</sup>. The exposure had its origin in a civil suit tried in St. Clair County Circuit Court in Port Huron, MI. Plaintiff John Maxwell was seeking to recover his property from the Grosse Point Properties Inc. (GPPI), held under lien. In 1952 Maxwell had begun construction of an elaborate home and unable to complete it, the unfinished construction deteriorated. Subsequently borrowing money from the GPPI to complete the construction, he then sought to purchase the mortgage from GPPI. GPPI refused on the grounds that he was "undesirable". Under questioning by Maxwell's attorney, Orville Sherwood, executive secretary of the Grosse Pointe Property Owners Association describe the "point system" used to rate Maxwell as "undesirable".

<sup>190</sup>. The Grosse Pointe Brokers Association had been founded in 1934 to protect property values and maintain the character of the community in any way deemed possible.

<sup>191</sup>. Some of the questions asked by private investigators were the following: 1) If not American born, how long have the applicants lived in this country? 2) Is their way of living typically American? 3) Are the husband's immediate associates typical? 4) Are their friends predominantly typical? 5) Appearances—swarthy, slightly swarthy or not all? 6) Accents—pronounced, medium, slight, or not all? 7) What is the husband's position as distinguished from his occupation? 8) How does this position stand in the public's estimation? 9) Dress—neat, sloppy, flashy or conservative? 10) Grammar—good, fair or poor?

Northern European ancestry, e.g., Anglo-Saxons, Germans, French, Scandinavians etc., but of a total of 100 points, Poles would pass with 55 points, Southern Europeans with 75, Jews with 85. Negroes and Orientals were never eligible and were automatically disqualified. “A person with a very swarthy complexion would probably get a low rating.”<sup>192</sup> Attorney General Adams considered the practice at the very minimum to be “morally corrupt”, and Governor G. Mennen Williams, a registered voter nearby Grosse Pointe Farms condemned the screening as “an odious situation.”<sup>193</sup>

The real estate business was an essential element of Michigan’s free enterprise economy, but the practice of discrimination on the basis of race, religion or national origin made it a major political issue. The Michigan Civil Rights Act of 1885 had granted full and equal treatment to all citizens, and the Michigan Supreme Court had declared it a valid exercise of the state’s power. In 1927 Michigan had taken action prohibiting discrimination in public schools, and the Fair Employment Act of 1955 had enacted far reaching nondiscriminatory practices in hiring and firing. An amendment to the Real Estate License Law that would authorize the suspension or revocation of a real estate broker’s license for refusing to sell a home to a person on the basis race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry was introduced to the Michigan Legislature in 1960 but never reported out of committee. Officially responsible for Michigan’s administrative oversight of the real estate industry was Lawrence Gubow, the Corporation and Securities Commissioner, and Paul L. Adams, the Attorney General. Both deemed the discrimination practices of the Grosse Pointe Realtors contrary to the

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<sup>192</sup>. “Rights” ADL Reports on Social, Employment, Educational and Housing Discrimination. Vol. 3, No 3, September, 1960, DCCR, Box 36, Folder: Grosse Pointe System, 36-9.

<sup>193</sup>. DCCR, ADL “Rights”, p. 72.

public policy of the state and a violation of basic civil rights. The question was how to proceed.

Personally committed, and officially responsible for the exercise of basic civil rights in Michigan, Gubow and Adams believed that an attack on discrimination in housing would be better served by public exposure than legal action. Legal actions would surely be challenged and decisions could be delayed. Public hearings would focus attention on the practices and techniques of discrimination in housing, and would provide support for more far-reaching action. Initially scheduled for Grosse Pointe, the hearings were finally held in Detroit on June 21 and in Grand Rapids on June 28, 1960.

The hearings received wide coverage throughout the state, and were reported in major newspapers throughout the United States. *The Detroit News* reported that U.S. Congressman Charles Diggs said “the Grosse Pointe area residential screening story broke in the papers of Hong Kong and Tokyo while he was there.”<sup>194</sup> The article in *Holiday* magazine about “Rich, Rich Grosse Pointe” noted that Grosse Pointe was “nervous, more than anything else.”<sup>195</sup> The *New York Times* and *Time* magazine reported the point exposure in detail.<sup>196</sup> The *New York Times* added a postscript to their story that “the two groups, the Grosse Pointe Property Owners and the Grosse Pointe Brokers Association, were taking corporate action by means of resolutions and revisions of bylaws to comply with an earlier state order to drop the system.”<sup>197</sup>

The hearings clearly demonstrated the discriminatory character of the point system. Discriminatory practices in real estate transactions were common place, but this

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<sup>194</sup>. DCCR, ADL “Rights”, p. 74.

<sup>195</sup>. Quoted in *Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Race against Race*, by Kathy C osseboom, (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>196</sup>. Grosse Pointe Civil Rights Collection, 1963-1973, Folder 2-7 “Race against Race”. ALUA.

<sup>197</sup>. DCCR, ADL “Rights”, p. 73.

deliberately formulated discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or national origin fermented a groundswell of public opinion opposing it. The hearings focused attention on discrimination in housing and property transactions, and conditioned the public to greater corrective action. The hearings also placed the Grosse Pointe Property Owners and Brokers Association in an unfavorable light. Basic democratic values, including social justice, civil rights, moral responsibility, equality of opportunity, compliance with state laws, freedom of choice, et al, were more important than alleged property values.

Gubow and Adams, fearful that the Grosse Pointe groups would succeed in involving the courts regarding the Corporation and Securities Commission's subpoena powers and the authority of the Attorney General to investigate discrimination of real estate licensees, quickly concluded the hearings with an administrative ruling preventing discrimination by real estate licensees. Identified as Rule 9, it prohibited real estate brokers and salesmen from property transactions "because of the race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry of any person or persons."<sup>198</sup> It was an act of moral commitment in that Gubow and Adams had promulgated an administrative rule which had the force of law over an issue which Michigan's legislature had consistently refused to consider. Gubow and Adams set aside whatever the consequences might be for their positions in public service for the benefit of the whole community.

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<sup>198</sup>. Norman C. Thomas, *Rule 9: Politics, Administration, and Civil Rights* (Random House: New York, 1966), p. 53. The full text of the rule is as follows: "9. A broker or salesman, acting individually or jointly with others, shall not refuse to sell or offer for sale, or to buy or offer to buy, or to appraise, or to list, or to negotiate the purchase, sale, exchange, or mortgage of real estate, or to negotiate for the construction of buildings thereon, or to lease or offer for lease, or to rent or offer for rent, any real estate or the improvements thereon, or any other service performed as broker, or salesman, because of the race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry of any person or persons. A broker or salesman, acting individually or jointly with others, shall not refuse to sell or offer to sell, or to buy or offer to buy, or to receive an offer to sell or to buy, or to lease or offer for lease, or to negotiate the purchase, sale or exchange of a business, business opportunity, or the good will of an existing business, or any other service performed as broker, or salesman, because of the race color, religion, national origin, or ancestry of any person or persons".

An administrative regulation, Rule 9 was challenged in the 1961 session of the Michigan Legislature with consideration given to bills ranging from repealing the entire Real Estate License Law to revoking Rule 9. By a 64 to 35 Rule 9 was revoked with Governor Swainson vetoing the “repealer bill” a few weeks later. Rule 9 again surfaced in Michigan’s Constitutional Convention (1961-1962) with the compromise of a strong declaration of rights with an “equal protection of laws” section, and constitutional curbs on administrative rule making. In 1962 Governor Swainson asked the Michigan Supreme Court to determine the fate of Rule 9, and on February 7, 1963 Rule 9 was invalidated by a unanimous 7 to 0 vote. The courts opinion was that the problem of discriminatory practices on the part of real estate licensees’ was a matter for legislative, not administrative, resolution.<sup>199</sup>

Gubow and Adams had been correct in their decision to concentrate on focusing the public attention on housing discrimination rather than selecting to redress it through legal and legislative action. Legislative action had been considered as one of the more obvious ways to end the point system, and it would have placed responsibility for decisions in the hands of the electorate. But the continuing failure of Michigan’s legislature to enact anti-discrimination statutes suggested that it was a futile course of action. Public opinion would not have the legal power to end discrimination, but as the Rev. Henry Hitt Crane had reminded the members of Central Methodist Church in 1942, public opinion was the final arbiter of values.

It was from this expanded exposure of racial discrimination’s existence and practice in the sale and purchase of housing in their community that a group of individuals began gathering in private homes in 1960 as the Grosse Pointe Human

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<sup>199</sup>. Thomas, *Rule 9*, pp. 62-73.

Relations Council.<sup>200</sup> Inviting African American and white speakers from Detroit and neighboring suburbs, the group tried to find ways to encourage integration and open housing. Participating in these early discussions were individuals who valued human rights over property rights, and included labor union professionals and automobile executives, Democrats and Republicans, and educational and religious leaders. Monitoring the movement of Rule 9 through the political community in Lansing and mindful of its extended reach into the basic question of open housing that might not receive both legislative and judicial support, they continued to arrange educational and interracial group experiences to foster basic human relationships.

It was only after the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy that the Grosse Pointe communities hosted a demonstration march for open housing and twenty-six clergy members of the Grosse Pointe Ministerial Association drafted and signed a statement that “church members should lead the way in open housing”.<sup>201</sup> At the same time members of Grosse Pointe’s Human Relations Council joined with the Social Responsibility Committee of the Unitarian Church to form a Committee on Open Housing, but soon affiliated with the Human Relations Council as a subcommittee.

While the public’s attention was drawn in early 1960 to events unfolding in Grosse Pointe surrounding the Grosse Pointe Realtor Point System, Civil Rights activist Rose Kleinman and labor leader Douglas Fraser led the formation of the Greater Detroit Committee for Fair Housing Practices (GDCFHP).<sup>202</sup> Growing out of the personal contacts and mutual respect and trust that had developed in the rather loose fellowship of

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<sup>200</sup>. Interview with Russell Peebles, member of the Grosse Pointe, MI Unitarian Open Housing Committee, in 1964 on October 10, 2006 and again on February 4, 2007.

<sup>201</sup> Kathy Cosseboom, *Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Race Against Race* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1972) pp.115-160..

<sup>202</sup>. Rose Kleinman papers, 1 Box, ALUA.

professionals and committed laity, the GDCFHP was formed in May, 1960, with the conviction that discrimination in housing was the keystone in the practice of discrimination. It was the first organization in Detroit to devote its entire attention to the issue of racial discrimination in the sale or purchase of housing. One of their immediate efforts was the support and distribution of Open Occupancy Covenant cards that had been recommended by the DCC to its member denominations and congregations. Over two thousand signatures were obtained over a year's period, and the program evolved into a listing of "open housing" available for sale. No distinction was made between the signatures received from the religious community or the general public.

Opposition to racial discrimination in housing had slowly been gathering community strength from the convergence of efforts by the religious and political communities in the 1950s. To suggest that the Open Housing Movement in metro-Detroit was born with the formation of the Committee on Open Housing in Grosse Pointe is to ignore the significant elements of its origin throughout the post World War II years. The question raises itself. What were these elements that moved the formation of a cause into a movement? Just how did the issue of open housing become the single most important issue Detroit confronted at that moment of its existence?

### **OPEN HOUSING: FROM CAUSE TO MOVEMENT**

In *A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement*<sup>203</sup> Alexander von Hoffman cites Frank Horne's gloomy reflection as a warrior against racial discrimination that "we have been little more than inconsequential fleas on the sinuous hide of a man-

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<sup>203</sup>. Alexander von Hoffman, *A Brief History of the Open Housing Movement*, (Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, 1998).

eating tiger.”<sup>204</sup> Yet von Hoffman insists that the champions of the open housing movement have “triumphed again and again” in the more than five decades of its existence. For von Hoffman the open housing movement began when the chairman of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company told a newspaper reporter that the housing units in Stuyvesant Town project in New York City would not be rented to blacks “because Negroes and whites don’t mix. Perhaps they will in a hundred years from now, but not now.” Civil rights and open housing advocates were unable to prevent approval of the project by New York’s Board of Estimate “but a cause had been born”.<sup>205</sup>

For von Hoffman the “cause” gave birth to the Open Housing Movement when representatives from sixteen groups involved in the Stuyvesant Town campaign organized the New York Committee on Discrimination in Housing. The aim of the organization was to integrate all housing, and one of the most important results of efforts to integrate Stuyvesant Town was the “creation of a permanent national organization dedicated to wiping out racial discrimination in the housing field.”<sup>206</sup> In 1950 the New York open housing reformers founded the National Committee against Discrimination in Housing (NCDH) with the purpose of establishing non-discriminatory and non-segregated housing in the United States.<sup>207</sup> During its first years, the NCDH focused on federal government agency’s influence and on field consultation and education, but

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<sup>204</sup>. Hoffman, *A Brief History*, p. 3.

<sup>205</sup>. Hoffman, *A Brief History*, p. 19. Hoffman is writing about a National Open Housing Movement and his dating the movement with events in New York do not coincide with events in Detroit. There is no record of Detroit’s Open Housing Movement ever having officially united with the national movement.

<sup>206</sup>. Hoffman, *A Brief History*, p. 21.

<sup>207</sup>. Hoffman, *A Brief History*, p. 22. The fifteen organizations were: The American Civil Liberties Union, the American Council on Human Rights, the American Friends Service Committee, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the American Veterans Committee, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the national Association of Intergroup Relations Officials, the National Council of Negro Women and the National Council of Churches of Christ Race Relations Department.

became increasingly aware that the fight for open housing was most effectively waged on the community level.

Opposition to Detroit's policies and practices of discrimination began as spontaneous reactions but the growing economic and political strength of the African American community stimulated organized protests against specific instances of discrimination, including the work of Detroit's Urban League, the NAACP, the Second Baptist Church, St. Matthews Episcopal Church, black labor unions and the Citizen's Housing and Planning Council formed in 1937. Opposition to segregated housing was more formally focused against the Sojourner Truth project in 1942 where both national and city policies advocated white occupancy in the face of a critical housing shortage for African Americans.

The Mayor's Interracial Committee, under executive director George Schermer, had provided the most organized leadership for open occupancy in Detroit from 1943 until his resignation in 1953. It was Schermer's presentation to the Detroit Housing Commission on March 27, 1952 that outlined MIC's position on Detroit's housing issue not as "Negro vs. white" but "whether the government should practice discrimination on the basis of race."<sup>208</sup> MIC regarded the practice of assignment of housing on the basis of race morally wrong.

MIC's rejection of race-based housing assignments on moral grounds made a sharp distinction between "open housing" and "fair housing". Properly understood, MIC's position would have prevented the interchangeable use, even to this day, of the terms "open housing" and "fair housing". Fair housing presupposed some formula that sought to establish equity and fairness between diverse groups. The concept of fair

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<sup>208</sup>. See footnote 17.

housing presumed the practice of unfair housing, but it also presumed one body exercising power by relinquishing some of its privileges over another body in pursuit of justice. However noble the idea of fair housing might be, it was based on the dominance of one over the other. It was rooted in an ideology of racial proportionalism, that there was a statistically significant deviation between the proportions of African Americans in white neighborhoods and while constituting proof of discrimination, used a formula for distribution equal to the total proportional representation.<sup>209</sup> Fair housing was much less than open housing. Open housing was the absence of any and all formulas, restrictions, obstacles, barriers, presumptions of position et al related in any way to race, creed or national origin in the sale or purchase of housing.

George Schermer's resignation as Executive Director of the Mayor's Interracial Committee, when it was replaced by a legislatively authorized Commission on Community Relations (CRR), was far more consequential than the formation of CCR by city ordinance. It was Schermer's leadership that maintained the focus of MIC on racial discrimination and housing segregation. His resignation created a leadership vacuum in Detroit's public quest for open housing. Without visible public advocacy except through individual experiences of discrimination and segregations, open housing remained more a dream than a possibility.

The Archdiocese of Detroit's Catholic Interracial Committee, the MDCC, NAACP, the Urban League and the UAW, which had more of a supporting role than leadership in the cause for open housing, conducted seminars and distributed literature to

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<sup>209</sup>. This sounds like affirmative action, and if there were definitive boundaries in which racial proportionalism could be established they should be. But the housing market has no definitive boundaries and lacking any agency to establish proportions, the exercise of a free and open market offers a more acceptable process.

allay fears of property depreciation and increased crime resulting from removing restrictions against housing for African Americans. Never a formal organized body, this coalition of religious groups, labor activists, and African American organizations and churches maintained some attention to racial integration and open housing. By the mid-1950s, their emphasis had been redirected from advocacy to political action that resulted in the FHA changing its policies to permit African Americans in Detroit to purchase foreclosed houses in white neighborhoods and caused the Michigan Department of State to revoke the licenses of real estate brokers refusing to support open housing.<sup>210</sup> This redirection from advocacy to political activity paralleled the national Civil Rights emphasis on voter registration and civil rights legislation, but the more serious issue for Detroit was not forming legislation against discrimination but the implementation of existing legislation against it.

Wm. Price, director of the Detroit Urban League's Community Services Department, stated in his 1954 report to the League, that Detroit's urban renewal program had displaced an estimated 2000 families and 989 single persons between 1950 and 1953. Nearly 9000 dwelling units were in the path of federally funded highways, and over 1100 families would be displaced from neighborhoods selected for intensive conservation emphasis by 1957. Specific problems facing non-white families seeking shelter included mortgage financing, a severe shortage of decent private housing at reasonable prices, high rents on available rental units, and an insufficient number of public housing units, especially in the four-bedroom category.<sup>211</sup> It was clear that Detroit's public housing

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<sup>210</sup>. For Michigan House and Senate bills preventing real estate discrimination, see Housing Folder, Box 10, part I, Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches Collection. On open housing in the 1950s and early 1960s the Rose Kleinman Papers (Michigan Historical Collection) were informative.

<sup>211</sup>. William Price, "Urban League Report", March, 1954, pp. 1-13. DUL (check box #)

program, even operating at an accelerated pace, could never meet the housing needs of Detroit residents displaced by urban renewal, highway construction, and neighborhood conservation programs.

African Americans with growing incomes had created a market for private housing, and most often replaced whites who were moving out of a neighborhood. Private housing for African Americans was a commodity subject to a disparity between supply and demand and an array of restrictions that maintained a white cultural hegemony. It became increasingly apparent in the 1950s that neighborhoods were in racial succession rather than integration. Instead of maintaining a stable mix of white and African American residents, neighborhoods were in transition from white to African American. Legislation could not establish a stable mix of white and African American residents, but a culture in which the practice of social justice and equality was predominant would create that free and open space in which all could choose where to live without regard for race, religion or national ancestry.

Very few neighborhoods succeeded in maintaining long-term integrated environments, but integrated housing had never been the declared and avowed goal of the African American community. Integration was no more the ultimate choice for African Americans than it was for the white community. African Americans accepted integration as a step along the way to racial equality. Integrated housing had been the white community's perceived goal of African Americans, but open housing was not the same as integrated housing. Open housing was a civil right and the complete elimination of all elements associated with a racially discriminated market. Open housing did not rest on

the principle of “equity” but on the right of every citizen of the United States had to acquire and use real property as stipulated in the United States Code:

All citizens of the United States shall have the same right in every state and territory, as is enjoyed by the white citizens thereof to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold and convey real and personal property.<sup>212</sup>

The goal for African Americans was to have the same right as whites to bargain for shelter on the same terms and conditions anywhere in the housing market.

DCC’s Department of Public Affairs recommended the adoption of their pronouncements “Civil Rights Legislation in 1958” and “Open Occupancy Covenants and the Churches”.<sup>213</sup> The pronouncement on Civil Rights specifically addressed discrimination on the basis of race, color or creed in housing and called for its immediate abolishment. The pronouncement on Open Occupancy called racial segregation the most crucial social and moral problem in society and explicitly called for the implementation of the statement on Civil Rights through the use of the Open Occupancy Agreements cards which had been introduced in several denominations and were recommended to the DCC.

The Open Occupancy Agreements, available from DCC upon requests through individual congregations, were to be signed by those who agreed to the sale of their homes without racial restrictions. They were the first direct involvement offered to the entire membership of the religious community. The statements of DCC were generated and approved by the representative members of churches to the DCC. The laity was to be encouraged to sign the agreements and have their names publicly listed as a sign of support for open occupancy. No official tally was ever recorded of the number of

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<sup>212</sup>. Section 1978, Revised Statutes ( 8 U.S.C. 43); originally Section 1 of the Civil Rights Law of 1866.

<sup>213</sup>. Minutes, November 26, 1958. MDCC, Part 1, Box 8, Folder: Public Affairs Department, 1962-60.

Agreement cards distributed by the DCC and the Greater Detroit Committee for Fair Housing Practices, but slightly more than two thousand names were received over the course of several years and recorded in the minutes of the DCC.

Copies of statements adopted by DCC were always distributed to the member congregations where congregational leadership would determine their use in parish life. The DCC was a council of churches, not a legislative body. It had gathered together the broad expanse of institutional religion's presence in Detroit but it could not enact congregational actions nor require confessional accountability. DCC statements served as resources of information and points of contact. Given the limitations within which the DCC could act, the "Statement on Civil Rights Legislation in 1959 and "Open Occupancy Covenants for the Churches" expressed in the strongest possible terms institutional religion's opposition to racial discrimination in Detroit..

It was the exposure of discriminatory practices by real estate brokers and salesmen in Grosse Pointe and subsequent public hearings detailing them conducted by Michigan's Attorney General Paul Adams and Securities Commissioner Lawrence Gubow that brought together the concerns for basic democratic and cultural values. The formation of Rule 9 that specifically prohibited the use of any technique to restrict the sale and purchase of real estate on the basis of race, creed or ancestry may have been legally flawed but it was part of a broader value system that was embodied in the concept of public interest and well being. Rule 9 went beyond the power and practice of reason, even as it went beyond the political community where Gubow and Adams had much to lose. Gubow and Adams selected the course of action they believed was morally right and felt duty bound to establish as a matter of principle regardless of consequence. The

combination and synthesis of basic moral values they espoused, the dignity and equality of humanity exercised within the structures of democracy, including the executive, legislative, and judicial features of government wherein reason, social justice, freedom and accountability established and protected political equality and economic opportunities, completed the joining together of the many issues of open housing into a movement.

I have suggested 1925 as the beginning of what became known as Detroit's Open Housing Movement in the 1960s, and especially the purchase and occupation of their house by African American Dr. and Mrs. Ossian Sweet in a white<sup>214</sup> neighborhood. The shots fired from the house into the large crowd throwing stones and approaching the house on the second night and the killing of a member of the crowd, were deemed a felony act. Dr. Sweet and ten other men with him were charged with murder. The white public viewed the Sweet's action as a crime. The African American community regarded the Sweets as victims. It was the defense's success in accenting the violation of basic democratic values in the prosecution of the Sweets that ended in acquittals for the indicted. Darrow's portrayal of Ossian Sweet as the embodiment of the American dream and the violation of the Constitution of the United States that was advocated and supported by the white community when it used force and violence against another citizen were themes that would appear again and again in future civil rights battles.<sup>215</sup>

Detroit's white political community was chastened (slightly, at least) and challenged by the public disclosures of its policies and practices, and the subsequent

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<sup>214</sup>. An irony in this story is that the neighborhood was not all-white. The couple that sold the house to the Sweets was a bi-racial couple. The husband was a light-skinned African American and had an equally light-skinned brother on Detroit's police department.

<sup>215</sup>. The NAACP gathered and financed the Sweets' defense team that included Clarence Darrow as the lawyer for the defense. See footnote # 29.

appointment of and report from the Mayor's Interracial Committee (not to be confused with the Interracial Committee formed after the riot in 1943) detailed extensive discrimination with no specific recommendations to correction. With very little political power, African Americans could not change the white political hegemony, and in the 1930s were regarded more as "recipients" rather than "participants" in New Deal legislation.

The New Deal's public housing program for Detroit that was to provide relief for African Americans created aggressive opposition from surrounding white neighborhoods. Instead of remaining victims, the African American community was organized through the leadership of African American churches and was joined by individual whites in making demands on the white political community to implement policies of the New Deal. Basic to the strength of the African American strength was the grounding of their efforts in the basic understanding and practice of American democracy. The use of military and police powers to protect African Americans moving into the Sojourner Truth Project shifted the focus of illegal or criminal activity from the African American community to the white community which had joined in protest. It became increasingly clear that it was the white community who rejected the basic ideals and values of America.

The exposure of the white community's propensity for discrimination and the riot which followed in 1943<sup>216</sup> prompted Detroit's Mayor Edward Jeffries to appoint an

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<sup>216</sup>. There is no evidence of a direct linkage between the allocation of African American families in the Sojourner Truth Project and the riot that followed in Detroit in 1943. It would be naïve to believe, however, that a white cultural hegemony would not seek some form of retribution following such a judgment of their practice. Reason would counsel against it, but not all are reason-able, and before reason and order prevailed in the riot, it was raw vengeance wreaked on African Americans, but not only private citizens, but clearly also, by the Detroit Police Department.

Interracial Committee to pursue ways avoiding such events in the future. It was the Executive Director of the Committee who was soon recognized as the spokesperson for efforts to moderate racial discrimination. Executive Director Schermer served as a guide for the political community and the cultural environment, interpreting and adapting existing policies for a greater application of open and free housing. The decision of the Mayor, made at the urging and support of white homeowner associations that were important elements in his political strength, to terminate the Interracial Committee's activity and restructure it with members and responsibilities that were more compatible with his administration, slowed the momentum toward open housing, but did not stifle it completely.

The activities of the Interracial Committee had been rooted in Detroit's political community and suggested that the basic objectives for open housing would be more completely realized in political activity. The termination of the Interracial Committee and the loss of its leadership shifted reliance from a political solution to racial discrimination to a social one that was increasingly visible in Detroit's white religious community. The decisions of both civil rights groups and the white religious community to engage in more political activity and less advocacy again slowed the momentum of open housing toward a movement status. Neither the civil rights groups nor the white religious community had the organizational structure and leadership necessary to maintain public attention on open housing issues.

The raw and blatant racism exposed in Grosse Pointe, were the elements of personhood over which no one had any control, such as race, color, or national origin or ancestry, brought reason, the basic values of democracy and a commitment to social

justice together. Once a marginal issue in Detroit's public life, more and more attention was now given to open housing through the disclosure of the opposition it received. In an ever-widening circle of information, open housing had become a compelling concern for Detroit.

Communication between members of a group, and communication between groups provided the critical base of information for this development. For the Detroit Council of Churches, having a staff member on the Mayor's Interracial Committee provided a direct and reliable source of information for strategic planning. The sharing of values and commitments maintained a direct communication between the Executive Director of MIC and the DCC staff. To have the Coordinating Council on Human Relations draw together MIC and more than thirty-eight other religious and civil rights organizations was to establish a base of integrity and courage for action. In this network of communication the publication of pamphlets, brochures, booklets, and articles could challenge the fears of property depreciation and crime following African American movement into white neighborhoods.

This network of formal and informal communication between the political and religious communities opposing racial discrimination was only possible because the network consisted of groups sharing the same basic values. Rooted in the dignity and worth of each person regardless of race, religion or national origin, the right and freedom of open housing was just and moral. Racial discrimination was not only illegal; it was the basic denial of personhood that was contained in the truth that all people are created equal. Truth, freedom, personhood, justice, and equality demanded the end of racial discrimination and housing segregation.

The public hearings conducted by Attorney General Adams and Securities Commissioner Gubow on the discriminatory practices of Grosse Pointe realtors had accomplished what Adams and Gubow had hoped. The hearings had been widely publicized. The general public could no longer ignore the issue of open housing. The application of Rule 9 was the most expedient way of addressing the immediate problem of discrimination in housing and property transactions, but there was the possibility of redress by a powerful real estate lobby in the state's political community. There had been a response to racial discrimination from the white political community, and the white cultural hegemony had been confronted with its own inherent baseness. What was needed was an event where the dialectic of political and cultural change could be addressed. The idea for such an event was born when one community group asked what others were doing about the primary thing that was of great concern to them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience**

The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy held in 1963 was the apex for the city of Detroit and its religious faith community in joining together in a single event to address the basic issue of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. Neither before nor after had the city and its religious community joined together in such a unified effort against racial discrimination. The emphasis on the white religious community as the root and ultimate solution of discrimination, promising as it appeared to be, both misrepresented the major theological affirmation of reconciliation between two groups and excluded the participation of the African American faith communities. Equally flawed was the assignation of the community's moral responsibility to the religious community while excluding the political community. The failure to provide for a permanent structure to maintain the relationship between the city and the religious community was a major factor in the conference's ultimate dissipation. The conference had bridged the gap between the city and the faith community for a brief moment in Detroit's history, but the differences in theological affirmations, political and religious governance, territorial imperatives, ecumenical priorities, expectations, financial support, and lay involvement exposed obstacles that were not surmounted.

The genesis for a Metropolitan conference on open occupancy was in meetings of the Neighborhood and Housing Committee of the Jewish Community Council. They wanted to know what the Catholics and Protestants were doing about the same issue of

racial discrimination. At a meeting held in late summer, 1958 at the Jewish Community Center with representatives from Gesu Parish, DCC, one Protestant congregation, and three synagogues, the suggestion for a city-wide meeting was discussed.<sup>217</sup>

Detroit's Commission on Community Relations (CCR), as part of its role of monitoring neighborhood changes, hosted the conference "The Churches' Role in Neighborhood Changes" on December 10, 1958 for representatives from DCC, the Archdiocese,<sup>218</sup> and the Jewish Community. CCR's staff, in a unanimous vote, was "commissioned" to plan a metropolitan conference on open occupancy. The tri-faith group realized they felt more in common with those of other faiths dedicated and working against racial discrimination than with those of their own faith who were apathetic or negative. Each faith had both its committed and its "apathetic, fearful and escapists". Theologies and approaches differed, but each faith regarded forced exclusion on race, creed or national origin an "affront to religious principles and to the religious conscience".<sup>219</sup>

### **NATIONAL MODELS FOR URBAN AMERICA**

Detroit's religious attention to social issues, and most especially racial segregation and discrimination, was part of a national concern. The National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA (NCCCUSA), retained the Department of Race Relations

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<sup>217</sup>. Abraham F. Citron to Gene Wesley Marshall, Nov. 27, 1962. MDCC, Box 8, Folder: Metro.Conference on Open Occupancy. The growing relationship between Detroit's faith communities mirrored the growing relationship between the faith communities on the national level. Official staffs from Detroit's faith communities were involved in their respective national programs, and the support each received from the other encouraged ecumenical action.

<sup>218</sup>. Civil rights activists in the Archdiocese operated through the Committee on Human Relations which was later transformed into the Commission on Human Relations with an Executive Director by Archbishop Dearden in 1959.

<sup>219</sup>. "Challenge to Conscience", Program Booklet, Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience, p. 1. MDCC, Box 8, Folder Metro Conference on Open Occupancy.

of the Federal Council of Churches at its formation in 1950, renamed it the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, and staffed it with one executive secretary. Both the limited staff and the name change sent a message of restraint on racial issues.

NCCCUSA, between 1952 and 1958, adopted two dozen resolutions as their official policy on racial issues. The “Statement on the Churches and Segregation” was the most significant. This statement served as a guide for similar resolutions in Protestant denominations affirming as official policy what had been previously announced by the Federal Council of Churches in 1946.<sup>220</sup> The adoption of this statement occurred only two years after the formation of the NCCCUSA, but it served notice that race relations were not to be ignored. The NCCCUSA also supported the Supreme Court’s ruling on *Brown vs. Topeka’s Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools violated the Constitution. NCCCUSA scheduled meetings only in cities that prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations.

During this same period, individual denominations, including the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) and its extended efforts to initiate programs attacking racial discrimination and establishing social justice,<sup>221</sup> were adopting resolutions and statements on race and human relations at national gatherings. The ULCA’s “A Statement on Human Relations” established a vision more eloquent than any organizational effort for racial discrimination.<sup>222</sup> Less active were the smaller judicatories or regional bodies in more

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<sup>220</sup> James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle* (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), p. 14. The statement noted that “over 90 percent of the 6.5 million Protestant Negroes were in separate [segregated] denominations, and thus without association in work and worship with Christians of other races.” The adoption of the statement by the NCCCUSA was postponed several months to provide “more time” for southern churchmen to study and review its “uncompromising nature” against segregation.

<sup>221</sup> A more detailed account of the ULCA and race relations and its effect on St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church will be included in chapter VII.

<sup>222</sup> The statement on Human Relations is included in the Appendix as background material for the position of the ULCA and St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church detailed in Chapter VII.

immediate contact with church membership, with some Southern regional bodies recommending separation from their national organizations.

Both the ecumenical and denominational structures of Protestantism were more actively addressing the issue of race in the 1950s, but the primary focus was educational. Social statements were meant to inform the membership. Resolutions advocating racial fellowship gatherings and pulpit exchanges did not address the entrenched structural issues of racism. There was lack of urgency about racial issues because it was generally assumed that the solutions to racial discrimination were more evolutionary than revolutionary. The general goodness of human nature would prevail in the end.

A primary program emphasis for the NCCCUSA and its Department of Racial and Cultural Relations was the dissemination of program material to be used by denominations and congregations to purge prejudice. One of its more successful programs was the annual Race Relations Sunday which included the distribution of more than one hundred thousand reprints of the NCCCUSA's "message" on Race Relations, sermons, program helps and the sponsoring of annual institutes on race relations. These programs did not create any long term solutions to such issues as open housing, but contacts between whites and African-Americans created by these programs directed attention to the issue of racial discrimination.<sup>223</sup>

Receiving greater attention in the NCCCUSA during the 1950s was the joining together of Protestant bodies in an ecumenical witness that was most visibly demonstrated in the construction and dedication of the Interchurch Center, the official

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<sup>223</sup> The director of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, Dr. George Edmund Haynes, the only African American on the staff until the late 1950s, created the Race Relations Sunday program as a method and technique to increase contacts between whites and African Americans. The goal of these contacts was to create such satisfying experiences that would produce changes in attitudes and customs for the practice of justice and goodwill.

headquarters of the NCCCUSA, in New York in 1958. President Eisenhower laid the cornerstone before more than 30,000 people. The event paid tribute to the growing solidarity of Protestant and Orthodox denominations. We should not ignore the fact that in that same year the Roman Catholic Church elected Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli as Pope, who took the name of John XXIII and “opened the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people see in”, by convening the Ecumenical Council known as Vatican II. Observers from both Protestant and Orthodox faith communities were invited and attended the sessions over the three-year period of the Council.

### **THE SOUTHERN PROJECT AND NEW THEMES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

It was more than a year after the *Brown*<sup>224</sup> decision that NCCCUSA’s General Board authorized its Department of Racial and Cultural Relations to implement an experimental program to respond to the many crises in the South created by the edict that ended segregated public schools. Only after funds had been secured outside the Department’s existing budget did Will D. Campbell become director of what was known as the “Southern Project”. He crisscrossed the Southern states, established contacts, supported local projects, and played a major role in directing attention to the fact that racial segregation that had been described as the “African-American problem” was really a basic issue of the white community.<sup>225</sup>

Campbell understood his mission as primarily toward the white people of the South. He rejected the language of judgment and condemnation for breaking the law of the land that the South remembered only too well from the violence and law imposed by the North following the Civil War. Campbell used the biblical language of “redemption”

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<sup>224</sup>. The U.S. Supreme court ruled separate school systems based on race unconstitutional.

<sup>225</sup>. George Schermer, MIC’s director from 1943 to 1953, made the same point with his assertion that public housing was not an African American problem, but a housing problem.

and “grace”. For him it was by “grace” that we were no longer African American or white, but members of the same community that had been “redeemed” and that had nothing to do with color. This redeemed community was not created by law but by the Lord. The task for the church was to bring its members to that full awareness of their involvement in racial discrimination that would lead them to repentance and reconciliation. When Campbell asked a woman how “she behaved differently after becoming a Christian, what difference it had made in her behavior toward other races and groups, her response was instant. “‘Only one difference’, she replied. ‘One difference. Now my heart is broken’.”<sup>226</sup> For Campbell this was akin to the white hot emotion and indignation of the prophets, the piercing experience of the pathos and tragedy of the human condition. It was the “broken and contrite heart”, not the indifferent heart that would be an acceptable sacrifice to God.<sup>227</sup>

The NCCCUSA’s Southern project was terminated in 1963 but it had introduced several important “themes” into the ministry of the Protestant community for the improving race relations. What Campbell did and said during his journeys throughout the South contrasted sharply with the resolutions approved at board meetings and church assemblies. There was a direct engagement in Campbell’s ministry. His “walking with the people” exhibited the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, of God in Jesus, the Christ, and set the stage for his concluding judgment, what he called the “humanistic detour” of the churches. This was one of Campbell’s sharpest criticisms of the Protestant ministry in civil rights. He asserted that the Protestant church spoke most often of law and order, human dignity, human rights, democracy, the constitution, the brotherhood of

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<sup>226</sup>. Will Campbell, *Race and Renewal of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p.45.

<sup>227</sup>. The exact quote is from Psalm 51:17: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

man, and the fatherhood of God but ignored the mercy and grace of God which gave new life. For Campbell, the Protestant message should be redemption, not race, class or caste. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. Campbell's participation in the life of the South, including both the "segregationists" and the "integrationists", and his message of grace, redemption, repentance, and reconciliation, spoken to the white churches, were important contributions of the Southern project.<sup>228</sup>

### **CITY AND CHURCH ORGANIZE CONCERNS**

Campbell never visited Detroit in his official role as Associate Director of NCCCUSA's Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, but G. Merrill Lenox, Executive Director of the DCC was very familiar with the Southern Project and Campbell's ministry. NCCCUSA used the gathering of Ecumenical Council Directors from across the nation each summer for a week long retreat that provided both a review of ecumenical activity and future programming. Lenox had served both as recording secretary and program convener at these retreats. Both Lenox and Campbell were ordained Baptist clergy and shared theological insights.<sup>229</sup> DCC's official relationship to NCCCUSA and Lenox's personal relationship with Campbell meant that the progress of the Southern Project was followed and shared, although more informally than formally,

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<sup>228</sup>. Campbell, *Race and Renewal*, pp. 36-49. *Race and Renewal* is Campbell's extended treatment of the Church's failures and attitudes central to the issue of race relations.

<sup>229</sup>. I was a member of the MDCC's Board for Christian Education from 1961 to 1975 and had many conversations with Dr. Lenox about Will Campbell, whom we both admired, and whose teachings and writings we used in our respective ministries. Both Lenox and Campbell had a healthy "disdain" for the church's status quo. In an unsuccessful attempt to schedule Will Campbell for a Preaching Seminar at our parish, I had several long telephone conversations with him about his ministry in the Southern Project. His definition of Christianity remains one of the best... "We're all bastards, but God loves us anyway." It was his understanding of that love for all that gave him the strength and courage to minister to both segregationists and integrationists. Robt. Shelton, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and Martin Luther King, Jr. requested Campbell to visit them when they were imprisoned. It was and remains for me, the model for ministry.

with the small group of Detroit's social activists that included Richard Marks, executive director of Detroit's CCR.

Detroit's history of racial segregation had not included any programs that succeeded in stemming racism. The Mayor's Interracial Committee, first created in 1926 following the Ossian Sweet trial and reconstituted again following the riot in 1943, had concentrated on gathering basic facts of existing conditions for inclusion as information in a program of public education. Both liberal ideology and New Deal policies emphasized the resolution of issues through reason and debate. Basic information was essential for the practice of "reasoned debates" and the primary tool in the fight against racial discrimination.<sup>230</sup> Detroit had extensive information documenting racial discrimination but very little passion for eliminating it.<sup>231</sup>

The establishment of the Coordinating Council on Human Relations (CCHR) in 1947 by Detroit's Common Council to coordinate and foster cooperation among city agencies and civic groups created opportunities for these agencies and groups to support each other and share programs addressing community issues. Having such groups as the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, the Archbishop's Committee on Human Relations, the Detroit Council of Churches, and others join together in conversation and attention to racial segregation had not generated jointly sponsored programs to attack racial discrimination, but did nurture a growing commitment to more aggressive efforts by member groups.

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<sup>230</sup> . The publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* and the wide spread acceptance of its notion that integration was the solution to America's racial dilemma served supported "rational" efforts.

<sup>231</sup> . One of the most persistent assumptions in Detroit's housing market was the depreciation of value when African-Americans moved into a white neighborhood. In his statement prepared for the Housing Workshop at the 1952 NAIRO Conference in Washington, D.C., George Schermer, Executive Director of Detroit's Mayor's Interracial Committee, "The Transitional Housing Area", documented how the value of housing remained stable and often increased when whites did not panic and acted rationally. November 10, 1952, DUL, Box 38, Folder A2-8.

Challenged by both the executive director, G. Merrill Lenox and Raleigh Sain, the DCC representative to Detroit's CCR and CCHR, the DCC's Board of Directors approved sponsoring a conference for denominational leaders in 1956 which reported on successful integration. At the first meeting the DCC sought to emphasize the progress the Protestant community had made in eliminating racial discrimination by profiling individual congregations that had "succeeded in their efforts to become integrated churches."<sup>232</sup> Addresses by the Rev. Alfred Kramer, Associate Director of Racial and Cultural Relations for the NCCCUSA, challenged the clergy to end race discrimination in employment practices, and Mel Ravitz, consultant to Detroit's City Plan Commission,<sup>233</sup> emphasized the grave responsibility the churches had for helping Detroit choose between racial ghettos and integrated neighborhoods. Both moved the content of the conference beyond the sharing of modest successes toward a continuing struggle against racial discrimination.

Six months later the Detroit Urban League solicited support from Detroit's religious community for Mrs. Watkins' move into her newly purchased home in a white neighborhood. Opposition for her move had been formalized at meetings held in a church in a nearby neighborhood. With no white or African American Protestant church within the immediate area, the only support Mrs. Watkins received from Detroit's religious community was a general statement on bias that was not prepared nor released until several months later. What gave this general statement on bias special attention was

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<sup>232</sup>. *The Detroit Church Newscaster*, October, 1956. p. 5. MDCC Archives, Box 17, Folder 17. Reuther Library.

<sup>233</sup>. Mel Ravitz was employed by Detroit's City Planning Commission in the mid 1950s to organize block clubs in compliance with Federal grants to Detroit for urban renewal projects. Interviews with Dr. Ravitz included his experiences with the churches in the various neighborhoods where block clubs were being organized. Few churches permitted block club meetings in church facilities. When asked what he wanted from the religious community, he replied that "he wanted the Christian faith community to live and practice the teachings of Jesus". When asked what he actually expected from them he said, "nothing".

the Detroit Council of Churches joining with Roman Catholics and Jews in calling for fairness and neighborliness to all persons without regard for color, class or creed.

Released through the local press, radio and television, the statement was quoted in state and national newspapers as a model for unified action. The statement's ecumenical format was of greater consequence than its content, initiating prospects for more substantive ecumenical programming.

Denominational programming included invitations to other Protestant bodies, and it was increasingly obvious what one Protestant community was seeking to address would receive wider attention and support if other religious bodies joined in these efforts. By 1959 Detroit's Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish faith communities were joined with the city's CCR in organizing a conference program that would address the specific issue of racial discrimination and open housing. What had been originally suggested by Ralph Smeltzer, an official of the Church of the Brethren, to NCCCUSA's Board of Directors in 1956, that a national conference on the racial revolution should be organized to be more prophetic and to give encouragement to pastors and congregations, now became a conference on race and open occupancy for metropolitan Detroit. Detroit had one of the most serious housing shortages for African Americans in the United States, but by joining together the city's tri-faith religious and political communities it was creating a new model in the national fight against racial discrimination.

The binding of its major faith communities together with Detroit's political and governmental community in a determined effort to remove the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing revealed both the depth of the issue itself and the commitment of the city to eliminate it. For the political community it

marked the scope of responsibility it assumed for the city's social condition. For the religious community it marked the responsibility it assumed for the acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God and the character of life and individual conscience that this acknowledgment creates. In binding together, the faith community ascribed to the city the establishment and preservation of order, and the political community ascribed to the faith community the true nature of humanity redeemed by God. The responsibilities of the city could never be exclusively rooted in the will and desire of its citizens, and the responsibilities of the faith communities could never be exclusively devoted to spirituality. Justice becomes a transforming power when it is permeated by God's righteousness, and human redemption becomes a living reality when it is permeated by justice, equality and civil order. The political community has a positive God-appointed function, and obedience is not a matter of expediency but of conscience. The faith community has responsibility to define what belongs to the political community. The political community must guard against a theocracy, and the religious community must guard against state absolutism.

### **TRI-FAITH COMMUNITY PLANS METROPOLITAN CONFERENCE**

An executive planning committee for the Conference was composed of representatives from the Neighborhoods and Housing Committee of the Jewish Community Center, the Archbishop's newly created Commission on Human Relations, the Public Affairs Department of the DCC, and the Detroit Commission on Community Relations. The city of Detroit provided the meeting facilities for the conference. Other organizations, such as the NAACP, Urban League, Round Table, UAW, Central Business District, Detroit Housing Commission, Greater Detroit Committee on Fair Housing

Practices, Bagley Community Council, and Michigan Coordinating Council on Civil Rights were invited to join in sponsorship, and all accepted, with the exception of the two newspapers, the *Free Press* and *Detroit News*, who believed they could give better publicity if they were not members of the steering committee.<sup>234</sup> Other than the use of the group name in the program brochure, sponsorship included no obligation. The UAW agreed to cover the printing costs of the program brochures.

The Executive Planning Committee, from the very beginning, had sought the highest level of sponsorship from supporting groups. One of the very earliest and most important goals had been the support, involvement and participation of “top sponsorship and the involvement of top names for their symbolic value exhibiting the forthright position and concern for the highest levels of the religious and general community.”<sup>235</sup> It was deemed crucial for the Archdiocese, the Detroit Council of Churches and the Jewish Community Council which represented over three hundred and fifty Jewish organizations, including every synagogue and temple<sup>236</sup> be co-sponsors rather than only by the Archbishop’s Committee on Human Relations and DCC’s Department of Public Affairs. This would demonstrate to the African American community and liberal groups the depth of concern and commitment to this fight against racism. “When it was reported that the Archdiocese itself would co-sponsor the conference and that the Archbishop himself would make every effort to attend that everything began to hum”

<sup>237</sup>The date for the conference was changed twice to accommodate the schedule of

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<sup>234</sup>. Citron to Marshall, p. 4.

<sup>235</sup>. Citron to Marshall, Nov. 27, 1962. MDCC Box 8, Folder: Metro Conf.

<sup>236</sup>. Citron to Marshall, p. 2.

<sup>237</sup>. Citron to Marshall, p. 2.

Archbishop Dearden, but in the end his attendance at the ecumenical Council in Rome did not permit his participation.

Bishop John Dearden,<sup>238</sup> from the Pittsburgh diocese, had been appointed archbishop for Detroit in 1959 shortly after Pope John XXIII himself had been elected to the papal office. Among his initial actions as Archbishop were the creation of the Archdiocese Commission on Human Relations, appointing Fr. James J. Sheehan its director, and pledging of full support with the Protestant and Jewish faith communities to join with them in sponsoring the conference. Archbishop Dearden's directions to priests and parishioners to welcome African Americans into their neighborhoods and congregations and the organization of diocesan teams to visit parishes and conduct seminars, and instruction to priests to preach against racism were regarded as "imaginative efforts to link the Second Vatican Council with American racial concerns."<sup>239</sup>

It was the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit that had been addressing the issue of racial discrimination and segregated housing for the Jewish faith community. For them it was less the issue of discrimination experienced by Jewish families than their concern for the practice itself. For the Rev. Nicholas Hood, newly arrived from New Orleans to assume the pastorate of Plymouth Congregational Church, "one of the interesting things about Detroit when I arrived in 1958 was the effort of the

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<sup>238</sup>. Archbishop Dearden was named a cardinal by Pope Paul VI in 1969.

<sup>239</sup>. John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries, The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 209. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Seasons of Grace, A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1990) writes that Dearden's "generous vision was helping to transform both his city and his Church. The City's reputation for tolerance, however, did not survive the summer of 1967, when the infamous Detroit riot ushered in a new and troubled chapter in the city's history. . . . Detroit is a mostly black city now, and the Catholics of the Archdiocese a mostly suburban population. The problem of race relations has not been solved, but simply evaded—with predictable social consequences." (p. 512).

Jewish community to address racial discrimination and segregated housing at the same time synagogues were leaving the city for the suburban communities.”<sup>240</sup> Representing over three hundred and fifty Jewish organizations, it was the Community Relations committee, directed by Leonard Gordon of the Jewish Community Council, that conducted neighborhood gatherings and facilitated their direct attention to the facts of racial discrimination and segregation.

Increasing attention was also being given to civil rights by Detroit’s political community. Opposition to open housing had been a major feature of Mayor Albert Cobo’s administration from 1950 until his death in office in 1957. His successor, Louis Mirani, sought support from both the white middle-class homeowners and the African American community, but by 1961 his middle-of-the road position on race and housing alienated both white homeowners and the African American voters. In 1961 Jerome Cavanagh defeated incumbent mayor Louis Miriani benefiting from the newly exercised voting power of the African American community. The African American voters also elected Mel Ravitz. He had developed the city’s block club program to comply with Federal grants to the Common Council for urban renewal and development.

Early in 1962 Councilman James Brickley introduced a Fair Neighborhoods Practice ordinance endorsed by Mayor Cavanagh that would provide relief from real estate practices causing fear and apprehension in Detroit neighborhoods. Real estate agents used various tactics, generally referred to as “blockbusting”, to either prevent the sale of homes to African Americans to accelerate the transition from an all-white to an African American neighborhood. The Fair Neighborhood Practice ordinance was

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<sup>240</sup>. Interview with the Rev. Nicholas Hood, member of Detroit Common Council, 1965 to 1993. May 22, 2007.

regarded as a weak ordinance by civil rights supporters and activists. It was adopted in November, 1962, and prevented the use by realtors of appeals to race prejudice and apprehension and prohibited the use of “sold” signs with references to color, race, or creed. The city of Detroit was paying attention to civil rights and a conference was being planned to address the subject.

Mayor Cavanagh, his administration and the tri-faith religious community were committed to address the vexing issue of racial discrimination and segregated housing. The city’s Commission on Community Relations, which evolved from the city’s Mayor’s Interracial Committee in 1943 to a Commission established by city ordinance in 1953, had survived with a great concern for civil rights in a rather hostile political climate. The partnership of the Commission with the tri-faith coalition, and the promise of support from the Cavanagh administration in fighting racial discrimination made the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience a *kairos* moment. A Greek word for time, *kairos* is a very special kind of time and in contrast to *chronos*—regular, normal or clock time; *kairos* was used by New Testament writers to describe the “right” time, the moment of heightened expectations. *Kairos* was the moment of opportunity that history had presented, and not before that moment, nor after, had there been a time in Detroit when the political and religious communities had jointly sponsored and planned such an event for civil rights.

The African American denominations and congregations not affiliated with the Detroit Council of Churches were missing in this joining together of Detroit’s tri-faith religious and political communities. With few exceptions the DCC, which in 1962 renamed itself the *Metropolitan* Detroit Council of Churches (MDCC), was a white

institution, and while efforts were made to reach out into the African American church community, institutional characteristics and theological compositions hindered active relationships. Beyond the broad range of organizational structures and policies, from episcopal governance to independent store-front churches that made it almost impossible for any unified consensual activity, there was the history of alienation and separation that was constantly refreshed by the very issues the religious community was seeking to address. African American clergy and laity were cautious of white gestures of support, and whites were disappointed by the caution they often interpreted as rejection. White and African American Protestant interaction was very limited in Detroit and compromised the conception, planning, structure, conclusions, and recommendations of the Metropolitan Conference.

The initial discussions in the planning of the conference did not include any participative role for African American leadership because the white religious community believed it could operate unilaterally on racial justice. It was the consensus of the Executive planning committee that racism was a “white issue” and that it was the responsibility of the white community to establish the moral conduct of the white community. When the Executive Committee was informed by the NAACP and Urban League that an African American boycott was planned for the Conference, a 6:00 a.m. private “summit breakfast meeting was quickly set up in mid December at the Wolverine Hotel”.<sup>241</sup> Learning that the African American community would not support any program “that affected the human dignity and social rights of blacks unless they were

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<sup>241</sup>. Leonard Gordon, *A City in Racial Crisis, The Case of Detroit Pre-and Post-the 1967 Riot* (Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers ), p. 22.

equal participants in the planning process and on the program”<sup>242</sup>, The Rev. Charles W. Butler of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance was placed on the program as a featured speaker. Labor negotiator Willie Baxter was made a member of the Executive Committee, and Arthur Johnson, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, was placed on the Committee for Conclusions and Recommendations.

### **THE METROPOLITAN CONFERENCE ON OPEN OCCUPANCY**

The conference was designed to target the “specific and intolerable social evil of housing discrimination. We wanted to focus the religious conscience of the community on this specific problem”.<sup>243</sup> The sponsorship of the conference represented Detroit’s organizational effort to end racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. Held on January 2-3, 1963 at the Rackham Building in Detroit, the conference was officially called the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience (MCOO:CC).

Presentations were made by the newly elected Republican governor, George Romney, Detroit mayor Jerome Cavanaugh, councilman Mel Ravitz, and councilman William T. Patrick, Jr., Richard Marks, executive director of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations. Keynote addresses were given by representatives from the faith communities including the DCC, the Archdiocese, the Jewish faith community and African American churches. The conference was Detroit’s most concerted effort to address open occupancy and establish its practice.

Presentations from the religious community acknowledged the collective guilt for the failure to create and sustain a culture of racial equality, a failure that had unacceptable

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<sup>242</sup>. Gordon, *A City in Racial Crisis*, p. 22.

<sup>243</sup>. MDCC, “Challenge to Conscience”, p. 1.

consequences. In his keynote address, the Rev. Charles W. Butler of the Metropolitan Baptist Church and the President of Detroit's CCHR spoke for the African-American in that "continued inequality, continued humiliation, continued second-class citizenship, lack of economic progress, the danger is not violence but something much deeper and harder to combat: a sense of permanent alienation from American society."<sup>244</sup> "For over one hundred years we have been magnificent in our deliberation and woeful in our neglect."<sup>245</sup>

Governor George Romney said at a noon luncheon address that he was "personally convinced that racial, religious, and ethnic discrimination is our most serious domestic problem".<sup>246</sup> Richard Marks, Secretary-Director of Detroit's CCR declared that "open occupancy is not a goal we can tolerate, but one that we must deliberately seek for individual, neighborhood and institutional survival."<sup>247</sup> Councilman William T. Patrick, Jr. maintained that the role of government is to "provide the climate in which all people may develop their fullest potential as responsible, contributing members of the society."<sup>248</sup> Mayor Jerome Cavanagh challenged the leadership of the religious community to "rededicate itself to the creation of a moral and social climate encompassing the full acceptance of all people."<sup>249</sup>

In regarding Open Occupancy as a "challenge to conscience and a challenge to government,"<sup>250</sup> Cavanagh brought together two independent themes in civil rights. His election as Mayor, with major African American support over Miriani, was a prime

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<sup>244</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 13.

<sup>245</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 9.

<sup>246</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 17.

<sup>247</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 5.

<sup>248</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 7.

<sup>249</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 5.

<sup>250</sup>. MDCC, "Challenge to Conscience", p. 5.

example of the growing and more direct action in civil rights. He was acknowledging the increasing demonstrations for better housing, education, employment and a general equality of treatment and opportunity that challenged the responsibilities of government. The other theme was the initial focus of the religious community that accented the moral nature of racism and racial discrimination that education and religious teachings would bring a conscience-stricken community to correct.

The belief that racism could be eliminated by an increased awareness of its practices rested on the deep-seated belief in reliance on the basic goodness of humanity and the power of human reason to solve the problem of racial discrimination. Few said it more forcefully than Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Americans had a “creed” but their practice of racial discrimination contradicted this creed, and Myrdal was convinced that the American practice of racial discrimination would yield to the American creed as white Americans were enlightened and informed with facts.

Myrdal’s optimistic assessment of America’s capacity to resolve its dilemma of racial discrimination included a key indictment that was not as clearly recognized as the road to social harmony. His indictment of American complacency rested on his conclusion that the “Negro problem” was really a “white problem”, and that the white community had to change. Properly understood it was a searing indictment of white America but it was muted by Myrdal’s observation that “Americans have a boundless faith in free inquiry and full discussion.” There was no doubt, he said “that a great majority of white people in American would give the Negro a substantially better deal if they knew the facts . . . even a majority of Southerners would be prepared for much more

justice to the Negro if they were really brought to know the situation.”<sup>251</sup> Myrdal was not the only one to rely on good intentions and good deeds to form a more just society. President Harry Truman’s special committee on Civil Rights used Myrdal’s work as the basic foundation for its report, *To Secure These Rights*, and asserted that the “American Creed” was at odds with racial discrimination and that creed would ultimately triumph over practice.<sup>252</sup>

The challenge for the religious community included the re-forming of individual consciences in their respective faith communities to the confessions of faith to which they subscribed and to the exercise of citizenship. Consciences were formed either by the gradual work of society and upbringing, or by self-conscious and intentional acts.<sup>253</sup> Faith communities were to strive for the formation of a moral awareness that was rooted in worship and a ministry faithful to their relationship with God. The “sacredness of the human person is the central theological and philosophical fact that differentiates us from the communistic belief that man is merely material and temporal, devoid of inherent inalienable rights and, therefore, a thing to be manipulated, used, or abused, for political or economic purposes, without personal freedom or dignity.”<sup>254</sup> The practice of religion extends further into the realms of personhood than any other social institution or government can, and its practice must be “to think and act toward men as if there is one

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<sup>251</sup>. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 2 vols. (1944; reprint, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 1:25-49 (quotations, pp. 21, 48).

<sup>252</sup>. Quoted in David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of “An American Dilemma,”* 1944-1969 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), pp. 118-124.

<sup>253</sup>. What comes to mind here is Geertz’s description of “thick culture”. Any focus on formation points toward communities with their cultures. Many of these “models” for conscience development are unconscious elements that shape ethical positions. Moral formation in the religious community seeks to generate communities in touch with the world and all its problems and yet shaped by the daily sharing/telling of the fundamental stories of faith.

<sup>254</sup>. MDCC, “Challenge to Conscience”, p. 17.

race, the human race.”<sup>255</sup> It would be the practice of religion that would actualize the moral conscience of Detroit’s white religious community.

The exercise of citizenship and the practice of religion by the religious community were included in the conference’s recommendations for “Conscience, Commitment and Action within the Church and the Synagogue”. The fundamental relationship between the church and the city was presented. The life of each neighborhood synagogue and congregation shaped the response of that neighborhood to interracial challenges. Church leaders and laity were to act together in a witness to their presence as a comm(on)unity of faith. The interfaith witness to justice would shape patterns for society. Religion in its institutional presence carried institutional responsibilities and its membership was responsible not only for individual witness and ministry, but also through the proper exercise of institutional power.<sup>256</sup> Religion could and should influence society through the witness and ministry of its members individually and collectively.

A summary statement, “Conclusions and Recommendations”, in recognition of the conference’s date, coinciding with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, was unanimously adopted that specifically requested each church and synagogue to create a Committee on Human Relations and to work to obtain appropriate state open occupancy legislation, establish methods of communication to exchange information and experiences and unite action on every level of activity. The full report of

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<sup>255</sup>. MDCC, “Challenge to Conscience”, p. 22.

<sup>256</sup>. Beginning in 1963, the Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in America directed all member congregations to purchase all supplies from vendors with Equal Opportunity policies, and to engage only with building contractors with non-discrimination rules. When the parish I served as pastor began a building program, one of the first considerations made was the compliance of the preferred contractor with the non-discrimination policy of the Synod. One of the primary arguments presented for the ordination of women in 1970 in LCA, was the public witness it would make to the place of women in our denomination.

the Committee on Conclusions and Recommendations would be used as a guide for study and action by all persons in the total community.<sup>257</sup>

The theme chosen for the conference emphasized the faith community's responsibility to sharpen and activate the consciences of its members to effect justice and prevent the demonization of personal freedoms. This was not to replace the conscience of the political community, since even the political community distinguished between good and evil. This theme championed the faith community as a mediator of human rights, especially for open occupancy. What the theme did not accent was what the relationship with the faith community would effect the political community. It omitted any reference to the realities in which this expression of conscience would act and make its decisions. The theme left unsaid the active participation in political activity that would formulate policies and practices expressive of the justice for which the political community was responsible. The theme ignored basic facts that had been compiled by Albert Mayer and Thomas Hoult, two Wayne State University sociologists, which documented growing residential separation between the races ever since the end of World War II.<sup>258</sup> Their studies included measuring differences in income and educational levels between African Americans and whites. While the middle-class African American community was closing the gap, African Americans in the lower socioeconomic levels were falling behind. The Conference was designed to reduce interracial tensions by appealing to the white conscience and, in effect, assisting middle-class African Americans to move into the larger community. It ignored the growing number of lower-income African

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<sup>257</sup>. The text of "The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy Summary Statement on Conclusions and Recommendations" is included in the Appendix.

<sup>258</sup>. Albert Mayer and Thomas Hoult, *Race and Residence in Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Institute for Urban Studies, 1962).

Americans who were concentrated in segregated areas. The fact remained that even if all middle-class whites were conscience stricken enough to establish open occupancy, only a limited number of African Americans would have been able to afford to move. Acts of conscience alone would not resolve the extent of residential racial segregation. The structural flaws in Detroit's economic, industrial, political, and social life that aided and abetted the continued practice of racial discrimination were left unmentioned by the conference.

The decision of Detroit's white religious community to address racial discrimination in the sale or purchase of housing without involving the African American community deprived the African American community of a fuller understanding of the nature of the issue and how to overcome it. The decision not to include the African American community in the planning of the conference was a deliberate one. It was based on the judgment that the issue was a "white issue" and should be resolved by the white community. It was made because of the experience of white Detroit's separation from the African American community. There were very, very few African American churches involved with the Detroit Council of Churches, and African American members of white churches in the DCC were not representative of the African American community.<sup>259</sup> Attempts to gather African American churches into the Council had met with very little success and the separation remained. Organizational governances and policies were important factors in this separation, but the resulting void allowed and

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<sup>259</sup>. In retrospect whites did not recognize or acknowledge the social, economic, educational, political et al influences shaping community groupings in the African American community. Just as one white church can never represent the entire white community neither should we have assumed that individual churches/members from the African American community represented all African Americans? One of the important observations in the Kerner report was the same lack of "solidarity" that existed in the white community also existed in the African American community.

fostered interpretations and explanations that rested on half-truths or the judgments of only one party in the relationship. Not to be ignored is the element of arrogance that encourages one party to believe it can adequately understand and convey the experiences and beliefs of the other.

The major missing ingredient for the conference was the African American community in both planning and participating with the white community on an issue of great mutual concern. White Detroit believed it could act unilaterally on racial justice and ignored the rising tide of civil rights activity and growing inner-city discontent. True as it was that white racism was responsible for the “explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II”<sup>260</sup>, it was a fatal error to deny African Americans of their critique and judgment. Mayer and Hoult reported in 1962 that 95% of affluent white Detroit area residents were not interested in open urban renewal housing<sup>261</sup>, but active relationships with the African American community would have recognized the limited range of actions from a conference challenging white consciences. Something more radical than a challenge to conscience was needed to combat racism and racial discrimination. Inclusion of African American leadership would have given greater attention to the broader range of issues created by basic racism. Yet even the leadership of the African American community was not always aware of the depth and scope of discontent in African American Detroit. Arthur Johnson, Executive Director of the NAACP, reminded leaders from the African American community that he

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<sup>260</sup>. *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 203.

<sup>261</sup>. Gordon, *A City in Crisis*, p.14.

and his organization “had to run to keep up with his people because he was their leader.”<sup>262</sup>

The omission of the African American community from the conference precluded a discussion of the difference between a judgment to condemnation and a judgment to reconciliation which is a major feature of prophetic religion. There was no provision for a presentation or discussion that would have assisted the white community to accept the judgment that the issue of racial discrimination was not a “white problem”, but a judgment to reconciliation and not to condemnation. The purpose for judging racial discrimination to be a social evil included both punishment for evil deeds, and the resolution of a major social issue. It was what one intended the judgment to accomplish that influenced the way in which the judgment was rendered.<sup>263</sup> It was the difference between having made mistakes, and making things right; between abdicating responsibilities and accepting them; between a fight against racial discriminators and a fight against discrimination.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup>. Op.cit. Metropolitan conference on Open Occupancy, MDCC, Box 8, Folder “Metro Conference”

<sup>263</sup>. I vividly remember an incident from years ago when I openly disciplined a student for interrupting a class with his behavior. He responded by saying that he knew very well that what he was doing was wrong, and he did not need me to point that out. What he needed was for me to help him correct it. ...I had judged and condemned his actions, but not to any reconciliation.

<sup>264</sup>. Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 11-46. Marsh's account of Mrs. Hamer's fight for freedom is an illustration of the difference between judgment to condemnation and judgment to reconciliation. Arrested in the summer of 1963 for her work in Mississippi and the Delta project, and taken to jail in Winona, Mississippi where she was repeatedly beaten, and finally thrown into a cell that was called the “death cell” by two FBI agents who visited her two days after the beatings. It was on the night before she was released (unknown to her at the time) that she began to sing, and Marsh writes “their singing did not remove their suffering, or the particularities of their humiliation; rather, it embraced the suffering, named it, and embraced it in a cosmic story of hope and deliverance. Despair turned into a steady resoluteness to keep on going. And at least for Mrs. Hamer, a peaceable composure, incomprehensible apart from a deep river of faith, transformed not only her diminished self-perception but the perception of her torturers. She said astonishingly, ‘it wouldn't solve any problem for me to hate whites just because they hate me. Oh, there's so much to hate, only God has kept the Negro sane.’” p.22.

Now the difference is between the function of the state and the practice of being a people of faith. The basic function of the state is the establishment and preservation of order. To deprive the state of the right to the use of force to both discipline its citizenry and to defend them against enemies is to deprive the state of the right to exist. The reality of evil requires the presence of force to control it, but that is not the end purpose of force. Just as the preamble to the Constitution states that the United States is not only to “insure domestic tranquility” and “provide for the common defense”, it is also to “establish justice”. To establish justice, promote welfare and secure liberty defines the state as a community of law, and it is the law which distinguishes between true and false government.

The practice of the people of faith is to render judgment to reconciliation and not to condemnation. Recognition of racial discrimination as a demonic act is the judgment of life that the community of faith would make as the champion of human rights. It is the first step in the recognition of what divides the community and what needs to be done to bring it together.

God did not save man out of society, but redeemed him in and through community relationships. What concrete form faith took in this journey toward a reconciled community was never known ahead of time, because there was no fixed moral code or static set of principles that predetermined religious life. The break-through of faith-grounded love transformed attitudes and provided the opportunities for wholly new dimensions of community life.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup>. Will Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). Campbell recounts the story of his “conversion” when an editor friend challenged him to determine which person God loved more...the deputy sheriff who killed Jonathan Daniels as he exited a corner grocery store, or Jonathan Daniels, the young seminarian killed. Campbell realized he was “caught”...for he insisted that God loved

This social ethical activity was generated by the Holy Spirit as it mediated the alien righteousness of God to the religious community in such a creative way that it constantly actualized this loving service to reconciliation. A primary purpose of the religious community was to provide, by its own life, examples of a community under God where justice and love endured, and to educate and support its members in exercising their political responsibilities as citizens of the state.

The deliberate decision by the conference to not provide for continuing leadership and measurable accountability in this new hybrid relationship of religion and society was also flawed. The decision not to establish an inter-religious structure to carry out its recommendations was based on the judgment of the planning committee that an “intensification and more systematic use of the methods which brought about the Conference; namely cooperation on the neighborhood, church and parish level” would be the “best method of cooperative follow-up.”<sup>266</sup> The Conference planners gave considerable thought to “follow up” but “no one feels there should be a continuing metropolitan-wide interreligious structure to work on this problem.”<sup>267</sup> There was some agreement with recommendations to schedule a series of area conferences and a state-wide conference, but the primary responsibility belonged to

Catholic, Jewish and Protestant parish and congregational groups; either at the state of preparing a neighborhood for change, or working for welcome, decency, anti-hysteria, against flight and blight, and for enhancement and stability when Negroes move in. It isn't that we do not

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them both in the same way. The experience caused Campbell to redirect his whole ministry... to include the Southern “rednecks” with the Civil Rights workers. Some time later while sitting with his nephew’s body in the funeral home, he is addressed by his favorite uncle from whom he had been estranged because of his ministry among Civil rights personnel. Sharing his coffee with Will, Will writes that “until dawn, I sat in the redemptive company of a racist Jesus”. From that time forward he ministered to all with and in the same love.

<sup>266</sup> . Citron to Marshall, p. 5.

<sup>267</sup> . Citron to Marshall, p. 7

need cooperation but we feel that formal organization at the top would not be productive of the action we need<sup>268</sup>

It was a judgment that echoed the words of George Edmund Haynes, the first director of the Federal Council of Church's Department of Race Relations, in his article "Changing Racial Attitudes and Customs" that "the churches and their allied organizations are the great outstanding organs for the development of goodwill, understanding and interracial cooperation in the spirit of brotherhood."<sup>269</sup>

The decision to distribute responsibility for the implementation of the Conference recommendations to the neighborhoods, churches and parishes, rather than forming a new inter-religious leadership structure may have been based more on reality than rational conceptualization. There were very few, if any, individuals who were not already actively participating in anti-racial discrimination efforts. The committees of the tri-faith coalition represented the majority of individuals committed to a more aggressive fight against racial discrimination, but sectarian programs had priority over ecumenical efforts. Ecumenism had always maintained that what churches could do together should never be done alone, but the reality was that churches do together only what they cannot do alone. Congregations and denominations were struggling to survive. As they faced increasing opposition to social changes, programs of liturgical renewal<sup>270</sup> and declining membership and financial support, increasing attention was being paid to matters at "home". It was

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<sup>268</sup>. Citron to Marshall, p. 4.

<sup>269</sup>. George Edmund Haynes, "Changing Racial Attitudes and Customs", *Phylon* (1940-56), Vol. 2, No. 1 (1<sup>st</sup> Qtr. 1941), pp. 28-43.

<sup>270</sup>. Vatican II introduced new liturgical forms and use of vernacular languages for Mass. Protestant denominations also revised traditional liturgies. Changing liturgies often included using new texts of the Lord's Prayer, and as everyone knows, that is something not everyone supported.

simply a fact of life that fewer people and fewer dollars were available to participate in and fund ecumenical programming.

It was not only a matter of numbers, people or financial. There is no record of Will Campbell having attended the January, 1963 conference in Detroit, but in his report to the NCCCUSA Board of Directors in 1959 explaining the Southern project, and which he expanded in his *Race and the Renewal of the Church* in 1963, he stated that “Protestantism had difficulty making a witness in the crisis of American race relations, partly because it had no widely recognized spokesmen, no clearly defined lines of authority of policy and action, and no strong lay support.”<sup>271</sup> He did not advocate or plead for a monolithic ecclesiastical structure or infallible clergy, but he did assert that “American pulpits do not have the authority requisite for leadership in social change. The elected officials and professional staffs charged with the social witness of the denominations did not possess sufficient authority to represent the church in such a way as to help it become an effective influence for change in society.”<sup>272</sup>

The congregational governance of Protestant communions and a less than adequate primary formation in the essentials of faith in local congregations permitted a “disconnect” from the more adventurous forms of social witness. Without a congregational structure for confessional accountability or a solid theological base for social consciousness, the societal values surrounding Protestantism more often formulated its message to the society. In the summary of its recommendations and conclusions, the Metropolitan Conference was calling upon Detroit’s religious faith community to be the moral community for Detroit. In the absence of any

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<sup>271</sup>. Campbell, *Race and the Renewal of the Church*, p. 50.

<sup>272</sup>. Campbell, *Race and the Renewal of the Church*, p. 50.

recommendations for structural changes in the economic, industrial, social and political practices of Detroit, it would be the moral witness of Detroit's religious community that would lead the community to open occupancy and the exercise of social justice. It would not be enough to make statements and resolutions. To be the moral community of Detroit, the religious community would have to embody the moral content of justice!

It was theologically correct and eternally hopeful but it was unrealistic. To have every synagogue and congregation embody the moral content of justice in conformity with each other was to ignore the very differences that had created Detroit's pluralistic religious community. True as it is that if Christianity and Judaism were more radical in the "gospel sense" there would be less need for legal legislation and regulation, it was also true that both Christianity and Judaism were fallible human associations torn by internal dissent.

What the Metropolitan conference did provide was the larger context for each congregation and synagogue in Detroit in which the moral challenges of the community were received. The conference was restricted by time constraints that prevented the full measure of racism's impact on public life. Racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing was subjected to broad criticism and placed before Detroit's religious community with recommendations and requests for permanent attention and action. It was the time when Detroit's religious community was called upon to be what it was.

The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience (MCOO:CC) was a benchmark moment in Detroit's civil rights community, and sharpened community awareness of civil rights issues. The conference, attended by more than twelve hundred attendees, was a challenge deliberately directed toward the white

community, and the absence of African Americans, except for two presenters and leaders of worship discussions, was expected. It acknowledged failures of past programs composed and presented in liberal ideology and openly recommended political involvement. It composed recommendations for continued attention and implementation. The conference gathered Detroit's religious community with the political community in a specific focus brought attention on racial discrimination in the sale or purchase of housing, and the formal lines of communication that had served in the planning of the conference remained available, albeit informally, during the following years.

The conference did not establish a leadership structure for future programming. However, a group of who participated in the Detroit Conference attended the National Conference on Race and Religion that was planned by the NCCCUSA and which convened in Chicago three weeks after the Metropolitan Conference in Detroit.<sup>273</sup> Ignoring the Detroit conference, the Chicago conference hailed itself as the “first major ecumenical effort—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews joining together—to focus attention on the racial crisis” but its “rhetoric outweighed the ability to mount concrete programs of action.”<sup>274</sup> Upon their return from the National Conference in Chicago, the group from Detroit formed an “Action and Follow-up Committee” to carry out the aims of the national conference, and urged the creation of a permanent structure that would carry out the recommendations of the Detroit Conference.

In his letter to A. Harold Murray of the American Jewish Committee, the Rev. James Sheehan, the Roman Catholic representative on Detroit's tri-faith Conference

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<sup>273</sup>. Detroit's Conference on Open Occupancy had originally been scheduled for summer, 1962 and would have preceded the Chicago conference by more than six months. Wanting Cardinal Deardon to attend, they changed the dates twice to accommodate his schedule but in the end he was unable to attend due to his participation in Vatican II.

<sup>274</sup>. James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle*, p 32.

committee, expressed his disappointment at the slow pace of activity following the January conference. “Perhaps because most of us were far behind in our individual offices, things were all too quiet after our return from Chicago.”<sup>275</sup> The ad hoc Action and Follow-up Committee, formed to carry out the aims of MCOO:CC and the national conference in Chicago, recommended its withdrawing from Detroit’s Commission on Community Relations. It changed its name from the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy to the Metropolitan Conference on Religion and Race and “added the Greek Orthodox Diocese as a constituent member.”<sup>276</sup> The Action and Follow-up Committee also planned a conference on housing and prepared a brochure listing the best available aids in Human Relations available locally.

Abraham Citron explained in his letter to Jeanette Cleary of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, that the Executive Committee of the MCOO:CC had changed its name to the Metropolitan Conference on Religion and Race because their concerns were about more than the housing problem. They wanted to express their “intent to constitute an on-going and continuing agency for cooperation and coordination of all religious agencies interested in action in the field of inter-group relations.” Citron noted especially the “continuing cooperation of the Commission on Community Relations of the City of Detroit” and the commitment emphasized by the presence of “Dick Marks” at their meetings. It was their consensus that there be a

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<sup>275</sup>. James Sheehan to A. Harold Murray, March 14, 1963. MDCC, Box 8, Folder “Metro. Conference on Open Occupancy.

<sup>276</sup>. Shmarya Kleinman, “The Religion and Race Conference,” Minutes of the Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, meeting of September 25, 1963, p. 3

permanent secretary to keep minutes and a “convener or chairman rotated among the three religious agencies represented”.<sup>277</sup>

### **DETROIT’S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY HOSTS EVENTS**

The pace of events was moving slowly in Detroit for James Sheehan, but were accelerating on the national scene, and most likely unknown to Sheehan, were also developing in Detroit’s African American community. The Chicago conference had provided a major platform for the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to address white Protestantism. Three months after his Chicago address, King launched his campaign to desegregate Birmingham, Alabama. What Detroit’s white religious community apparently did not know<sup>278</sup> was that the Rev. C. L. Franklin, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church and a personal friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., had invited King to come to Detroit and lead a march down Woodward Avenue in support of the southern freedom struggle and Detroit’s African American community.

Franklin organized the Detroit Council for Human Rights at a Friday evening meeting at Bethel Baptist Church in May, 1963 to raise support and money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>279</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. King had been arrested in Birmingham, AL shortly after organizing civil rights demonstrations. Over eight hundred attended the first meeting of the Detroit Council for Human Rights, when Franklin announced that it would host a Freedom March on June 23, to raise money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and support for King’s program in

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<sup>277</sup>. Abraham Citron to Jeanette Cleary, June 7, 1963. MDCC, Box 8, Folder “Metro Conf on Open Occupancy”.

<sup>278</sup>. There is no reference to the appearance of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Detroit on June 23, 1963. in any document I have examined related to the programs planned by Detroit’s white religious community. Neither C. L. Franklin or Albert Cleage, Jr. participated in MDCC related programming.

<sup>279</sup>. The Rev. Nicholas Hood was the secretary of the New Orleans chapter of the SCLC before coming to Detroit as pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church in 1958.

Birmingham, Al. C. L. Franklin also sought and received the support from the Baptists Pastors Union for the march and fund raiser, only to have it retracted several days later because the Baptists Pastors had scheduled their own fund raising rally for King in July. The Baptists Pastors had also encouraged Franklin to include white churches and clergy in support of the march. Franklin's Freedom March was supported and endorsed by the Michigan AFL-CIO union organization headed by August Scholle, the Trade Union Leadership Council, CORE, and the Wolverine Bar Association, but the marchers came from the African American churches, social clubs, and neighborhood organizations.<sup>280</sup>

The Rev. Nicholas Hood did not participate in planning the march nor did he know about King's participation until the very last week, but he remembers announcing Sunday morning that the participants would gather on the church parking lot at 2:00 p.m. and march to Woodward Ave. He said that when they reached Woodward it was "sidewalk to sidewalk a solid mass of people...he had never seen anything like it and he was completely astounded. It was black Detroit marching."<sup>281</sup> On June 23, 1963 King led a march of nearly two hundred thousand supporters down Woodward Avenue in Detroit and delivered the speech "I Have A Dream"<sup>282</sup> that he repeated at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963.

Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, Michigan's former Governor John Swainson and UAW president Walter Reuther were the only whites that accompanied King in leading the march.<sup>283</sup> There is no record of any white religious leader from Detroit invited to

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<sup>280</sup>. Detroit Community Commission for Human Relations, Series III, Box 19, File Detroit Council for Human Folder Walk to Freedom, June 23, 1963. ALUA.

<sup>281</sup>. Nicholas Hood Interview, May, 2007.

<sup>282</sup>. "A Call to Conscience", Martin Luther King, Jr. [Http://www. Stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/ Speech-at-the-great-march-on-detroit](http://www.Stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Speech-at-the-great-march-on-detroit). February 10, 2007.

<sup>283</sup>. Jerome Cavanagh had been elected mayor over Louis Miriani with the support of the African American vote. Shortly after taking office, he appointed African Americans to key positions and instituted a non-

participate,<sup>284</sup> or any recorded discussion in Protestant circles acknowledging the prophetic themes King introduced in his speech which could have bridged the gap between the white and African American religious communities. With few exceptions, my personal conversations with members of the parish and clergy colleagues regarding the march disclosed a general feeling of antipathy verging on hostility. The March organizers deliberate exclusion of the white community in both planning and participation reflected the wide gulf between not only white and African American Detroit, but also between its religious faith communities, where one would have hoped for more of an effort toward mutual witness. The absence of the white community's participation in the march in June matched the absence of the African American community's participation in the Metropolitan Conference in January.

The actual number of marchers led by Martin Luther King, Jr. has never been established, but there can be no doubt, as the Rev. Nicholas Hood observed, "it was black Detroit marching". It was the first time such a great number of Detroit's African Americans had gathered in one place but it should not have been such a great surprise. The growing economic strength of the African American community that enabled it to expand educational, residential, social, and leisure activities was increasingly thwarted by both institutional and personal practices of racism and discrimination. The development

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discriminatory hiring practice for the city. Democrat Governor Swainson had been a strong supporter of Civil Rights legislation and Walter Reuther's UAW had been at the forefront of Detroit's fight against discrimination. Republican George Romney had defeated John Swainson in the November 1962 election, but was not invited to participate in the parade. Those present and those absent were important marks of the state of affairs between white and African American Detroit.

<sup>284</sup>. Interview with the Rev. Canon Wm. Logan, Michigan Diocese, ECUSA, included Canon Logan remembering that when Bishop Emrich learned of the parade and was unable to change his schedule to join in the march, he requested the Dean of the Cathedral, the Very Rev. John Weaver, to represent him in the march. The marchers assembled on Woodward Avenue in the immediate area in front of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Episcopal Diocesan headquarters. C. L. Franklin's refusal to include white clergy in the planning process or invite them to participate in the parade was another reason for the withdrawal of support and sponsorship of the Baptists Pastors Union for the parade. Hiley Ward, *Detroit News*, June 12, 1963.

of African American leadership in organized labor brought expertise and experience to their community that could activate and focus community concerns. The Freedom March of June 23, 1963 was the Detroit African American community's display of its presence and its growing power. It was a display of presence and power that went counter to where American culture had placed them.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. had written in *The Vital Center*, published in 1949, that "history had equipped modern liberalism . . . to construct a society where men will be both free and happy."<sup>285</sup> Given the domination of liberalism in American thought and politics following World War II, one can readily understand the influence of liberalism in the programming of white Protestantism's ecumenical organizations. The national Race Relations Sunday Program's emphasis on providing information through pamphlets, brochures, sermon outlines, and the encouragement of "pulpit exchanges" in white and African American churches was repeated in Detroit in the hope that positive interaction would create human mutuality. Detroit city and suburban congregations were paired together for the purpose of pulpit, choir and lay leadership exchanges, and invitations encouraged attendance at congregational fellowship events. The encouragement of the support and participation of white churches from Detroit in Southern voter registrations rested on the belief that white and African American interaction and African American votes would place, what Myrdal had called the American Creed,<sup>286</sup> into practice.

Reinhold Niebuhr, as early as 1932, had criticized liberalism's belief that education or religion or any other human program could resolve and end social conflict. In his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* he rejected the possibility that man could

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<sup>285</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 4, xx.

<sup>286</sup> The American Creed was the center of Myrdal's conclusion that the ideals of equality, justice, liberty and a fair treatment of all people would keep the United States together.

compose a moral society because the natural impulses of humanity's collective nature would prevail over individual morality. It was the basic limitation to human nature that would create a cumulative effect in community life and political power and would guide the public order, rather than individual moral or rational persuasion. Twelve years later, in his *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, Niebuhr wrote that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible. Man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." Liberalism believed that prejudice would yield to information and education, and Niebuhr believed that prejudice would yield only to force, or political power.

It was Niebuhr's critique of liberalism's doctrine of man and indictment of institutional morality that attracted Martin Luther King, Jr.'s attention as a graduate student at Boston University. Born and reared in the African American church with its attention to the Old Testament prophets, King developed prophetic themes during his seminary days that he later included in his speeches and writings.<sup>287</sup> Niebuhr's own theological themes were drawn less from the Old Testament prophets than from New Testament sources, but Niebuhr's New Testament sources organized and framed the prophetic themes in a way that Niebuhr could re-present in a language twentieth century intellectuals understood. Jesus' attack on the Temple and his warnings against the moral decline of the Israelite nation were used by Niebuhr to indict institutions and speak against the capacity of nations to create morality.

Civil rights had never been one of Niebuhr's higher priorities, even though his pastorate in Detroit had exposed him to the facts of extended racial discrimination. He had written more about the nature of political power and its use and abuse than about

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<sup>287</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope. Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 42-56.

those abused by it. As early as 1926 he had acknowledged that “the white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so”.<sup>288</sup> He cautioned against any use of violence, but believed that some form of nonviolent resistance was necessary. Referring to Mr. Gandhi’s experience in India, whom he called “the greatest modern exponent of nonviolence”, Niebuhr quoted Gandhi’s declaration that “the ordinary methods of agitation by way of petitions, deputations and the like is no longer a remedy for moving to repentance a government so hopelessly indifferent to the welfare of its charge as the Government of India has proved to be.” Niebuhr concluded that “non-violent coercion and resistance is a type of coercion which offers the largest opportunities for a harmonious relationship with the moral and rational factors in social life.”<sup>289</sup>

Thirty-one years after Niebuhr had written that “it was hopeless for the Negro to expect complete emancipation from the menial social and economic position into which the white man has forced him, merely by trusting in the moral sense of the white race”<sup>290</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the nearly two hundred thousand participants at Detroit’s Freedom March, on June 23, 1963. King was a product of the American south in which the African American who had dared to present himself in this manner would have lived a short life. He was an exception to Niebuhr’s generalized characterization of the America of the 20s, but Niebuhr was more right than wrong, and King was more an exception than the rule for African Americans of his generation.

In his “I Have a Dream Speech” King called the march a “magnificent demonstration of our commitment to nonviolence” and said “all over the nation, we are

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<sup>288</sup>. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, p 253.

<sup>289</sup>. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, pp. 242-252.

<sup>290</sup>. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, p. 252.

simply saying that we will no longer sell our birthright of freedom for a mess of segregated pottage. In a real sense, we are through with segregation now, henceforth, and forevermore.” It was Niebuhrian theology, born and honed in the Detroit of the 1920’s, and in his articulation of nonviolence King proclaimed it “marvelous to have a method of struggle where it is possible to stand up against an unjust system, fight it with all your might, never accept it, and yet not stoop to violence and hatred in the process.” He ended his speech with the ringing declaration that “with this faith we will be able to achieve this new day when all God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing with the Negroes in the spiritual of old: ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!’”

Sadly, white Detroit did not hear what King said in June, 1963. What David Wills said about “the relationship between black Americans and the Protestant establishment during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century” could also be said about Detroit. It was “above all a story about distance.”<sup>291</sup> Both the Federal Council of Churches and its successor, the NCCCUSA had renounced segregation in race relations and committed themselves to “work for a non-segregated church and a non-segregated society”.<sup>292</sup> No less committed to a non-segregated church body was the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches, but for all their efforts their greatest success in gathering together African American churches was their compiling of the annual directory of Churches in Detroit and Windsor.<sup>293</sup> Both African American clergy and laity from mainstream Protestant

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<sup>291</sup>. David W. Wills, “An Enduring Distance: Black Americans and the Establishment”, in William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times, The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America 1900—1960*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 168-192.

<sup>292</sup>. Cited in David M. Reimers, *White Protestantism and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 112.

<sup>293</sup>. One should not underestimate the effort or value the MDCC’s annual directory represented. Many of the congregations in the African American community were independent congregations and had at best,

denominations were part of MDCC's leadership and committees, but the overwhelming majority of African Americans in Detroit belonged to churches not involved in MDCC's programming and ministry.

The theological themes in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Detroit speech were opportunities for the white Protestant churches to share their ministries. African Americans were redeemed people who recognized the generic intransigence of institutions and sought the full freedoms of life in non-violent ways. The political facts of their life were clear, and it was the religious faith shared by all within the Christian community that would confront and correct where injustice abounded.

There was no response or support for King's address from Detroit's white Protestant community. Both their historical separation and the prejudices of the white community prevented them from grasping a very unique opportunity to engage in mutual reflection. There is no record of any official overture from MDCC to the African American community that offered to join with that community in their non-violent struggle against racial discrimination. Mainstream MDCC Protestant denominational leaders encouraged their denominational member congregations to seek and develop partnerships with African American congregations within their general neighborhoods. Individual pastoral and congregational overtures and invitations to partnership were unable bridge the separation that official denominational or ecumenical action might have achieved. There is no way to estimate the response the ULCA Michigan Synod might have received to an invitation to the clergy and members of African American

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loosely structured affiliations with larger bodies. Simply gathering the correct names of clergy, addresses and telephone numbers required a great amount of time.

congregations in Detroit to discuss King's address, but it would have been a witness to faith to have offered one.

African American Detroit was beginning to express itself, but Detroit's white religious community was unable to match the support the African American community demonstrated in the Freedom March of June 23, 1963, nor could they host such emotionally charged events as the NAACP's demonstration protesting housing discrimination in Oak Park, MI that featured Rosa Parks and Merle Evers, whose husband Medgar, NAACP Mississippi field secretary, had been assassinated June 12 in Jackson, MS.

The first sign of dissension and division within the African American community was the November, 1963 visit of Malcolm X to Wayne State University. Albert Cleage hosted the visit in order to provide a counter conference speaker for C. L. Franklin's Northern Negro Leadership Conference occurring at the same time. Franklin and Cleage were clergy members of different church bodies and never had a close relationship. Cleage's involvement in arrangements for King's visit had been very limited. When Franklin invited African American clergy from the northern United States to Detroit to develop a leadership program similar to King's SCLC, Cleage hastily arranged for a gathering of clergy committed to his anti-integration programs of self-determination. African American nationalist leaders protested Franklin's integrationist and coalition orientation while African American integrationists protested Cleage's separatism and anti-integrationist programs. Neither conference was well-attended, but Malcolm X's speech at Wayne State received the most media coverage. Cleage later formed the

Freedom Now Party, the precursor to the Black Panther Party. Arthur Johnson, executive secretary of Detroit's NAACP called it "a split in ranks, but not in consequences."<sup>294</sup>

### **MDCC ASSUMES ENABLING ROLE**

By mid-summer 1963, there were at least fourteen groups in Detroit that were organizing anti-discrimination programs and events. They ranged from the UAW and its members to two committees from city government. They also included church sponsored groups in both the white and African American communities, and several local chapters of national organizations. As one of the fourteen, the tri-faith Conference on Religion and Race sought to implement the recommendations and conclusions of the Metropolitan Conference, but clearly defined leadership had not been established nor secured, and the white Protestant churches were invited and encouraged to work through the MDCC.

G. Merrill Lenox, facing budget restraints caused by declining denominational support, but committed to the fight against racial discrimination recommended the formation of a special Commission on Religion and Race in the MDCC that would combine the programs of the National Council of Churches and their newly created Commission on Religion and Race with Detroit's ad hoc committee that was determined to carry out the recommendations of the Conference. In his letter to the MDCC Board of Directors soliciting their attendance at a breakfast meeting to act on the proposal, Allan A. Zaun, president of MDCC called attention "to the grave nature of the present situation, not only nationally but in our own community as well."<sup>295</sup> The actual funding of the

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<sup>294</sup>. DCCR, Box 12, Folder 12-18 "Northern Leadership Conference". ALUA.

<sup>295</sup>. Allan A. Zaun to Denominational Executives, August 12, 1963. MDCC, Box 8, Folder 8, ALUA

approved Commission depended on the offerings received above and beyond the regular contributions from MDCC's supporting denominations.<sup>296</sup>

An important concluding recommendation of the Metropolitan Conference, and a challenge presented by both Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh and Governor George Romney that the religious communities join together in an integrated and cooperative effort against racial discrimination, spurred efforts for a more permanent inter-faith religious structure. The number of men and women committed to action against racial discrimination and available for committees and leadership roles was limited for several reasons. Staff personnel were used for both committee assignments and leadership roles. This practice maintained the existence of the committees but reduced the involvement of the laity and ultimately compromised the churches' ministries.<sup>297</sup>

Beyond the issue of supporting or opposing the church's' position and their actions against racial discrimination that eliminated many laity from these committees, there were the practical issues of committee meeting places and times. Unless a person were retired, self-employed, salaried by an employer which permitted time away from work, or was a stay-at-home spouse, participation in committee meetings most frequently scheduled during day-time hours would be very difficult.. The lack of reliable public transportation complicated such participation, and hourly personnel were almost automatically excluded. Committees led by staff and meeting during "working hours"

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<sup>296</sup>. The reply received from Frank Madsen, president of the Michigan Synod, LCA to the request for special offerings supporting the MDCC Commission on Religion and Race enthusiastically endorsed the idea, but did not provide any funds as the Michigan Synod included all LCA congregations in the lower peninsula of Michigan and thus could not divert funds from one city to another. MDCC, Box 8, Folder 8, ALUA.

<sup>297</sup>. Reading the names of committee members actively engaged in fighting racial discrimination makes one realize how often the same members of one committee are involved with another committee. It is not uncommon to see the same person serving on three or more committees, and most frequently if the committees are related to neighborhoods, churches and city-wide organizations.

were well organized, but the continued practice created a growing gap between the “professional” and the “laity”. Part of the distrust and hostility that denominations experienced toward programs supporting open occupancy and integrated neighborhoods was created by the way the decisions were made, projects were funded, and support was claimed.<sup>298</sup> It was a very serious obstacle to participation in community service by the very members of the community whose support was needed.

Leadership, funding and lay participation were critical issues that thwarted the formation of a tri-faith organization specifically dedicated to the follow-up and implementation of the Metropolitan Conference’s Conclusions and Recommendations. The original judgment that the results of the conference could best be implemented by the individual denominations had been supplanted by the decision to take advantage of both the internal and external effects that an ecumenical and integrative religious group could create. To have all the religious groups in the community joined together in one statement would neutralize any suggestion that one’s own rabbi, priest or minister was misleading them. It would demonstrate the commitment of the entire religious community, not the commitment or interest of any one clergy person, congregation or denomination. It would also raise the importance of the issue addressed and encourage, stimulate, and foster mutual respect, understanding and friendship. When leadership, funding, and laity for programming activities could not be arranged from the tri-faith community for this ecumenical project in Detroit, the public image the conference had

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<sup>298</sup>. A denomination’s management style was almost as critical as the structure of governance. The church body to which the parish belonged I served as pastor funded projects fighting racism with offerings received for various projects. Redirecting funds received for one project to another that had a more timely urgency was not illegal but it changed the character of response from support to challenge...from “yes we will” to “why did you?” After several instances where judgments made by staff were extensively challenged by synodical discussion the level of scrutiny was raised and trust questioned.

achieved by joining the political and tri-faith religious communities together with a unity of purpose against racial discrimination disappeared.

Just when it appeared that the project would have to be terminated, funds became available through a new program designed and funded by the NCCCUSA's Commission on Religion and Race. The money trail was more informal than formal. Much like Detroit's Coordinating Council on Human Relations, which had provided a place and purpose for the social and civic organizations of Detroit to gather and share in their attention to Detroit's social issues, so the new Interchurch Center in New York provided a place to meet and give attention to national issues confronting Protestant faith communities sharing the facility.

NCCCUSA's Commission on Religion and Race was organized to create and direct programs that addressed racial issues, and had offices in Interchurch Center on Riverside Drive, New York where the Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race was also headquartered. Included in the projects funded by this Presbyterian Commission was a specific grant to the Presbytery of Detroit to establish a unified and cooperative effort in metropolitan Detroit for work in race relations, or, to state it more clearly, to finance the continuation of Detroit's tri-faith Commission on Religion and Race. Very few cities had established tri-faith Commissions on Race and Religion, and the Presbytery grant saved MDCC's newly organized Commission from being terminated. The Presbytery proposed that MDCC would assume one-third of the costs during the first year, increase responsibility to one half in the next, two-thirds the following year, and the full amount by the fourth year. Executive Director, G. Merrill Lenox, aware of the serious challenge to finance the project beyond regular contributions,

fully supported the proposal and recommended approval. MDCC's approval set a new course for its program against racial discrimination..

This change in course for MDCC's programming was more subdued than dramatic, but was ultimately far more consequential. The officially sanctioned tri-faith coalition which had bound together the Roman Catholic and Jewish faith communities together with the MDCC in the sponsorship of the Metro conference was replaced when the MDCC assumed the basic responsibility for the follow-up, and the Roman Catholic and Jewish faith communities served consultative roles. MDCC remained an ecumenical organization, but the loss of parity between the three faith communities weakened theological scrutiny and program innovations.

The separation of the religious community from the political community in their officially mandated joint exercise against racial discrimination in housing was more serious than the separations within the religious community. The assumption of responsibility and leadership by the MDCC for the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the Metropolitan Conference relieved the political community from having a direct responsibility and allowed it to assume a subordinate role. MDCC's representatives participated in CCHR meetings and shared program details, but the burden of responsibility was no longer shared. CCHR had only a supporting role..<sup>299</sup> In the new arrangement MDCC alone made the formal decisions, and while it was itself still ecumenical, it was no longer directly engaged in decision making within the political community.

## **THEOLOGICAL THEMES REVIEWED**

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<sup>299</sup>. Both CCHR and MDCC minutes included attendance lists at all meetings, and MDCC representatives were always present to provide detailed up-dates on programming progress.

The de facto separation of Detroit's religious community from the political community spoke directly against the affirmations of Reformation theology,<sup>300</sup> and the fundamental judgment that life was lived in community. As clearly articulated in Protestant theology and doctrines and the confessional statements of Lutheranism, every Christian lives simultaneously in a redemptive community of faith and in the created communities of life's facts. Social, political and economic relationships constitute human society, and energy in this society of life flows both God-ward and neighbor-ward.

Reformation theology did not divorce the sacred from the secular. All life was sacred, whether temporal or eternal, and the law in the communities of society interacted with the gospel in the communities of faith. God exercised lordship over all civil affairs through the arm of the law and the state, and ruled religious humanity through the arm of the gospel through Christ and the church. The law of the state was formed both by and for justice, and by the religious form of faith exercised through love. Justice could exist without any acknowledgment of God, but faith exercised through love could not exist without any concern for justice.

The civil rule of the law was the power of God protecting and preserving created life, and the practice of faith was the power of the gospel-generated love breaking through into human society. It was very important for the religious community to make the right distinctions between the civil rule of law and the power of the Gospel, for the commingling of law and gospel would have disastrous consequences for both church and

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<sup>300</sup>. I am using the term "Reformation theology" to include both the period of history when the Christian Church underwent a "reformation" and the theological affirmations arising from the re-formation of biblical studies and church doctrines. Reformation theology would include the basic teachings and doctrines of mainstream Protestant Christianity.

state. The state and the church were not spheres that could be separated, but dimensions of life that must be distinguished. To invoke the principle espoused by the ULCA of “institutional separation but functional interaction”, the twofold involvement of God meant that God works creatively to promote what is good for human life in all its personal and social dimensions, and, on the other hand, works redemptively to bring the world forward to its final perfection.

When the MDCC separated from the CCHR in order to implement the MCOOR:CC’s recommendations, it was much more difficult, if not impossible, for the religious community to live the drama of God’s will in Jesus Christ and to generate an evangelical ethic between the two poles of faith and the facts of every day life. Since it was not good deeds that created good people, but was good people who did good deeds, principles and codes of action did not regulate the decisions of faith. Such decisions were made because one had a relationship with a living God which formed one’s response to changing situations.

Christians formed the content of Christianity’s ethical conduct as they made pragmatic decisions by choosing from the available alternatives which would serve the common good and the demands of justice. When MDCC separated from CCHR it withdrew from the very partnership in which an evangelical ethic could be realized.

Since the only alternatives available were those of the MDCC itself, the decisions it made had to be more exclusive than inclusive. To act individually no longer meant to act together, it only meant to act alongside. But it was only by acting together that the MDCC and the CCHR could have maintained the two poles of faith and facts between which an ethical life can be generated.

MDCC's decision to join in partnership with the Presbytery of Detroit to continue the fight against racial discrimination preserved the basic intention of Detroit's white Protestant community, but seriously compromised its prophetic and ethical content by its withdrawal from the political community's facts of life. By joining with the Presbytery of Detroit in supporting a continued and specific attention to racial discrimination, the MDCC was able to fulfill the demands of the white Protestant community to fight racism, but in withdrawing from the partnership with the CCHR, MDCC eviscerated the program of its chief strength.

The faith of Detroit's white Protestant community was no longer directed to the political community's facts of life, and those facts of life were no longer being addressed by religious faith. The political community may not have expected much from the religious community,<sup>301</sup> but the responsibilities of the political community were not dependent on either the success or failure of the religious community to be what it should be. Reformation theology asserted the state was the core of the political order, and recognized by faith as a "servant of God". The functions of the state were not to be defined by what the public expected from government. The more fundamental issue was what God expected from the state. The political community was not autonomous, nor independent from its Creator.<sup>302</sup> The political community needed to be reminded of this responsibility before God because of its inherent capacity to become demonic. Reminders would come from the religious community, from its witness to morality, its members, and

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<sup>301</sup>. See footnote # 14 on page 7.

<sup>302</sup>. Reformation theology would not regard as adequate the statement in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive "their just powers from the will of the governed." Lincoln was more aware of this deficiency when he included "under God" in his Gettysburg Address, "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom".

its very presence in the city. Even democracy was in danger of demonization, as evidenced by market free economy exercise's of racial discrimination, segregated housing, restrictive covenants, et al.

Freedom itself could become demonic if it were a freedom separate from God. The rejection of revelation and the reliance on natural reason and natural rights by the intellectual leaders of the American Revolution resulted in a division between church and state that was more like the subordination of the church to the state than of two equal orders in community. Reformation theology regarded democracy as a form of political organization, not as a way of life that was either a Christian heresy or a rival religion. Reformation theology did not champion an autonomous conscience, but a conscience that was bound to the Word and which regarded the state and all humanity as equally sinful and dependent upon God's grace. The opportunities for Detroit's religious community to help the political community acknowledge the sovereignty of God and to create together new avenues for justice and the elimination of racial discrimination were greatly reduced by the series of decisions that separated the religious and political communities in the days following the Metro conference on Open Occupancy.

The decisions of the MDCC were very similar to the decisions of NCCCUSA and while the leadership of the nation's Protestant ecumenical body was deeply committed to the fight against racial discrimination, the policies and positions of the denominational bodies made it very difficult to reach consensus on any position beyond the one least offensive to the greatest number. And what was true for the national judicatories was equally true for their regional bodies in the MDCC. The greater the number who drafted the statement, the more general it became. But it was more than just denominational

policies and positions that guided Protestant ecumenical Christianity through the early days of the Civil Rights movement. Secular society had its say as well.

Detroit's white Protestant community, by the end of summer of 1963, had, more by default than deliberate action, withdrawn from the tri-faith coalition and its partnership with the city's political community. In place of the tri-faith coalition with the city, the Protestant community initiated plans to establish a generally ecumenical Protestant ministry through the MDCC, and permitted the long-standing division between Detroit's white and African American churches to continue in spite of their shared theological and ethical affirmations articulated in King's Detroit's Freedom March address. At the very time that Protestantism's national ecumenical community was vigorously pursuing political partnerships and engagements, Detroit's white Protestant community was drawing more tightly within itself.

Mel Ravitz was elected to the Common Council by a strong African American vote, defeating three other white candidates. He was especially well informed about housing segregation and racial discrimination in Detroit because of his responsibility for forming block clubs in Detroit. After taking his seat on the Council in January, 1962, he waited until the summer of 1963 to join with William Patrick to sponsor an ordinance for open occupancy that had been drafted by CCR at the request of the Council. The proposed ordinance exempted only homeowners who rented space in a two-family or single family residence. A petition from the Homeowners' Council requested an ordinance that was the exact opposite of open occupancy. The Common Council was aware of the public's interest and

hosted a public meeting to discuss open occupancy and the two proposals before the Common Council that attracted two thousand people. The Patrick/Ravitz proposal was defeated by a vote of 7 to 2 and that was a portent of things to come.<sup>303</sup> Supporters of the Homeowners' Council initiatory petition collected over forty-four thousand signatures, more than twice the number required for ballot initiatives, and it was ultimately submitted to a public vote in September, 1964.<sup>304</sup>

### **OPEN HOUSING MOMENTUM SLOWED**

It was clear by the end of summer, 1963, that momentum for open occupancy legislation and a challenge to the conscience of Detroit had been dramatically slowed. No single decision or event could be charged for this loss of momentum, but combining events and decisions all combined together to expose flaws in Detroit's program for open occupancy, which had achieved its greatest exposure to and received its greatest attention from white Detroit in the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience.

This conference sought to mobilize white Detroit in a massive attack on racism and racial discrimination. The very absence of the African American community from the planning and participation of the one event designed to address the very issue dividing white and African American Detroit illustrated the problem.

The basic facts and conditions of Detroit's public life that led to the conference included the "long frustration and inability to get any consideration for fair housing

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<sup>303</sup>. Mel Ravitz interview, May 14, 2007. Question: "What was the most important issue for the city of Detroit in 1962?" Answer: "Open Housing....absolutely no doubt about it, but the vote 7 to 2 against the ordinance Patrick and I presented tells you how the rest of the Council felt." Question: "Did Cavanagh support the proposed ordinance?" Answer: "With a 7 to 2 vote against it he did not have to disclose his position, and I do not know what it would have been."

<sup>304</sup>. See pages 176-178 for a more detailed account of the Homeowners' Council ordinance.

legislation from the state legislature”, and the increased mass movements in the South, which had been supported by civil rights activists from the North. Personal contacts and mutual respect and trust in the “loose fellowship of a group of professionals and professional laymen sharing a deep concern for an end to all discrimination” were also cited, along with a special recognition for the work of Msgr. Clement Kern and his activation of the effort within the Archdiocese of Detroit. Figures that indicated an accelerating flight of white people from the city and the relative growth of the African American population within segregated neighborhoods were especially sobering concerns for the committee. Equally disturbing for the planning committee, and cause for a more direct community response was the program of “mass arrests by the Police Department responding to two murders by Negroes”.<sup>305</sup> None of the hundreds arrested and held for twenty-four to forty-eight hours led to solutions of the crimes in question.

The Conference planners were only acquainted with the facts of public life that testified to and outlined the practice of racial discrimination against the clear functions and responsibilities of government and the community from their own “reading” of the facts. White Detroit could only know what was wrong from the white point of view. It was the absence of the African American community in the planning and unfolding of the conference that left the white religious community without any clear and forthright responsibilities and actions. For any reconciliation between divided communities to occur, both must be involved in the process. What was left unsaid was the members of the white faith communities were first to be brothers and sisters to the African American community and to one another, and then what they should do from within a secularized and demonized (racial discrimination is a demonized act) political order. There was a

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<sup>305</sup>. Citron to Marshall, p. 7.

reference to the larger arena in which public life was to be organized with the addition of the words “challenge to conscience” in the title of the conference but that was more rooted in the human formation of values of good and evil than in the revelation of the practice of God’s sovereignty over public life.

Even with the flaws in the planning process, it was the first such conference held in the United States, and, equally significant, it was the first such conference sponsored by a metropolitan tri-faith coalition. The joining together of the Jewish community, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit, which had created its own Commission on Human Relations in 1960, and the Detroit Council of Churches in order to address the pressing issue of racial discrimination, had been driven by the urgent needs for housing both within the city of Detroit and in surrounding suburbs. Compelled more by the public’s raw exercise of segregation than by the application of theological and prophetic judgments that would have exposed the abuses against the human community, the tri-faith coalition provided the time and the place for Detroit’s metropolitan community to engage its “cultural conscience” together with the sovereignty of God which the faith communities affirmed. The moral essence of Detroit’s white Protestant community was enclosed within its cultural surroundings, and its moral witness was more a reflection of opinions than a witness to Christianity’s fundamental nature as a community of sinners forgiven by God in Jesus Christ.

What the conference had not been able to do was to quiet the public opposition to open occupancy and the larger issue of basic civil rights. In the public’s experience of volatile issues, a raging fire can be set with a single match. That raging fire was set off in April, 1963, with the ballot proposal that an income tax should be established to provide

additional revenues for Detroit's public school system. The Greater Detroit Homeowners Association was organized by Thomas Poindexter to defeat the tax proposal. It became the umbrella organization that gathered support from the real estate and neighborhood associations that had opposed the Brickley Fair Neighborhood Practices Act in 1962, and which introduced Thomas Poindexter to Detroit politics. Poindexter, who was opposed to any increase in taxes, served as the group's spokesperson, and following the defeat of the proposal, used the group to create an Initiatory Petition for an Ordinance proposal for presentation to Detroit's Common Council.

The provisions of this ordinance would protect the individual's right "of privacy", "freedom from interference with his property by public authorities", "freedom of choice of persons with whom to negotiate or contact" and the freedom to employ real estate brokers to act in accordance with the homeowners' instructions."<sup>306</sup> The Homeowners Council quickly collected more than twice the number of signatures required for ballot initiatives and the petition was presented to Detroit's City Clerk in July, 1963, and was submitted to the Common Council on October 24, 1963. The earlier failure of the Ravitz/Patrick ordinance for open occupancy by a 7 to 2 vote, and the submission of a petition with twice the number of required signatures for the continued protection of homeowners' rights did not give any sense of optimism for its defeat.

Poindexter's success in gathering the deep-seated opposition of Detroit homeowners against open occupancy and civil rights into the form of a petition for an ordinance that would protect their self-defined rights made him drop his earlier accusations against the automotive industry for the economic insecurity created by

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<sup>306</sup>. "Provisions of the Greater Detroit Homeowners' Council", dated October 24, 1963, for presentation to the Detroit Common Council. DCCR, Box 29, Folder: Homeowners' Ordinance. ALUA.

layoffs etc., and to concentrate on crime, integration and taxation as the major issues for Detroit. Having been defeated in his first attempt for public office in an ill-chosen campaign against Martha Griffiths<sup>307</sup> in 1954, Poindexter was an unsuccessful “law and order” candidate for the Detroit Court of Common Pleas. In 1963, having submitted the petition for a Homeowners’ Rights Ordinance, Poindexter received national attention. Senator Strom Thurmond invited Poindexter to testify before the Senate Committee on Commerce on “behalf of the 99 percent of Detroit white residents” against the administration’s proposed civil rights legislation. Repeating his standard attack on crime, taxation, and integration Poindexter claimed that “when integration strikes a neighborhood . . . there will be an immediate rise in crime and violence . . . and the residents will suffer the loss of their homes and savings.”<sup>308</sup> Returning to Detroit, Poindexter filed his candidacy for election to Detroit’s Common Council, and was elected in the November election with the most votes in a field of thirty-six candidates.

Poindexter waited for only two weeks in his position as a member of Detroit’s Common Council before presenting his five point program for a better Detroit. Second only to his attack on crime was his proposal to build homes for residents leaving the city because their homes had been demolished for urban renewal. His rationale was purely economic; it would generate needed income from taxes. He was supported in his election by the Homeowners’ Rights Council. Homeowners’ rights and freedoms

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<sup>307</sup>. Martha Griffiths was a Democratic party regular and a popular member of Michigan’s delegation the United States Congress. With very little money and less campaign experience, Poindexter can be faulted for extremely poor judgment in entering the campaign. What he chose as his issue was however, perhaps more by his personal experience in Detroit itself, was the wave of plant closings and automation-related layoffs. They were issues worthy of attention.

<sup>308</sup>. U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, *Civil Rights—Public Accommodations Hearings*, 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, August 1, 1963, part 2.

constituted the remaining features for his program for a “better Detroit”.<sup>309</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> District’s Democratic organization censured Poindexter. He was anathema to the civil rights groups in Detroit, but was the chosen leader for its opposition. The numbers were on his side.

Detroit’s chapter of the NAACP joined with the Detroit Bar Association and the Catholic Lawyers Guild to seek a ruling on the constitutionality of the proposed ordinance, and Circuit Judge Joseph Moynihan, Jr. declared it “patently unconstitutional and . . . a grave public issue.” The Greater Detroit Homeowners’ Council appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court which reversed Judge Moynihan’s decision because the “power of the judiciary may not be invoked properly to restrain the right of initiative in this state”.<sup>310</sup>

With no alternative but to put the proposed ordinance submitted by the Homeowners’ Rights Council to a city-wide vote, it was placed on the ballot for the primary election on Tuesday, September 1, 1964. The submission of an ordinance that would amend the constitutional governance of Detroit was far more consequential than a conference that had been designed to “challenge the conscience”. For white Detroit homeowners the basic issues were not conscience and morality but property and neighborhood. The increase of the African American population in Detroit and growing economic uncertainties in the automotive industry had made race and housing inseparable issues. In his survey of Detroit in 1950 Arthur Kornhauser had reported that homeowners feared above all the loss of their precarious economic security, and race was a close

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<sup>309</sup>. DCCHR. Box 15, Folder: Poindexter file, 15/12. ALUA.

<sup>310</sup>. DCCHR. Box 10, Folder: Housing-Homeowners Ordinance. ALUA.

second in the ranking of Detroit's most pressing problems.<sup>311</sup> There was no evidence to suggest that had changed in 1962.

The reversal of the Circuit Court's decision by Michigan's Supreme Court prompted leaders from various sectors of Detroit to create "Citizens for a United Detroit". The Very Rev. John J. Weaver, Dean of the Cathedral of St. Paul, (Episcopal) was the chair, the honorary chair was the mayor, the Honorable Jerome Cavanagh. Co-chairmen included members from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, the Detroit Council of Churches, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish faith communities, as well as the Wayne County AFL-CIO, Community Councils, the NAACP and the Republican and Democratic parties. It was a blue ribbon list of Detroit's committees and organizations. Calling the amendment "immoral, unconstitutional, disruptive and fraudulent", the Citizens for a United Detroit were rebuffed by Detroit's populace by a 55 to 45 margin. African American wards defeated the amendment by nearly four to one, but in Wards 20 and 21 it was supported on a two to one ratio.<sup>312</sup>

The city-wide campaign against the Homeowners' Rights Ordinance revealed the separation between leadership in the faith communities and organizations committed to civil rights and the majority of white Detroiters. The combined forces of civil rights supporters in the religious, labor and civil organizations were unable to defeat the ordinance but it was never implemented. The Wayne County Court ruled the Homeowners' Rights Ordinance unconstitutional in 1965. The success of the

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<sup>311</sup>. Arthur Kornhauser, *Detroit as the People See It: A Survey of Attitudes in an Industrial City* (Detroit, 1952) pp. 68-69, 75, 77-82.

<sup>312</sup>. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, p. 227. This was supported by Nicholas Hood in my interview with him on May 22, 2007. Interestingly enough, in Hood's campaign for the Common Council in the fall of 1964, Bushnell Congregational Church, and the assistant pastor, the Rev. John Forsyth, hosted many coffee gatherings for him at the church for the membership living in Wards 20 and 21.

Homeowners' Rights Council in leading Detroit to adopt the anti-open occupancy ordinance was their last successful campaign. .

Poindexter had provided for white Detroit by opposing open occupancy, exactly what the supporters and activists for open occupancy needed, a visible, vocal, committed and aggressive leader with a simple message. Poindexter united white Detroit around the threat of economic losses and the removal of personal freedoms. It was much more difficult to articulate the call for enlightened consciences and exercise deliberate restraint and control over the human inclinations to satisfy one's own wants and needs at the expense of others that create injustice and destroy community.. The absence of a consistent and visible leader for open occupancy made it easier for Detroit to treat it as an urban issue. Poindexter made segregated housing a human cause.

Poindexter was defeated by Nicholas Hood in his bid for re-election. Hood was supported by the *Detroit Free Press*,<sup>313</sup> religious groups in the city, the Jewish labor groups, and, more surprisingly, significant numbers from Wards 20 and 21 where Poindexter had received the most support in 1962.<sup>314</sup> Poindexter had seriously damaged his candidacy for re-election when he openly admitted having witnessed a strong-arm robbery and not calling for the police, but equally important was the increasing number of African Americans moving into previously all-white neighborhoods. Urban renewal projects and interstate highway construction forced African American families from previously African American neighborhoods, and the continuing exodus of whites from the city made housing available in previously all-white neighborhoods.

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<sup>313</sup>. Interview with Nicholas Hood. He distinctly and fondly remembers how the *Free Press* would write editorials supporting his candidacy and display his picture in the newsstands where the papers were being sold.

<sup>314</sup>. See footnote # 93.

Nicholas Hood was a principled and respected member of the Common Council. He was the Pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, that was itself in the path of the expansion of the Harper Medical Center. Hood negotiated the purchase of forty three acres of land for the construction of a new church building and housing for families displaced from urban renewal projects and for senior citizens. He was a member of an African American ad hoc Detroit Council for Political Education that met weekly. It provided support and counsel to increasing numbers of African Americans entering political arenas at city, state and national levels.<sup>315</sup>

The eruption that Sidney Fine called “violence in the model city”<sup>316</sup> in July, 1967 dramatically changed the composition of city leadership when the New Detroit Committee was formed. Following the riot of July 23-August 2, 1967 that ended with forty-three deaths, at least one thousand injured, and over two thousand five hundred stores and businesses burned or destroyed, Detroit created a new committee that combined leadership from the private sector, the African American, and the white community. It was a new concept for urban leadership and governance.

The Detroit Council of Organizations, following the ruling of Michigan’s Attorney General in August, 1967 that the jurisdiction of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission over discrimination in housing was limited to civil procedures, drafted an open housing ordinance that was presented by Councilman Nicholas Hood and approved by the Common Council in September, 1967. Before going into effect on December 31,

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<sup>315</sup>. Interview with Nicholas Hood. The group met weekly and concentrated on supporting African American candidates for political appointments and elections. Their successes included the appointment of Damon Keith as Judge for the Sixth Circuit Court of the United State Court of Appeals.

<sup>316</sup>. Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). It is a detailed and carefully researched account of the Detroit Riot, with the title a reference to Detroit claimed by the Johnson administration as a “model city” of Federally supported urban programs.

1967, petitions with more than one hundred thousand signatures, fifty-four thousand more than required, were received, referring the ordinance to a public vote.

The MDCC, Detroit Archdiocese and the New Detroit Committee, maintaining their belief that open occupancy was the key element in re-forming Detroit's public life, sought to have Governor Romney place open housing on the agenda for the special session of the Michigan legislature he had called following the riot. Adjourning without taking action on open occupancy, the legislature reconvened in January, 1968 and five months later enacted what was described as the "strictest fair housing law in the nation."<sup>317</sup>

Thomas F. Hoult wrote in 1967 that "Negro Detroiters are more segregated in their housing today than they were three decades ago."<sup>318</sup> Part of a study conducted by Wayne State University's Regional and Urban Studies (IRUS), showed that housing segregation had steadily increased in Detroit since 1930. In areas where African Americans had been able to purchase housing it would take a little as a five-percent change in racial composition to accelerate an almost total racial change in just a few years.<sup>319</sup>

The dedicated efforts of those who gathered and shaped support for the advocacy of open housing, hosted a major conference for a large metropolitan city, sought passage of ordinances by the Common Council attacking and restricting racial discrimination and subsequent action by the Michigan legislature did not really change the segregated

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<sup>317</sup>. Fine, *Violence in the Model City*, p. 431.

<sup>318</sup>. Thomas F. Hoult, "About Detroit. . . We Told You So," in *The Crisis*, 74, no. 8. (October, 1967),. 407-410.

<sup>319</sup>. The report was released a week before a major school bond issue which was defeated by more than 120,000 votes. Both director Albert Mayer and associate director Hoult were blamed for the defeat because it forecast the development of Detroit as a city of dependents that would have to be supported by a constantly shrinking tax base.

housing pattern of Detroit. The interim nature of the leadership of the sponsoring bodies and the decision of the conference against permanent leadership for the advocacy of open occupancy were major factors in the ultimate dissolution of the open housing movement. Even though open housing had been a critical issue that affected individuals and families, it had not accumulated any type of “critical mass” until the exposure of the point system used by Grosse Pointe realtors to rate prospective buyers that shamelessly excluded African Americans. It was only after the State of Michigan’s corporation and securities commissioner Lawrence Gubow and Attorney General Paul Adams profiled the practice in public hearings that the issue of open housing gathered public support from the formations of the Greater Detroit Fair Housing Practices and the Human Relations Council in Grosse Pointe and other suburban communities. The committees gave attention to open housing but were unable to produce the kind of dedicated leadership necessary to generate greater public support.

This vacuum of leadership was less obvious in the white Protestant faith community. The distance between the Detroit Council of Churches and denominations and their individual congregations compromised this exercise of leadership. Without any direct involvement in their selection and supervision of responsibilities, church members were seldom aware of DCC and denominational staff involvement in civil rights activities, and both the anonymity and the separation fostered misinformation at best and at its worst strong opposition. Efficient as it might have been, DCC and denominational staff failed to develop indigenous congregational leadership, participation and support.

By the time ordinances and laws had been created to stem racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing, population shifts and economic conditions had changed

Detroit's demographic and socioeconomic platform so drastically that open housing was no longer the critical issue. White flight, lack of affordable homes available to African American families, a real estate industry that knew its way around the roadblocks to racial segregation, and the continuing evaporation of economic strength for lower income African Americans had made open occupancy an elusive experience for all but a few.

The diverse and fragmented nature of support for open housing created an environment in which information was easily distorted. Without the "checks and balances" that African American participation would have provided to the basic information used for the planning of the conference, distortions appeared in both the transmittal of information and interpretation of it by individual denominations, congregations, and members. Because information was distributed most frequently at smaller group meetings and conversations, the margin for misinterpretation was significantly increased. Open housing did not mean that one was required to sell one's home to an African American, it only meant that no law could prevent one from doing that..

The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience was Detroit's one and only major public event in which one of the most critical social issues was addressed. Racial discrimination had been a fact of Detroit's housing market from the very beginning. It was increasingly and deliberately pervasive following World War I, but it was not until after World War II that aroused individuals formed groups advocating open occupancy. The ultimate expression of Detroit's opposition to racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing was at the conference held in January, 1963.

St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church carried out its ministry to Detroit's Danish community from its location in the Scandinavian "ghetto" at Caroline and Vermont from 1907 to 1956. In 1956 it relocated to Pembroke and Greenfield in northwest Detroit. As a parish with the majority of its members scattered through-out the city, it was part of all that transpired in Detroit. Its affiliation with the synodical and national judicatories of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America made it a participant in the denomination's fight against racial discrimination and segregated housing in Detroit. St. Peter's remained in the city of Detroit until 1982 when it merged with a Scandinavian congregation in suburban Berkley. The story of St. Peter's participation and experiences in Detroit's fight against racial discrimination and its advocacy for open occupancy is really the story of the Danish community in Detroit. The Danish were the second smallest immigrant group in Detroit and were served by one Lutheran parish, St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church. The next two next chapters will trace the Danish immigration to Detroit and the role their church played in the face of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Danish Lutherans Adapt Themselves to Detroit**

The Danish are among the fewest in number of all the immigrant groups in Detroit. This was true in 1872 when seven Danish men joined together to form a Danish fellowship that was later organized as St. Peter's Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and it remained so for the one hundred and ten years that St. Peter's remained in the city of Detroit. Only the Norwegians and Welsh were fewer in number until the 1920 U.S. Census reported a greater number of Norwegians. Of the entire number of more than 360,000 Danish immigrants to the United States, the number of foreign-born Danes in Detroit never exceeded 6,000, or less than .016% of the total.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the history of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church in the city of Detroit from 1872 to 1955, from the time it was organized until its relocation from the Woodbridge Community to Pembroke and Greenfield in Northwest Detroit. St. Peter's was the only Danish congregation in the city of Detroit, and the discussion of its ministry and mission provides a representative overview of the Danish population engaged against racial discrimination and the practice of segregation in the sale and purchase of housing in the city of Detroit. Emigrants from Denmark left behind a state church relationship that was pervasively influenced by a Grundtvigian and Inner Mission schism. St. Peter's congregation who were adept at adapting their adopted country's manners in public life and congregational organization, served as the primary presence for the Danish immigrants in Detroit. St. Peter's maintained the Danish

language as a major feature of its identity until the late 1930s. Following the life of St. Peter's from 1872 to 1955 displays both their assimilation into and resistance to features of Detroit. In the following chapter I will detail St. Peter's direct engagement in and response to the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience that was Detroit's most direct confrontation with the racial discrimination and the practice of segregation in the sale and purchase of housing. These two chapters will provide an account of how Danish Lutherans in Detroit were joined with the larger religious community in addressing the social injustices of racially segregated housing.

Immigration from Denmark to the United States began in the early 1820s and by the mid 1870s small Danish settlements had been established in Wisconsin, western Michigan, Minnesota, and Nebraska. The majority of immigrants came from the rural areas of Denmark and settled in the rural areas of the United States. The Homestead Act of 1863, which opened vast areas of the west, was a major factor in the rapid growth of these rural settlements. For the filing fee of \$18.00 and a commitment of five years to farm it, one hundred and sixty acres of land could be acquired and many Danish immigrants took advantage of the opportunity.<sup>320</sup>

Immigration from Denmark was considerably less than from the other Scandinavian countries of Norway and Sweden. From 1820 to 1870 only about 30,000 had migrated to the United States from Denmark, while more than 250,000 immigrants had arrived from Norway and Sweden. During the 1850's more than three fourths of the Danish immigrants (2,898 out of 3,749) were converts to Mormonism, and during the

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<sup>320</sup>. George Nielsen, *The Danish Americans*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 74. Danish migration to the United States had been relatively insignificant before 1860, and Danes interested in religion either joined other denominations or were ministered to by Norwegian Lutheran pastors. In those few instances where Danish immigrants had joined together for worship, they invited Norwegian clergy to conduct the services. The Danish and Norwegian languages are similar and can be understood by both.

1860's it was nearly two fifths (4,942 out of 13,011). By 1870 only Wisconsin had more Danish-born people than Utah.<sup>321</sup>

Immigration from Denmark increased dramatically after 1864 when Prussia defeated Denmark and Schleswig Holstein came under German rule. Much of the population moved to Copenhagen, and others immigrated to the United States. Detroit had not been the first choice of destination for Danish immigrants, but in 1870, Jorgen Iversenoer, a founder of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church in Detroit, and known as George Everson to his associates and friends, passed through Detroit en-route to the lumber camps and the farms in the Saginaw valley. The four settlements established by Johann Wilhem Conrad Loehe of Franconia, known as Frankenmuth, Frankentrost, Frankenlust and Frankenhilf were thriving communities and offered employment to Goerge Everson, both in the lumber camps and as an apprenticed wagon builder.<sup>322</sup> The fire that destroyed more than 1,200,000 acres between Saginaw and Lake Huron in 1871 made lumbering jobs scarce and George Iverson moved to Detroit where he used his skills as a wagon maker to work in the carriage industry.<sup>323</sup> Yearning for fellowship, he gathered six other immigrants from Norway, Sweden and Denmark into a social club called "Norden Sonner" that also provided occasional religious services conducted by Norwegian clergy from Ypsilanti and Gowen, Michigan. Learning of his father's death in 1873 he returned to Denmark to manage his father's business and remained there for seven years, including a term in the Danish army. He returned to Detroit in 1880 with his

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<sup>321</sup>. William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion* (Minneapolis, 1957), p. 104.

<sup>322</sup>. Frederick Hale, ed., *Danes in North America* (Seattle; University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 166.

<sup>323</sup>. "The Biography of George Everson", St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, File 1, Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.

finance Julia Jensine Holst, established a carpenter's contracting business, and with other Danish Lutheran immigrants organized St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church.

George Iverson illustrated Alexis de Tocqueville's observation about Americans' propensity for "civic association" when he gathered young men into the Norden Sonner and later organized St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church. In de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, a report of his visit to the United States during the early 1800s, he observed that Americans "are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . .Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America."<sup>324</sup>

It is most unlikely that George Iverson considered his efforts to organize the Norden Sonner and St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church part of what would later be considered fundamental features of social capital. What he and other Danish immigrants did upon arrival in the United States was to bind and bond together, a life and culture that would become a major contribution to the whole fabric of public life in their new homeland. The conceptualization of social capital would be the contribution of such theorists and sociologists as James Coleman and Robert D. Putman who regarded the quality of public life and the performance of social institutions as direct results of the norms and networks of civic engagement.<sup>325</sup> However much the concept of social capital

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<sup>324</sup>. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Maier, trans. George Lawrence (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), 513-17.

<sup>325</sup>. James E. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital", *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure (1988), pp. S95-S120. Robert D. Putman, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

might have initially neglected the role of institutions, what George Iverson and his fellow Danish immigrants brought to the United States were major assets for the formation of the American culture.<sup>326</sup> Danish immigrants created what political philosophers called “civil society” and sociologists called “social capital”, through their folk-schools, rural cooperatives, brotherhoods and religious institutions in the United States.

Social capital is not a single entity. It contains both personal and social elements. Social capital, unlike physical capital or financial capital that exist by themselves, is constituted from the structure of relationships between one and others. Social capital includes descriptive and prescriptive norms and values for society and family, a shared heritage, and appropriable social organizations. Social capital is nurtured by trust, tolerance, equality and accountability.

Robert Putnam asserted in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, that religious affiliation has been the most common associational membership among Americans.<sup>327</sup> Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow made a similar assertion in his *Producing the Sacred: An Essay in Public Religion*<sup>328</sup> that two thirds of all small groups in America are directly connected with churches and synagogues.

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<sup>326</sup>. In his writings on American religion, Robert Wuthnow emphasized the role of the institutional church in society. He believed that reducing society to a single factor that privileged the moral worth of gregarious people well-connected ignored the structure and functions of institutions.

<sup>327</sup>. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 68f. Putnam popularized the concept of social capital by documenting its decline in American life. Religious affiliation may be the most common associational membership among Americans but religious sentiment is increasingly self-defined. Labor unions are increasingly a fading memory and mainline civic organizations have experienced significant reductions in support. His most popular evidence was the reduction of organized bowling leagues by 40 percent, while individual bowling has increased 10 percent. The issue however for bowling-lane proprietors is the loss of revenue from beer and pizza. League bowlers consume three times as much beer and pizza as solo bowlers, and “the money in bowling is in the beer and pizza, not the balls and shoes.”

<sup>328</sup>. Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay in Public Religion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 56-57.

Beginning with religion as a group phenomenon places the emphasis on the association with others that is expressed in congregational life and that extends to ever larger arenas. Religion enlarges civic engagement. Group associations require interactions, clear communications, common goals, shared norms, and divisions of labor, and create identities that include commitment and trust. Religion establishes a dichotomy of reality, distinguishing between what Durkheim identified as “sacred” and Rudolf Otto called “the holy”<sup>329</sup> and what we call profane or secular. Religion acknowledges a sacred place or situation, the difference between vertical and horizontal authority and provides the context for their exercise of faith. Religion is composed of a set of beliefs and practices that include charity, morality, and economic and social justice.

Religion is not the only magnet for associational life but faith communities have been considered the single most important repository of social capital.<sup>330</sup> As true as this has been for Americans in the last decade of the twentieth century, it was certainly true for Danish immigrants in nineteenth century Detroit. For George Iverson and his six Scandinavian friends who formed the Norden Sonner in 1872 for fellowship and worship it was religion that initiated the exercise of their social capital. Socialization by a group into a body of norms born in Denmark who shared meanings and interpretations for their life in their new home was not a unique process.

## **DENMARK’S DEFEAT SPAWNS NEW CULTURAL THEMES**

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<sup>329</sup>. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Collier, 1961), p.52; Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 8-11.

<sup>330</sup>. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 66. “As a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships in America is church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America’s social capital,” p. 66.

Denmark's war with England that began in 1801, when England forced Denmark to give up its armed convoy policy,<sup>331</sup> ended in 1807 when the British navy seized the Danish fleet. The British bombardment of Copenhagen destroyed nearly half of the city. Denmark joined in an alliance with emperor Napoleon and declared war against Sweden who had refused to join with the French against England. Invasion plans never materialized but a continuing gunboat and privateer war continued against England until a final peace settlement in 1814 which included Denmark's ceding Norway to Sweden after it had been part of the Danish-Norwegian kingdom for more than 450 years. The war with England ruined Denmark, and with its national bankruptcy, the loss of more than 1400 merchant and military ships and the imprisonment of more than 7,000 seamen by the British, Denmark was no longer a first-rate nation.<sup>332</sup>

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, considered one of the four most influential persons in nineteenth century Denmark,<sup>333</sup> made his debut in Danish history in 1807 with the *Maskekradeballet I Denmark* which castigated the Danish people for not taking the country's profound degradation seriously in their defeat by the British in that year. He joined his father three years later as curate of a Lutheran parish and delivered the sermon "Wherefore hath the Lord vanished from His House?" It was a violent attack on the clergy, he was reprimanded, not for its content, but its title. Unable to secure a pastorate, he began writing hymns and translating major portions of Scandinavian mythology. In

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<sup>331</sup>. It was the Danish government's use of men-of-war ships beginning in 1797 to protect Danish merchant ships that changed Denmark's official policy of neutrality to armed neutrality and challenged both England and France. When Danish men-of-war refused to allow British warships to board and search a merchant ship convoy, fighting broke out and Denmark surrendered.

<sup>332</sup>. Claus Christiansen, "War With England 1801-1814" Dansk Militaerhistorie  
<<http://www.milhist.dk/englandskrigene/england/introuk.html>>

<sup>333</sup>. N.F.S. Grundtvig, Hymnwriter and theologian; Hans Christen Andersen, fairy-tale writer; Soren Kierkegaard, philosopher; and Bertold Thorvaldsen, neoclassical sculptor, are considered the four most influential persons in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark. They all lived in Copenhagen at the same time, the capital city of Denmark, with little more than 100,000 inhabitants.

1824 he published his “*New Year’s Morning*” and in its 312 eleven line stanzas described his own development and the tasks of the Danish Church and the Danish people in the days ahead.<sup>334</sup>

Lutheranism had been the established religion of Denmark since 1536, shortly after the Reformation in Germany began. The introduction of absolutism in 1660 brought Denmark’s established Lutheran religion under the rule of the monarchy that was to “maintain the kingdom’s inhabitants in this faith and protect them against all heretics, fanatics and blasphemers”. The national Church allowed the Danish mother tongue to become established although Latin continued as a language of learning. The Danish church was subservient to the State and a feeling of Danish national identity began to emerge.

By the end of the sixteenth century the reformation begun in Germany had settled into a Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>335</sup> In the nineteenth century this alliance with the Danish state and the Danish’s state’s defeat by the British made the Lutheran church in Denmark as much a target of discontent as the monarchy itself. Not entirely due to the economic hardships created by the war and the massive population relocations this discontent also reflected a rejection of the rigid formalism of the state religion and the oppressive power of the clergy.

Grundtvig had been faithful to Lutheran confessional theology, which stated the Church’s foundation rested on the Bible as the Word of God in which one would find Christ. In his literary work he arrived at the view that it was the Church itself, and its

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<sup>334</sup>. A.M.Aallchin, S.A.J. Bradley, N.A.Hjelm, J.H. Schjorring, editors, *Grundtvig in International Perspective* (Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2000), p. 113.

<sup>335</sup>.  
<http://www.ambwashington.um.dk/en/menu/InformationaboutDenmarkCi;tire:oteratire/M/F/S/Grundtvig>, p. 18

tradition most clearly expressed in baptism, that was the basis of the Christian faith. Christ should not be sought in a book, but in the living community, where people were declared Christian in baptism and their life was nourished by the sacrament of Holy Communion. It was in the congregation, at baptism and communion, where Christ spoke his word that created life. The Church, the congregation, had existed before the Bible was written. This was the living word that initiated and nourished faith. In this emphasis on the living word, the congregation would nearly constitute an independent community.<sup>336</sup>

Grundtvig presented this view in “*The Church’s Reply*”<sup>337</sup> which was addressed to a professor of theology who asserted that the Bible was the foundation of all theology, and its truth was discerned through the power of intellectual reason. What Grundtvig had hoped would be the subject of debate became instead the content of a libel suit. Fined and censored, he resigned his pastorate and went to England to study Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and continued writing hymns for worship.

In the midst of its Industrial Revolution there were great political and economic issues in England. Grundtvig was greatly influenced by the exercise of free speech and debate. He turned from the penitential religion of Lutheran orthodoxy and pietism to a world-affirming Christianity that emphasized first the human and then the Christian sequence of faith. Lutheran orthodoxy had placed the rule and function of faith in the hands of the church’s hierarchy of learned clergy. In his *Mythology of the North*, he wrote that traditional Christians should be ready to work with all who accept the “Judeo-Christian tradition”. He called for a new synthesis of cultural strength and the Christian

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<sup>336</sup>. Aallchin, *Grundtvig in Intellectual Perspective*,. p. 49ff.

<sup>337</sup>. Aallchin, *Grundtvig in Intellectual Perspective*,., p. 79.

point of view. A new culture, Grundtvig said, held the Christian view of the creation of humanity and utilizing the natural historic strength and wisdom of the Nordic peoples, should be built. Grundtvig followed his *Mythology of the North* with his *The Danish Four-leafed Clover*<sup>338</sup> which advocated an educational system that would serve the needs of the people in the nineteenth century. He maintained that everyone should be admitted, with the Danish language and history providing the information for understanding and participation in public affairs. But education was for something more than participation in public affairs. It was for the fullest experience of life itself. He wrote:

“I saw life, real human life, as it is lived in this world, and saw at once that to be enlightened, to live as useful and enjoyable human life, most people did not need books at all, but only a genuinely kind heart, sound common sense, a kind good ear, a kind good mouth, and then liveliness to talk with really enlightened people, who would be able to arouse their interest and show them how human life appears when the light shines upon it.”<sup>339</sup>

For Grundtvig this meant that knowledge must involve a “living contact and interaction with others.”<sup>340</sup>

Grundtvig combined his concepts of education in his “folk-schools”. This included the fellowship of teachers and students living together and thus learning from one another. He emphasized the importance of the “living word” and the emphasis on common humanity which began with an understanding of one’s own culture before studying that of others. This living interaction would lead to enlightenment, or the

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<sup>338</sup>. *The Four-leafed Clover* was Grundtvig’s first book to deal with education and was written in 1836. The Four-leaf Clover was the reference to Denmark’s King, the People, the Homeland and the Mother Tongue.

<sup>339</sup>. Quoted in Steven M. Borish, *The Land of the Living, The Danish folk high schools and Denmark’s nonviolent path to modernization* (Nevada City, 1991), p. 18.

<sup>340</sup>. K.E.Bugge, “Grundtvig’s Educational Ideas” in C. Thodberg and A.P.Thyssen (eds), *N.F.S.Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal*, (Copenhagen: Danish Institute, 1983), p. 20.

meaning of one's own existence. It was the unity of the person and society that held together all the different faculties of human nature.<sup>341</sup>

Grundtvig's writings and teachings were instrumental in the process that led to the Constitutional Assembly in 1849 that adopted the democratic monarchy for Denmark. He included the principle of religious freedom as a substitute for compulsory membership in the State Church. However, religious equality was not acknowledged. The Evangelical Lutheran Church received a special position in the Constitution, because its membership included nearly the entire Danish population. Members of the Danish National Church were defined as people baptized in the National Church or in another Evangelical Lutheran Church and later transferred to the Danish Church, as well as those baptized in another Christian faith and who had since associated themselves with the National Church. Only the members of the National Church were taxed to support it.

Grundtvig had always opposed any action toward a separation from the National Church, but his emphasis on the believing, worshipping congregation as the "living church" gathered many supporters. Soon known as the "Grundtvigian Movement", parishes supporting the movement built assembly halls for public cultural events. Lectures, reading circles, song fests,<sup>342</sup> folk dances, gymnastics, and fellowship gatherings, which celebrated life in the interaction with faith, were regularly scheduled events.

A second group within the National Church shared the concerns of the Grundtvigians for the life of the church and the practice of religion in Denmark, but stood

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<sup>341</sup>. Max Lawson, "N.F.S. Grundtvig" in *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative literature* (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIII, no 34, 1993, pp.613-623.

<sup>342</sup>. These song fests would include hymns and folk songs. The folk songs were really story songs about love, the land, forests, the country, farming, fishing, the long days of summer and the long nights of winter.

in opposition to their themes of religion, and focused their efforts on spiritual renewal and personal piety. Jens Larsen, a blacksmith influenced by Grundtvig, wanted to be a missionary to the people of Denmark. Gathering laymen of pietistic leanings who desired small-group devotional meetings, Larsen advocated lay preaching and created his own Society for Inner Mission. In 1861 the association was reorganized as the Church Society for Inner Mission<sup>343</sup> and Vilhelm Beck was chosen as leader. Beck, who had questioned the ministry of his father and his father's mentor, the popular Bishop of the Zealand diocese, wanted the church to make an impact on every feature of daily life. Its goal was to offer spiritual renewal within the framework of the National Church.

The Church Society for Inner Mission believed in the depravity of man, worked for conversions, and emphasized the literal interpretation of Scripture. Its understanding of the sacraments was orthodox Lutheran theology, and the objective was to bring the Gospel to each person. Thus each person would know the state of their perdition and how, through Jesus Christ, forgiveness, hope and new life were found. Strict standards of conduct were established and dancing, drinking, gambling, immorality, and Sunday labor were renounced. The difference between believers and non believers was well marked.

The difference between Grundtvigians and the Inner Mission Society was not as well marked. To a large extent, social differences acted as the wedge driving them apart. The Grundtvigians were mostly landowners who were advancing economically, socially,

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<sup>343</sup>. Industrialization had created poverty among working families in the city and many remained out of the church. Jens Larsen had heard Grundtvig preach and had been inspired to make his religious life more expressive of his faith. During this same time, Mormon missionaries had arrived and called the people of Denmark to a deeper commitment of faith and a more rigorous life of devotion. The Mormons made many converts through their more austere life style which stood in stark contrast to the affluence of the National Church. During this same time Inner Mission movements were gathering momentum in Germany and in Norway under the name of Pietism. Pietism was a reaction to scholastic orthodoxy and sought to give place and opportunity to devotion and emotion. It emphasized the role of the laity and the power of Christian love to heal social ills.

and politically. The emphasis on folk-schools supported the value they placed on education. The Inner Mission was most attractive to the agricultural workers and the more impoverished working class in the cities who found spiritual comfort and solace in the high degree of piety. Grundtvigians, generally speaking, were regarded as doctrinally unsound, worldly and spiritually impoverished. Inner Mission folk were considered narrow, self-righteous and sectarian. Strong tensions developed between Grundtvigians and Inner Mission adherents, but they co-existed within the freedom of the Danish National Church.

A part of Danish history that is not well known is the success of Mormon evangelists, most often returning emigrants, who exhibited frugal, disciplined, faithful religious lifestyles, converting thousands of Danes to Mormonism. Emphasizing Mormon's oldest doctrine, the "gathering", which would unite them into a group that would build up the Kingdom of God, the Mormons would bring them out of Babylon (Denmark) to America and the land of Zion (Utah). Carefully written pamphlets that used Biblical language in contemporary assignation, Mormon newspapers printed in the major cities, and free or subsidized passage to the United States were important features of Mormonism's success in Denmark.

The Inner Mission Society and the Grundtvigians had existed as "subcultures" in the "dominant culture" of Denmark's state religion. Grundtvigians and the Inner Mission Society created oppositional thought and discourse that was not structurally formulated until the Inner Mission Society was organized in 1861 to seek conversions of Lutherans to a more disciplined and moral life of faith. Seeking adherence to the existing norms for behavior in Lutheran orthodoxy, the Inner Mission Society represented a norm-oriented

movement that contrasted with the Grundtvigians who emphasized the restoration and experience of values espoused in Lutheran orthodoxy.

The presence and influence of Soren Kierkegaard on Danish culture was an important element in the development of these two movements in the Danish National Church. Kierkegaard, the seventh son of a father who valued order and self-discipline over other values, sought life's fulfillment in the pleasures of the world. The death of his father changed his life dramatically, and from 1846 to 1850 he wrote a series of works examining what it meant to be a Christian. His *Training in Christianity* was a summation of what he believed it meant to follow the teachings of the Bible. Establishing a journal, *The Instant*, Kierkegaard criticized the church for its wealth and political influence and emphasized the simplification and emulation of the teachings and life of Jesus.<sup>344</sup>

Often regarded as a philosopher, but more correctly viewed as a theologian, Kierkegaard was convinced that the Christian life should exceed the very highest level of secular, human decency by what he described as a "leap into the religious stage". This leap would be the work of God but would require an intentional conscious effort of preparation. In his *Attack upon Christendom*, a series of essays from the last two years of his life, he saw the church-state alliance as bankrupt, and contrasted the Christianity of his day with the New Testament. He was critical of clergy who expounded doctrine rather than the sharing of life formed by Christ, who made vows of poverty and lived extravagant life styles, and allowed the practice of baptism as a social act without integrity. He regarded the public expression of religion more a set of social conventions than a deep relationship with God, for Christianity no longer existed in religion, but had

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<sup>344</sup>. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: New York University Press, 1998).

been replaced by a socio-political structure that obscured the real message.<sup>345</sup> In a country the size of Denmark, with less than two million inhabitants, Kierkegaard's writings and life were extensively cited in opposition to official Christianity.

The tensions between the Grundtvigians and the Inner Mission Society, Kierkegaard's attacks on organized religion, the religious pluralism allowed by the 1848 constitution, the success of Mormon proselytizing of church members, and the growing strength of the Marxian socialism introduced in Germany caused increasing abandonment of traditional Christianity. Economic stress created by the migration from rural areas to the cities, and the growing allure of the United States described in newspapers, magazines and private correspondence, emigration to the United States increased from a total of 1,449 in 1860 to 17,094 in 1870 and to 31,771 in 1880.

### **DANISH IN DETROIT IS A LANGUAGE**

Danish immigrants brought the Danish culture with them to Detroit. Detroit's Danish immigrants were richly endowed with social capital. They came from a nation with a rich cultural heritage, an international history as a once dominant major European power, universal education and a literacy rate of 99% with English or German as a second language. Almost immediately universally conversant in the English language, indistinguishable in dress, appearance and conduct from other northern Europeans, tolerant, espousing democratic values, employed and employable, Danish immigrants were quickly assimilated into Detroit life.<sup>346</sup> Danish immigrants, few in number,

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<sup>345</sup> Frank N. Magill, Ian P. McGreal, ed, *Masterpieces of Christian Literature in Summary Form* (New York: Harpere & Row, 1963), p. 728.

<sup>346</sup> When the Detroit Board of Education and Ford Motor Company established The Americanization Committee prior to World War I to provide English language instruction to immigrants, only two students were ever enrolled from Denmark. *Americanization Committee of Detroit*, Folder 1, Bentley Historical Library.

obtained housing restricted only by availability and cost and did not establish any Danish neighborhood. It was the formation of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church in 1882 and its use of the Danish language for worship that gathered the Danish immigrants scattered throughout the city together into an identifiable body in Detroit. The site that provided the greatest accessibility to public transportation for its scattered membership was chosen for St. Peter's location. St. Peter's was never a Danish neighborhood parish church.

To claim that "faith communities, in which people worship together, are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America",<sup>347</sup> is also to ask why people gather together for worship. It is a question that has intrigued philosophers through the centuries. It was no longer important to establish the origin of religion, but to determine its function. Beyond avoiding sectarian landmines and doctrinal disputes, the function of religion focused on empirical evidence and observations. To understand why the Danish immigrants gathered together from the different residential areas in Detroit to organize St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church is to recognize what St. Peter's did for them in Detroit.

A most helpful overview of St. Peter's purpose begins with the summary of religion's role in creating and reinforcing societal integration that Emile Durkheim used in his work. Beginning with his assertion that religion reflected the norms, roles, and social relationships of society, and that belief in the soul is a "symbolic representation of the relation between the individual and society"<sup>348</sup>, he identified four primary social functions of religion. For Durkheim, religion served a disciplinary and preparatory function for social life. It provided a cohesive function by bringing people together, re-

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<sup>347</sup>. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 66.

<sup>348</sup>. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Collier, 1961), p. 236.

membering—re-establishing—their social heritage and establishing a sense of communal well-being.<sup>349</sup>

The Danish immigrants' strong commitment to the continued use of the Danish "mother-tongue" can be traced to the N.F.S. Grundtvig's fundamental idea that it was the word, the language that makes human beings human. The heart was the center of the word, and all education evolved from words which touched the heart. Life was lived forward, and experienced backward. Grundtvig's translation of Beowulf, the oldest surviving epic poem in the old English language, into Danish in 1820, initiated his efforts to replace Denmark's "Latin culture" that he believed as destroyed by the French Revolution, with a new Germanic culture. Grundtvig was one of the first to recognize that the epic poem included actual historical events, and considered it part of Denmark's "living word", the past which should be included in the present. The Danish language carried this living word forward. Both the mythology and the living truths of Christianity that Beowulf contained were essential for a true revival of learning. The Danish language, the mother tongue of Denmark, would be the medium of expression. Each person was to feel he was a part of that living stream of life known as Denmark, knowing its past and its aspirations for the future, and assuming responsibility for it. Culture and identity were embedded in the unity of life and language. For Grundtvig this would happen through the living Church, where Christ was most visible in the confession of faith by those attending the sacrament of baptism. The living word experienced in the sacraments was proclaimed by the living word of the Church.

Grundtvig's emphasis on the Danish language for transmitting the living word from the past through the present and into the future was an important part of the

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<sup>349</sup>. Harry Alpert, *Emile Durkheim and His Sociology* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), pp. 198-203.

immigrant's heritage. But there were factors working against the general use of the Danish language by Detroit's Danish immigrants. Unlike German, Polish or Irish immigrants, who had created ethnic neighborhoods, Danish immigrants were scattered throughout the city. Most often, their neighbors would be something other than Danish. In all of Detroit there was only one Danish grocery store, one Danish butcher, one Danish shoemaker and one Danish tailor. The English language was the language of commerce, industry, instruction and public discourse. The spoken and written word for Danish immigrants was English, except for worship and programs at the Danish church.<sup>350</sup>

Less conspicuous as an inherent issue in the use of the Danish language for worship but potentially more serious, was the blending together of the Inner Mission Movement adherents with the Grundtvigians, into one congregation. Having developed and maintained distinctive styles and themes of ministry and emphases in Denmark, while yet remaining within the Danish National Church, Detroit offered the two groups no choice but participation in St. Peter's. The difference between the strong emphasis on the individual as a free standing entity present in the pietism of the Inner Mission movement and Grundtvig's interest in the cultural, associational nature of human experience created a tension for St. Peter's. The use of the Danish language for the Inner Mission followers was much less important to them than the development of a strong and resilient pietism emanating from knowledge of Scripture, devotional practices, and the inculcation of spiritual wholeness. Grundtvigians would not disagree with this, but believed that the use of the Danish language would facilitate them. What Inner Mission

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<sup>350</sup>. Frank M. Paulsen, *Danish Folk Traditions. A Study in Fading Survivals* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1968), p. 22.

and Grundtvigians did share was the strong conviction of the role, authority and supremacy of the laity in matters of church governance and faith life.

The early years of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church were committed to the securing of pastoral leadership,<sup>351</sup> congregational organization, and a permanent location. Pastoral leadership was supplied by both Norwegian and Danish clergy until 1904 when St. Peter's formally affiliated with the Danish Lutheran Church in America<sup>352</sup> and obtained Danish speaking clergy educated at Danish seminaries. In 1907 it relocated from the near east side of Detroit to the edge of the Woodbridge Farm, a planned development begun in 1870 which had a mix of professionals, merchants and industrialists. The median center of the Danish population had moved to Detroit's West side and the new location on Vermont Street, in the center of what was known as "Scandinavian center",<sup>353</sup> provided East-West cross-town streetcar lines, the Charlevoix and the Forest, and two West side lines. In 1907 most of the membership came to church in public transportation. Charting membership residences from congregational rolls resulted in very few living closer than twelve blocks of the church building.<sup>354</sup> St. Peter's was a "commuter parish" from the very beginning of its existence..

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<sup>351</sup>. The National Church of Denmark had no official jurisdiction or commitment to immigrants, other than to provide theological candidates for ordination as available. The limited number of Danish clergy in the United States made it very difficult for Danish congregations to obtain Danish clergy. Norwegian clergy were often used in Danish congregations as the Norwegian language is similar to the Danish language and could be understood.

<sup>352</sup>. One of the continuing issues following the formation of the Danish Lutheran Church in America was the relationship of independent congregations. St. Peter's was organized and incorporated by laymen, with the ownership of the congregation in the name of the laity. St. Peter's formal affiliation with the Danish Lutheran Church in America did not include any reference to how the question of property ownership was resolved.

<sup>353</sup>. *1907 Report*, St., Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, Box 1, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>354</sup>. I charted the membership in 1910, 1930 and 1950 from membership roles and 1970 from the addresses included in the church directory. The movement outward remained fairly constant with increasing numbers moving to the outer edges of Detroit, northern suburban communities and Farmington Hills.

Although St. Peter's was drawn together by the Danish language, it was the issue of language that created the first major dissent in St. Peter's. Church youth, either coming as very young children from Denmark or born in the United States and unable to speak Danish fluently, insisted that "in a heated discussion where they must speak distinctly to convey their meaning, it must necessarily be in the English language."<sup>355</sup> All members could speak both English and Danish, but only a very few were fluent in both. There were no restrictions on the constitution of the Danish Youth Group, and the English language was allowed, but when the pastor, the Rev. Nikolai Viggo Holm, insisted that the Danish language be used at Youth Group meetings, attendance dropped from fourteen members to five.<sup>356</sup> At the same time, St. Peter's was informed that another Danish congregation would be organized, and nine members of St. Peter's Youth Group joined with the newly established Trinity congregation.

Beyond the internal language debate in St. Peter's, World War I introduced new issues. The anti-German sentiment created by World War I enveloped all immigrants who retained identities and practices that were not transparently American. Public opinion did not appreciate how the memory of Denmark's defeat and the transfer of Schleswig and Holstein to Germany made St. Peter's use of the Danish language that much more important. Public opinion did not appreciate the distinction the members made between public life and the life and programs of St. Peter's church. The members of St. Peter's had always been spatially integrated, but the growing emphasis on "Americanization" raised questions about their "Danishness", which featured the use of a

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<sup>355</sup>. Paul Nyholm, *The Americanization of Danish Lutheran Churches in America* (Copenhagen: Institute for Danish Church History, 1963), p. 303.

<sup>356</sup>. *1907 Report*, Box 1.

foreign language for worship. The anti-German sentiment expanded into ethnic tensions that included Danes.<sup>357</sup>

Powerful voices were raised against “hyphenated-Americans”. The former President Theodore Roosevelt had spoken forcefully against hyphenated-Americans.<sup>358</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, the new pastor of nearby Bethel Evangelical Church, wrote an article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Failure of German-Americanism” that blamed German Americans themselves for the lack of esteem in which they were held by other Americans. He cited their partisanship that made compact racial groups out of partially assimilated racial elements in the United States. He expected German immigrants to place the virtues and powers of their particular race in the service of the ideals that “animate the people” with whom they have allied in the United States. He charged them with indifference to the national ideals of America, and of being inconspicuous in the social developments of the nation. Perhaps his most searing criticism was for their “studied and sometimes hostile aloofness toward all interdenominational movements. Not even the more liberal of the German-American churches have entered very heartily into Christian fellowship with other churches.”<sup>359</sup> This article did not go unnoticed in the Danish community.<sup>360</sup>

The Federal government fanned anti-German sentiment with several specific acts.

At the beginning of World War I President Wilson created a Committee on Public

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<sup>357</sup>. From conversations with residents of the Danish Old Peoples Home in Rochester, MI, who were former members of St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church. Part of my parish duties included conducting bi-weekly worship at the Danish Old Peoples Home from 1962-1975. In many conversations the residents would recall experiences from their life in St. Peter’s. Bi-lingual, Danes quickly learned to use the English language when in any public place where they sensed this “ethnic tension”, but continued to use Danish for their worship.

<sup>358</sup>. See pp. 58-63 in Chapter Three..

<sup>359</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Failure of German-Americanism”, *Atlantic Monthly* 118, (1916): 13-18.

<sup>360</sup>. See note #36. Several residents knew Reinhold Niebuhr personally, remembered the article and the conversations it created at St. Peter’s.

Information. It placed pro-war advertisements in magazines and distributed 75 million copies of pamphlets defending America's role in the war.<sup>361</sup> The Espionage Act of 1917 and its counterpart, the Trading-with-the Enemy Act were created by Congress. Codified and legitimized, justifications were established for the persecution and prosecution of any one speaking, writing, or acting against the war with Germany. Title XII of the Espionage Act empowered the Postmaster General to ban from the mails any matter "advocating or urging treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the United States."<sup>362</sup> By 1923 laws in one way or another restricted the teaching of foreign languages in twenty-one states, including Nebraska and Iowa, where there were substantial numbers of Danish Lutheran Churches.<sup>363</sup> For the Danish Church such laws became the primary subject of annual conventions.<sup>364</sup> These laws were eventually overturned by the Supreme Court in 1923 and 1926, but the impact on minority immigrant populations was consequential.

In the midst of Detroit's emphasis upon and conduct of programs on Americanization, St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church continued to conduct its worship

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<sup>361</sup>. George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper Bros. 1920), pp. 114, 457-458. Creel was the head of the CPI, and the pamphlets included the *Red, White and Blue* series with names like *The Meaning of America, Friendly Words to the Foreign Born, National Services Know No Hyphen* and *No Qualified American*.

<sup>362</sup>. Paul Murphy, *World War One and the Origin of Civil Liberties in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 109.

<sup>363</sup>. In *The Danish Lutheran Church in America*, Enok Mortensen includes the experience of the Danish Church in Newell, Iowa where the congregation asked the sheriff if he were authorized to lock the church doors in the event that the congregation continued its Danish services. The sheriff advised the congregation to proceed with its activities as usual...p. 177.

<sup>364</sup>. Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Church in America*, p.166, pp. 171-173.

As long before as 1877, one the leading pastors of the Danish church in the United States, Adam Dan, had said that theological students must "feel at home in the mother tongue, both in speech and writing, but also be well verse in the English language." In 1894 the president of the Danish Seminary in Dana, NE, suggested that English be used a few hours per week. In 1905 the Seminary had three faculty members, two using Danish and one English in their lectures. Shortly afterwards, one resigned and another died. It was more than thirteen years before another English speaking professor could be obtained.

services using the Danish language and the Danish liturgical order. Church School classes were conducted in Danish, and the pastor wore the traditional Danish clerical garb. A one-year Catechetical instruction program for youth leading to full adult membership was conducted in the Danish language, and the Youth Group conducted their meetings in the Danish manner, using songs, Bible study and social events incorporating folk dancing and gymnastics. The variance for the youth was the use of both the American and Danish flags on festive occasions, and intermittent use of the English language.

The Gundtvigian churches in the United States, which included St. Peters in Detroit, continued to emphasize the use of the Danish language in the home, the church, and in the theological education of the clergy until the late 1920s. It was stressed that parents should use the Danish language in conversation with their children. Congregations were to use the Danish language for instruction, and where there was any deficiency in Danish literacy, elementary Danish should be taught. In 1923, the district in which St. Peter's was a member congregation enrolled five times as many students using the Danish language rather than English. Within six years, the number was reversed.<sup>365</sup>

Is there a distinction between Danish language, culture and ethnicity? Accounting for differences is difficult. Ethnicity is a property of social formation and a feature of interaction. If Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan are correct in their assertion that the earliest dictionary appearance of "ethnicity" was in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972, that would still not permit any use of "ethnicity" without reference to historical and current religious motifs. The word "ethnic" is much older than 1972 and is

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<sup>365</sup>. Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Church*, p. 298.

derived from the Greek *ethnos*, which in turn is derived from *ethnikos*, which originally meant heathen or pagan. From its use in 14<sup>th</sup> century England onward, where “ethnics” gradually referred to Jews, Italians and the Irish, the religious implications are obvious. Ethnicity has its origin in the soil of religion, but religion is not always included in ethnicity.<sup>366</sup>

Ethnic differences generally include cultural differences, but Danish cultural differences were very elusive and obscure, and were primarily of class, rather than ethnic. It was the Danish language that created and provided the interaction creating Danish culture and ethnicity. Denmark was defined by the Danish language, and a fundamental feature of the Danish culture was the use of the Danish language. Grundtvig’s translation of Beowulf, the history of Saxo Grammaticus and the Icelandic Sagas into Danish re-established the original Nordic or Danish mind. He created the all-embracing view of nature, history and language. Culture and identity were embedded in the unity of life and language. Grundtvig produced a definition of national identity after the outbreak of Denmark’s war with Germany over Schleswig. His more precise expression was in the form of verse:

People! What is a people? what does popular mean?  
Is it the nose or the mouth that gives it away?  
Is there a people hidden from the average eye in burial hills  
behind bushes, in every body, big and bony?  
They belong to a people who think they do,  
those who can hear the Mother tongue,  
those who love the Fatherland  
The rest are separated from the people, expel themselves,

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<sup>366</sup>. In Roger Daniels’ *Coming to America, A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, (Princeton, NJ, HarperCollins, 1990) the Danish, Swedish and Norwegian immigrants are collected together as “Scandinavian”. In the section dealing with Danish immigrants, Daniels devotes his major attention to the migration of Danish Mormons to Utah.

do not belong.<sup>367</sup>

This definition was more voluntaristic and subjective in that it stressed the will of the people. Grundtvig did not assume a hierarchy of nationalities. There would be cultural diversity but no cultural dominance and in that sense it is nonessentialist. Yet, there was something basic to Danish identity. To be Danish in Detroit was to use the Danish language.<sup>368</sup> That was enough.

### **DETROIT DANES MODIFY DANISH CHURCH**

The formation of the Norden Sonner fellowship and its evolution into St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church for Detroit's Danish immigrants had emphasized Danish traditions and identity. But Denmark and Detroit were not the same, and while the Danish could use the Danish language, other features of the Danish heritage had to be modified. In his efforts to present more clearly and faithfully a new and culturally fruitful expression of Christianity, Grundtvig had raised the fundamental question of how transcendent perspectives could be socially embodied. Amid all his work and writings, the central issue was one of ecclesiology. Danish immigrants could establish a Lutheran church in Detroit that would use the Danish language and be known as the Danish church but it would exist and function in the socio-political and economic world of the United States.

Detroit Danes adapted quickly. Shortly after the gathering of the Norden Sonner fellowship group, a small building was built on Leland Street, but it was sold three years

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<sup>367</sup>. Uffe Ostergard, "Peasants and Danes: The Danish National Identity and Political Culture", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan., 1992), p. 10.

<sup>368</sup>. Denmark makes no requirement regarding skills in Danish and Danish language use for its citizens. Citizens born within the country's borders are not required to master Danish. One can reside in Denmark without any knowledge of Danish but mastery of the Danish language is required of those seeking to become Danish citizens.

later to satisfy creditors when timely payments were not made. For George Iverson it was a learning experience and in the succeeding formal organization of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, contributions of fifty cents a month for men and twenty-five cents for women were assigned. In Denmark, the Danish National Church had been supported by taxes, but in Detroit St. Peter's would be supported by contributions that were "voluntary" but also "recommended". Assigned contributions were only the first of other changes for St. Peter's in Detroit. Also new were the ownership and management of church property by the membership of the congregation. The Danish National Church owned and maintained church buildings in Denmark, but St. Peter's assumed and accepted responsibility for all financial obligations and the maintenance and upkeep of their property. Incorporation as an eleemosynary institution in the state of Michigan required a constitution with by-laws, clearly prescribed memberships, officers, etc, and permitted the corporation to buy and sell real estate and incur debt. Perhaps more consequential for church governance was that St. Peter's was legally independent,<sup>369</sup> with leadership exercised by laity elected from the congregation. Parish pastors provided liturgical leadership and pastoral ministries.

Grundtvig's embodiment of the transcendent in the living word in the living church most fully experienced at the Sacrament of Baptism accompanied by the Apostles' Creed, had created a social differentiation which forced the Lutheran church in the United States to specialize in "religion", however culture might choose to define it.

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<sup>369</sup>. Lutheran congregations around the world subscribe to the confessional statements of faith that include the three ecumenical creeds, Nicene, Apostles and Athanasian, and the six symbolical books included in the Book of Concord. The six are the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism, Luther's Large Catechism, the Formula of Concord and the Smalkald Articles. These confessions are historical documents that cannot be changed, and describe the Lutheran witness to the Christian faith.

Lutheranism was the state religion of Denmark until the 1848 Constitution defined the Danish National Lutheran Church to consist of “baptized members”. Nearly 90% of the Danish population of more than five million were listed as “baptized members” of the Danish National Church,<sup>370</sup> but attendance at Sunday worship was less than 5% of the membership. “Belief” and “unbelief”, “inside” and “outside” in the traditional sense were problematic.

Membership in Detroit’s St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church was defined as those “baptized”, but rather than consisting of all Danish immigrants who had been baptized, it included only those who voluntarily joined St. Peter’s through the Sacrament of Baptism, either by transfer or the rite itself. St. Peter’s was the only Danish Lutheran church in Detroit, but not all Danish immigrants were members of St. Peter’s, and their presence in Detroit was as important as the “Danishness” exercised in the worship and ministry of St. Peter’s. The issue was how Danish immigrants outside the membership of St. Peter’s were to be included in Detroit’s Danish presence.

The solution for Detroit’s Danish immigrants was the organization of Danish Brotherhood Lodge #227 in 1907.<sup>371</sup> There was a dimension of social reality for “Danishness” that existed outside the formal institution of religion. The Danish Brotherhood Lodge building was designed by George Iverson, and was constructed in 1916 on a site less than two blocks from St. Peter’s church building. It was chosen for its location in the middle of the expanding Danish population, and was a much larger building, featuring three floors for large group gatherings. It provided space for all of St.

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<sup>370</sup>. 2005 Statistics of the Danish National Church, <<http://www.interchurch.dk/LutheranChurch/menu.htm>.

<sup>371</sup>. Voting membership in the Danish Brotherhood was restricted to males, but all programs and social events were gender neutral from the very beginning.

Peter's social functions as well as all the functions of the larger Danish community.<sup>372</sup>

Beyond providing space and programs for Danish fellowship, Detroit's Danish Brotherhood Lodge was also part of the national Danish Brotherhood in America that provided a life and accident insurance program for Danes. Policies providing burial funds were the ones most often purchased.<sup>373</sup>

The Danish Brotherhood Lodge was not organized as a variant among the existing ecclesiological themes or as a reformation of strategy or structure. It was a new way of understanding the social reality that shared the "Danishness" which also existed in the Danish church. Grundtvig's "living word in the living church" did not place the emphasis on human living over Christian living, but rather that the humanity of individual living and the indigenous life of people were the primary influences on Christian life.<sup>374</sup> His emphasis on The King, People, Homeland, and Mother Tongue brought life and restored Denmark's honor and glory. Danish nationalism, Danish life and Danish culture were the sources of enlightenment and the joy of living.<sup>375</sup> The Brotherhood Lodge did not gather the Danish community around the baptismal font and join in the profession of the Apostles Creed, which Grundtvig regarded as the ultimate

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<sup>372</sup>. The ground floor of the Brotherhood Lodge provided space for several Danish services, including a tailor, travel agency and shoe repair shop. Dance instruction and dances were among the most frequently scheduled events in the building.

<sup>373</sup>. Sinne Sorensen described in an extended interview in November, 1988, the support she and her sons received in the death of her husband who had purchased an insurance policy from the Danish Brotherhood to cover burial expenses. A member of the parish I served as Pastor, Sinne shared many stories from her life in Detroit.

<sup>374</sup>. Johannes Knudsen, ed. *Selected Writings, N.F.S. Grundtvig* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 5

<sup>375</sup>. In *UpSouth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Matthew Countryman describes how various Black programs, including The Freedom Library, Citizenship Schools and others, emphasized the importance of a "rich and meaningful identity." (p.186). Lectures on famous Blacks, important contributions from black history et al, were presented to help the black community develop racial pride. There is a similarity between Grundtvig's emphasis on King, People, Homeland and Mother Tongue and the Black community's emphasis on Race, History and Shared Experiences.

essence of the living church, but there was no denying the enlightenment and joy of living experienced there.

Because the use of the Danish language was the primary expression for both the Danish Brotherhood and St. Peter's cultural and national heritage, the request of St. Peter's Youth Group to use English as their language of discourse was a very serious matter as well as being a larger community issue.<sup>376</sup> The growing attention to hyphenated-Americans at the beginning of World War I raised the question of patriotism and basic citizenship. Foreign-born Danish immigrants were bi-lingual, with English as their second language. Their children, born in the United States, were also bilingual speaking with Danish as the second language. But fewer and fewer of the second generation born in the US retained both English and Danish literacy. To insist that the Danish language be used for their Youth Group meetings was to make it very difficult for the youth to experience that fullness of "Danishness" through the use of the language itself. Classes for the learning of the Danish language only provided a level of competency that facilitated participation in liturgical worship and the reading and singing of hymn texts in the Danish language. Literary competency, the ability to read and "digest" the Nordic literature that embodied historical Danish culture was another matter.

For St. Peter's, the use of the Danish language by their Youth Group was settled de facto in 1916. It was never established de jure. The subject of dissent in the Youth Group had been over the use of English rather than Danish, but the real issue for the parish had been the retention of their second and third generation members. The use of the Danish language had not been formally repudiated or disallowed, it had simply ceased

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<sup>376</sup>. Interviews with Paul Hansen, Marie Kjolhede, Offer Preuthum, Elsie Kusk, Ina Christensen, Paul Blinkede and Alice Jorgensen established and confirmed this.

to convey or inform the whole reality of every day life as prescribed by “Danishness”. The reality to which the use of the Danish language pointed was not an unquestioned, taken-for-granted perspective within which the second and third generation could rest with assurance. It was a defined and specific reality that imparted direction and coherence. At the beginning of World War I, the youth of St. Peter’s used English for their pledge of allegiance to the United States and Danish for their opening devotional prayers and hymns.

St. Peter’s quest for a resolution over the use of the Danish language by their Youth was part of what has been called “a struggle for the real”.<sup>377</sup> The nature of “the real” was no longer self-evident. The meanings which the use of the Danish language had contained were no longer received by the second and third generation on the old terms. Much of what Grundtvig had acknowledged in Denmark’s ancient writings was a “commonsense world” which Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann described in *The Social Construction of Reality* as a network of collectively generated representations which define a complex intersubjective world of significance.<sup>378</sup> The most important mechanism for the reproduction of identity was not one of roles and norms, but of habits and practices. It was more important that the youth of St. Peter’s attend and participate in Youth Group meetings using English than that they absent themselves because Danish was required. It was an issue less of norms and more of practice and habit. St. Peter’s

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<sup>377</sup>. The phrase appears as the title of the last chapter in Clifford Geertz’s Terry Lectures, *Islam Observed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968). Geertz presented a general framework for a comparative analysis of religion and applied it to one creed, Islam, in two contrasting civilizations, the Indonesian and the Moroccan. In Morocco the conception of life meant activism, moralism and intense individuality. In Indonesia it emphasized aestheticism, inwardness and dissolution of personality. He identified four major styles for this study. The classical styles grouped likes together, but the greater the gathering of “likes” the greater variety, thus creating relationships. . . The third style of interpretation was the Scripturalist and the fourth was “the struggle for the real”.

<sup>378</sup>. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966.

Youth Group was permitted to use the English language with the hope that they would remain active members of the parish.

The Youth Group's use of the English language was not the only concern for St. Peter's. There was a greater concern that they experience the living word of the living church in the years of their adolescence, preparing them for participation in the affairs of life. Danes called this a concern for "development with a human face."<sup>379</sup> Grundtvig had been the prime mover for the establishment of Folk Schools (the Danish term is *folkehojskole*, or more simply *hojskole*) in Denmark to help young people learn to think, speak, and write clearly, sensibly, soundly, and rightly.<sup>380</sup> But this learning was to be given in a national and popular way, instilling in young people the love of Denmark, its language, its customs, and establishments.<sup>381</sup> The young people were to know both the nation's virtues and its faults, for without this learning there would be disaster.<sup>382</sup> St. Peter's concern for their youth was later transferred to a consuming concern for the second and third generation members scattered throughout the city.

Grundtvigian folk schools placed great emphasis on oral teaching. The way individuals revealed themselves to each other was by the words they spoke to one another. The real and deepest truths that constitute enlightenment could only be taught by life itself. Grundtvigian folk schools did not emphasize teachers questioning students, but rather students questioning teachers. It was a paradox in that the deepest task of life was

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<sup>379</sup>. Steven M. Borish, *The Land of the Living: The Danish Folk High Schools and Denmark's Non-Violent Path to Modernization* (Nevada City, Calif.: Blue Dolphin, 1991), pp. 7-9.

<sup>380</sup>. Borish, *The Land of the Living*, p. 18.

<sup>381</sup>. Paul Blinkhede recalled the Danish dance classes he attended on Saturday afternoons following the morning Catechetical instructions, and the good times he and his friends had at these classes.

<sup>382</sup>. N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Embassy of Denmark, Washington, D.C.*, <http://www.ambwashington.um.dk/en/menu/InformationaboutDenmark/Culture/Literature/N.F.S.>

to acquire enlightenment, but it was something that no schoolroom lesson could ever teach.

St. Peter's Danish Church in Detroit did not have a Folk School, and the one established in Ashland, Mi had closed. There was very limited success in transplanting the Grundtvigian folk schools to the United States. The folk schools had not accommodated themselves to the American scene, but their underlying purpose, to provide opportunities to learn more of themselves, and their heritage, and be enlightened in the foundation of their faith, remained important to exercise. Folk Schools had created a balance between things that were different, but enlightened each other with these differences. Folk Schools had awakened in each student a pride in Danish culture and a desire for learning that would continue for their entire life.

The arrival of the Rev. Sven Jorgensen as pastor of St. Peter's Danish Church in 1925 marked a new beginning for the parish. Applying Grundtvig's teaching that it was a "human being first, then Christian", and that both religion and culture had to be placed at the service of human life, Pastor Jorgensen affirmed the purposes of the Young Peoples' Society, the Danish Brotherhood and the Danish Sisterhood, the Men's Group, the Reading Club, Songfests, and Dances, with the worshipping congregation at the heart and center of their faith. To "be a human first and then a Christian" meant that the congregation could not exist in a vacuum, but had its basis in the nation. The Danish Church was based on the Danish people and their history, and it was through the Danish language that the people encountered Christianity. It was not possible to speak of the Kingdom of God without using the words that had their birthright in one's national life. And there lay the challenge. The resolution, not perfect, but the best under the

circumstances, was for Pastor Jorgensen to conduct Sunday morning worship in Danish, and the Sunday evening *folkelig* (folk-school---enlightenment) lectures in English.

St. Peter's Sunday morning liturgy followed the Danish order, beginning and ending with the clergy kneeling at the altar and prayer being led by the laity. The liturgy included a confession of sins, the absolution, a selection of hymns, and readings from Scripture followed by a sermon. The Apostles' Creed was used for the affirmation of faith, an offering was received, prayers of intercession offered, and on selected Sundays, the Holy Eucharist would be administered. Baptisms were by sprinkling, pouring or immersion for infants and adults and were scheduled as requested.

There was a fine line between the Gospel and Danish culture. Lutheranism was quite clear about the distinction between gospel and culture, and yet the gospel would find its best expression in a cultural mold. One of Grundtvig's fundamental insights into Christianity was his conviction that the Bible itself was a cultural document created by the Church. The Bible had been transmitted in a cultural medium, and the gospel message was to be handed on from the biblical culture to the membership of St. Peter's. The biblical world, the Danish culture and the city of Detroit were not the same "world" with different labels. They were different worlds. The task for Pastor Jorgensen was to plant the gospel rather than impart the Danish culture. And yet, the Gospel could not be transmitted apart from the Danish culture.

The subjects that Pastor Jorgensen could not include in his Sunday morning sermons, he used as the subjects for the Sunday evening *Folkelig* lectures. *Folkelig* programs were held on the first Sunday evening of the month. The lectures were given by Pastor Jorgensen, and topics covered included "Ramsay MacDonald, prime minister

of Great Britain”, “Danish-American Literature”, “Danish Song”, “From the Writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig”, “Benito Mussolino”, “The Girl From Denmark”, “Danish-American Writers”, “Danish Folk Schools”, “Henry Van Dyke and his writings”, and other lectures simply entitled “Danish Lecture”. Occasional guest speakers included Danish pastors, Enok Mortensen and Einar Farstrup, Architect L. Marnus, Peter Mannicke from the Danish International High School in Denmark, and Norwegian author, O.E. Rolvaag.<sup>383</sup>

The *Folkelig* lectures on the first Sunday of each month were followed on the third Sunday evening of each month by discussions (*Fremtidsvel*) on topics of current interest. A survey of the topics covered included “Einstein’s Theory”, “What Are The Real Causes of Depression”, “O.E. Rolvaag’s ‘Giants in the Earth’”, “Unions Under the NRA”, “Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales”, and “Peer Gynt”.<sup>384</sup>

As successful as the Sunday evening programs in English had been in providing interactive social and political discourse<sup>385</sup> and a potential for creating greater social and political sensibilities, they did not resolve the issue of second and third generation young people moving away and joining other parishes. For them it was not a matter of language but of distance, as newly married and younger families purchased homes further and further away from St. Peter on Vermont and Caroline. In Denmark families remained for generations in the same rural community or urban neighborhoods. In Detroit St. Peter’s was confronted with a challenge that was not part of the Danish church experience in Denmark. The question was how should our children be brought to the knowledge and understanding of the living word in the living church in an expanding urban area?

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<sup>383</sup>. St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church, *Our History*, Bentley Historical Library, Box 1. Translation of Danish titles by Alice Jorgensen.

<sup>384</sup>. St. Peter’s *Our* for George Iverson r *History*. Box 1

<sup>385</sup>. Political discourse does not mean partisan politics. It is the discourse of the “polis”, the community in conversation about mutual concerns.

Life in both rural and urban Denmark followed a different pattern and pace from life in Detroit. Detroit was an industrial city, a working city, and work schedules filled the week. Family Bible instruction was not the highest priority in the work week, and no program had been provided for children at St. Peter's other than the catechetical instruction for the profession faith at the rite of Confirmation. The Catechetical instruction was held on Saturday mornings because parents were available to provide transportation.<sup>386</sup> The decision to provide an opportunity for children to hear Bible stories in Danish on Sunday mornings marked the beginning of a Sunday School program at St. Peter's. The Sunday School program, begun in the early 1930s, followed the pattern of Danish story telling in the manner of Danish literature. Parents attended worship while children listened to Bible stories. The children heard the Ten Commandments spoken by the teacher in the manner of Grundtvig's admonition that the Ten Commandments were "living words", handed down from mouth to mouth in order that they might convey the needed inspiration to make them effective ones in life. In 1937 the Danish Lutheran Church in the United States created a Council of Elementary Religious Education that affirmed the practice St. Peter's had established years before.<sup>387</sup> The new committee recommended that all material should be Lutheran, based on biblical and pedagogical principles. It should also provide the history of the Danish church and "the views of our church".<sup>388</sup> St. Peter's creative response to the secularizing experiences of an urban culture became a model for Danish congregations in the United States.

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<sup>386</sup>. Interviewees Paul Blinkhede, Paul Emanuelsen and Ina Christiansen remember using public transportation for Saturday morning instruction on several occasions, but having parents provide transportation more often as some students came in from nearby suburbs.

<sup>387</sup>. St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, *Annual Report, 1937*. Box I Bentley Historical Library. The original name of the Council was simply "The Sunday School Committee

<sup>388</sup>. Mortensen, *Danish Lutheran Church in America*, p. 215.

Attention to and concern for the second and third generation members of St. Peter's parish revealed another social issue not clearly anticipated. Many second and third generation family members had aging first generation members. In the flush of youth the care and needs of the elderly were remote concerns, but Detroit's Danish community had aging members, and their needs were becoming increasingly apparent. Unlike Denmark with its long cultural, social, and religious history that included public attention to and provisions for the care of the aging, the Danes in Detroit would have to provide their own. The solution was created by Danish Brotherhood Lodge #227 with the purchase of a 110 acre farm in Rochester, Michigan on which the Danish Old Peoples Home was built.<sup>389</sup> Included on the committee that was appointed to develop the project from its initial proposal to its completion was George Everson, the son of George Iverson, who had gathered the six Scandinavians together in the Norderen Sonner in 1872. The 110 acre farm was purchased after World War II for \$57,000, and the farm house was renovated to accommodate twenty-eight residents. In 1960 a memorial garden was created at the Danish Old Peoples Home that featured gas lamps from Denmark and the Marshall Fredericks fountain sculpture, the "Swan and Ugly Duckling", as a monument to all Americans emigrating to the Detroit area from Denmark. It is the only monument, not only in America, but in the whole world, dedicated to the Danish immigrant.

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<sup>389</sup>. Serving a Lutheran parish in the same community, my wife and I were asked to conduct Sunday afternoon services twice a month at the Danish Old Peoples' Home. Accompanied by our two children, whom we sometimes believed the residents wanted to see more than to have us conduct the services, we would spend several hours with them, conduct the services, sing hymns and hear many stories, some joyful and others sad, about their lives. During the days of the Vietnam War I participated in The Laity and Clergy Opposed to the Vietnam War movement which assisted young men opposed to the war seek refuge in Canada. I remember the gentle criticism several male residents made of my work, only to learn they had come to the United States to avoid being drafted in the Army for the First World War.

## CLERGY RESTRUCTURE<sup>390</sup> DANISH MINISTERIAL ROLE

From the beginning St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church was served by clergy acting in the role and tradition of the Danish National Church. At first unwilling, and later more unable, the Danish National Church was unable to provide clergy for the Danish congregations in the United States. Its influence in the formation of ministerial practices was primarily from clergy who had participated in the Grundtvigian and Inner Mission Movements. In their practices, the Grundtvigian and Inner Mission clergy had already made revisions of the clerical office in the state church of Denmark.

Denmark's defeat by England in 1807, combined with English based revivalists and missionaries preparing large-scale missionary activities in Danish colonies had crystallized the distinction of emphasis between Anglo-American revivalism and German Lutheran theology in the Danish National Church. The Anglo-American Christian world view was more attentive to the struggle against human vices. Believing that the Christian had to stand before God on the Day of Judgment, Anglo-American Christianity emphasized one's active struggle against sin and vice. German Lutheran theology emphasized being justified by faith alone, and that through Christ's expiation on the Cross, humanity had been granted forgiveness and salvation. Anglo-American revivalism emphasized the conscious efforts to be made in quest of a more perfect obedience, leading to perfection itself. German Lutheran theology emphasized the assurance of salvation and the joy of life in knowing one's present and future relationship with God. German Lutheran theology was criticized for its propensity for human

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<sup>390</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Beginning with the end of W.W.II, Wuthnow surveys the religious life in the United States and notes dramatic changes. Restructuring for him means identifying the changes that have occurred in the boundaries, defining the religious communities in the United States. St. Peter's clergy established new boundaries to define their ministry.

passivity in matters of faithful discipleship, and Anglo-American revivalism was criticized for its propensity for self-righteousness in matters of salvation.

Anglo-American revivalism existed in Denmark primarily in the Inner Mission Movement in the Danish National Church. The emphasis on individual morality and the discipline of a more ascetic lifestyle stood in marked contrast to the freedom for living that was experienced in the knowledge of one's justification by faith. The Inner Mission Movement emphasized an austere lifestyle leading to human perfectibility and contrasted with Grundtvigianism that emphasized the joy and delight of life assured of salvation through justification by faith through grace. The continuing challenge for St. Peter's was retaining the support and participation of both Grundtvigian and Inner Mission members..

For St. Peter's clergy and laity, the Danish National Church was never a presence other than through past participation and remembered experiences. There was no formal, official relationship between St. Peter's and the Danish National Church which bound the clergy to them or subjected the congregation to the disciplines of the national body.<sup>391</sup> Yet the clerical role in St. Peter's began in the manner of the Danish National Church, with their responsibilities for conducting worship (the laity would open and close the liturgy with prayer, emphasizing lay responsibility and "ownership" of the service) and administering the Sacraments, which included instruction for Baptism and Confirmation, assigned to the office of the ministry. St. Peter's clergy were advisory members of the congregation's committees, with a voice but no vote. The clergy were under the

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<sup>391</sup>. The first Danish bishop to visit the Danish churches in the United States came in 1923 when Bishop H. Ostenfeld of Copenhagen was invited to visit Danish churches in America. His suggestions for the incorporation of the episcopacy into the American Danish church were vigorously opposed. The general sentiment was expressed by Pastor James C. Peterson who believed that such a proposal could only lead to one conclusion: "After all, good friend, our situation, both historically and practically, was not understood." Quoted in Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Churches in America*, p.97.

authority and discipline of the congregation. St. Peter's affirmed the ministry of all the baptized but assigned the constitutive office of the congregation, the office of Word and Sacrament, to the clergy. It was a unique combination of clerical responsibility exercised within the body of laity whom they were called to serve and who maintained complete authority and discipline over them.

St. Peter's had been organized by laity and the congregation incorporated in Michigan listed the laity as the owners of the property.<sup>392</sup> St. Peter's was responsible for securing pastors and providing for all support instead of having clergy assigned by bishops to serve as pastors. What had been a hierarchical line of authority and responsibility that began with the Crown and ended with the congregation's compliance, had been replaced in the United States with lay authority and the responsibility for property and ministry residing in the congregation which was constitutionally formed and incorporated in the state of Michigan. The political activities exercised by clergy in Denmark to maintain harmonious relationships with bishops and state officials had been redirected in St. Peter's toward the maintenance of harmonious relationships with the leadership and membership of the congregation.

Transferring the center of authority and power, responsibility, and accountability in congregational ministry and witness from the hierarchical episcopacy to the congregation composed of baptized men, women, and children was a major restructuring

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<sup>392</sup> Timothy L. Smith, "Lay Initiative in Religious Life, 1880-1950" Anonymous *Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History*, ed. Tamara Hareven (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977). In this essay, Smith asserts that the local and national religious organizations established by immigrant groups in the United States closely resembled in structure and function the religious organizations they had known in their native land. This was only partly true for the Danish immigrants in Detroit. Smith also suggests that the development of these religious organizations in the United States were part of the immigrants' desire to participate on their own terms in their religious practices. Smith concludes that the social history of the immigrant population displayed a strong preference for what scholars persist in labeling the middle class way.

of relationships between the clergy and the congregation. What had once been directed from within the congregation toward the larger arenas of mission and witness, i.e. the diocese, the nation, and ultimately the Crown, was now reversed and directed inward to the congregation itself.

The intentional use of the Danish language for St. Peter's worship and educational programs was both an obstacle and an aid to this self-serving style of organization, for it was the Danish language that constituted Danish ethnicity in Detroit.<sup>393</sup> St. Peter's had been organized by and for Danish immigrants and continued to use the Danish language during World War I. The withdrawal of nearly half of the Youth Group to participate in the organization of a Danish church using the English language<sup>394</sup> made the use of Danish an issue to be resolved. Determined to maintain its ethnic ministry, St. Peter's affirmed the use of the Danish language for worship but permitted English for Youth Group discourse. The Rev. Sven Jorgensen was called as pastor to lead the congregation in this ministry.

The Rev. Jorgensen, born in Denmark but raised and educated in the United States, retained the Danish language and introduced the regular use of the English

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<sup>393</sup>. Martin Marty, "Ethnicity: The Skeleton of Religion in America", *Church History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (March., 1972), 5-21. Having suggested with Frederick Jackson Turner that "the story of the peopling in America has not yet been written", Marty writes that scholars have been increasing attentive to the regrouping of peoples in the United States along racial, ethnic and religious lines that are called "peoplehood". It is impossible, he suggests, to incorporate all the ethnic-racial-religious complexes in the United States in five main models he identifies as the secular, private, pluralist, denominational and the common-religious. "New particularisms will continue to arise" he writes to "embody the hopes of this people of peoples" (21).

<sup>394</sup>. St. Peter's had been organized by Danish immigrants reared in the Grundtvigian tradition. There were a few Danish immigrants in Detroit reared in the Inner Mission Movement tradition, and in 1916 began the organization of an Inner Mission Movement parish in Detroit. With the Inner Mission Movement emphasizing personal salvation and moral character and giving little attention to national identity, Inner Mission Movement churches had dropped the use of the Danish language for worship as early as the late 1890's. The Inner Mission Movement congregation in Detroit existed for less than six years and disbanded in early 1921. Nearly all those who left St. Peter's to join with the Inner Mission Movement parish returned to St. Peter's.

language. While conducting the Sunday morning worship in the tradition of the Danish church and the Danish language, he led the Sunday evening Folk School programs in English. Few remembered objections over the “official” use of English for the evening programs.<sup>395</sup>

It was during Jorgensen’s pastoral ministry that new concerns and issues were being raised for the congregation. Within two years of his arrival at St. Peter’s, Ford Motor Company laid off 60,000 men and the relief load for the city of Detroit increased to \$1,000,000.<sup>396</sup> St. Peter’s membership included many skilled workers and the effects were not immediately obvious, as productivity improved in the auto industry, and only 91 workers were needed for every 100 displaced. If those who worked at Ford Motor Company in 1929, making 92 cents an hour were still employed in 1932, they now collected only 59 cents an hour.<sup>397</sup> When the parish celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1932 it was optimistic that it would survive, but offerings were substantially less, the pastor’s salary was reduced and payments of bills were sometimes delayed. St. Peter’s was being held together by “Danish glue”. “Hers was a fellowship that began at worship, deepened at the communion table, was made lasting by the cycle of shared weddings and baptisms and confirmations and funerals. It was a network of family relationships and kindred memories and stretched to Denmark across the Atlantic and into some of the Danish communities of America’s Middle West.”<sup>398</sup>

The 1932 national presidential campaign initiated extended discussions on economic issues in St. Peter’s Men’s Group, as well as subject material addressed by the

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<sup>395</sup>. Christensen, Emanuelson and Pedersen interviews.

<sup>396</sup>. Robert Conot, *American Odyssey* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1974), p. 248ff.

<sup>397</sup>. *Detroit Almanac*, p. 45.

<sup>398</sup>. *Our History*, Bentley Historical Library, Box 1.

pastor at the Sunday evening lectures. FDR's New Deal was often debated at St. Peter's.<sup>399</sup> Sunday School teachers encouraged their students to bring clothing, toys, shoes, and food to share with those on relief. The Ladies Aid loaned coffee pots to the picket lines in Detroit's labor wars.<sup>400</sup> An anonymous benefactor made regular contributions to the Pastor's discretionary fund which was used to provide basic necessities for desperately impoverished member families and individuals.<sup>401</sup> By the mid 1930s, Detroit's Department of Public Relief list of recipients had increased from 156,000 to 728,000, nearly half of Detroit's population.<sup>402</sup>

Beyond the immediate needs of food and clothing, there was the collateral deterioration of Detroit's housing. The homes immediately surrounding St. Peter's had been built in the late 1800s but unemployed families were unable to maintain their homes, and many simply moved out, unable to make mortgage payments. St. Peter's neighborhood was not the only one that neglected home repairs. The entire city was short of money.

Neither St. Peter's nor the Danish Lutheran Church in America addressed the Depression in any public manner other than to speak about the suffering experienced by the unemployed and destitute in their immediate relationships of life that included their families, friends, church, work, neighborhood and children's' schools. American Lutheranism had not yet developed a sense of collective social responsibility that would encompass both the physical and spiritual needs of humanity. There were groups in

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<sup>399</sup>. *Our History*,, Box 1.

<sup>400</sup>. *Our History*,, Box 1.

<sup>401</sup>. Personal interview with Alice Jorgensen, January 25, 06. She was the daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Sven Jorgensen. She identified this benefactor as Wm. Knudsen, president of General Motors. He would meet regularly with her father for lunch, give him a check and ask to remain anonymous. Her mother kept meticulous records of those given money that would total more than \$500 each year from 1932-1938.

<sup>402</sup>. Peter Garvilovich and Bill McGraw, ed. *Detroit Free Press, the Detroit Almanac, 300 Years of life in the Motor City*, (Detroit, The Detroit Free Press, 2000), p. 45.

American Lutheranism who espoused this social responsibility but it would not materialize in any effective manner until later. For St. Peter's it was the pastoral ministry of the Rev. Sven Jorgensen that activated an outreach of care that included not only the members of the parish in need, but also those whom the members knew to be in need. St. Peter's was still a Danish church, but it was the Danish church in Detroit, and "in Detroit" became just as important as "the Danish church". What the Danish National Church would have expected Denmark to provide for its citizens, St. Peter's in Detroit sought to provide, attending to the needs of the body as well as the nurture of spirit and soul.

#### **NATIONAL MERGER ASSIMILATES DANISH ETHNICITY**

In 1909, the General Council, one of the largest Lutheran bodies in the United States, invited the General Synod, the United Synod of the South, and other Lutheran bodies, including the Danish Lutheran Church, to co-operate in a celebration of the 1917 Quadri-Centennial of the Reformation in Germany. By 1917 a resolution was presented to the Joint Committee on the Celebration of the Quadri-Centennial of the Reformation that called for the unification of the Lutheran church in America and was adopted nearly unanimously. The merger created the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) and granted greater powers to the merged organization than to any other Lutheran body. These powers were important ingredients in American Lutheranism's development of social consciousness. The congregation remained the primary body through which the power committed to Christ was exercised, but by the provision of the constitutions and by-laws, the area synods granted wide jurisdiction to the national body. Legislative powers were vested in the biennial convention of the delegates from the constituent

synods, and were absolute in such matters as external relations of synods, conferences and boards, in general organizations and movements. The executive functions of the ULCA were vested in the officers, the Executive Board, and eight other boards, all elected by conventions of delegates. It was there that the ULCA had its greatest concentration of power.

The constitution of the ULCA granted its area synods privileges to continue programs of ministry that were satisfactory to the general body, but in practice, the work of the church was to be done through the general boards as representatives of the church at large, rather than through individual synods or congregations. The merger of the three separate Lutheran bodies into the ULCA was not a federation, but rather an organic union of three bodies into one. Individual synods had certain rights and responsibilities, but the general structure and function of the ULCA was on a national level.

Language was not a major issue for the ULCA, but linguistic diversity had its supporters. Six smaller territorial synods which had more recent immigrations used the German language for worship, and church-wide German conference fostered retention of this identity. A Slovak synod was formed in 1920 followed by a Hungarian conference in 1921.

The Lutheran Commission for Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare, which included all the Lutheran groups in the United States except those in the Synodical Conference, composed a united Lutheran voice before the government to develop pastoral care for military training centers. The Commission was organized as the National Lutheran Council (NLC) in 1918 as an agency for the participating Lutheran bodies. The composing churches were called "constituents" or participating bodies. Each church

body could choose its programs to support. It did not have a defined doctrinal base, or any responsibility for furthering Lutheran unity, but it did have a general mandate to act for Lutherans in emergencies which required a united front. The functions of the NLC were limited to matters that would not affect the essentials of faith, or prejudice the confessional basis of the participating churches.<sup>403</sup>

The ULCA, the Augustana Lutheran Church, and the Danish Lutheran Church were most alike in theological commitment and temperament to the ministry provided by the NLC. Both the Augustana and Danish churches had maintained relationships with the ULCA, but after World War II they expressed interests in merging with the ULCA. Discreet inquiries and conversations at NLC meetings developed into more formal conversations in the early 1950s.

The place of the Danish Lutheran church in the tapestry of American Lutheranism had been a subject of study for decades. The president of the Danish Lutheran Church in America had asked the question in 1943 whether it was “worthwhile to carry on a separate synodical organization in the name of the Danish church? . . . It is a constant struggle to keep the generations growing up in our synod aware of our identity and our institutions. Are there ties of sufficient strength and importance to keep us together in the future?”<sup>404</sup> His answer described the sentiment of St. Peter’s Church in Detroit, as well as those of the entire Danish Lutheran Church in America:

We are bound to the Danish church by deep and sacred memories and obligations. Our entire spiritual and cultural life has been given birth and sustenance by the Danish church. The men and women who wrote its songs and hymns, built the early churches and our institutions, who expressed to us through sermons and lectures, through fellowship and friendship the faith they had, the views they held,

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<sup>403</sup>. Frederick KI. Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert, the Story of the National Lutheran Council 1918-1966* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), pp.82ff.

<sup>404</sup>. Danish Lutheran Church Annual Report, (1943) pp. 5-6.

the ideals and visions they had come to love and to live, gave to us the Danish church as a spiritual home. To be replanted would be fatal. To be unfaithful to sacred memories and ideals that have inspired us in our youth is unthinkable. . . From Grundtvig we have inherited a deep appreciation of all things human. It was not humanity devoid of all trace of good and divine, but rather humanity created in the image of God and being guided by Him toward the goal of complete fellowship and fuller development,. If we do not preach or recognize conversion as an instantaneous change taking place in the life of a person, it is due to our belief that for man to become truly Christian, he must experience ever deeper and more completely the miracle of baptismal grace and forgiveness of Ours has been, and I believe is also today, the so-called nurture type of Christianity.<sup>405</sup>

The Danish Lutheran Church dropped “Danish” from its title in 1953 and became the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC). Historian Johannes Knudsen noted that the AELC had paid dearly for clinging so long to its Danish roots. At one time the AELC had eleven parishes in the Eastern District comprised of New England, New York and New Jersey. By 1955 they had dwindled to three.<sup>406</sup> In 1955 the AELC convention approved a proposal that it become a non-geographical synod of the ULCA. With a vote of 157 to 124 in favor, the motion failed for lack of a two-thirds majority.<sup>407</sup>

The participation of the AELC in merger discussions with the ULCA and Augustana Churches marked a dramatic review of the congregational polity prevalent among American Protestantism. Congregational polity was not rejected, but it was deemed inadequate for the needs of the modern world. Beyond the congregation, the assembly of believers in a particular place, there was also the historic and universal character of the whole Christian church. Institutional religion in twentieth century

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<sup>405</sup> . Danish Lutheran Church Annual Report, pp 6-7.

<sup>406</sup> . Mortensen, *The Danish Lutheran Church in America*, p. 220, 250, 154, 159.

<sup>407</sup> . Mortensen, *The Danish Lutheran Church in America*, p. 254.

America needed an organizational structure that included congregational ministries, but could also extend beyond them into larger arenas of life.

The merger that had created the ULCA in 1918 included the formation of thirty-two synods or regionally defined judicatories. A number of these synods existed long before 1918 and a history of independence. They were not ready to join under the central authority of the ULCA. The compromise finally adopted in 1918 was to assign the shepherding and disciplining of congregations and the responsibilities for education, ordination, and discipline of clergy to the synods. The church-at-large would determine the number and boundaries of synods, and establish the standards for acceptance and for the continuance of all clergy in the ministry of the ULCA.

However much the proposed structure of the LCA would differ from the structure and style of the Danish congregations in the AELC, the greater concern was the potential loss of their Danish identity. Richard Niebuhr had identified two tendencies in the history of immigrant denominations: “The first tendency is toward conformity with the prevalent religious attitudes and practices which have been established by the churches previously acclimated in America. The second tendency is toward the differentiation of the immigrant church from the prevailing type, toward the preservation or development of its distinctive character.”<sup>408</sup> How would the proposed LCA include the intimate relation the Danish Church had with Grundtvigianism and his conviction that the Word of God should not be equated with the Bible, but with Christ Himself, and that the Bible was the sacred, revelatory history of God’s redemptive purposes? How would the proposed LCA preserve the Danish emphasis on *folkelighed* and their cultural traditions?

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<sup>408</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Cleveland: Meridan Books, 1924, 1962) p. 203.

In December, 1956 representatives from the ULCA, AELC, the Augustana (Swedish), and Suomi (Finnish) Synods created the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity (JCLU) that would develop the process for the merger of these four bodies into the Lutheran Church in America in 1962. What is of more than passing interest is that these church bodies which began in the United States conducting their worship in a foreign language, in some congregations up to World War II, made no provisions for ethnic identity in the proposed new church body. German, Swedish, Danish and Finnish Lutheran congregations were being merged into the Lutheran Church in America. In the merger of these ethnic churches into the LCA, “no one felt that the heritages of the Danes, Finns, Swedes, Germans, Slovaks, Icelanders, Blacks, Hungarians, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and the host of other ethnic groups who came together that day were being lost. Instead they sensed the birth of a church enriched by all that these peoples had brought to its forming.”<sup>409</sup>

### **NATIONAL MERGER YIELDS SOCIAL VISION**

The emergence of a new social consciousness paralleled the merging of ethnic Lutheran bodies in the United States. This is not to suggest that ethnic Lutheran churches had no social conscience before, but simply to acknowledge the expansion of a social vision that went beyond such individual acts as immorality, drunkenness, dancing, card playing, and the desecration of the Sabbath. Immigrant, ethnic, and mostly rural, Lutheran congregations were neither ready nor equipped to handle the social issues of urban life. Equally noteworthy is that the Lutheran doctrine of two realms emphasized the State’s function to establish justice and maintain order, and the Church’s to preach the

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<sup>409</sup> W. Kent Gilbert, *Commitment to Unity, A History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 112

gospel and administer the sacraments. The proper way for the Church to deal with social issues was to concentrate on the task of preaching and sacramental administration. The transformation of society would be accomplished by the transformation of individuals.

The flaw in this emphasis on orthopraxis was the lack of any standard by which to evaluate the “ortho” or “orthodox” part of orthopraxis, the activity the Gospel proclaimed. Lutheran confessions had defined orthodoxy, but orthopraxis had been described as the moralistic behavior of individuals.<sup>410</sup> Statements on alcoholism, gambling, sex, marriage, family, abortion, death and dying were designed for individual responses. There were no provisions for the “right practice” of orthodoxy in matters of community life. Congregational autonomy would permit each congregation the formation of its own definition and practice.<sup>411</sup>

St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church in Detroit was directly exposed to social issues that extended beyond individual deeds of immorality or personal dispositions. Unemployment, poverty, racial discrimination, labor-management strife, hunger, and homelessness created victims beyond the capacity of St. Peter’s assistance, but not of its care and concern. St. Peter’s, a small parish with limited resources, could only reach out to the individual needs of its members. Beyond the care and outreach to individuals, the judgment of Christianity was needed regarding the economic, political, industrial, urban, and social order. Equally important was a vision of justice and responsibility that would

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<sup>410</sup>. This emphasis on the moral behavior of Christians as the means for the transformation of society is sustained throughout Protestantism.

<sup>411</sup>. Gerhard Lenski wrote a publication for the National Lutheran Council with the title “*Congregationalism as a Problem in the exercise of Christian Social Responsibility in American Protestantism*”. Richard Leucke includes this as a footnote in his “Themes in Lutheran Urban Ministry” in *Churches, Cities and Human Communities*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), p. 126. In telephone interviews, both Richard Leucke and Walter Kloetzli, the secretary of the Urban Planning Mission committee for the Division of American Missions in the NLC, who had requested the article, remembered it, but did not know where a copy could be found today. It is not included in the archival material of the NLC.

lift the causes of urban ills from the backs of its victims, and identify clearly the basic flaws of the industrialized capitalistic order. That judgment and vision was slowly being formed in American Lutheranism but it had not yet reached any state of maturity that would render it effective.

The economic depression and its accompanying unemployment, population displacement, hunger, poverty etc challenged traditional church statements. The Augustana Church and several smaller territorial judicatory synods of the ULCA, including the Pittsburgh Synod, the Maryland Synod, the Ohio Synod,<sup>412</sup> and the ULCA at its national assembly in 1932,<sup>413</sup> adopted resolutions that spoke about unemployment, poverty, the right of labor, to organize and bargain collectively. The formation of the Board of Social Missions in the ULCA was a new concept in American Lutheranism, but it was more of a theological emphasis than organizational change. The members of the Committee on Moral and Social Welfare who were elected to the new Board of Social Missions were successful only in scheduling a series of six social institutes that reviewed the relationship of the church to society.

Except for a few editorials in the *Lutheran*, the official publication of the ULCA, which referred to discrimination against Jews and Negroes, little attention was given to race relations.<sup>414</sup> World War II exposed categories of discrimination, as well as an urgent need for the reappraisal of Lutheran ethics. At the first post-World War II church-wide assembly, the ULCA called for the Board of Social Missions to investigate factors

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<sup>412</sup>. Maryland Synod, *Minutes* (1930), p. 95; Susquehanna Synod, *Minutes* (1936), p. 96; Pittsburgh Synod, *Minutes* (1935), p. 124; Synod of Ohio, *Minutes* (1938), pp. 81-91. Nearly all of the thirty two Synods of the ULCA adopted resolutions opposing war.

<sup>413</sup>. ULCA *Minutes* (1932), pp. 407-417.

<sup>414</sup>. "The State, The Church, The Synagogue," *Lutheran*, June 8, 1933, p.14; "Race Relations", *Ibid.*, February 14, 1937. p.14.

concerning social ills and exploration of methods to combat them.<sup>415</sup> During the compilation of data, the ULCA protested the relegation of the Negro to an inferior position in society,<sup>416</sup> and in 1951 adopted the *Statement on Human Relations* that called upon all congregations to open their doors to all races.<sup>417</sup> The statement was drafted to address the changing circumstances of the world in light of the Gospel. It was a theological statement, not one regarded as a new creed or a new confessional statement. It required no congregational affirmation. Giving each parish in the ULCA the freedom to accept or reject the statements as directives for their witness and ministry removed the possibility that any church-wide action could address social needs. The most that could be expected was the formation of a vision, but it was a beginning.

#### **ST. PETER'S NEW BEGINNING FOR THE LAST TIME**

Several months after World War II had ended, St. Peter's Lutheran Church adopted a motion by a two-vote majority to "explore relocating St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church from its present location to a more-central site for its membership."<sup>418</sup> The discussion for the relocation included awareness of the "changing neighborhood", but the primary concern was the retention of second and third generation Danes moving out of the city to adjacent suburbs. They had moved from Detroit's near east side to the Woodbridge community in 1907 to provide a central site for their membership, and as their second and third generation families moved further and further into the outlying neighborhoods of Detroit, and, after World War II, into the rapidly expanding suburbs, St. Peter's felt compelled to provide a more accessible location for their membership.

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<sup>415</sup>. ULCA, *Minutes*, (1946) pp. 456-457; and *Minutes*, Board of Social Missions, May 9, 1946, p. 16.

<sup>416</sup>. *Minutes*, Board of Social Missions, November, 1946, p. 15.

<sup>417</sup>. ULCA, *Minutes*, (1956), pp. 1258-1262.

<sup>418</sup>. "Minutes", St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church, Bentley Historical Library, Box 1.

Whatever the primary reasons might have been for the decision to relocate, St. Peter's was not alone. The two other Lutheran parishes within the immediate area of what was known as the Scandinavian ghetto, Bethlehem Lutheran Church (the Swedish parish) and St. Olaf Lutheran Church (the Norwegian parish), had purchased property in the north-west part of Detroit and were in the process of relocating. The Danish Brotherhood Lodge, which was the center of the community's social life, including a Scandinavian Orchestra, was also exploring the purchase of land for relocation. St. Peter's had been the first Scandinavian group to move into the Woodbridge Community in 1907 and it was the last to leave it in 1956.

The relocation of Lutheran churches affiliated with the National Lutheran Council was not as simple as locating a choice property and building a new facility. Lutheran bodies cooperating in ministries through the NLC had given responsibility to the NLC for counsel, advice, and approval for congregations desiring to relocate, so that Lutheran congregations would avoid duplication and infringement of ministries. Early correspondence from St. Peter's to the National Lutheran Council's Board of American Missions regarding possible sites for relocation revealed a growing congestion of Lutheran congregations in western and north-western Detroit. Failing to locate property in Detroit that would meet the criteria established by the NLC and the expressed needs of St. Peter's for a centralized location in the midst of its membership, the congregational decision to purchase property at Pembroke and Greenfield in the northwest part of Detroit was made without NLC approval. A deciding factor in support of this location was its accessibility by automobile and its central location for the Danish membership.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>419</sup>. Interviews with Hansen, Blinkhede, Jorgensen, Pedersen, Emanuelson, Christiansen and Preuthum all emphasized the importance of automobile accessibility from suburban communities. By 1956 Detroit's

With a new church sanctuary and a new location from which to continue its ministry to the Danish population of Detroit, it was the decision of the Rev. Sven Jorgensen to retire, and so he announced his resignation as pastor of St. Peter's effective January, 1957. It was a time of great changes for St. Peter's, and also a time of changes in the city of Detroit. In the next chapter I will trace the interaction of St. Peter's with one of these changes in Detroit, namely the formation and dissolution of the Open Housing Movement.

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surface railway system was being dismantled and no plans made to replace it. Cars were to be the means of transportation for Detroit.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Danish Lutheranism Moderates Parish Participation**

St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church's relocation from Vermont and Caroline and the Woodbridge neighborhood to Pembroke and Greenfield in Northwest Detroit marked the beginning of its final chapter of life in the city of Detroit and its engagement with the Open Housing Movement. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the interaction of St. Peter's mission and ministry with the Open Housing Movement and its engagement with racial discrimination and its practice in the sale and purchase of housing in the city of Detroit. The framework for this engagement is in the individual pastorates of the three clergy who served St. Peter's from 1957 to 1982. Each was unique. It was the Rev. Howard Christensen who gathered the scattered second and third generation Danes into renewed activity at St. Peter's during his pastorate. That renewed activity was a primary reason for St. Peter's relocation to Northwest Detroit. His successor was the Rev. James Garrison who assumed the pastorate in 1963. Garrison added the name Wilson to Garrison in 1971. He facilitated St. Peter's adoption and membership in the newly merged LCA. Garrison most directly guided St. Peter's mission and ministry to focus on the practice of racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing in Detroit. St. Peter's final ten years of ministry in Detroit were guided by the Rev. Peter Thomsen. His pastorate included a consolidation of ministry in the urban context, and the arrangements for a merger with a suburban parish.

By the time St. Peter's had made the decision in 1946 to relocate from Vermont and Caroline, it was the last Scandinavian church in the Woodbridge area. The Norwegian parish, St. Olaf Lutheran Church had moved from its Woodbridge site in 1930 to the Northwest section of Detroit near the Northwestern Highway. The Swedish parish, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, which had changed its name to Augustana Lutheran Church, had already purchased property in the Northwest section of Detroit, near Northwestern Highway, and less than one mile from St. Olaf Lutheran Church. St. Olaf and Bethlehem Lutheran churches had moved to Northwestern Detroit for the same reason St. Peter's approved their own relocation from Vermont and Caroline: to maintain a more central proximity to their scattered membership. The University of Michigan's Detroit Area Study, conducted during the second half of the 1950s, reported that "white Protestants constitute a majority in the western portion of the outer city and in all of the suburban areas except the southern. In most of these areas their majority is small, but in the northwestern and north central suburbs the margin is more sizable. . . . 70 per cent of the respondents identified themselves as white Protestants, while in the northwestern area 60 per cent did so."<sup>420</sup>

St. Peter did not consider their proximity to the Norwegian and Swedish parishes disrespectful since they were much further apart in their new locations than in their previous sites. Except in marriage, Scandinavians remained members of their national churches, and each congregation maintained their cultural practices. There was no sense or practice of competing for members with other Lutheran congregations because the national and ethnic associational identity of the parish was still paramount. Competition

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<sup>420</sup> Gerhard Lenski, a member the ULCA's Board of Social Ministry, and a professor of sociology at the University of Michigan, summarized much of the Detroit Area Study's findings in *The Religious Factor* (Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1961), p. 72.

for church membership was an American practice that had developed in the United States and was “foreign” to the Danish immigrants. The merger of Lutheran bodies that would bring these three congregations into the same national judicatory, and mute the growing practice of competition for members, had not yet even been presented for discussion.

Of all details relating to St. Peter’s choice of location, several are more important than others. Lutheranism’s congregational polity gave St. Peter’s the responsibility and organizational structure to adjudicate Lutheranism’s affirmation of mission and ministry. St. Peter’s was responsible for the ministry and mission of Lutheranism where it was located. But St. Peter’s was not just a Lutheran church; it was a Danish Lutheran church. From the very beginning, it had regarded its mission and ministry to be the gathering of Danish immigrants into its worship, educational, social and fellowship activities for the witness and exercise of faith. It was not a neighborhood parish responsible for a Lutheran witness and practice within a well-defined area of the city. It was the Danish Lutheran church for the Danish immigrants in metro Detroit.

Accenting the Danish presence was St. Peter’s architectural style with its traditional Danish tower. The tower, with its cream-colored bricks and red roof, the Thorvaldsen Christ statute in the sanctuary, and the blond wooden furnishings made the church building and its worship place the Danish Lutheran Church named St. Peter’s.

### **GATHERING THE SCATTERED**

St. Peter’s was successful in calling a Danish pastor in 1957, the Rev. Howard Christensen, following the retirement of the Rev. Sven Jorgensen. A Bachelor of Science graduate of the University of Wisconsin, the Rev. Christensen attended Grand View Seminary in Des Moines, Iowa. With only eight students enrolled in the Seminary in

preparation for the parish ministry in the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) in the United States, faculty, resources and opportunities were limited to the barest essentials.<sup>421</sup> As early as 1901, the General Council of the Lutheran Church in the United States had proposed to the Danish church that students preparing for the ministry could enroll in the Seminary in Chicago and that a Danish professor be added to the staff. In the late 1940s this proposal was again considered in discussions about either closing the seminary or merging it with another Lutheran seminary. During these years of uncertainty, the Rev. Christensen also matriculated at Drake University and received a Master of Religious Education.

The Rev. Christensen was called to St. Peter's following his ordination and five year ministry at a two-point parish in rural Nebraska. He was a son of immigrant parents, born and raised in Racine, WI, but he was not fluent in the Danish language. St. Peter's decision to call him included their discontinuance of the use of the Danish language in worship.<sup>422</sup> Any future services featuring the use of the Danish language would be conducted by guest preachers fluent in Danish.

The Rev. Christensen was committed to the challenge included in his call to the parish of gathering together the Danish Lutherans scattered through-out the Detroit metro-area. He began by creating a list of families he would visit and invite to return to St. Peter's.<sup>423</sup> Technically, not all Danish citizens were members of the Danish National

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<sup>421</sup>. In 1953 The Danish Lutheran Church in American dropped the designation "Danish" and adopted the name of the "American Evangelical Lutheran Church".

<sup>422</sup>. According to John Rosenkrands, president of St. Peter's congregation from 1963 to 1967, Pastor Christensen knew only enough Danish to call Square Dances, which he did quite well. "If he had tried to preach in Danish, the members would have laughed."

<sup>423</sup>. Following his pastorate at St. Peter's, the Rev. Christensen served as the Assistant to the President of the Michigan Synod, LCA, and later as Bishop of the Michigan Synod, LCA. In office as Bishop, he gathered the clergy of the Synod and carefully described the way the clergy should create "calling lists" as he had done in his pastorates. He used his ministry at St. Peter's as the model for clergy to use.

(Lutheran) Church, but membership by baptism and voluntary transfer included the vast majority of Denmark's population. With no other Danish congregation in Detroit, St. Peter's was committed to provide the mission and ministry of the Lutheran church to all the Danes in Detroit. It would prove a daunting task.

The Rev. Christensen was well acquainted with the distinctive themes residing in the Inner Mission and Grundtvigian movements in the Danish church. Having moved his own alliance from Inner Mission to Grundtvigianism, he sought to bind the scattered families of St. Peter's together in a more committed membership. There had never been any open conflict between the two groups, but there was a quiet recognition of each other's presence. The short-lived separation of the Inner Mission group from St. Peter's after World War I proved the impracticality of having two Danish churches in Detroit.

A charting of the 1955 membership revealed that over seventy-five families lived in more than thirty suburban communities, and some lived more than sixteen miles from the church. Emphasizing the development of individual character and spirituality and the communal association of corporate worship at Pembroke and Greenfield the message was clear. Distance was not to be an excuse to separate families from St. Peter's church. This ran counter to the findings of the Detroit Area Study that more than half of Detroit's churchgoers spent no more than ten minutes on their journey from home to church. Well over half of the churchgoers in Detroit lived within two miles of their church, and 40 percent lived within one mile. The Detroit Area Study also reported that approximately one-half of the church members had been members of their current

congregation for no longer than five years.<sup>424</sup> Blending together the Inner Mission's emphasis on the need for a disciplined spiritual life and the Grundtvigians' joy of fellowship, the Rev. Christensen initiated the return of the second and third generation families to St. Peters.

The Rev. Christensen, who was persistent in his pastoral calling on second and third generation families, concentrated on strengthening the educational programs for children that had been introduced during the 1930s. He aggressively recruited Sunday School teachers and provided them with graded curriculum materials and teacher training programs, which used the aids and resources he had developed as the Director of Parish Education for the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish) in America. With programs of religious education available for children, youth and adults, and deliberate attention to the Inner Mission and Grundtvigian emphases in their Danish heritage, second and third generation families of Danish immigrants were returning to the church of their forebears. The success of these efforts was reflected in the parochial report for 1957 which listed an enrollment of 105 students and a teaching staff of 7 women, 3 men and many substitute teachers. St. Peter's baptized membership<sup>425</sup> reported for the year 1955 also indicated an increase of 131 over that of 1950. Confirmed (adult) membership during that same period increased by twenty-nine. By 1960 baptized membership had increased to 937 and confirmed membership had increased to 504.

It was the very success of gathering the scattered second and third generation families to St. Peter's at Pembroke and Greenfield that led to its failure in developing its

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<sup>424</sup>. Walter Kloetzli, *The Church and the Urban Challenge* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, ULCA, 1961), p.12. In an interview with Dr. Kloetzli, he emphasized the influence that travel to and from church functions had on church membership.

<sup>425</sup>. Lutheran parish constitutions include three categories of membership: baptized, confirmed and communing.

presence as a neighborhood parish. The gathering of second and third generation Danish families from throughout the northern and western parts of Detroit and adjacent suburbs confirmed St. Peter's Danish presence and effectively discouraged whatever spontaneous and voluntary interest and participation there might have been from the immediate neighborhood in St. Peter's ministry. What made St. Peter's so attractive to its Danish membership also made it unacceptable for fellowship with its non-Danish neighborhood.

The gathering of the scattered second and third generation families to St. Peter's created an institutional resilience that had less to do with theological and doctrinal affirmations than with its Danish communal relationships. St. Peter's fellowship was based on the will of its members to belong to a community in a society becoming increasingly impersonal and detached. St. Peter's "coffee hour" with open-faced Danish sandwiches after the 11:00 a. m Sunday service created what some called the "upstairs and downstairs church".<sup>426</sup> All were members of St. Peter's, but those coming only for coffee and sandwiches were regarded as the "downstairs church", while those attending worship and staying for coffee were considered the "upstairs church".

The identity of St. Peter's as a Danish parish, and the worship and social activities that affirmed its Danish heritage created an insularity that separated it from society with all its needs. St. Peter's met the religious, social and emotional needs of its members but its ministry and mission, and most especially its social activities that did provide its members communal attachment to one another, was limited by its Danish identity.

It was the very limited participation of neighborhood children and the willingness of second and third generation families to send their children to summer week-day church

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<sup>426</sup>. Paul Hansen, Ralph Pedersen, Alice Jorgensen, John Rosenkrands and Paul Blinkhede differentiated between the "upstairs and downstairs churches" as those coming for worship and staying for coffee, and those coming only for coffee and sandwiches.

school programs in their areas that initiated the formation of an evangelism program to announce and promote St. Peter's presence in the area of Pembroke and Greenfield. The Rev. Christensen, addressing the need for this outreach program, used both the pulpit and the church newsletters to outline the foundation and purpose of this outreach. Especially useful was the occasion when a neighbor adjacent to the church began to mow his yard at the exact moment the pastor began to preach. Emphasizing both the neighbor "ignoring the Lord's day" with the lawnmower sending out "its roar of 'too busy' to God", and its whisper "that no one ever made me understand that what you are doing is more important than what I have to do", the mower was a reminder to "make disciples of all men" and to begin by helping the "man across the street to a better understanding of faith and worship."<sup>427</sup>

St. Peter's evangelism program, organized in 1960 for neighborhood visitations, outlined the sociological nature of its presence and sought the encouragement and support of the neighborhood for its ministry. St. Peter's was determined to cultivate that response with its evangelism program, having received no "spontaneous" response from the neighborhood to its presence since 1955. The strong commitment of St. Peter's members rested more on communal association than particular theological doctrines. The sense of responsibility St. Peter's was to exercise for its neighborhood emphasized a gathering much like the "gathering of the scattered second and third generation families". The sociological nature of the church exceeded its theological and doctrine affirmations.

What the passage of time permits us to see in greater detail is the nature of the religious revival ascribed to the 1950s and the consequences of the themes and accents

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<sup>427</sup>. "The Message of the Mower", *The Messenger*, St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church Newsletter, October, 1959.

introduced during those years that have been described by some as nothing short of a “Great Awakening”.<sup>428</sup> Gerhard Lenski reported in his 1958 study of Detroit, that “a transcendental faith is gradually being transformed into a cultural faith”.<sup>429</sup> Where humanity was once regarded as standing before the *mysterium tremendum*, and having some contacts with the primal depths of the universe that could both terrify and comfort, this sense of the transcendent had largely disappeared from human consciousness. Humanity was now more defined by its community than its relationship to the transcendent and cosmic order.

St. Peter’s evangelism program between 1959 and 1962 was part of the program emphasis in the Lutheran church on evangelism, and demonstrated St. Peter’s growing alliance with its future national judicatory. While the program did not ignore its theological and doctrinal roots, its program presentations emphasized their sociological components. The national and local evangelism programs could in this sense be regarded as theological failures. Increase in numerical membership, rather than a genuine religious experience issuing from authentic faith and wholeness of spirit, combined with a contemporary relevance to mission and service was the normal measure of the program’s success.

It was the emphasis on gathering, gaining, collecting, “winning”, converting, finding, and saving lost souls, the unchurched, the outsider, et al, which obscured the proclamation of redemption, of being saved by grace through faith. It was the emphasis on saving souls and bringing people into the church that prevented the evangelists from recognizing themselves as sharing a salvation already received. The apostle Paul did not

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<sup>428</sup> . William G. McLoughlin and Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Religion in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. X.

<sup>429</sup> . Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p.54

write to the New Testament church in Galatia near the end of the first century that it was the success of an evangelism program that made the Galatians “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female”. He wrote “they were made one in (through) Christ Jesus.”<sup>430</sup>

St. Peter’s evangelism program, designed to gather together the unchurched in its neighborhood was similar to the program created by the NCCCUSA to gather the support and commitment of the southern churches for the emerging possibilities of improved race relations following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that ruled the end of racial segregation in public schools. Will Campbell, the director of the Southern project, however, chose not to emphasize the separation of the southern churches with their objections to the Supreme Court decision from the NCCUSA, but concentrated on the “grace” and “redemption” flowing directly from God’s judgment of all people that brought humanity together before God. It was the proclamation of grace that would empower them to embrace new forms of justice. Campbell made a clear distinction between the true content of evangelism and its common usage, but his recommendations for theological integrity were generally ignored in favor of customary practice.

St. Peter’s internal wrestling with its Danish identity, and the neighborhood’s renouncement made obvious in its lack of response to the evangelism program, was being repeated in ethnic Lutheran congregations across the United States. The Swedish congregations comprising the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Finnish congregations comprising the Suomi Synod, and German congregations retaining German language worship were all wrestling with the same issue. The theological and doctrinal

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<sup>430</sup> . Galatians 3:28.

distinctions of the Lutheran confession were being dismissed in favor of its sociological presence, and competition for church members made its first appearance.

The Rev. Christensen, while not directly involved in the theological and doctrinal discussions that would lead to the merger of the Danish, Swedish, Finnish, and German Lutheran churches in the United States, with the exception of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod, was a member of the Joint Committee for Lutheran Unity which was created to design the institutional structure for the emerging national body. The kind of organizational structure the proposed merged church would establish, and how the ethnic-specific and linguistic congregations would be assimilated, were important issues. The practice of concentrating home mission work in their linguistic groups had generally ended by World War II, but the final merger proposal included the option for the Danish, Finnish, and Icelandic Lutheran groups to choose to preserve something of their unique heritages through special interest conferences.

One of the last major programs the Rev. Christensen organized at St. Peter's, was the closing convention of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. A member congregation since 1904, St. Peter's had been singularly concerned about preserving and perpetuating its Danish heritage. There had been no general unanimity in the AELC for defining and expressing this heritage, but in religious, cultural, nationalistic and linguistic ways, the Danish immigrants had sought to express Grundtvig's "human first and then Christian". By this, Johannes Knudsen wrote, the "humanity of individual living and of the indigenous life of a people created in the image of God has a primary influence upon Christian experience and fellowship. There can be no dichotomy of human living and

Christian living.”<sup>431</sup> The Danish Inner Mission churches in the United States which composed the United Evangelical Lutheran Church were not part of the merger that created the LCA in 1963. That would happen in the merger of 1982 that created the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The Rev. Christensen was called to be the assistant to the bishop of the newly created Michigan Synod of the LCA and resigned his pastorate at St. Peter’s in the fall of 1962 upon the completion of the merger process and the actual service celebrating the formation of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) on June 28, 1962. Beyond the completion of the merger creating the LCA there were more substantial theological and doctrinal issues regarding the re-formation of biblical, theological and confessional affirmations which led to direct attention given to social missions and especially to human rights. First proposed in the mid-1930s and then revived after World War II this developing emphasis influenced both the theological education and oversight of LCA clergy and the specific ministry of the Rev. James Garrison, who succeeded the Rev. Christensen as pastor of St. Peter’s in 1963.

### **NATIONAL CHURCH RE-FORMS MISSION TO SOCIETY**

Lutherans, as early as 1912, were criticized for their disposition to search out and serve Lutherans of the same national background, which kept them aloof from the social ills arising from the urbanization and industrialization of America. Walter Rauschenbusch would write in *Christianizing the Social Order* (1912):

Some denominations have not yet awakened. For instance, the Lutherans have beautiful institutional charities, but it is hard to discern any trace that as a body they are sharing in the new social enthusiasm. They have never exercised the influence in public life to which their members, the splendid qualities of their Teutonic stock, and the ability of their leaders would have entitled them.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup>. Johannes Knudsen, *Selected Writings, N.F.S. Grundtvig* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) p. 5.

<sup>432</sup>. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1917), p. 131-45.

In *The Kingdom of God in America*, H. Richard Niebuhr observed that Lutheranism tended in practice “to give up the area of ‘natural things’ as beyond the scope of the Word.”<sup>433</sup>

Language, its rural setting, and a fundamental disagreement with the optimism contained in the emphasis on the social gospel kept Lutheranism from the social gospel movement and its emphasis on the immanence of God and the creation of the kingdom of God on earth. J.H.W. Stuckenberg was named by Charles H. Hopkins in his landmark *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*“ as the first, and one of the few who made significant American formulations of social theology.”<sup>434</sup> For Stuckenberg, the Kingdom of God was a spiritual one, not of this world, and yet the dominant emphasis for this Kingdom rested in the world. Because Christ’s concern is all that is human, his religion is as much a religion “for this earth” as it is for heaven, and that “its aim is, in fact to establish a kingdom of heaven on earth.”<sup>435</sup> American Lutheranism generally ignored Stuckenberg’s summons to the church, and did not provide any major support or assistance to the Social Gospel Movement, other than through voluntary and unofficial organizations and charities.

It was the First World War that moved American Lutheranism toward joint projects. Joining together in vocal opposition to the prohibition of foreign languages, and in providing ministries to military personnel, the social consciousness of American Lutheranism expanded to include war relief, peace, and prohibition. The economic depression and its accompanying unemployment, poverty, hunger, and population

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<sup>433</sup> . H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>434</sup> . Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), pp. 16 and 19.

<sup>435</sup> . J. H. W. Stuckenberg, *Christian Sociology* (New York: I.K. Funk, 1880), p. 7.

displacement challenged traditional church statements. It was in 1938 that the United Lutheran Church in America's national Committee on Moral and Social Welfare presented the resolution that formed the new Board of Social Missions.<sup>436</sup>

The resolutions that expanded the commitment of the ULCA address the new concerns of social ministry were composed by individuals, congregations, and synods experiencing the transition from a rural to urban life-setting. The 1938 resolution was an important step forward for the ULCA's to address new concerns of social ministry, which had been threatened before by the argument that the New Testament gave priority to individuals rather than to society. The 1938 resolution now committed the ULCA to social missions for theological rather than organizational reasons. Individual conversion preceded structural and environmental changes. The ULCA would relate to society in terms of its evangelistic thrust to convert the individual, and to follow up with guidance in the sphere of social action.

World War II was the subject for most Lutheran assemblies during the first half of the fourth decade, but ethnic derivation and confessional kinship made European issues such as orphaned missions, refugees, and the reconstruction of Europe important concerns. Except for a few editorials in the *Lutheran*, the official publication of the ULCA, little attention was given to race relations, but World War II did expose categories of discrimination and initiated the need for the reappraisal of Lutheran ethics. The 1946 ULCA convention adopted the resolution for "research to provide facts concerning social ills and exploration of methods to combat them"<sup>437</sup> Conceived as a

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<sup>436</sup> . ULCA, *Minutes* (1938), p. 108.

<sup>437</sup> . ULCA, *Minutes* 1946), pp. 456 and 457, and *Minutes*, Board of Social Missions, May 9, 1946. p. 16.

study to root Lutheran social action on sound scriptural and confessional grounds, the process resulted in a three-volume study, *Christian Social Responsibility*.<sup>438</sup>

The 1951 ULCA's Statement *on Human Relations* was the most comprehensive statement on human relations issued by any Lutheran body in the United States prior to the United States Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools. Part I included seven statements rooted in creation and redemption motifs, and Part II included a list of human rights and responsibilities, concluding with paragraphs on Christian actions. In 1954 the Board of American Missions adopted the resolution that "pastors and congregations should work with persons of all races rather than establish special work with special races."<sup>439</sup>

The ULCA's emphasis on evangelism during the 1950s was shaped in large measure by America's postwar return to religion. Combining the continued vitality of religion that growing membership and worship attendance figures exhibited with the judgment that the nation was becoming increasingly secular, it was important that the Lutheran church should be more deeply involved in strengthening the spiritual and personal aspects of religious faith. President Eisenhower's frequently quoted remark "that our society is founded on a deeply felt religious faith, and he didn't care what faith it was", raised concerns regarding the distinctive proclamations of Lutheranism, and spawned renewed efforts in witnessing to the faith. It was a smooth transition from explaining the faith to inviting participation in it because it provided the all important component of a personal decision. More right than wrong, it had been the practice of

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<sup>438</sup>. Harold Letts, ed. *Christian Social Responsibility*, (3 vols: Philadelphia, 1957).

<sup>439</sup>. ULCA. *Minutes*, (1954) pp. 225-226 and 821-824.

Lutheranism to emphasize the personal decision to accept the grace of God over the proclamation of its gift to humanity.

There were exceptions to this emphasis in the ULCA. The resurrection that completed the victory of Christ over sin and death was not reserved for Christians alone. And there was no disputing what St. Paul meant when he wrote that “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”<sup>440</sup> Joseph Sittler had written in 1952 that the Christian community needed to carefully examine the limitation it had placed on the work of Christ. Using the text from Colossians 1:18 for his address to the 1952 New Delhi assembly of the World Council of Churches, he said, “it is now excruciatingly clear that Christ cannot be a light that lighteth everyone coming into the world, if he is not also the light that falls upon the world into which everyone comes.”<sup>441</sup> Beginning in the earliest Christian community, redemption was understood to be cosmic in scope, including both culture and creation. It was this redemption that rejected actions and beliefs that divided people from people, and people from nature, or God from all His creation.

The social statements of the ULCA expressed the growing church-wide responsibility for American life, but were hesitant about the implications for ethical judgments. American Lutheranism had questioned the adequacy of theological paradigms devised in the early twentieth century for engaging in social action. Joseph Sittler had asserted that “Jesus repudiated principles in favor of a vital pattern of

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<sup>440</sup>. Colossians 1:18ff.

<sup>441</sup>. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Petger Bakken, ed., *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

response”.<sup>442</sup> Christianity and Christian ethics were not propositional. They depended on the natural orders of creation as the arenas of witness and service. Lutherans were to work through the public structures of government, industry, education etc., being witness to the incarnation of God. It was the world, and not just the Christian church that was redeemed by God.

The social statements of the ULCA were specifically drafted to address the changing circumstances of the world in the light of the Gospel. The social statements were theological documents because they viewed the world from the perspective of the Christian faith. As such, the statements were subject again and again to the testing of whether they were faithful to Scripture and to the creeds and the confessions of the Lutheran church. These statements were not new creeds or new confessional statements, but were the collective judgments of the people composing the ULCA as a guide for a faithful witness to the Gospel.

The social statements were teaching documents. They gave voice and content to the prophetic mandates of the ULCA and invited the congregations to reason together about how to care for the world. The statements were meant to guide, inform, and challenge the church, and, as such, had only persuasive, not coercive authority. In anticipation of the merger of the Danish, Swedish, and Finnish judicatories with the ULCA, scheduled for final presentations at their respective church-wide gatherings in 1961 and 1962, the ULCA social statements on human rights were shared with them, and supporting program materials were made available for congregational use.

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<sup>442</sup> Joseph Sittler, “The Structure of Christian Ethics”, *Christian Social Responsibility*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957) Vol. III, p. 16.

Between 1958 and 1962, the ULCA's social programming centered on the study of the three-volume *Christian Social Responsibility*. A study guide accompanied the three-volume set. 3,000 copies of the three-volume set were sold, and 26 conferences were held across the U.S. to promote the study which was attended by 1,200 clergy and 200 laity. Neither synodical social action committees nor the clergy were as engaged as was hoped for.

The Pastors' Conference on Christian Social Responsibility held throughout the ULCA during the past year, brought to light a wide-spread confusion on the part of many clergy about the mission of the church in the world, and about the roles of both clergy and laity in the fulfillment of this mission. Still, in the Church of the Reformation, an institution centered, clergy-dominated conception of the church is a major obstacle against a break-through of the Gospel into significant realms of modern life. Pastors, no less than laymen need awakening to the vision of an "extroverted" church, no longer preoccupied with its own life and growth, but facing out in a creative self-offering to the world.<sup>443</sup>

A major weakness in Protestant hegemony's emphasis on *orthopraxis*, or actions faithful to church doctrine, was the lack of any commonly agreed upon standard. It was the responsibility of each congregation to<sup>444</sup> establish its own standard. Protestant denominations, including Lutheranism, had defined orthodoxy, but the standards for action were left to be made present in the moralistic behavior of the individual members. Regarding alcoholism, gambling, sex, marriage, family, abortion, death, and dying, the moral conduct expected was clearly obvious. In matters of community life the standard of right or orthodox conduct was less obvious. Congregational autonomy permitted each congregation the formation of its own definition and practice.

There is no written record or recollection by those interviewed from St. Peter's, that either the Social Statements of the ULCA or the three-volume *Christian Social*

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<sup>443</sup> *Minutes*, Board of Social Missions, ULCA, November 11-12, 1959, p. 57.

<sup>444</sup>. See footnote # 92 in Chapter Six.

*Responsibility* were presented for discussion during the pastorate of the Rev. Christensen. Beyond more generic references to serving “your neighbor”, he did not direct attention to social issues. His sermons expounded the Word from the Scripture texts for the day. He was faithful in his pastoral ministry and he had succeeded in gathering the second and third generation families together into the congregation and enriching their personal and families’ lives with a firmer transcendent identity, meaning, and dignity in relation to God. It was the evangelism program that was unable to generate any spontaneous and voluntary participation from the neighborhood surrounding the church, indicating the need for a fundamental re-assessment and re-appropriation of identity for St. Peter’s.

The evangelism program’s lack of success in generating neighborhood interest in St. Peter’s and the merger of the Grundtvigian churches into the new Lutheran Church in America, meant that to survive, St. Peter’s identity would have to be more than that of its congregational and Danish self. There was a societal dimension which linked it to its communal character. St. Peter’s was no longer a Danish parish for Danish immigrants. It was a Danish parish with a Danish membership that needed to establish a stronger cultural identity. The integration of the Grundtvigian churches by the proposed merger marked the end of their “Americanization process”.

Some might question whether St. Peter’s appreciated the need to engage in this “self-actualization” and to embody more inclusive and coherent modes of parish life. St. Peter’s ministry had been anchored in its Danish Lutheran heritage, Danish familial relationships, and a reliable and consistent pattern of worship maintained over years of faith life. But no objection was voiced or raised against the merger of the Grundtvigian

churches into the LCA. There was an excitement about the future's possibilities.<sup>445</sup> There was no interest or support for creating any permanent organization within the new church body that would maintain the Danish presence. What was "felt" more than acknowledged were the rapid changes in society. "We knew things were changing, but we had no idea how far they would go". "Are you talking about the church or the city?" I asked. "Both" they said. . "Were you ready for these changes?" "We worked hard on it," they replied.

### **THE MERGER CREATES EMERGING CHURCH**

St. Peter's nearly unanimous support of merger of the Grundtvigian congregations with the Swedish and German churches marked an end to its insulated Danish relationships and opened the way to the interplay of pluralism and homogeneity. Not only had St. Peter's voted to end its emphasis on Danish ethnicity, but they had also called the Rev. James Garrison to serve as their pastor, who assured them he "did not have one ounce of Danish blood".<sup>446</sup> The churches forming the Lutheran Church in America were almost entirely from four European countries—Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. Values and culture, as well as geography, were surprisingly similar, and their religious heritage was grounded in the German Reformation.

A similar intertwining of sameness and diversity was apparent in their American experience. Their values and abilities led these immigrants and their descendants to places that respected their desire for success, their ability to organize and manage, their faithfulness to family and friends, and their drive for independence and self-sufficiency.

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<sup>445</sup>. Paul Hansen and Paul Blinkhede, president and former president of the congregation, both remembered the "excitement" the congregation felt about the forthcoming merger.

<sup>446</sup>. During World War II, the American Red Cross had permitted St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church identify and designate their blood donations as "Danish" and for use in Denmark.

Whatever social class designation we want to assign to them, the various church bodies of the LCA migrated into the same level of social stratification in America. Especially visible in this social class stratification was the willingness to accept the American experience and openness to modern knowledge. St. Peter's supported the merger because it enlarged their arena of faith with the addition of Swedish, German, and Finnish fellow-believers.

The merger of the four national Lutheran bodies into the LCA created a paradigm shift for the ministry of the church. Each body had contributed its unique expressions and styles of ministry, and the blending of these into one emphasized such goals as social justice, the Christian vocation and others that were more attentive to our life together on earth than future life in heaven. The individualistic moralistic ethics of earlier Protestantism were not to be dismissed, but there was a social dimension to life that required a collective witness. The challenge was bringing the salvation-oriented otherworldliness of Christianity to the critical needs of society. The danger was that the theological and religious expressions of faith would be set aside in favor of the social engagement of faith. Would the pursuit of ethical living displace the witness of the faith? Would ethics be the death of Christianity? The two World Wars and the depression in-between had raised the question of Lutheranism's "survivability" as a separate confessional church. Should Lutherans practice a fruitful coexistence and collaboration with others that would minimize Lutheran particularity or should it more sharply define itself with contours decidedly Lutheran, practical and ecumenical? Lutheranism's experiences in the urban eastern seaboard, and the concentration of Lutheran scholars and

leaders there molded a church body that constitutionally enclosed integrity for its confessional faithfulness to the proclamation of the Word of God.

To prevent exchanging what is only a witness to faith with the goal of faith itself, the LCA gathered the understanding of the faith the four church bodies espoused and clearly stated it in the merger document. Despite their ethnic diversity, different leadership styles and polities for governance, their statement of faith preserved the continuity of more than 150 years of history and reflection on the faith that was grounded in Scripture, measured by the Person and mission of Christ, expressed in the historic Lutheran confessions, and personalized in the evangelical awakenings of the nineteenth century.<sup>447</sup> The Scriptural and confessional foundations of faith remained the same for St. Peter's in their relationship with the ULCA, but there were important features within this relationship that exercised new influence.

### **St. Peter's encounter with change and diversity.**

St. Peter's had benefited from the historical-critical study of Scripture and tradition, including even the church school curricula, because the Christ of Scripture and its text were the final authority. Post-biblical traditions of Lutheranism had also been critiqued. The acceptance of this critical process in Biblical, theological and historical studies of the faith opened the door to a more critical review of the world itself. St. Peter's had reviewed the world through its Danish eyes and mind, but in the newly merged church, the Danish critique of society was blended with what Swedish, German, and Finnish eyes and minds had seen and understood. St. Peter's biblical studies, theology, organizational structure, evangelism, stewardship, and education of both laity

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<sup>447</sup> E. Clifford Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America, 1914-1970*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1972), p. 23.

and clergy were now subjected to the authority of doctrine and modern thinking. Balancing the authority of scripture and doctrine with modern life and modern thought did not prove as difficult for St. Peter's as for others in the LCA because of their long history of Inner Mission supporters worshipping side by side with Grundtvigians. The emphasis on personal piety and spirituality in the Inner Mission movement and the joy and delight of "human first and Christian second" of the Grundtvigians had existed side by side in St. Peter's for more than seventy years.

### **The contextual presence of American life.**

Whether Lutheranism penetrated American life or had been penetrated by it can remain unresolved, but the fact remains that the LCA was the most urban of all Lutheran bodies when it was formed by merger in 1962. The anomaly was that it was one of the most urban of all the congregations in the national body that was the most rural in the newly merged LCA. Yet, it had retained its distinctive ethnic characteristics. The LCA had a significant presence in over twenty-five metropolitan areas, creating a diverse membership, and making change more actual than virtual. For St. Peter's, the merger placed her alongside fifteen other LCA congregations in the city of Detroit. Imprecise as class stratification might be, the backgrounds and values the Lutherans brought to Detroit placed them in Lloyd Warner's social class identifications of upper-lower through upper-middle class in which "career" and "respectability" are important value orientations.<sup>448</sup>

Just the very term "middle-class" would make the members of the LCA part of what is indispensable to the American society. Comprised of engineers, doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, managers, small and medium-sized businessmen, skilled

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<sup>448</sup> W. Lloyd Warner, *Social Class in America* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1949, 1960) and Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure* (New York: Rinehart and Co. 1960), chap. 7.

technicians et al, these literally kept Detroit operating through their planning, organizing and managing skills. Middle-class values and styles were normative for Detroit, just as they were normative for St. Peter's. Organization and effectiveness, the desire for success, a responsible and serious attitude toward life, faithfulness to family and friends and a drive for independence were important characteristics of their middle class life.

With the basic initiative and sustained attention to Lutheran merger coming from the ULCA and the Augustana Lutheran Churches, these middle-class values were operative in the development of doctrine and ministry long before they were officially merged into St. Peter's and the Grundtvigian churches. The doctrine of ministry that proceeded from the Word of God, instituted to proclaim the presence of God as the Augsburg Confession enunciated, emphasized the ministry belonging to the church. The LCA's doctrine of ministry was not a freelance operation as Baptist and other free-thinking traditions had formed it. The Rev. Garrison, St. Peter's pastor, could not function at will without the church-at-large approving his ministerial activity. Individual pastors, local congregations and the national church were indissolubly linked together in the LCA. In the move toward a centralization and an organizational firmness, there was an emerging line-of-command system of accountability, with financial, educational, promotional and programmatic weight that was brought to St. Peter's by the merger.

It was no accident that clergy were no longer identified as "ministers" but rather as "professional leaders". ULCA and Augustana Seminaries had added little to the Biblical, theological, doctrinal, and liturgical curricula established in their early years, but following World War II they had concentrated on helping candidates for ordination relate more effectively to the practical situations of the church. Preaching styles, organizational

patterns, associational groupings, and even pastoral care were oriented to the middle class.

### **Ecumenical hospitality.**

A third feature of St. Peter's new relationship in the LCA was an openness to ecumenical diversity and its force for change. The ULCA had been a primary body in the formation of inter-Lutheran groupings that led to the Lutheran World Federation and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the World Council of Churches. The resulting theological input, social ministry outreach, liturgical renewal, and educational interrelationships had helped shape the Lutheran practices. In 1957 the Michigan Synod of the ULCA joined the Detroit Council of Churches. Clergy and lay appointees to DCC commissions and committees created reports to Synodical assemblies and disseminated information that educated and motivated responses.

Any evidence of Michigan Synod participation or support of the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy in 1963 is either missing from the archives of the Michigan Synod, LCA, or had not occurred. All persons directly involved in synodical affairs during that time are deceased, and clergy interviewed in Detroit cannot recall any participation or support. Several remembered, as I do, the emphasis the Michigan Synod had placed on organizing new congregations in suburban communities. I had been called to Rochester, MI. for that very reason. With limited staff and 41 congregations under development in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, 9 fields approved for development and 9 being investigated, one could swiftly exclude ecumenical activities in favor of more proprietary concerns.

The merger of the ULCA, Swedish, Danish, and Finnish churches that formed the LCA in 1962 created a synodical judicatory in Michigan's Lower Peninsula that was nearly twice the size of its predecessor body. 68 clergy and 64 congregations comprised the Michigan Synod in 1962. There were 135 clergy and 121 congregations comprising the Michigan Synod in 1963. Headquartered in a small office complex with a Synodical president, one full-time assistant, and clerical support staff, an immediate challenge for the new synodical judicatory was to increase staff support and consolidate records, programs, and synodical committees. One member who was added to the synod staff by the end of 1962 was the Rev. Howard Christensen, who had resigned from St. Peter's to accept the staff appointment. One of the first of the committees newly composed for the Michigan Synod in the fall of 1962 was The Site Committee that was commissioned to find a new location for the Synod headquarters. Within two years, the Synod's headquarters were moved to a more central location in its newly constructed office building on Greenfield Avenue, two blocks from St. Peter's.

The Michigan Synod, understandably absorbed in the administrative details of gathering, coordinating and collating the ministries of 121 congregations in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, did not participate in the planning, promotion, and support of the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy. In an exchange of correspondence between the Rev. Frank Madsen, president of the Michigan Synod, and the WJBK Radio and Television Station in 1960, the Rev. Madsen's support and commitment to the improvement of race relations was clearly outlined. He explained his delay in answering the station's first request, which prompted the second one, by his "load of work".<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> . The Rev. Frank Madsen to Dr. John Dempsey, October 27, 1960. Michigan Synod Archives, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence". Bentley Library.

The priority of Lutheran merger issues over support for and participation in the 1963 Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy was repeated when the National Conference on Race and Religion was held in Chicago three weeks after the event in Detroit. The national ULCA Lutheran body declined to join in support, endorsement and participation, because “the United Lutheran Church in America will in effect go out of existence at the end of next month, with the result that it will be unable to send representatives to the event that is planned in January.” As to the willingness of the new body to participate the Rev. Franklin Clark Fry, President of the ULCA, continued “In view of our strong hesitancy over the years to participate in inter-faith projects, I would guess the answer would have been negative.”<sup>450</sup>

The events and issues of the LCA merger prevented LCA support of two programs for bringing faith communities together to act against racial discrimination. With no extant list of participants it is impossible to chart any LCA participation in the Detroit or Chicago conferences, except for a very few personal acquaintances. Without any endorsement, encouragement or partnership from national and regional leadership, it was easy to disregard both of them.

Both the Rev. Dr. Madsen, the recently elected president of the Michigan Synod, LCA, and the Rev. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, the newly elected president of the LCA, sent pastoral letters to all clergy in July, 1963 with clear statements supporting civil rights actions. It was Dr. Fry who wrote that “the implications of the Gospel in this regard are so plain . . . that I can hardly imagine a single man in the ministry unclear on that score.

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<sup>450</sup> Dr. Franklin Clark Fry to Mr. Irwin Miller, May 13, 1962. ULCA Archives, NLC Files, Division of American Missions, Box 2.

If he is, I confess that I have grave doubts either about his perceptiveness as to what the Word of God teaches or about the state of his Christian obedience.”<sup>451</sup>

The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy and the acceptance of its goals and recommendations by the Detroit Council of Churches became a special focus for the Michigan Synod under Dr. Madsen’s leadership. The Social Missions Committee of the Michigan Synod compiled a study document on Open Occupancy which detailed history and outlined programs of action and was sent to all the congregations. Financial restraints prevented the employment of specialized staff for urban ministries, but all clergy candidates for parish pastorates were carefully apprised of synodical and national expectations for urban ministries.

The Rev. James Garrison, accepting the call from St. Peter’s to serve as Pastor, moved to Detroit in June, 1963. Both he and I remember the pastoral letters from Dr. Fry and Dr. Madsen, read to the Church Councils of the parishes we served as pastors. They were the kind of letters that transferred responsibility for forthright support of civil rights from one individual to the entire Lutheran church. . We were not creating unrest, we were obeying the Word of the Lord (delivered through our judicatory leaders) which was creating the unrest. And thus the Rev. Garrison began his ministry at St. Peter’s.

### **SOCIAL MISSIONS RE-FORMS ST. PETER’S MINISTRY**

The Rev. Garrison was born, raised and educated in eastern United States and embodied what E. Clifford Nelson called “eastern Lutheranism”.<sup>452</sup> That was the earliest structure of Lutheranism in America formed by the General Council and General Synod. Accepting the methods and principles of higher critical scholarship and sympathetic to

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<sup>451</sup>. Pastoral Letter, Franklin Clark Fry to LCA Clergy, July 8, 1963. LCA Archives, Franklin Clark Fry Correspondence, Box 1.

<sup>452</sup>. Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America*, chapter 3.

the social gospel, it was aware of and participated in the intellectual enterprises of the nineteenth century. Eastern Lutheranism provided the vast majority of leaders for the merger creating the LCA. It was the Board of Social Missions, with offices in New York City, that recommended the Rev. James Garrison to the Michigan Synod for St. Peter's, and with the approval of the Michigan Synod and nearly unanimous vote of the parish, he was called to serve St. Peter's.

When the Rev. Garrison arrived in Detroit at the end of June, Detroit's struggle for civil rights was part of a national struggle. Detroit opened 1963 with the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience in January, a direct confrontation with racial discrimination. NCCCUSA hosted the National Conference on Race and Religion in Chicago three weeks later. In April Martin Luther King, Jr. began his challenges to racial discrimination in Birmingham, Al. While arrested and held in jail, he wrote his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail". In May Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety "Bull" Connor's use of fire hoses and police dogs against demonstrators for civil rights awakened a nation to civil rights. On June 11, Federal troops were used to force the Governor of Alabama, George Wallace, to integrate the University of Alabama, and President Kennedy introduced his Civil Rights legislation that became the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. On June 12, Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson, MI. On June 18, 3,000 African American students boycotted Boston, MA schools. On June 23, Martin Luther King, Jr, led nearly 200,000 in the March for Freedom in Detroit. In September three members of the Ku Klux Klan exploded a bomb in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL that killed four young girls in a Sunday School class who werestudying the lesson "The Love That Forgives".

The Rev. Garrison's arrival was a great relief to St. Peter's elected lay leadership. St. Peter's lay president, Paul Hansen, a product manager for Ford Motor Company, was transferred overseas in the midst of the calling process for a new pastor. John Rosenkrands, vice-president of the Council, was unable to free up much time from his responsibilities at General Motors because of his involvement with GM's Corvair project and Ralph Nader's challenges. It made little difference that the Rev. Garrison was not Danish. He was there and ready to serve and guide St. Peter's.<sup>453</sup>

Installed one week after the beginning of his ministry, and surely a sign of urgency for the ministry of St. Peter's, the Rev. Garrison began to outline the gifts and responsibilities he believed St. Peter's and the newly merged LCA were to share with each other and with the world. Important among these gifts and responsibilities were Lutheranism's progressive theological self-understanding which would constantly reshape its understanding of the world; a new sense of openness to American culture and ecumenical relationships; an organizational structure with strong interdependent relationships with local, synodical and national units; and a growing body of analysis and interpretation of current social and cultural issues.<sup>454</sup>

The adoption of a constitution was required of all congregations in the newly merged Lutheran Church in America that would not only meet the requirements for a legally incorporated eleemosynary or religious organization in the state of Michigan, but would also include the required statements of faith, purpose, calling of a pastor, powers of the congregation, et al, as defined by the Lutheran Church in America. The statement of purpose clearly stated that the congregation was to "serve in response to God's love to

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<sup>453</sup>. Interviews with Paul Hansen and John Rosenkrands, October, 2006, January, March and June, 2007.

<sup>454</sup>. Condensed from interviews and correspondence with the Rev. James Garrison between June, 2005 and June, 2007.

meet human needs, care for the sick and the aged, advocate dignity and justice for all people, work for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and stand with the poor and powerless, and commit itself to their needs.”<sup>455</sup> In a further explanation of this purpose it stated in C4.03.e that the congregation was to “respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.”<sup>456</sup> The constitution and by-laws of both the LCA and of each congregation detailed the organizational outline, structural pattern, and the rubrics of governance for their life together.

To fulfill the constitutionally mandated responsibility to “advocate dignity and justice for all people”, the Rev. Garrison recommended that St. Peter’s create a Social Ministry Committee, and it was quickly approved by the congregation. At the same time that St. Peter’s was organizing itself in the pattern of the LCA constitution for congregations, the Rev. Garrison urged the congregation to support the passage of the Patrick/Ravitz ordinance that would ban all housing discrimination, and defeat the proposal of the Greater Detroit Homeowners’ Council led by Thomas Poindexter. No congregational vote was requested and he does not remember any opposition to his statements which he shared along with the letter to the congregations from the synodical president that requested the same response. At the November meeting of the Church Council, money was allocated for the Rev. Garrison to attend the regional conference in Chicago on “The Church’s Concern for a Diverse Society” in January, 1964. Discussed but not acted on was the questionnaire from the Synodical Social Missions Committee regarding the acceptance of non-white members. The questionnaire was discussed again

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<sup>455</sup>. LCA Constitutions for Congregations, LCA Minutes of 1962 Assembly, pp. 334ff

<sup>456</sup>. LCA Constitutions for Congregations, LCA Minutes of 1962 Assembly, p.336.

at the December meeting but no action was taken since the Social Missions Committee was reviewing the social statements of the LCA for the purpose of recommending responses by the congregation.

The Detroit Common Council's defeat of the Patrick/Ravitz ordinance for open occupancy, the increasing momentum of the Greater Detroit Homeowners' Council petition for statewide legislation, the ruling of the Attorney General that the Civil Rights Commission had authority over city ordinances on private housing, and the Council of Churches inclusion of "Open Occupancy" as an issue in the larger category of Civil Rights marked the end of the Open Housing Movement. The quest for open housing had been combined with the pursuit of civil rights in state legislation.

The dissolution of the Open Housing Movement did not solve the critical problem of housing in Detroit which was intensified by Detroit's urban renewal program and the Federal Highway Program construction of I-75 through the heart of African American Paradise Valley. When Wayne State University joined with the city of Detroit to clear substandard housing on Hobart Street for campus expansion, a small group of activists joined together to protest the demolition and were arrested for trespassing. The Rev. James Garrison joined with the leadership of the West Central Organization<sup>457</sup> in the demonstration that organized as part of their community organization program for self-determination. was among those arrested for trespassing.<sup>458</sup>

The response of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church to the arrest and conviction of their pastor for trespassing resulting in a monetary fine was unlike the response of

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<sup>457</sup>. The Rev. Garrison and the Rev. Tom Johnson, a Lutheran member of the WCO staff, had become friends through their mutual efforts for social justice. With several other clergy members of the Michigan Synod they had also introduced resolutions for social justice at the 1964 synodical assembly.

<sup>458</sup>. The Elijah McCoy housing development exists today on the site of this demonstration.

parishes where clergy who engaged in social protest demonstrations were asked to resign. It was the decision of the Church Council that Rev. Garrison, individually supported by members of the congregation, including the president of the Church Council and others,<sup>459</sup> could continue his participation in demonstrations against racial discrimination and other acts of injustice, but that the members of the Council would not always be available to join with him and he would be responsible for his own fines. “They could not always join with him, but they would support him in what he did.”<sup>460</sup> All those interviewed remembered how the Rev. Garrison kept them informed about LCA and Synodical correspondence and programs for social justice, but significantly they could not remember having been invited to accompany him to any events except those related to Synod programming.

The Rev. Garrison was increasingly aware that the “Danish” in the name of the church and conspicuously displayed on the signboard had been interpreted as “exclusive” rather than “historical”, and proposed a motion that was made to the church council on June 9, 1964 that “Danish” be dropped from the church signboard, worship bulletins and stationery.<sup>461</sup> The Church Council postponed action on the motion until October, a questionnaire was prepared with responses to be shared at the Congregational meeting. One month later, at the July 14th meeting of the Church Council, it was moved, seconded

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<sup>459</sup> . Paul Hansen, John Rosenkrands, Paul Blinkhede, and Sue Kamens stated their support for this in their interviews.

<sup>460</sup> . Quote from Paul Hansen, January, 2007. Paul had returned from Europe in 1964 and was serving as Church Council secretary

<sup>461</sup> . None of the interviewees could identify the source of the motion except all agreed that it was not made by the pastor, nor was it introduced at a meeting of the Congregation. Several thought it came from the Social Missions Committee, others thought it was a member of the Church Council.

and carried that “St. Peter’s would welcome any person to take part in the church activities and services and become a member regardless of race or nationality.”<sup>462</sup>

The sanctuary was filled to overflowing for the October, 1964 congregational meeting of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church to discuss and act on the motion to drop “Danish” from the church sign, worship bulletins and church stationery. The responses to the questionnaire ranged from “it is who we are” to “it should not be used because it reveals a determination to remain unchanged in a world of revolutionary change”.<sup>463</sup> For those who might leave because “Danish” was dropped it was suggested they “do not have the church at heart”. Others said “Danish” should not be used because it “suggests that the leaders of the congregation are unwilling to face up to their elected responsibility to lead in Christ’s name.” The majority of those who spoke at the meeting supported the motion, but when the motion was put to a vote, it ended a tie. John Rosenkrands, president of the Congregation, asked for a count to verify the total votes cast, and chose not to break the tie vote. Disappointed but not surprised, he believed it to be more a historical issue than one of exclusivity, and that removing “Danish” from the church’s name would result in many leaving the parish. It would be better to have access to both groups in the development of faithful discipleship, than only one.<sup>464</sup>

St. Peter’s Lutheran Church had, in slightly more than one year, adopted the model constitutions for congregations of the LCA that called attention to issues of social justice and had composed a Social Missions committee for congregational ministries. The Social Missions Committee had reviewed the statements for social justice adopted by

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<sup>462</sup>. Church Council Minutes, July 14, 1964. St. Peter’s Lutheran Church Archives, Bentley Library.

<sup>463</sup>. Congregational Minutes, October, 1964. St. Peter’s Lutheran Church Archives, Bentley Library.

<sup>464</sup>. My discussions with John Rosenkrands on this issue revealed a deep anguish for the failure of the church to rise above its Danish history and emphasize the mission of Christ.

the LCA, completed the Synodical questionnaire regarding race relations, and used the study guide for Open Occupancy prepared by the Synod. The congregation had sent the Rev. Garrison to a conference of Racial Diversity and in June, 1964 adopted the resolution regarding open membership to all regardless of race or national origin, but it had not removed “Danish” in its official title, and had not engaged in any direct congregational action for open occupancy...

The convergence of the LCA, the Michigan Synod, St. Peter’s Lutheran Church and the Rev. James Garrison initiated a series of decisions and events that created a new form of ministry that separated the congregation from direct participation in social missions except through personal witness and individual political action. St. Peter’s direct attack against racial discrimination had been exercised through their pastor. Rooted in theological and sociological affirmations and political realities, St. Peter’s success in moving beyond individualistic and moralistic ethics created a distance between the laity and the clergy. Clearly stated in New Testament writings was that the church was understood as a community of faith called to mission,<sup>465</sup> but equally clear in New Testament writings was the differentiation of ministries.<sup>466</sup> Lutheran theology affirmed the differentiation of ministries by affirming the pastoral office as the calling of one from among equals. The distinction was in function not status. The Rev. Garrison was St. Peter’s representative in the fight against racial discrimination.

It was a natural development of clerical function and form for the LCA. Following World War II, the ULCA and Augustana Churches, predecessor bodies for the LCA with established Seminaries preparing candidates for the ordained ministry, added

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<sup>465</sup>. Ephesians 3:9, 10; 4:15, 16; Colossians 1:24-19.

<sup>466</sup>. Acts 6:1-6; I Corinthians 12:1-13.

Church and Society courses to their basic curriculums to better equip graduates for social mission. It was not enough to have clergy prepared for the church's inner life—the sacramental life, worship and nurture—Christian life was life in community. Increasing attention was paid to the mission of the Church expressed in culture, the nation and the world. There was an enormous increase in efforts to relate to the practical context of the church and to improve the skills needed for effective ministry and it created clergy expertise. Combined with a “line-of-command” system of accountability, with financial, educational, promotional and programmatic weight in both national and regional headquarters, the parish pastor was responsible to the microcosmic element of the system—the parish—and to the macrocosmic element—the church at large.

Theologically, the organizational structure of the LCA was to enable the laity to carry out their own ministry, but functionally, it required an expertise to facilitate it, and it was the accredited professional who was assigned the task.

The Rev. Garrison accepted this task and served it well, just as it served him well. Interviews with the presidents of the Church Council during his pastorate included descriptions of his “finding his place” in the ministry. Not to be ignored in the disproportionate attention to open occupancy between the Rev. Garrison and the members of St. Peters was his pursuit of personal fulfillment and identity. He shared with the congregation his difficulty in choosing a vocational call and how he followed the advice of his grandmother to “go into the ministry”. Never completely convinced that he had chosen the right career, or that he had chosen the ministry for the right reasons, the opportunities and challenges of urban ministry provided the arena in which he experienced the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment. The congregation adopted him and

gave him “space to make mistakes and support when he made them.”<sup>467</sup> “I certainly didn’t know if what I was doing was going to make any difference, but I knew I was in the right place and working on the right issues. It was frustrating, confounding and exciting at the same time.”<sup>468</sup>

By the end of 1964, when the issue of open occupancy had become part of the more inclusive struggle for civil rights, the Rev. Garrison directed the attention of St. Peter’s to the West Central Organization (WCO), using Saul Alinsky’s Industrial Areas Foundation as the model for community development on Detroit’s West Side. The primary purpose of WCO, a coalition of neighborhood associations, was to retain and develop adequate housing for the area’s residents, which by 1965 was nearly all African American. WCO’s relationship with Saul Alinsky, and its efforts to secure funding for his participation, was opposed by nearly all the Protestant denominations in Detroit.<sup>469</sup> On the recommendation of the Rev. Garrison, St. Peter’s approved annual \$100 grants to WCO.<sup>470</sup> Unsuccessful in fully funding the participation of Saul Alinsky and his IAF, which included a rejection of funding from the MDCC, the WCO maintained its presence with city grants and smaller grants from the Board of American Missions, LCA, and other Protestant denominations until 1972, when WCO was merged into the formation of a Lutheran mission known as St. Philip’s Workers.

The Rev. Garrison, continuing St. Peter’s involvement in the quest for social justice, and several other like-minded Lutheran clergy in Northwest Detroit established a

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<sup>467</sup>. Interviews with Paul Hansen, John Rosenkrands, Ralph Pedersen and Paul Blinkhede.

<sup>468</sup>. Telephone interview with the Rev. Jim Garrison, January 14, 2006.

<sup>469</sup> The Rev. Dr. Alan Zaun, pastor of Jefferson Presbyterian Church and president of the Detroit Council of Churches wrote a letter to the Executive Board of DCC outlining his objections to the funding of WCO’s request for funding Saul Alinsky. DCC Archives, Box 2, Folder Executive Minutes. Bentley Library.

<sup>470</sup>. St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Council Minutes, 1965. Bentley Library.

program for the increasing numbers of teen-agers using the Northland Shopping Mall as their place of destination for socialization and fellowship. Creating an “after-school” program that included hospitality, recreation, counseling, and group discussions on social issues, the “Salt Cellar” provided a growing number of youth the opportunity to participate in inter-racial fellowship.

Following the Detroit riot in 1967, St. Peter’s joined with other LCA congregations in metro-Detroit in gathering and providing foodstuffs, clothing, furniture and housing. St. Peter’s, with the support of Synod staff, joined with neighboring LCA congregations to explore and develop new ministries of service. In the midst of marital discord that ended in divorce, the Rev. Garrison sought another assignment, and resigned in 1971 to accept the call as Lutheran Campus Pastor at Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo, MI.

To establish the life-span of the Open Housing Movement in Detroit is an exercise of judgment. To establish the life-span of St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church participation in the Open Housing Movement is a matter of fact. The Open Housing Movement was never presented for congregational attention during the pastorate of the Rev. Howard Christensen. It was during the pastorate of the Rev. James Garrison that St. Peter’s attended to the Open Housing Movement. To suggest in any kind of summary form how St. Peter’s attended to the Movement I would accent the “professionalization” of the clerical office in the LCA. To document what St. Peter’s did, one must understand how the parish was led by its pastor.

It is not necessary to trace the history of the professionalization of Lutheran clergy except to acknowledge that it began with the German Reformation in 1517, and

the influence it had on the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1545 to 1563.<sup>471</sup> A liturgical church with a confessional base, clergy for the Lutheran church have always been required to complete a formalized seminary education. Though not always of equal quality, every candidate for ordained ministry in the Lutheran church completed a prescribed theological education.

For the LCA, in whose seminaries the Rev. James Garrison received his theological education, the parish ministry was rooted in the Bible, history, and theology and was shaped by the Lutheran confessional heritage. Unable to depend on a Christian culture to transmit basic Christian knowledge and values, Lutheran clergy were to provide a theological and spiritual leadership based on this intimate knowledge of scripture, a distinctively Lutheran theological understanding, and contemporary methods of theological reflection. Lutheran clergy were provided with education in the practice of ministry that not only included the specific skills of ministry, but also the integration of practice with spiritual and theological depth, sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, and an overall capacity for leadership. With parishes existing in particular cultures and local contexts, clergy would need to be skilled in a diverse range of life situations, including ethnic origins, vocation and educational experiences, family situations, regional variations, types of community, and political value systems. In parish settings, clergy prepared members to integrate their life with their faith.

Ascribing itself to the middle-class culture or “lifeway”, the LCA took very seriously the particularities of this culture in composing its theological education for clergy. As culture is a system of discriminations and exclusions the proclamation of the

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<sup>471</sup> The Council of Trent was called to refute the heresies of the German Reformers, but one of the important consequences was the establishment of seminary education for Roman Catholic clergy.

Gospel takes on ethnographical residence. The Gospel was encultured. While this is admittedly complex, it can generally be said the middle class manifested the values of the dominant culture. These were the career oriented middle-management, business, and professional people who sought out achievement and success. The middle class played a pivotal role in creating life style options. The middle class prized organization and effectiveness which could promote efficiency at the expense of human values, or provide a freedom of life in the achievement of its goals. The theological educational system of the LCA dovetailed its organizational structure within a middle-class enclosure.

The theological educational system of the LCA emphasized that the ministry of the LCA belonged to the LCA. As a clergy member of the LCA, the Rev. Garrison was not free to seek his own parish, or to organize one. The entire process of clergy selection, nurture, ordination, and installation was administered and directed by and through the LCA and its regional Synods for the benefit of the member congregations. When St. Peter's Lutheran Church sought to fill their pastoral vacancy following the resignation of the Rev. Howard Christensen, it was the Michigan Synod, with the official approval of the LCA that recommended the Rev. Garrison for them to call. The issuance of the call to the Rev. Garrison and his installation as pastor of St. Peter's made the Rev. Garrison equal to the laity responsible for the ministry of the LCA in that parish which the LCA had accepted as one of its member congregations.

A second feature of summary would be that the clearly articulated theological foundation for the professionalization of the clerical ministry in the LCA effectively overshadowed the theological articulation of the role of the laity. Theological education, including the disciplines and skills necessary for the understanding of Scripture,

doctrines, moral practices, et al were defined as necessary for the clergy, but never for the laity. Laity and clergy were assigned equal responsibilities for the practice and witness of faith but the LCA provided one structure of education for the clergy and another (from little to nothing) for the laity. The LCA did not question the importance of “faith formation” for the believer, but in its organizational structure and practice of theological education, the LCA presupposed that theological education was important for the clergy but not for the laity who exist in the “world”. It was the practice of the LCA to use the weekly liturgical event of worship as the primary resource for the education of the believers. As valid as the sermonic event might be, it was inadequate as a comprehensive paradigm of the way the believer’s life in the world should be effected and disciplined.

The net result of this differentiation in theological and practical preparation for ministry between the clergy and the laity was in the exercise of their ministry of each. There was a gap between the “pulpit and the pew”, and, much as the Rev. Garrison used the Social Missions Committee to inform and support the membership of St. Peter’s in the church’s fight for open occupancy, their exercise of ministry would be dependent on both his presentation of the material used for instruction and his own model of servanthood. While the Rev. Garrison was always accompanied by lay members at evening and week-end meetings, conferences, and retreats conducted by Michigan Synod staff and committees, it was much more difficult to arrange for lay participation at week-day events. The work schedule of middle-class America did not lend itself to active participation in confrontations, demonstrations, protests, et al against the political, real estate, and social power structures of middle-class America.

Both the theological and practical features that relegated lay participation to a second-class status prevented St. Peter's from utilizing their resources of talent, access, example, and commitment. The relation between the world of everyday life and the sacred domain is indirect. The potential for transcendence by individual humanity is realized in the exchange of face-to-face relations. It was the secular nature of the laity that provided a direct engagement in temporal affairs. It was their life in the world, in the place where racial discrimination was practiced, that formed the context of their existence. To neglect the mission of the laity was to ignore the twofold nature of God's work, that God rules public life as well as church life. The witness of the laity would have clarified the relation of the Christian faith to the community. The ministry of the laity would have fully demonstrated the theological doctrine of the Word made flesh, the central doctrine of the church. But St. Peter's was not alone. With very few exceptions, it was the clergy from LCA congregations who participated in Detroit's social justice events and programs.

The net effect of this reliance on the clergy and a limited theological education for the laity was the ultimate weakening of the Lutheran witness to social justice. Reliance on the ministry of the laity would have increased exchanges with the world from the one to the many. The very engagement of faith with the world, of the sacred with the secular, would have been increased many fold had responsibility been given to a well equipped laity. To equip a congregation to act as a moral community is to generate a community in touch with the world and yet shaped in a daily telling and retelling of the Christian story. St. Peter's concern for the second and third generation Danish immigrants was the realization that the moral education and witness of one generation is the moral formation

of the congregation for the next generation. Older and wiser, and years later, the Rev. Garrison wished that “he had spent more time equipping the laity for their witness to social justice than being St. Peter’s principal witness for it.

The third feature of a summary was the role of the Synod or the regional body. The synod was composed of the member congregations in a defined geographical territory. As a member congregation of the Michigan Synod and on the official clergy roll, both St. Peter’s and the Rev. Garrison were under the direct pastoral care and supervision of the Synodical president (later changed to Bishop) who had the primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Synod. The merger creating the LCA in 1962, with its attention to urban missions, re-directed the Rev. Dr. Madsen’s zeal and passion from organizing new congregations during the 1950s in and around Detroit for the ULCA, to the LCA’s commitment to social justice and civil rights. The like-minded accord between the Rev. Dr. Madsen and the Rev. Garrison, and the location of St. Peter’s and the Synod’s office, within two blocks of each other created an interdependent and mutually enriching relationship for St. Peter’s and the Synod. The Synod staff encouraged and validated their exercise of responsibility for social justice by their official support, endorsement, and affirmation of St. Peter’s ministry. St. Peter’s delegates to the annual Synodical assemblies were equally supportive of Synodical programs for social justice. Paul Hansen, Paul Blinkhede, Ralph Pedersen and John Rosenkrands were regularly appointed delegates to the annual assemblies and supported all programming for social justice.

A fourth feature of summary is what is missing from this research, and no longer possible to acquire, if ever it was. Just how the mission for social justice was exercised

by the individual members of St. Peter's at work, at home, and in city government remains unknown. Ernest Campbell's and Thomas Pettigrew's report of their involvement in the desegregation crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957<sup>472</sup> included the extremely hostile reactions from the members of their congregations.. What Campbell and Pettigrew were unable to obtain was any accurate information of personal voting patterns. It has been a common assumption that the laity reacted strongly against clergy exerting leadership on controversial issues and exercised their opposition in their personal practices, but few studies have documented this. Membership losses, reduction in financial support and forthright dismissals of clergy strongly implied lay disapprovals and opposition to political issues, but the evidence was more circumstantial, and not always related to the pursuit of social justice. There is no way to ascertain how the members of St. Peter's exercised their faith in daily life at work and at home. No accounts of hostile reactions from the laity to the involvement of the Rev. Garrison in demonstrations, protests, et al were uncovered in St. Peter's archives, with the single exception of a question raised by a member of the Church Council in 1969 as to the amount of time "the pastor had been spending on programs in the inner city".<sup>473</sup>

The Rev. Garrison's ministry at St. Peter's, unlike many pastorates in urban parishes during the 1960s and 70s, ended without acrimony and bitterness, and a congregation that was prepared to continue its ministry in the city. With unusual speed, the process of interviewing candidates and calling the one chosen to be their next pastor was quickly completed, and the Rev. Peter Thomsen, of Danish descent, was installed as

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<sup>472</sup>. Ernest Q. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis: A Study of Little Rock's Ministry* (Washington, D.C: Public Affairs Press, 1959).

<sup>473</sup>. St. Peter's Lutheran Church Archives, Church Council Folder. Council Minutes for March 11,1969.

pastor of St. Peter's in 1971. Seeking to consolidate the second and third generations of Danish immigrants with the social emphasis of St. Peter's as an urban parish, the Rev. Thomsen directed their focus to the integration and conservation of St. Peter's neighborhoods.

Beginning with an assessment of their resources and the immediate opportunities for their engagement in ministry, it was the clear choice of St. Peter's to maintain their Lutheran presence and at the same time participate in the ecumenical program developed by the Center for Ecumenical Action Training (CEAT). CEAT was a Detroit based agency. It was organized to assist congregations to study, plan, and implement viable and relevant action-responses to the critical urban issues. Using workshops, lectures and work-study projects, CEAT assisted congregations to develop motivation and skills leading to healthy and meaningful relationships within changing communities. St. Peter's contract with CEAT began with the creation of a Task Force to gather and analyze congregational data, and ended with the commitment to continue their ministry to both the scattered second and third generation Danish immigrants and to the neighborhoods surrounding the church.

What was made clear in the CEAT study was an inherent dialectic that included on the one hand, St. Peter's understanding of the church defined by their confessional doctrines, and their actual experiences defined by what they were able to accomplish. It was equally clear that St. Peter's understanding of the church's presence and witness was a statement of faith, but that actually fulfilling the mission of that presence and witness was more a technical than a moral issue. By 1975 the disappointing response to St. Peter's

concerted outreach to the surrounding neighborhoods generated technical and pragmatic discussions with the staff of the Michigan Synod.

The discussions with the Michigan Synod were inevitable. This was where the congregational study developed by CEAT had led them. It was the considered advisement of the Michigan Synod staff that St. Peter's had three options. The first option was to stay at Pembroke and Greenfield, continue to experience the loss of membership due to transfers, inactivity, and death (the median age of the congregation was over 60) that would not be replaced by conversions or accessions, and with the accompanying loss of financial support ultimately unable to support a pastor, and end with the closing of the parish and assignment of the assets and liabilities to the Michigan Synod. Option two was to sell the property and move to a new location. But unlike their decision in 1955 to purchase property without the approval of the National Lutheran Council and its Board of American Missions that governed church locations through its comity relationships with other church bodies<sup>474</sup>, St. Peter's would only be permitted to purchase property west of Novi. Option three was to merge with another congregation and permanently comprise their Danish identity.

Using the volume of statistics available to the Michigan Staff from LCA urban congregations throughout the United States, the trajectory of St. Peter's life at Pembroke and Greenfield was clear. St. Peter's response to the judgment of the Synod was not as positive as first assumed. Options one and two were unacceptable, and option three especially anguishing. St. Peter's did not want to insist that new members become "Danish", either before or after they joined the parish, but it was important for them to

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<sup>474</sup>. H. Paul Douglas described "comity" as a combination of ecclesiastical eugenics and planned parenthood.

know that it was not wrong to be “Danish” if that was what one was. “We were sailing in uncharted waters, but we were determined to succeed. We had little other choice”.<sup>475</sup>

Making a list of potential candidates from the churches in the immediate suburban areas to their location at Pembroke and Greenfield, the leaders of the parish reviewed the annual reports of these congregations that included worship and Church School attendance, financial health, etc. Couples were assigned to visit congregations and report their impressions and experiences. Finally, a congregation that had been organized for Swedish immigrants, and originally located in the Woodbridge neighborhood near St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church, was selected for official visits. St. Peter’s Church School students were invited to join the Church School in the chosen church. St. Peter’s leadership made the decision and began the process of explanation and recommendation. Letters, discussion meetings, and pastoral visits culminated in St. Peter’s congregational vote, 49 yes and 38 no. The vote from the selected congregation for merger was 118 yes and 2 no. In 1982 St. Peter’s merged with Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Berkley, MI. and its first official action the newly merged congregation adopted the name Cana Lutheran Church. Cana Lutheran Church celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, 2007. Cana Lutheran Church remembers and honors its ethnic heritages with special ethnic events, but it is no longer regarded as either the Danish or Swedish Lutheran Church in Detroit. What Cana Lutheran Church fervently continues to hope is that the generations tracing their religious life in Detroit to either St. Peter’s or Gethsemane will remain constant in their witness of faith wherever they may live.

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<sup>475</sup>. Interview with Ralph A. Pedersen, President of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, 1973-75.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A SUMMARY FINIS

In *Origins of the Urban Crisis* Thomas Sugrue identified “racially changing neighborhoods” as the primary factor in the exodus of white Protestant churches from the city of Detroit beginning in the 1950s. Calling it “white flight” he identified congregational governance as an important means for their actions. Congregations were leaving the city of Detroit and new congregations were organized in suburban communities. Congregational governance did facilitate many of the decisions made for the closing of parishes in Detroit and the establishment of new ones in the suburbs. But congregational governance also facilitated decisions made by parishes that chose to remain in Detroit. As Sugrue acknowledged, congregational governance was an important factor in facilitating white flight, but surely not the only one.

I had chosen the life and history of St. Peter’s Danish Lutheran Church in this examination of “white flight” as Sugrue had named it, because I was well acquainted with St. Peter’s and its merger with a suburban parish in 1982. Members of St. Peter’s who had moved to Rochester joined the parish I served as pastor. The Danish Old Peoples Home where I conducted services twice a month included elderly members of St. Peter’s who had shared many stories of their lives with me. The congregational stories and life histories both that clergy and laity shared with me created a far more complicated and complex context for decisions than congregational governance could explain.

To make this research of St. Peter's something more than a statistical and chronological accounting of parish events, memberships, and clergy; I chose to examine the engagement of St. Peter's in the Open Housing Movement in Detroit. Studying the involvement of St. Peter's in the Open Housing Movement and their mutual interaction open up several different approaches to research and investigation, of both the city and the church.. This research moved back and forth between the two poles of faith and the facts of life and was an examination of how faith takes on ethical power and community life takes on religious significance. The law in the community of public life and the gospel in the community of faith have interacting roles. There is an institutional separation between religion and the public order, between the church and the city, between St. Peter's and Detroit, but there is also a functional interaction that should serve the common good. Sectarian theology and doctrine with partisan politics and city policies were legitimate subjects for examination and making summary judgments.

Researching the engagement of St. Peter's with the Open Housing Movement helped me appreciate how congregations should be viewed as Hopewell described them as textures, mechanism, organisms and means of signification.<sup>476</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden<sup>477</sup> had sought to respond more adequately to the challenges faced by urban congregations and directed attention to the social responsibility of

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<sup>476</sup>. James F. Hopewell, *Congregations: Stories and Structures*, ed by Barbara Wheeler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>477</sup>. Washington Gladden was a Congregational pastor in Columbus, Ohio where he directly applied Christianity to the social issues of the day. He is considered one of the first leaders of the Social Gospel. Walter Rauschenbusch was pastor of a German Reformed congregation in New York and formed the religious teachings of his heritage into a "social gospel" which became a fundamental foundation for the Social Gospel movement..

congregations. H. Paul Douglas and Edmund deS. Brunner<sup>478</sup> further developed this attention to the social context of Christian congregations through their Institute of Social and Religious Research (1921-34) that created more than forty-eight separate research projects and seventy-five published articles.

H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*<sup>479</sup> raised the issue of the relationships between congregations and culture and exposed the inadequacy of efforts to free Christianity from culture. "Christ claims no man purely as a natural being, but always as one who has become human in a culture; who is not only in culture, but into whom culture has penetrated."<sup>480</sup> In *Noise of Solemn Assemblies*<sup>481</sup> Peter Berger regarded American congregations as socially established institutions whose chief purpose was to keep religion irrelevant. Joseph Fichter and Gibson Winter<sup>482</sup> joined Peter Berger in probing congregational relations to the secular environment.

James Gustafson responded to Peter Berger's negative view of American congregations with his *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*<sup>483</sup> that described congregations as earthen vessels carrying the treasure of the biblical heritage. In perhaps the first interdisciplinary study of congregations, Gustafson urged congregations be viewed as human, natural, and political communities with language, memory, understanding, belief, and action. James Hopewell further developed this with his *Congregation: Stories and*

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<sup>478</sup>. H. Paul Douglas and Edmund Brunner, *The Protestant Church as a Social Institution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1935). This book is a summary of more than a decade of effort to regard the church "scientifically".

<sup>479</sup>. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Bros. 1951).

<sup>480</sup>. Ibid. p.69.

<sup>481</sup> Peter Berger, *Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co, 1961).

<sup>482</sup>. Joseph H. Fichter, *Dynamics of a City Church* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (Garden City, N.Y; Doubleday, 1961).

<sup>483</sup>. James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

*Structures*<sup>484</sup> that emphasized the social and narrative approach to congregational studies. For Hopewell, each congregation was a living subculture and he noted that the “Christian congregation took me by surprise”.<sup>485</sup>

A significant development in the study of congregations came in 1982 when the Lilly Endowment, Inc., an Indianapolis based private philanthropic foundation established in 1937, hosted a gathering of scholars, clergy, and consultants to engage in an interdisciplinary study of one congregation. The report of that gathering, *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church*<sup>486</sup> clearly illustrated what Clifford Geertz had described as “thick culture” and the “web of significance”<sup>487</sup> that distinguished one congregation from another. This was followed in 1987 to 1991 by the Congregational History Project by the Chicago Divinity School at the University of Chicago. With a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., this gathering of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, practical theologians, and organizational development experts created two volumes that offered a “rich sampler of American religious life in its complex, local particularity”.<sup>488</sup> An important contribution from this study was the establishing of a new scale for the location and ministry of a congregation. Where congregations had been traditionally assumed to operate within prescribed neighborhoods or property lines, the study concluded that congregational life included sociological,

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<sup>484</sup>. James Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, ed. Barbara Wheeler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>485</sup>. Hopewell, *Congregation*, , p. 3.

<sup>486</sup>. Carl S. Dudley, ed., *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983)

<sup>487</sup>. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.,1973). Chapter 1, pp.3-33.

<sup>488</sup>. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, ed., *American Congregations, Volume I: Portraits of Twelve Religious Communities and Volume II: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).The quote is from Vol. II, page 1.

historical, theological, economic, religious, and political issues extending far beyond property or neighborhood areas.

What the University of Chicago's School of Divinity research on Congregational life asserted, that "the primary extrafamilial form of community for much of the American population has been the religious congregation"<sup>489</sup> was clearly evident in the establishment of St. Peter's Danish Lutheran Church in 1872. It was a voluntary gathering of Danish immigrants, it was never a neighborhood church. It was organized for the purpose of Danish fellowship, worship, and ministry in the tradition and practice of the Danish church. True as it was that St. Peter's sought to be centrally located within its scattered membership, it never regarded itself as a parish church in the tradition of Roman Catholic parishes' assigned specific neighborhoods. In its three re-locations during its existence in the city of Detroit it did not abandon one neighborhood for another, but rather sought sites that were most accessible, first by public transportation and later, by private transportation, for its Danish membership that became increasingly scattered throughout the city.

St. Peter's, strategic location, not only served the Danish immigrants of Detroit, but also maintained family solidarity from one generation to the next. First, second, and third generation family members gathered for Sunday worship and continued with family dinners and visits. In this mixture of religious and family use of St. Peter's worship and educational programs the Danish community nurtured both the claim of their Danish tradition and its projected presence into the future. St. Peter's was the center of both conservation and change for the Danish immigrant, and encompassed a local cultural entity with a transnational Christian heritage. In the Danish liturgy and family

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<sup>489</sup>. Wind and Lewis, *American Congregation*, Vol. 2, p.23

gatherings, the members of St. Peter's embodied their Danish heritage both religiously and socially and extended it historically. St. Peter's basic respect for the city of Detroit was rooted in their Danish heritage in which their tradition and religion described and defined their identity. Democratic constitutional government, religious tolerance, universal education, a structured historical self-consciousness and sufficiency, family cohesion, and personal responsibilities were at the center of life both in Denmark and Detroit. As Detroit's only Danish parish, it included both Grundtvigian and Inner Mission members in harmonious relationship.

St. Peter's organization as a Danish parish remained its focus throughout its history in Detroit. Where many congregations were first established as the singular religious institution in a neighborhood, and served more comprehensive purposes, St. Peter's growth evolved into a more devotional and distinctively religious form, and even further into a social and participatory life. St. Peter's was organized as a Danish parish in the tradition of the Danish National Church and remained so until its relocation from Detroit in 1982. St. Peter's was not a "sect" type of church, separatist in spirit and life-style practices from the public order. St. Peter's was a "church" type that maintained its confessional witness and yet legitimated the public order.<sup>490</sup> St. Peter's brought together in its membership the Danish historical heritage, the Danish Lutheran church ethos, a strong family dynamic, individual skills, professions, and hopes and expectations that

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<sup>490</sup> Ernst Troeltsch distinguished between "sect" and "church" types in his *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Sect type churches represented the theme of individualism in religious practices and church types maintained the motifs of universalism. Sect type's churches would include such religious groups as the Amish, Mennonites, House of David etc. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod might also be included, but that would be less likely today. Sect type churches are more self-defensive cultural enclaves and considered less effective in witness, but that might be a judgment questioned today.

were shaped both by Lutheran confessional theology and the culture of Detroit into purposeful and fulfilling lives.

Spatially integrated in the city of Detroit, St. Peter's Danish membership affirmed and celebrated its Danish heritage within the worship and fellowship of the parish, but through its Folk-school programs it also engaged and addressed social issues and changes in urban Detroit. St. Peter's liturgical and educational programs were rooted in Danish history and were ethnically distinct but socially compatible. It was in its liturgical practices that St. Peter's nurtured a distinctive form of moral awareness and behavior that both challenged and affirmed the social mores of Detroit. The Greek word for "liturgy" or *leitourgia* has a moral sense that meant the performance of a particular public service or *diakonia*. St. Peter's worship led to the sacramental transfiguration of everyday life, just as the Eucharistic bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. In their daily life the members of St. Peter's displayed their witness. St. Peter's worship schedules followed the pattern of both Roman Catholic and Protestant congregations throughout the city. Educational programs and fellowship events were coordinated with the industrial and cultural patterns of work and recreation. Danish holidays were celebrated within the congregational life of the parish and the social calendar of the Danish Brotherhood, and all national holidays of the United States were acknowledged and affirmed.<sup>491</sup>

St. Peter's was organized by laity and governed by laity from the very beginning, unlike the majority of Lutheran congregations in the United States that were organized

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<sup>491</sup> A unique feature of Danish history in the United States was the transfer of United States' Fourth of July celebration to *Rebild Park* in Denmark. The 50<sup>th</sup> Rebild Festival was held in 1962 where ex-vice-president Richard Nixon was the featured speaker and a recorded greeting was delivered from President Kennedy.

by clergy assigned to establish congregations in specific areas. St. Peter's organizational structure and practice exhibited basic middle-class values, such as efficiency, accountability, family and work responsibilities, striving for success, et al. St. Peter's success in being and remaining self-sufficient and financially supported by voluntary contributions, in contrast to the practice of Denmark's state supported church was but one sign of the Danish adoption and adaptation to American cultural practices.

Danish immigrants arrived in Detroit with adequate social capital to remain in the middle-upper-middle class of society. Bilingual, educated, and skilled in either trades or professions, they were productive and assimilated citizens from the beginning. Although one of the smallest immigrant groups in Detroit, their bilingual, and frequently tri-lingual skills (Danish, English which was required as part of their educational program in Denmark, and often German through their proximity to Germany) facilitated their immediate participation in the majority of Detroit's neighborhoods. The use of the Danish language for worship and religious instruction continued only until the mid-1930s.

St. Peter's expanded attention to social justice and exposure to the Open Housing Movement was initiated with its merger into a more inclusive national Lutheran body. Lutheran social responsibility had been created and developed in national Lutheranism by its theological understanding and responsibility for community, its urban setting, the First World War, which required ministries outside parish settings, and the re-construction of countries destroyed in the war. Expanding this social responsibility beyond individual vices challenged traditional church statements on social issues and initiated renewed theological responses to economic depression, poverty, racial discrimination, hunger,

unemployment, and population displacement. Following World War II this national Lutheran body also sought a more responsible exercise of ministry in the arena of civil rights. St. Peter's was led to a greater application of attention and support to social justice, and especially to the issue of discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing and urban renewal through both its national affiliation and the calling of its first non-Danish pastor. St. Peter's engagement in this ministry revealed a separation between the clergy and the laity.

The professionalization of Lutheran clergy, which included a screening of all applicants, a rigorous seminary education, and a certification process to assure qualified and trained clergy, created a form of elitism that separated clergy from the laity, in both practice and abilities. Lutheranism's concentration on clergy education fostered the neglect of theological education for the laity, which extended the separation between them. With very few opportunities provided to the laity for in-depth theological and Biblical studies they were compromised in their historical understandings and applications of their faith to the public order. While there were clergy invitations and encouragements for lay witness and participation in demonstrations against social injustices, little theological and biblical background and few opportunities for participation were provided that would have accommodated their professional responsibilities and schedules. St. Peter's greater attention in the Open Housing Movement by the clergy with very little lay participation in public demonstrations compromised its witness.

Interviews with St. Peter's clergy and members disclosed that there were few encouragements for the exercise of individual faith witness against social injustices at

home, neighborhood and work. Lutheran confessional theology's strong exercise of one's Christian vocation, which is to share at home, work, and the world, the witness to faith, would have dramatically increased the exposure of St. Peter's position on social justice had there been greater encouragement for lay involvement. Lay conversations included admissions of caution and reluctance, even refusal, to engage in public conversations because of their limited knowledge and information, and more often than not, in discussions with African American friends and neighbors who displayed greater familiarity to biblical admonitions. Lutheran liturgies do not encourage extended sermons of biblical exegesis, so a Lutheran in conversation with a fundamentalist exposed to lengthy weekly Biblical expositions is surely challenged.

The long silence of Detroit's white Protestant religious community on racism and segregated housing was rooted in the growing privatization of religion, doctrinal divisions, organizational diversity, and parochial interests that prevented the formation of a strong institutional ecumenical witness. Thomas Luckmann's *The Invisible Religion*<sup>492</sup> provided a theoretical probe of religious impulses moving into the private realms of experience, but it was in Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*<sup>493</sup> that Shelia described her private faith as "Sheilaism", a faith expressed not through religious institutions at all but through "just my own little voice."<sup>494</sup>

Religious institutions were still normative, but religious impulses and energies were increasingly restricted to the private realms of experience. Owing to doctrinal divisions, organizational diversities, and parochial interests the one ecumenical

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<sup>492</sup>. Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

<sup>493</sup>. Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>494</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 221-223.

organization in Detroit, the Detroit Council of Churches, could do only what its member denominations permitted it to do. Without a specific mission for social justice, and with no mandated authority of its own, it was restricted to soliciting and gathering approval for each action and pronouncement against racism and acts of discrimination. The delays encountered in gathering approval and support often rendered ecumenical testimony and action of little avail.

Equally as serious as the organizationally flawed ecumenical structure preventing timely and forthright proclamations from the religious community was the emphasis on institutional ecumenism rather than an apostolic ecumenism that could have redirected the debate and discussion beyond simply obedience and compliance with laws to the nature and practice of basic morality. Institutional ecumenism required organizational relationships and doctrinal agreements. Apostolic ecumenism which is most adequately expressed in the three ecumenical creeds of the Christian faith would have lifted the attention to the basic proclamation of the Christian faith, beyond the worldly goal of making ecumenical religion uniformly ethical. Apostolic ecumenism would have guided attention to the ultimate significance of God in society.

Apostolic ecumenism asserts that the world is greater than the sum of its parts. Without it there is no transformation of its separated and fragmented parts into an integrated whole. Apostolic ecumenism would have clearly established the mission of the church to make the ethical practices of world cultures religious. In its emphasis on the political (legislative) process and the criminalization of racial discrimination and segregated housing, Detroit's ecumenical witness failed to establish the basic arena and context of life in which racial discrimination and segregated housing are not only

criminal by the definition of the codes and ordinances, but far more importantly, are basic violations of creation and human life.

The ecumenical proclamations of Detroit's religious community shared the condemnation of racial discrimination, but did not attempt to construct that worldview in which moral community (common unity) exists. Moral community is not the exclusive domain of institutional religion. In its proclamation of the transcendent and witness to it, institutional religion presents the world view in which moral community can be affirmed and lived.

The white Protestant Detroit Council of Churches was organizationally separated from the African American religious community, and had exercised very little interaction with it. There were several African American congregations included in the major member denominations of the Detroit Council, but the vast majority of African American congregations were not affiliated with the white Protestant ecumenical community. Differences in governance and organizational structures made reciprocal relationships difficult, but there is no extant correspondence or archival material to indicate there were serious efforts to join the Detroit Council of Churches with the African American religious community to addressing racial discrimination and segregated housing.

The most serious omission in any interaction with the African American churches was the exclusion of the African American churches from the composition and planning of the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience. A serious rift was exposed between the very bodies who were immediately involved in the process of organizing the conference. Each was necessary for the other in any attempt at the reconciliation of their mutual lives. What was left unexamined and unchallenged in the

white religious community was the assumption that the white religious community could unilaterally solve its demeaning characterization of other human beings. By their very exclusion of the African American churches the white religious community further demeaned the very ones with whom they wanted to be reconciled.

The exclusion of the white religious community in the planning and participation of the March to Freedom led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., six months after the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy further illustrated the wide gulf between the white and African American religious communities. With few representatives from the white religious community joining in the parade, the white religious community did not hear, listen to or understand what Dr. King presented. Serious attention and discussion of King's speech among white and African American clergy could have revealed paths towards the resolution of basic injustices against African Americans.

Personal conversations with Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Lutheran<sup>495</sup> denominational leadership included their disappointments and regrets for the failure of the ecumenical community to speak and act more aggressively against racial discrimination and segregated housing. Each felt powerless to change the ecumenical witness and instead directed their energies to their respective denominational responsibilities. Opposition to open occupancy was shared by Detroit's religious leadership but by failing to develop and apply the theological and organizational strength residing in organized religion this opposition was muted. Extended isolation, doctrinal differences, diverse practices, policies of governance, and memories of aggrieved

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<sup>495</sup>. As chairperson of our judicatory's Ecumenical Committee I was often engaged with representatives from the major denominations on ecumenical matters. These conversations extended over a period of several years from 1966 to 1970 and included the realization that the failure to take King's Detroit speech more seriously had been a serious error of judgment. It was one of those historic moments to which they wanted to have responded differently.

experiences contributed to caution and hesitation in ecumenical association. The determination of Detroit's Protestant denominational leadership to avoid dissension in ecumenical pronouncements, thus requiring complete agreements, often delayed the expression of their shared opposition to racial discrimination in specific instances.

The Open Housing Movement did not succeed in generating public attention to the issues of racial discrimination and segregated housing until the disclosure of the "point system" used by Grosse Pointe Realtors to screen the sale and purchase of homes. The response of the community was directed through Michigan's Attorney General and the Corporation and Securities Commission. Attorney General Adams and Commissioner Gubow advanced the cause of Open Housing by using public exposure and administrative rulings rather than legislative action that repeatedly failed to enact anti-discrimination laws.

Owing to the absence of any appointed or elected leadership the Open Housing movement did not institutionalize or organize itself, or acquire any kind of continuing influence in the public order to present racial discrimination and segregated housing as fundamental issues of human relations, far more extensive and insidious than illegal acts. Never a viable organization with officers etc, it consisted of dedicated volunteers who succeeded more in presenting an ideology than a program of action.

The objectives of the Open Housing Movement were important considerations for Detroit's Commission of Community Relations and its Executive Director, George Schermer. It was an appointed commission that had been established for political purposes and not for substantive change. Schermer sought the removal of all restrictions against the sale and purchase of housing in Detroit. Primarily responsible for public

housing Schermer included open occupancy as an issue of public housing. The CCR gathered together agencies and organizations from the city to better coordinate their services, It was in this gathering that a city-wide event addressing open occupancy was first suggested. With the CCR a part of Detroit's political community, Detroit's city administration was able to separate itself from official endorsements of open occupancy and maintain its political base in the white community.

Owing to the silence of Detroit's religious community on racial discrimination and segregated housing, and the continuing efforts of CCR to create open housing in all public housing projects, CCR became increasingly regarded as the guide for morality in public life. By failing to speak forthrightly and forcefully on the nature of human community that exists above the level of law and order, the religious community vacated its acknowledged leadership role for public morality. In its advocacy for open housing and the silence of the religious community CCR was increasingly regarded as the "conscience of the city". The "high moral ground" the religious community had been given both by public acclamation and personal consideration was transferred to the CCR.

The primary goals of law and order were accepted as the secular community's responsibility in the absence of religion's espousal of values and the advocacy of basic human community rooted and built on equality, dignity and care for one another, The moral fiber of the community was deemed fully contained in law and order. The failure of the religious community to establish the fundamental nature of community as is founded by God, within which the practice of law and order was only part of human relationships, allowed the secular community to independently establish legal goals and objectives for public life. In its own definition of law and order that remained

unexamined and unchallenged by the religious community, Detroit's city administration maintained the practice of racial discrimination and segregated housing.

Detroit's city administration, unrestrained by any official endorsements for open occupancy, both facilitated and tolerated the organization of neighborhood block clubs and associations that protected existing neighborhoods with white majorities.

Neighborhood block clubs and associations were used by the city administration to facilitate urban renewal projects and neighborhood conservation. With their dedicated leadership many of these neighborhood associations and ad hoc organizations maintained a strong force opposing open occupancy.

The Detroit Real Estate Board, the association of white realtors, was an especially significant force for maintaining practices of racial discrimination and segregated housing. DREB created broad public support for their practices by emphasizing economic integrity, i.e. free market capitalism, and their compliance with the National Code of Ethics. Especially effective for DREB, in the absence of official policies and ordinances against racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing, was their emphasis on maintaining economic values in the sale or purchase of housing and their avowed compliance with national professional standards of conduct. Their comparison of these affirmations of basic capitalism, which included very little attention to social justice and professional ethics, with religious admonitions for social justice, was seldom challenged.

The Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience was the first conference of its kind in the United States. It was conceived in a mutual regard for open housing in both the CCR and the religious community, and it represented the

first national effort to unite the political and religious community in a joint effort to address racial discrimination and segregated housing. The decision of the planning committee not to create a formally organized body with elected and accountable leadership to maintain public attention and continued action for open occupancy was a major error. Its judgment that individual denominations and organizations would best continue the efforts for open occupancy failed to take into account the territorial responsibilities of the major church bodies and the importance of their mutual strength and encouragement. As an example, the Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in America included congregations from the entire Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Detroit was important but it was not the only issue for the denominations and did not always receive the attention it needed. Without the creation of a more permanent committee and election of the leadership to maintain public attention and responsibility the momentum created by the conference came to an end.

The recommendations of the Conference included the exercise of basic citizenship and the practice of religion, but Detroit's political community regarded the religious community as the basic source and guide for the moral and social climate of Detroit because "it reached further into the realms of personhood and could actualize moral community". This assignation of responsibility to the religious community and its uncritical acceptance allowed the political community to divert priority attention and action from open housing. Mayor Cavanagh was the first mayor of Detroit to publicly state support for open housing but his administration never exhibited aggressive activity for it.

Lack of leadership, funding, and lay participation for the ad hoc tri-faith Metropolitan Conference on Race and Religion prompted the Metropolitan Detroit Council of Churches to assume program responsibilities for the recommendations of the Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy. This separated Detroit's CCR and the Roman Catholic and Jewish religious communities from direct involvement, and gave responsibility for decision making to the MDCC. This fragmentation of the Detroit community prevented the MDCC from making decisions that incorporated the full measure of community and justice. Justice can exist without religion, but the exercise of faith active in love cannot exist without justice. The rule of law is the power of God for the protection of life, and the practice of faith is the power of gospel-generated love in human community. The separation of the religious community from the political community deprived both from the interaction of law and faith in the building of community.

Aggressive opposition to open occupancy was mobilized by the Greater Detroit Homeowners Association organized by Thomas Poindexter. Emphasizing basic homeowner rights and economic stability, it succeeded in defeating a city-wide ordinance for open occupancy. Joined together in their opposition to the Association were the leaders of Detroit's religious communities, the political parties, NAACP, and labor organizations, and the defeat of the ordinance clearly displayed the gap between the leadership and the membership on the issue of open occupancy.

There was no direct engagement between St. Peter's Lutheran Church and the Open Housing Movement before 1963. St. Peter's had moved to its new location on Greenfield and Pembroke in 1953. The synodical judicatory with which St. Peter's was

affiliated had joined the Detroit Council of Churches in 1957 and facilitated a flow of information to its member congregations, but St. Peter's concentrated its ministry on gathering the scattered second and third generation Danish immigrants and developing a Sunday School educational program for children and youth. St. Peter's called the Rev. Howard Christensen, the professor of Christian Education at the Grand View Danish Seminary in Des Moines, Iowa as their pastor. The Rev. Christensen concentrated his ministry on gathering the Danish immigrants together at St. Peter's and providing a program of Christian education to inculcate the Lutheran confessions and doctrines in historical Danish self-consciousness. He had also served as the Danish representative on both state-wide and national committees to complete the merger of the Danish Lutheran Church in the United States with other Lutheran bodies, which required of him extensive travel and time.

The resignation of the Rev. Howard Christensen and the calling of the Rev. Jim Wilson-Garrison initiated St. Peter's most concerted efforts to address racial discrimination and segregated housing. Arriving in mid-summer 1963, the Rev. Wilson-Garrison organized St. Peter's Social Ministry Committee, distributed the social statements of the Lutheran Church in America, introduced a study of the LCA's three-volume publication on *Christian Social Responsibility*, and joined with other clergy in public demonstrations against the displacement of residents in urban renewal projects. When the Rev. Wilson-Garrison was arrested and fined for his act of civil disobedience St. Peter's voted not to pay their pastor's fine, and decided that members of St. Peter's would not always join with him, but that they would support him in what he did.

The Rev. Wilson-Garrison's ministry at St. Peter's illustrated the differentiation between the ministry and theological education of the clergy and that of the laity. The gap between the "pulpit and the pew" was not about the church's responsibility for social justice, but the manner in which the ministry to social justice was applied. In simplistic terms, the congregation supported the pastor in his ministry of social justice rather than the clergy supporting the membership in their ministry of social justice. Both Lutheran seminary education and judicatory administration and polity emphasized the role and responsibility of clergy for congregational leadership, the equipping of the membership a secondary issue. It was a serious flaw.

Following the resignation of the Rev. Wilson-Garrison the Rev. Peter Thomsen was installed and directed St. Peter's final decade in Detroit toward an ecumenical study of neighborhood ministry and continued support of social ministry projects in the area.. Advised by judicatory leadership to disband, to relocate to an area not served by a Lutheran congregation or to merge with a suburban parish, St. Peter's began the process of decision in the late 1970s and completed a merger with a Swedish congregation in Berkley, MI in 1982.

Did St. Peter's relocation from the city follow in the manner suggested by Sugrue? The vote to relocate was a vote of the congregation at a meeting conducted by the lay president. It was an act of congregational governance. Was it a move from the racially changing neighborhoods? The neighborhood at Pembroke and Greenfield had changed from an all-white neighborhood in 1953 to nearly a majority of African-Americans according to the 1980 census, but remained a middle-class community both because of the nature of single-family residences and the increasing number of African

Americans able to afford this type of housing. No person who was interviewed expressed opposition to integrated neighborhoods, and several praised the efforts of the Niensens to maintain the Woodbridge community from which St. Peter's had moved to Greenfield and Pembroke.

Detroit's white Protestant congregations, with few exceptions, were not engaged in the Open Housing Movement before the convening Metropolitan Conference on Open Occupancy: Challenge to Conscience. In the absence of an identifiable Open Housing Movement and a strong ecumenical body that could aggressively assert itself in the formation of moral clarity, public responsibility, and congregational participation, denominations and congregations were left to exercise their own responses to racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. This meant that the religious community did not speak with any kind of unified voice. Since Detroit's white Protestant religious community did not grant full authority or provide financial support to the Detroit Council of Churches to engage in the Open Housing Movement, the Detroit Council of Churches could not give priority attention to Detroit's pattern of residential segregation.

Retaining primary authority, responsibility, and financial support for their own public ministry, St. Peter's synodical judicatory directed engagement with social issues through its synodical staff. Concerns for administrative efficiency deterred direct congregational involvement in social issues thus effected clergy rather than lay involvement. By not aggressively developing and supporting laity in their engagement with social issues, the gap between the Synod and the member congregations mirrored the gap between congregational clergy and laity. The synodical emphasis on efficiency

and immediate responses diverted energies from the development of lay support and participation.

St. Peter's exercise of Lutheranism's awakened responsibility for social justice was initiated by clergy leadership. St. Peter's lay leadership directed the congregational support of both clergy and synodical action against segregated housing, but the diversion of clergy attention away from the development of lay support and participation and toward clergy participation limited St. Peter's congregational engagement.

White Protestant congregations began leaving Detroit in the early 1950's, and some relocated from more centrally located sites to the outer edges of the city. With the dramatic change of the racial map of Detroit following World War II, Sugrue's attribution to "racially changing neighborhood" is both descriptive and prescriptive. Further attribution to congregational governance as the means for "white flight" is less helpful, for it obscures the trajectory of white Protestantism's ecumenical, denominational, synodical and congregational efforts to combat racial discrimination in the sale and purchase of housing. It is virtually impossible to determine how much St. Peter's decision to leave the city of Detroit was influenced by a "racially changing neighborhood", but their decision by congregational governance was not made until 1982.

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS OF METROPOLITAN CONFERENCE ON OPEN OCCUPANCY; CHALLENGE TO CONSCIENCE

On the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, we, representatives of the various religious faiths of our community, and others of good will, assembled in this Conference on Open Occupancy, do hereby guarantee our best efforts to emancipate the housing market of our community from the unconscionable evils of discrimination for reasons of color, religion, or national origin.

We believe that this Conference on Open Occupancy has addressed itself to the most important domestic issue confronting our communities: the existence of an almost total pattern of neighborhood segregation and housing discrimination. The Conference has shown us that if this moral evil is not eradicated quickly our communities face the disaster of such sharp divisions and disunity as may never be totally healed.

We express our deep sadness that for the most part the churches and synagogues of our communities have failed to assume their role of leadership in awakening the conscience of the people of Metropolitan Detroit to this end: have failed to see their involvement in it: and have acquiesced to its existence. We can call this no less than sin and disobedience to the will of God. Therefore we recommend:

1. That every church and synagogue become a generating center of the forces of intergroup understanding and welcome: that each create a Committee on Human Relations or its equivalent which will educate the congregations on the problems of Intergroup Justice, involve them in programs and action to solve the problem, and cooperate with such committees of other congregations on a neighborhood and community level;
2. That churches work to obtain appropriate state open occupancy legislation that will bring to bear the overall power and status of the law, will effect an evenness of community efforts, make possible swifter and more complete solution, and prevent human frailty from obstructing man's progress; that churches and synagogues throughout the state create combined committees in each legislative district to further this end: that each faith and denomination also work independently through its own organization to achieve this goal:

3. That the sponsors of this conference establish methods of communication, exchange of experience, information, and united action on every level of activity for open occupancy in our community.
4. That the full report of the Committee on Conclusions and Recommendations be used as a guide to study and action by the member of the Conference and by all interested persons in the total community.

A. CONSCIENCE, COMMITMENT AND ACTION WITHIN THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE

Call to Conscience.

We issue a call to the conscience of every person who seriously considers himself a Catholic, Protestant or Jew to vigorously and actively promote all aspects of intergroup justice in his church, parish, synagogue, in the neighborhood and community, in the state, nation and in our world.

Passive "good will" is by no means enough.

For over one hundred years we have been magnificent in our deliberation and woeful in our speed.

No man can have the right to call himself or feel himself a god Christian or Jew and not work actively and diligently to solve this problem with all possible speed.

1. Every Church and Synagogue a Center of Welcome.

We recommend that every church, parish, or congregation of whatever denomination or location should make itself the generating center of forces of intergroup understanding and welcome in its neighborhood and community.

2. Leaders and Laymen Working Together.

We recommend that committed church leaders and laymen act together in every congregation to stimulate and to encourage each other so that a spiral of interacting forces may be created involving more and more of the congregation in the solution of this problem. The leadership should reach out to the laymen and the laymen to other laymen and to the leadership. Committed members of every congregation must speak out and work with leadership to activate total congregational resources on this problem.

3. Allocation of Time, Energy, Budget. Staff

We recommend that the central church bodies, the headquarters of denominational decision and administration should focus on the problem of intergroup justice as a paramount, immediate and inexorable challenge to Christian and Jewish faiths. Time, energy, budget, staff, program, and material should be allocated to making the church and the synagogue vital leaders of our society in solving the problems of discrimination and inequality of opportunity.

4. A Committee on Public Affairs in Every Congregation.

We recommend that every church, parish or congregation have the equivalent of a committee on public affairs or social action: that a central concern of such committees be equality of opportunity of all citizens, the destruction of every vestige of discrimination against all groups and the reduction of attitudes of prejudice to a minimum. These committees should be linked on a neighborhood and community level.

B. WORK OF THE CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE IN THE COMMUNITY

6. Cooperation With Neighborhood Councils and Groups.

We recommend that, through committees mentioned above, churches and synagogues cooperate in all practical and helpful ways with community councils and neighborhood associations dedicated to open occupancy. We recommend that in areas where such councils do not exist that church and synagogue groups aid in creating them.

7. Sponsorship of Community Conferences on Open Occupancy.

We recommend that churches and synagogues sponsor community conferences on open occupancy in cooperation with other community groups.

8. Cooperation with the Commission on Community Relations.

We recommend that churches and synagogues cooperate closely on the neighborhood level with the work of the Detroit Commission on Community Relations. This cooperation becomes increasingly important in views of the increased responsibilities of the Commission.

9. Work with Real Estate Brokers.

We recommend that churches and synagogues work with real estate associations, companies, brokers and agents to urge them to conduct their business without regard to ethnic considerations, and to support brokers

who conduct their business without discrimination against persons or neighborhoods.

We recommend work with builders and developers on the same basis.

10. We recommend that churches and synagogues urge participation of their Members in the Greater Detroit Committee on Fair Housing Practices, in the NAACP, and in the Detroit Urban League.

## C. SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES AND METHODS

### 11. Legislation

We recommend that all religious bodies work vigorously for the passage, this year, of a comprehensive civil rights bill which will convert the FEP Commission to a civil rights commission with jurisdiction over the field of *employment, public accommodation, education and housing*. Such legislation is already successfully in effect in nineteen states.

We recommend that work for such legislation be conducted both through the Michigan Council for Civil Rights and independently along creedal and denomination lines.

### 12. The Presidents Executive Order.

We recommend that the churches and synagogues do all in their power to see to it that the President's Executive Order is enforced to the limit of its coverage and potential. We recommend that combined church committees representing the continued interest of this conference and the three co-sponsors, call upon builders and builders' associations to gain a deeper understanding of their problems in this regard, and to urge them to market homes without discrimination. We recommend continued contact with all federal agencies responsible for implementation to back up their efforts.

We recommend that churches and synagogues immediately join with responsible civil rights organizations in calling for the expansion of the order to cover all housing which utilizes in any way whatsoever federal financial aid or guarantees, through banks, public agencies, credit or any other source. The moral principle here is not a matter of degree. Wherever the money, aid or credit of all the people is used, all the people is used, all the people, without discrimination as to color, "race" religion or origin must have equal access to benefits conferred.

### 13. Open Listing Service, Covenant Cards. Repossessed Housing.

We recommend that churches and synagogues

- (a) Adopt the covenant card campaign of the Greater Detroit Committee on Fair Housing Practices or develop a similar campaign within their own denominations.
- (b) Utilize the open housing service of the Greater Detroit Committee on Fair Housing Practices.
- (c) Apprise their Negro members of the possibilities of Obtaining homes on a non-discriminatory basis from The large selection of repossessed homes on the lists of the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans' Administration. At this time several thousand such homes Are listed and are available, distributed all over the metro-politan area.

14. Continuation of Structure for Communication and Cooperation.

We recommend a continuing method of united action on the part of the major sponsors of this conference. This method can be worked out by the sponsoring groups. Its function will be to make available to all experience of each in this field: to coordinate community efforts: to keep pressing each organization, each faith for maximum effort attention and progress in ending not only discrimination in the housing market, but all discrimination.

15. State Conference in 1964

We recommend that in the event insufficient progress is made toward achieving an open housing market in 1963, that an inter-faith sponsored State conference on Open Occupancy or Fair Housing Practices be held in Lansing in 1964.

Statement on Human Relations  
Adopted in 1951 by  
The United Lutheran Church in America

“The Word of God, which the Church proclaims, reveals the righteous judgment of God upon sinful man, and sets forth the distinctive power of Christ to redeem him. Since one of the disruptive forces which hinders the will of God is prejudice and discrimination in human relations, the United Lutheran Church in America sets forth the following propositions as the basis for study, discussion, experimentation, and concerted action by its congregations and members.

I. Christian Principles

1. *God the Father is the Creator of all mankind.* We are made in His likeness. In the light of the common creation of all men, differences in physical characteristics or social background are only of incidental importance.
2. *God condemns all injustice, all hatred, all abuse and persecution of men.* His judgment is revealed in the moral sickness of all men and in the torn fabric of our common life.
3. *God's atoning grace embraces every man.* Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God offers redemption to all. Christ died for all mankind. All men have equal worth in God's sight.
4. *Forgiveness through the Cross restores men to fellowship with God.* Through the remission of sins the way is opened to reconciliation between men. The love of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Cross, leads men to the deepest kind of human fellowship and mutual service. By the power of the Cross men can overcome prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation which sinfully distort God's order and are the basic cause of social tension.
5. *God Calls all men through the Gospel to Christian brotherhood.* Love which flows from God, seeks to create justice and true community. Love for one's fellowmen is the necessary counterpart of love for God. God calls men to serve Him by serving each other.
6. *In God's providence Christians, different in racial, geographical, economic, and social backgrounds may use their differences to contribute to the total enrichment of life.* No group is self-sufficient. By the exercise of justice and brotherhood men may cooperate in building true human community.

7. *The abiding love of Christ, our Lord, impels us.* We dare not separate ourselves from that love. Christ is the one Word of God, to whom we must listen and whom we must trust and obey in life and death. Thus Christians must face all human relationships in the spirit and power of Christ's love.

## II. *Human Rights and Responsibilities*

"In the light of these truths of Christian Faith the Church ought to help its people by offering a common witness to guide the individual conscience. Consistent Christian living requires that men shall seek to accord to each other the observance of the following rights and their matching responsibilities:

1. To possess and to respect the life and dignity of the human person as a child of God for whom Christ died.
2. To worship God without human distinctions in the Church, the Body of Christ.
3. To develop his God-given talents through education and cultural pursuits in order to use these talents in answer to God's call.
4. To establish a home in living space and housing conducive to a wholesome family life.
5. To occupy the place in economic life for which he is individually fitted, being free to advance therein on the basis of character and ability.
6. To share the privileges and obligations of community life, having equal access to all public services, including those related to health, education, recreation, social welfare and transportation, and receiving equal consideration from persons and institutions serving the public.
7. To exercise one's citizenship in elections and all the other processes of government, having freedom for inquiry, discussion and peaceful assembly, and receiving police protection and equal consideration and justice in the courts.

## III. *Propositions for Christian Action*

"The foregoing declaration of Christian principles in the field of human relations and the enunciation of human rights and their attendant responsibilities derived therefrom, inevitably point toward Christian action. In working out the implications of our faith we face an awesome and urgent task in overcoming the evil tensions and injustices in human relations that obedience to God requires us to challenge. Christians ought to lay the following propositions to heart.

### 1. *Acknowledge our Sin.*

Evil tensions and injustices resulting from racial and cultural practices must be faced before God. The unacknowledged sins of pride, fear, injustice and hatred have added a

great moral peril to our present situation. Men must learn in repentance to seek God's atoning grace and renewing Spirit so that society may attain its true basis in God's order.

2. *Accept Individual Responsibility.*

Each Christian must realize his moral responsibility to God for his actions affecting his neighbor. Each must examine his actions in the light of God's commands. Each must learn to show respect to all men as children of God and render justice to those with whom he deals. This obligation is crucial today in relation to members of minority groups.

3. *Begin in the Home.*

Our families must nurture their members in Christian life and outlook so that people of different backgrounds are respected and treated with equal fairness and good-will. Parents must be on guard neither to pass on to their children the sins of prejudice, nor to lead them in discrimination which is unbecoming to Christians. Rather it is the duty of parents to lead their children, by precept and example, in interracial cooperation and understanding.

4. *Continue at Work.*

All of have special responsibilities in our daily work and economic activities to strive for justice for our neighbor, fair employment opportunities for all, and the removal of those economic handicaps from which minorities suffer. Christians in labor unions, business organizations, and industrial enterprises should take the lead in working for justice for oppressed groups. Minorities likewise should seek to fulfill in their employment their responsibilities to their employers and fellow-workers and to the groups affected by their work.

5. *Rally as Citizens*

Christians have special responsibilities as citizens to make society's laws and practices conform to God's order. Many human rights in which Christians believe, especially rights as to personal safety, citizenship, education, employment and housing, are not being extended to all men. Christian brotherhood is impeded by practices enforcing segregation. God calls for, and human justice requires, speedy changes at every level in every area of our society.

Community self-surveys to determine the areas where basic rights are being denied, and what the opportunities for remedial action are, have proved useful. Fair Employment Practices Laws have proved generally beneficial to cities and states where they have been enacted. Citizens' groups have secured fair use of educational funds, just action in the courts, and fairer treatment in press and radio for minorities. Christians should work for such constructive changes, and for public support of democratically enacted laws which conform to Christians standards.

6. *Arouse the Church*

Since the Church is the Body of Christ, it must free itself from those cultural practices of prejudice and discrimination which persist in our society and must manifest in its own life, the principles and attitudes of Jesus. The Church must seek to be true to its own

nature as a community of children of God inclusive of every race, nation and class who confess Christ as Lord.

The Church's agencies and institutions should seek to serve all people fairly without distinction because of racial or cultural background. All its congregations should be centers of action to develop Christian fellowship across human barriers, and to instill the spirit of equality and Christian brotherhood. To this end the United Lutheran Church in America calls its pastors and people to earnest study and remedial action.

## INTERVIEWS

### CLERGY:

- The Rev. Jim Garrison, Pastor of St. Peter's from 1964 to 1972  
The Rev. Howard Christensen, Pastor of St. Peter's from 1955 to 1963 (deceased)  
Assistant to the President of the Michigan Synod, 1964 to 1972  
President of the Michigan Synod, 1972 to 1980  
The Rev. Frank Madsen, President of the Michigan Synod, 1956 to 1972 (deceased)  
The Rev. Ray Heine, President of the Michigan Synod, 1972 to 1980  
The Rev. Wm. Moldwin, LCA Pastor in Livonia and Detroit 1958 to 1978  
Michigan Synod Staff, 1979 to 1988.  
The Rev. Peter Thomsen, Pastor of St. Peter's from 1972 to 1982.  
The Rev. Edward Carlson, Pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church, 1962-1970  
The Rev. John Miller, Pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church, 1970-1980  
The Rev. James White, Pastor of Advent Lutheran Church, 1964 to 1970  
The Rev. Ronald Fuller, Pastor of Advent Lutheran Church, 1958 to 1963  
The Rev. Kevin Jensen, Pastor of Cana Lutheran Church from 1995 to 2006  
The Rev. Dr. Walter Kloetzli... Sec'y of Urban Church Planning, NLC  
The Rev. Richard Leucke... Chicago Urban Ministry Center, 1960 to 1990.  
The Rev. Dr. Merrill Lenox, Executive Director of MDCC (deceased)  
The Rev. Wm. Logan, Canon Deacon, Michigan Diocese, ECUSA, 1958-1985  
The Rev. Dr. Chas. Adams, Pastor, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church.  
The Rev. Hubert Locke, Campus Pastor, WSU, Ad. Ass'to Ray Girardian,  
The Rev. Michael Nabors, Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit, MI.  
The Rev. Kenneth Harris, Detroit Baptist Temple, Detroit, MI

### DETROIT COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- The Rev. Nicholas Hood, Member of Council from 1966 to 1990  
Dr. Mel Ravitz, Staff member for City Planning Commission, 1954 to 1962  
Member of Council from 1962 to 1990

### MEMBERS OF ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

- Alice Jorgensen, daughter of Svend Jorgensen, pastor of St. Peters, 1926 to 1955.  
Paul Blinkhede, Church Council President... 1956—58  
Paul Hansen, Church Council President... 1959-62, 1965-69  
John Rosenkrands, Church Council President... 1962-1965, 1969—73  
Ralph Pedersen, Church Council President... 1973-75  
Olaf Kroneman, Jr.  
Jim and Mae Earle  
Offer Preuthum, Church Council President.... 1975-79

Ina Christensen  
Tom and Marian Tucker  
Mary Lynby  
Sinne Sorensen  
Paul Emanuelsen  
Elsie Kusk....translated Council Minutes from Danish to English

#### ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH AND DANISH BROTHERHOOD RESOURCES

Eric and Ginger Ketelsen  
Paul Carlson  
Paul Christensen  
Rose Marie Thomadsen-Bathey  
Ted Popowitz

#### DETROIT HISTORY

Dr. Michael Davis, Automotive Historian and former President of Detroit Historical Society.

#### GROSSE POINTE HISTORY

Russell Peebles... Member of Unitarian Church, Grosse Pointe, MI from 1958.

#### DANISH HISTORY RESOURCES

Max and Marilyn Christensen.....Danish settlement in Greenville, MI  
The Rev. Tom Barbret.... Pastor of Danish Church in Brown City, MI, 1966 to 1970.  
Kent Jespersen.....Danish settlements in Nebraska  
Alan Andersen.....Danish history in Racine, WI

#### MISCELLANEOUS

Will Campbell, Associate Director, Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, NCCCUSA, 1956-1963.

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