

THE STORY OF THE INDIANA INTERCHURCH CENTER,
TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Ecumenical agencies in Indiana prior to 1960 had lived in rented quarters. For forty-eight years, from its founding in 1912, the Indianapolis Church Federation was at home in the Downtown YMCA Building. The Indiana Council of Churches, founded in 1943, had offices in a building at 1130 North Alabama.

Exploration of the idea of a comprehensive center to house these agencies and denominational offices began in the late Fifties but "did not jell" (letter from Harold Duling, 21 Aug 62 of the Lilly Endowment). The Federation had begun seeking new quarters in 1956, in part to house its expanding program in research and planning. Three years later, with a grant of \$75,000 from the Lilly Endowment, the Federation purchased a residential property at 1622 North Meridian. It was remodeled to become the offices of the Indiana Council of Churches as well and on September 25, 1960 the building was dedicated as The Inter-Church Center. It also housed an Urban Ministry Center and the Indiana office of CROP.

The idea of a more comprehensive ecumenical center was not long dormant. The coming of the Inter-State Highway into the center of Indianapolis was the material cause for the revival of interest. The United Presbyterian Synod of Indiana was to lose its office to the highway. A letter from Victor Frisch to Grover Hartman, Executive Secretary of the Indiana Council of Churches, on April 27, 1961 got the idea back on the agenda. Frisch, the President of the Board of Trustees of the Synod of Indiana, United Presbyterian Church in the USA, was transmitting

the action of his Board asking for a response from denominations and ecumenical agencies to its proposal to explore the establishment of an inter-church center.

There was sufficient interest and on January 31, 1962 representatives of five denominations (United Presbyterian, the Episcopal Diocese, the Indiana Area of the Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Indiana Synod of the United Lutheran Church), the Church Federation and the Indiana Council of Churches, met for lunch at the Columbia Club. They established a Committee of Exploration with Grover Hartman as chairperson.

The Committee first met on May 29, 1962 at the Atherton Center on the Butler Campus. Representatives from the Association of Christian Churches of Indiana had joined the group as well as two persons from Christian Theological Seminary. With Hartman both acting chairperson and recorder the Committee got down to work.

They set June 27 for their next meeting and after a two month's summer recess began meeting monthly or oftener. G. Harold Duling of the Lilly Endowment accepted an invitation to join the committee. By March 4, 1963, the ULC had become the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Lutheran Church in America and had withdrawn.

Three tasks were assigned: Dr. Harms was to correspond with Centers elsewhere to learn of their experiences; Victor Frisch, Alfred Porteous, Marcus Kendall and Don Davidson were to look at space needs and facilities; Ivan Gwaltney, Jerrus Bryant, Byron Stroh and Doyle Zaring were to explore possible sites.

The Committee on Exploration soon had plans ready for a not-for-profit corporation to plan the building, decide upon a site, raise funds, own and administer the building. The new corporation held its first annual meeting in January, 1965, elected Lester Irons president, launched a financial campaign, by June 1966 had signed a building contract and broke ground July 17, 1966. Irons, President of the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis at that time, was an Indianapolis attorney, a member of the United Methodist Church and was to remain President of the Board of the Interchurch Center until 1981 or, as he is remembered to have said, "until it is out of debt."

Why an Interchurch Center and Why Now?

The religious arguments supporting the establishment of an Interchurch Center were well summarized in a development document published in October, 1966. Intended to raise money for the Center it contained architectural drawings and carried the endorsements of Methodist Bishop, Richard Raines, United Church of Christ Conference Minister, Dr. Harry Bredeweg, Indiana Disciples Executive Secretary, Dr. John Harms, Presbyterian Synod Executive, Dr. John Fox, Indiana Council of Churches Director, Dr. Grover Hartman and Indianapolis Church Federation Executive, Dr. Lawrence T. Hosie.

The document presented the following rationale for the project. The Center will be "An eloquent witness to the unity which God has given to the churches in Indiana and which sinful man cannot take away." It "will provide an opportunity whereby the spirit and practice of cooperation to which the communions are now committed may be nurtured." "The process of long range

planning among Protestant and Orthodox-Catholic communions can be immeasurably strengthened" at the same time providing "for as much separateness within the Christian fellowship as the denominations wish to maintain." The Center will be "A symbol of inner unity and the freedom of conscience and action." "However, another compelling reason is the higher level of denominational stewardship that is represented in the pooling of costs that is possible in such a project."

Material arguments included the needs of several denominations to relocate their offices. Already noted was the United Presbyterian need for a new place. At least six other denominations were in various stages of merger and would be establishing new offices in the state. Adding urgency were the Disciples' plan to build a new building of their own in Irvington and the word that Christian Theological Seminary had three and a half acres available on its campus for an Inter-Church Center.

The Site

The Site Committee had considered seven locations from State Highway 100 on the East to Lowe's Theatre downtown, some requiring a new structure and others extensive remodeling. One of the more interesting sites was several acres at the corner of Meridian and Forty-sixth Street owned by First Baptist Church. That corner has since become part of the grounds of the Indiana Governor's Mansion. The decision to come to the corner of Forty-Second Street and Michigan Road was sealed by the action on November 5, 1963 of the Trustees of Christian Theological Seminary to grant the land to the Interchurch Center Corporation

on a ninety-nine year renewable lease at one dollar a year. The City of Indianapolis later agreed to widen Forty-second Street between Michigan Road and Haughey Avenue and completed the work in 1971.

Arguments for the site included the accessibility of the seminary's research and planning lab, its TV facilities, its library, chapel and meeting rooms. Harold Duling with grants from the Lilly Endowment was encouraging cooperation between the seminary, the Church Federation and the Council in the areas of research and planning, television production and counseling programs in public institutions throughout the city.

Whose on Board?

Getting the denominations officially signed on took most of the year, 1963. Both the Council and the Federation had approved participation in the project by Fall of 1962. The Indiana Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, USA had given its backing.

There was reluctance on the part of some. Warren Davis reported for the Episcopalians that no word had come from Bishop Craine and "he knew a selling job will have to be done because some Episcopalians feel entering a 'center' would blur the denominational image (8 Feb 63)." They also felt tied to their Sherwood House offices on Meridian Street. Other denominations were in various stages of merger negotiations and a decision to join the Interchurch Center added complications. Nevertheless, all denominational executives were invited to the next meeting and a Proposed Plan of Organization was presented.

By May, 1963, the newly formed Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the

United Church of Christ reaffirmed the action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church Synod and the Congregational and Christian Churches Conference and voted full participation in the project. The Association of Christian Churches in Indiana had voted to join. The three Conferences of the Methodist Church of Indiana also "approved, in principle, the proposed Interchurch Center." This brought, signed and sealed, it seemed, four denominations and the two ecumenical bodies with their financial commitment into the project. All had designated their three Trustees to an Interchurch Center Board. Lester Irons was asked to draw up incorporation papers and bylaws with the assistance of John Harms.

Launching the Craft

October 16, 1963 was an historic day for the development of the Indiana Interchurch Center. Its Board of Directors met for the first time. It was announced that incorporation papers had been filed with the State of Indiana. It elected a slate of officers. Agreement with Christian Theological Seminary was reached with approximately four and a half acres available for a 99-year renewable lease. A contract with the architectural firm of Wright, Porteous and Lowe was voted on motion of Dr. J. Kenneth Forbes, Methodist, and Donald Smith, Disciple, the "costs to be shared equally by the four interested denominations up to the completion of preliminary plans."

The officers elected to lead the new corporation were Lester Irons, Chairman, John W. Harms, vice-chairman, Ludwig Burck, secretary, and Fermor S. Cannon, treasurer. Grover Hartman was

made executive secretary and resident agent of the corporation. Additional members of the Executive Committee were J. Kenneth Forbes, Melvin R. Phillips and Beauford A. Norris. Harry Bredeweg had chaired the Nominating Committee.

Rough Waters

But the crew was was restless and to be tested in the rough waters ahead. 1964 was the year of crisis. The financial challenge of raising more than \$800,000 for the building was rattling their nerves. The obligations of the denominations were not yet clear. Nor were annual operation costs and the rental fees required to meet those costs at all firm.

Even before the end of 1963 Methodists had expressed their uncertainty about proceeding with the building plans. The following March the Cabinet of the Indiana Area of the Methodist Church reported to the Interchurch Center Board that they were terminating their relationship with the Interchurch Center project. Harms, Fox and Bredeweg were sent to negotiate with Bishop Raines.

The Methodists countered with a proposition and at a meeting on September 10, 1964 Bishop Raines restated the Methodist position. They wanted primary responsibility and control to be with the four denominations. They wanted clarification on the added costs from housing the two ecumenical agencies in the building. They wanted to re-examine the matter of the architect. And, they wanted to insure "that the wisdom and experience of business men were brought to bear in the shaping of the plans for financing and operating of the building."

The Committee responded by providing that there be three

members on the Board of the Corporation from each denomination, two from the Indiana Council and the Church Federation, and one from Christian Theological Seminary. Five business men were appointed to study the plans and financing: Ludwig Burck, United Church of Christ and vice-president of INB; Fermor S. Cannon, United Presbyterian and president of Railroadmans; Harry Helweg, later replaced by Donald Smith, Disciple, lawyer and CPA; Alex Taggart III, Methodist and president of Colonial Baking Company. This review committee gave its "OK" to the proposal by November and reaffirmed it at a meeting on January 22, 1965

Facing up to Finances

Denominational executives were taking the lead and a financing formula was taking shape. The four denominations and two ecumenical agencies would be "Equity Members" and contribute \$10,000 each. In addition they would be expected to supply "Warrant Capital" out of their investments according to their ability on which they would receive interest at the current rate. This might possibly bring the total commitments to \$700,000 and plans were begun to raise the remainder from foundations, individuals and corporations.

The Council of Churches had no capital reserves on which it could draw so would be excused from the warrant capital obligation but the Federation held title to the Inter-Church Center office property on Meridian Street. The Lilly Endowment had said returns from sale of that property could be made available to the new Interchurch Center project which would cover the Federation's commitment.

In February, 1965 an agreement was signed with Frank K. Zoll of Anderson to assist the Corporation in a capital funds campaign to raise \$350,000. Zoll was a United Presbyterian layman and well known fund raiser in Indiana. A "Committee of 600" was proposed and Matthew Welsh, Disciple layman and former Governor, agreed to chair the campaign committee along with former Lt. Governor Richard O. Ristine as co-chair. The kick-off was hailed as "Meet the Governors" luncheon on May 17, 1965 at the Indianapolis Athletic Club with invitations to the reigning governor, Branigan, and eight other former governors and lieutenant governors.

A monumental effort to enlist contributors included meetings at fifteen centers over the state. More than 560 volunteers were enlisted with chairpersons in over 120 communities. At the same time, approaches to foundations were vigorously pursued. Pledges from congregations and individuals, totaling \$203,380, came from every part of Indiana. Most of the 339 pledges were in modest amounts. Foundation pledges included \$50,000 from the Irwin Miller family of Columbus, \$20,000 from the Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis and \$5000 from the Ball Foundation of Muncie. Later an additional \$25,000 came from the Kresge Foundation.

The Board was preoccupied during 1965 and early 1966 with the financial campaign and with refining the building plans. The general layout of space, size of common service areas, location of various offices were discussed. The Seminary architect, Edward Larabee Barnes, had reviewed the preliminary drawings in 1963 and in general had given his approval but asked that "It

should not appear to be part of the Seminary." He later insisted that it be not more than two stories or 24 feet in height (3 Oct 1963)."

A Time to Build

When the contractors' bids were opened on May 16, 1966, the lowest totaled \$1,030,134, one hundred thousand over estimates. Architectural and campaign expenses added another \$100,000 in costs. The financial campaign was lagging with pledges of only \$166,115 in hand. With \$700,000 committed by the denominations, Council and Federation it was clear that nearly another \$300,000 had to be found. The Board authorized seeking a loan "not exceeding \$500,000 at 6% interest" from the Indiana National Bank. Also, the Board terminated the contract with Mr. Zoll.

The crew remained resolute and voted to sign the building contracts and break ground on July 17, 1966. At its June meeting the Board had voted to require an equal job opportunity commitment from all contractors. Also at the June meeting the denominational executives were asked to come up with a plan to raise \$290,000. Dr. Harry Bredeweg, UCC executive, became chair of the Campaign Committee.

The Board then elected one of its own members, Jerrus M. Bryant, to be its Executive Director. He later became Executive Secretary and Building Manager. Bryant was a member of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and had served on its Board of National Missions. He had just retired as Chief Engineer of the Linkbelt Corporation. He was to be paid "that which he can receive under Social Security restrictions, plus expenses." The

salary was then set at \$1500 per annum, plus expenses and professional fees. He was to expedite the financial campaign and work with the building committee. Throughout the development phase of the project Mrs. King on the Indiana Council of Churches' staff served as bookkeeper.

The financial campaign received several boosts. The four denominations agreed each to add \$37,500 to the Warrant Capital. This assured the Kresge Foundation grant of \$25,000. A memorial gift for Bishop Reuben H. Miller, first Bishop of the Indiana Area of the new United Methodist Church, in the amount of \$10,000 underwrote a conference room. The largest single contribution was announced in September, 1968 when the Krannert's agreed to contribute \$100,000 to memorialize the Assembly Room.

In the meantime the building was under construction and two major denominations expressed renewed interest in the Center. The Indianapolis Diocese of the Episcopal Church decided to leave Sherwood House and asked to be included. The Synod of the Lutheran Church in America said it was undertaking a study regarding a new site for an office. A wing was added to the building plans and the Episcopalian became an equity member with a Warrant Capital investment of \$140,000. The Lutherans were invited to consider taking equity membership and invest \$100,000 in Warrant Capital. After more than a year, they decided to remain where they were.

Indiana Ecumenism's New Dwelling Place

While the addition of the wing remained under discussion, the first unit of the building was being made ready for its new owners and tenants. July 5, 1967 was moving day. The

Interchurch Center Board and its committees had a new address and its own meeting place with dining and conference rooms. The following April, 1968, the added wing was ready and the Episcopal Church moved in. Five denominations, several the result of recent unions and reunions, and two ecumenical bodies had moved in together, with adequate space for each. To this day, they remain the Equity Members, trustees and stewards of the property.

Financial Challenge, Again?

The deadline was approaching for payment of the \$500,000 on the note with INB. Extensions of the loan decreed that rents would have to be raised. The Council, which lives largely from denominational gifts, did not have funds to pay the increased rent, and urged that a new finance campaign be "mounted at once." (Memo to the Finance Committee of the Indiana Interchurch Center, from the Indiana Council of Churches, March 1, 1968.)

The R. H. Goettler and Associates of Columbus, Ohio was hired to direct a one million dollar "long term campaign." Lynn Barry would be the on-site director. Lyman Ayres agreed to serve as Honorary Chair and Francis Hughes was to be General Chairman. The proposed operating budget of the new Interchurch Center for 1969 came to \$68,919. There were, in addition, interest payments on the Bank Note and Warrant Capital of \$67,944 and Campaign costs of \$40,000 to be paid.

Within a year it was clear the "long term campaign" was not working. The costs had far exceeded the income, insufficient numbers of volunteers had been recruited and the "big money" from the Indianapolis area was not forthcoming. Several thousand

square feet of space was still available for rental. Because other religious tenants were not making commitments as had been hoped and the Church Federation wanted to return 1733 square feet of space which had housed the Research and Planning Department, the Board voted to rent space to non-church groups (20 Jul 70).

The Equity Members, in addition to their original contributions of Warrant Capital, by the end of 1970 had invested an additional \$288,453 in Debenture Warrants. One year later through the help of returns on campaign pledges but largely because three Equity Members, The Episcopal, United Church of Christ and United Presbyterian, had assumed \$284,230 of the debt in debentures, the Interchurch Center was free of bank indebtedness.

All denominational agencies were tightening their belts. The Association of Christian Churches had cut its staff in half and notified the Center Board that it was considering jumping ship unless it were permitted to cut back on space and be relieved of about half its rental costs. The entire second floor of the new wing was unfinished and unfilled rental space was proving a drag on operating budget and debt retirement.

An aggressive leasing policy was adopted in 1972 and with the coming of the Salvation Army into the new wing the problem was somewhat alleviated. By the end of 1973 thirteen tenants, beyond the seven Equity members where occupying the building.

A year later it was noted that the two previous financial campaigns had netted \$354,906 and in 1975 the Lilly Endowment made two grants of \$50,000, one outright and another matching toward debt reduction. The debt was down to \$122,849 and was owed entirely to the United Presbyterian and United Church of

Christ members of the Corporation.

An additional boost was the contribution of \$10,000 by the Gemmer Foundation to memorialize the tower and cross. On June 20, 1975 the Gemmer-Hartman Peace Pylon was dedicated. Rent that year was charged at the rate of \$5.897 which was adequate to cover costs of operation, interest and payments on the debt. The financial waters were notably calmer and juggling finances would consume less of the time of the Board.

At the Annual Meeting, 1975 of the Corporation Harry Bredeweg noted that the building was starting its ninth year and was showing signs of wear and tear. He suggested that the Board initiate a Replacement Fund as an annual budgeted line item. Ten years later it was renamed "The Capital Replacement Fund" with a goal of \$200,000. Careful financial management and the wise use of the Fund has permitted the Center to meet recurring replacement needs as well as to undertake projects to modernize and update its facilities.

A Working Board

Tenant-ownership has been a key to the success of the Interchurch Center. Those who rent and use the building each day are also its owners. The five denominations and two ecumenical bodies have invested heavily to bring the Center to its present status. Their representatives, including their executive officers, constitute the owning and governing board. They have seen to it that their facilities are adequate and efficient.

The working board has functioned with four working

committees: Finance, Personnel, Nominating and House. They are often chaired by staff of the agencies who work in the Center.

One early decision was that there would be no rank displayed in the naming and assigning of parking spaces. The Board and its committees have been concerned with everything from "black fungus on the flowering trees" to the location of light switches and the conservation of energy. This latter was of special concern during the energy crunch of 1977 and evening meetings were canceled under pressure from the Citizens Gas and Coke Utility. Energy conservation has remained on the agenda throughout the years.

At the end of ten years it was announced that "all available space in the building" was filled with a total of twenty-five tenants. The use of the conference rooms had doubled. The Presbyterians had installed a printing facility which was being shared among the tenants. (16 Nov 76)

Some thought was given to changing the name to the Indiana Interfaith Center but after "considerable discussion" it was dropped (16 Nov 76). All were delighted when the United States Postal Service agreed to bring mail to the tenants' offices in 1978. The same year the Board voted to make the Center an emergency shelter for the Red Cross (13 Dec 78).

The Board decided in 1979 to "stop having two classes of tenants and to charge the same rate for all" (7 May 79). The following year, with the indebtedness at \$110,450, it was agreed the debt be assumed by the equity members on the basis of the square feet then assigned to them and be considered warrant capital (20 June 80).

Lester Irons retired from the presidency of the Board at the end of 1980. He had led the Interchurch Corporation throughout its first fourteen years. J. Kenneth Forbes was elected his successor. Forbes was Executive Assistant to the Bishop of the Indiana Area of the United Methodist Church. Other presidents have been Ralph Quellhorst, United Church of Christ Conference Minister, John McDune, Associate Synod Executive of the Presbyterian Church, and David Rees, Lutheran layman and, like his predecessor Irons, is an attorney and serves as president of the Indiana Council of Churches.

When Jerrus Bryant asked to be retired from the position of Executive Director and Building Manager the search committee found another United Church of Christ layman, Earl Wilson, to succeed him. Wilson was a native of Indianapolis but had been working prior to his retirement as the Associate Director in the Program Division of the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. Not until 1985 was it decided to employ a full-time building manager. Bernice Foster began work in November 1985 and left in the Spring of 1987 to join her husband in retirement in Florida. Her successor, Garlene Hotlkamp, came with extensive experience in property management. Since 1988 she has been Executive Director of the Corporation. Under her direction, extensive remodeling and redecorating have been undertaken. The Center has become a more complete conference facility as well as an attractive and convenient office for the tenants.

Where We Have Come

Many of the dreams of the founders of the Indiana Interchurch Center have been realized. Some who had a part in its founding are today at work in the Center. One of those, Bishop Leroy C. Hodapp of the Indiana Area of the United Methodist Church, believes that "ecumenical work and ministry in Indiana has been strengthened and enhanced by the fact that so many of us work in the same surroundings, and our staffs . . . share so much in common."

There is recognition that the Interchurch Center represents only a portion of the ecumenical community. Nevertheless it remains a witness to the unity of the church. There is disappointment that the Center has not functioned more fully as a catalyst for ecumenical cooperation. Working in the same building has not in itself resulted in ecumenical strategizing. However, there is agreement that the Center is an expression of financial stewardship on the part of its equity members. It has facilitated the work of each member and its twenty-five years have demonstrated it is possible and beneficial for Christians of diverse denominations to dwell together.

Sources for this report include letters found in the archives of Christian Theological Seminary, files of Grover Hartman in the office of the Indiana Council of Churches, copies of the Indiana Councilor and minutes of the Board of Directors and Standing Committees of the Indiana Interchurch Center. John Fox read an early draft and suggested some additions and changes in emphasis at certain points. I also had a lengthy and helpful telephone conversation with Earl Wilson. In writing the last paragraphs I consulted with the heads of the Equity Tenants, some of whom have been part of the Interchurch Center from the beginning.

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