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# Politics of the Spirit

*Religion and Multiethnicity in Los Angeles*



**“Emotionally. politically,  
sociologically, we were all  
changed irrevocably by the  
events of April 29, 1992. And  
we will never be the same.”**

*Thomas Hill*

*Operation Resurrection and New Life,  
United Methodist Church*

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A preliminary report of research,  
conducted under the auspices of the  
Religion and Civic Order Project at the  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
and the University of Southern  
California, with funding provided by the  
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## The Religion and Civic Order Project

Beginning in the late afternoon, April 29, 1992, life-as-usual in Los Angeles abruptly came to a halt, perhaps forever. For an extended apocalyptic moment, the City of Angels became a city of fires. Starting in South Central, a crazy quilt pattern of torched businesses extended throughout the city, then south into Long Beach and its environs, then east into Pasadena and San Gabriel. Hardly any area was completely spared. Not affluent Hancock Park. Not the Westside. Not multiethnic Hawaiian Gardens. Certainly not Koreatown. Then, throughout the region, looting followed the fires. There were rumors of a run on the sale of guns and ammunition. People were arming themselves. Individuals were pulled from their cars and beaten up, just as Reginald Denney had been battered, over and over, at the

intersection of Florence and Normandie.

During these terrifying hours, television cameras focused on events at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, located just off Adams Boulevard in South Central Los Angeles. It was here that Mayor Tom Bradley expressed his outrage at the verdicts delivered in the Rodney King trial by an all-Caucasian jury, which had deliberated in a courtroom barely thirty freeway miles from South Central, yet in another, psychologically distant world. It was also here in the First AME Church that the Reverend Cecil Murray instantly emerged as the anointed media voice for the city's minority populations. Speaking out of memories of the 1965 Watts riots, with the demeanor of an individual who was skilled in the making of media events, Murray expressed frustration concerning the fundamental conditions that had kindled the night of fires. And then, in the spirit of the religiously-inspired American civil rights movement, with which he had long been associated, Murray invited the citizens of Los Angeles to join together in acts of reconciliation and healing.

In one sense, this document is a preliminary report on the acts of reconciliation and healing that Cecil Murray called for during the post-verdict service

at the First AME Church. The Religion and Civic Order Project (for which this report is a product) was born that night out of the interest of researchers at the University of Southern California and the University of California, Santa Barbara in tracing the responses of Los Angeles' religious community to the April 29 uprising.<sup>1</sup> At that time, we believed that these responses would constitute an awakening from ecclesiastical slumbers—that is, we thought the rebellion would launch an era in which political/social initiatives within the Los Angeles religious community would reflect a new realism about the depth of tensions among the city's multiethnic populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the clergy and lay religious leaders that we interviewed insisted that the events of April 26, 1992 should be viewed as a rebellion against the verdicts delivered in the Rodney King trial. A few preferred to use the term uprising, because they believed that "rebellion" inaccurately implied that a broad-scale racial war had been ignited. Others used the terms "riot," "uprising," and "rebellion" interchangeably. We have chosen the latter course, mainly for academic reasons. Our intention is not to take sides in arguments about naming the April 29 events. *We do* acknowledge, however, that we have a great deal of sympathy with the observation that the naming of an event is itself a political act.

The Religion and Civic Order Project, which subsequently was funded by the Haynes Foundation, quickly broadened. We discovered that political/ social initiatives within the Los Angeles religious community in response to the April 29 uprising could not in any sense be regarded as an awakening or as the beginning of a new era. Ministers, priests, rabbis, and other religious leaders had been aware of the depth of tensions among the city's populations for a long time. For years they had been acting out of an image of themselves as representatives of "one of the last viable institutions in urban America " that is capable of speaking with moral authority to the city about these tensions. "After the [Watts] riots, religious groups started lots of programs, especially inter-religious and cross cultural coalitions," one African-American minister observed. "But, really, we were just working more and harder on what we had been doing all along. We had been scared to death about the Watts riots happening again. We had been trying to make a new riot unnecessary."

The Religion and Civic Order Project, almost from its beginning, became an attempt to place the Los Angeles religious community's responses to the April 29 uprising in this larger

context. The uprising did indeed spawn new, often-heroic efforts by religious leaders. But the larger story proved to be just as interesting, perhaps even more inspiring. During the past decade, it turns out, there has been a large shift in the character and style of the city's religious-political leadership. Today that leadership is more decentralized, more neighborhood specific, more coalitional, more populist, and more organizationally experimental. In many ways, it seems more attuned to the needs of a multi-ethnic metropolis.

Mirroring these changes in leadership, there has been a large shift in the character and style of the social and political programs which this leadership is building. The programs tend to be congregationally-based. Far more than a decade ago, they are based in evangelical Protestant churches and non-denominational Christian fellowships. They address the needs of particular neighborhoods. They emphasize mentor relationships that put former addicts, prisoners and gang members together with on-the-street addicts and gang members. They encourage upwardly mobile African-Americans and Latinos to be role models for others. They merge spiritual and political concerns.

"No one believes that what

churches are doing is sufficient to the needs of Los Angeles," Mark Lazenby, former director of Dolores Mission Alternative, told participants in one of the focus groups sponsored by the Religion and Civic Order Project. "Then again," he continued, "nobody believes that *any* group can deal with the size of problems this city is facing. If we are ever going to build a humane, pluralistic city, it will have to be built piece by piece by lots of people, in lots of institutions, in lots of different places. But we shouldn't sell the contribution of religious groups short. Really, can you think of any other institution whose leaders have a moral vision for the city and is located in every neighborhood of the city?"

In the earliest days of the Religion and Civic Order Project, we realized that it literally would be impossible to catalogue the piece-by-piece efforts of religious leaders in their attempts to build a just, peaceful metropolis. There were far too many programs, and the programs were far too fluid to be fixed at any single moment. There were too many overlapping inter-cultural religious coalitions to investigate thoroughly, and it was not always clear which of these coalitions had been organized to launch political and social initiatives. Indeed, it was not

always clear if religious leaders had much interest in distinguishing between spiritual and political initiatives. In multiethnic Los Angeles, the two sets of concerns had merged.

We wanted to develop a comprehensive view—to approach our complex subject-matter in as global a manner as possible. Los Angeles is a very large place, cut into sections by mountain ranges and freeways that encourage people to forget that whole sections of the city exist. A city-wide project such as ours, it was hoped, would assist religious leaders and academics to understand what religious communities do when a whole city senses that it is being redefined demographically.

We had to start somewhere. Phase I of our study, we decided, would put the spotlight on South Central, Pico-Union, Mid-City, and Eastside Los Angeles<sup>2</sup>—the areas most affected by the April 29 uprising. We would study efforts in these areas to achieve peaceful co-existence and to achieve multiethnic justice. It was obvious, though, that these efforts did not exist in a vacuum. They were connected to the social ministries of suburban congregations, to city-wide human service programs, and to programs coordinated by assorted varieties of regional coalitions. While

focusing on the central city's attempts to construct a multiethnic society, we had to trace these connections.

Later phases of the Religion and Civic Order Project would put the spotlight on religious social ministries in other areas of the city, which had only recently begun to absorb large groups of Latinos, African-Americans, Middle Easterners, and Asians. At a later time, we would also study the political/social activities of religious communities in middle class and upper middle class parts of the city, where ethnic and racial groups were living together without community-fragmenting tensions.

We formulated methods that were aimed, first, at collecting information about the scale and the character of acts of reconciliation and healing among Los Angeles' religious organizations, both before and after the April 29 uprising. We began by conducting telephone interviews with representatives from a large number of religious headquarters and centers. Most of them told us not about denominational or top-down programs, but about a complex pattern of decentralized leadership, coalitional efforts, and neighborhood-specific projects. Simultaneously, we started to trace this complex pattern. We attended coalition meetings and events. We spoke with

coalition leaders. We attended events where political/social ministries were in progress. We interviewed lay and clergy leaders, who shared with us their perceptions about the role religious communities were playing in building a workable multiethnic Los Angeles. Finally, we brought together focus groups of leaders, who helped us to explore some of our particular interests in greater depth. For example, we spoke with leaders about what religious groups were doing to address gang violence, to improve the education of the city's children and youth, and to nurture the economic viability of central city neighborhoods. We

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<sup>2</sup> We have become aware that each of these megaregions within central Los Angeles is made up of clusters of smaller districts. South Central includes, for example, Watts, the Crenshaw District, the Vernon District, North University Park, and the West Adams District. We have included references to Pico-Union mainly because of its increasing political visibility in Los Angeles.

We are aware, also, that there are continuing discussions about the appropriate use of terms like East LA and Eastside LA.

Since our intention is not to become involved in discussions about boundaries, we have simply decided to use generic labels. We hope, of course, that our practice will not be offensive to people who feel strongly about these issues.

turned to them for help in understanding the changing character of the city's religious leadership, and especially in understanding the changing character of evangelical Christianity's political/social commitments.

During many of these interviews and group discussions, Los Angeles religious leaders urged members of the project team to forego a posture of scholarly distance in issuing a report. They wanted evaluation. They wanted interpretations. They wanted assistance in encouraging discussion, even debate, about the acts of reconciliation and healing that were needed in Los Angeles. They assured us that it would not be offensive for persons like ourselves (i.e., persons based in academic institutions) to voice their opinions, even if those opinions would run counter to the day-to-day intuitions of lay and clergy activists. We believed them, and—uneasily—accepted their advice. We hope that our observations will prove helpful to the city's religious leaders as they chart the future of their noble enterprise.

John B. Orr (University of Southern California), Donald E. Miller (University of Southern California), Wade Clark Roof (University of California, Santa Barbara), and J. Gordon Melton (Institute for the Study of

American Religion) served as co-investigators in the Religion and Civic Order Project. Research assistants for the project were Sheilah Jones, Lyn Gesch, Elaine Yastishock, Wendy Kohlhase, and Perry Glanzer. Financial support was graciously provided by the Los Angeles-based Haynes Foundation.

We are painfully aware that we have not been able to describe every political-social program that is occurring in the central city's religious institutions. We are sorry, because we know that these programs have been built through the hard labor of saints and heroes. We have met people whose willingness to care about the health of our city inspires awe. Their activities convince us that—literally—it is possible for people to love Los Angeles, because there is no other way to account for what we have witnessed.

We cannot name all of these people whose good works have inspired us. We wish we could. We wish you could see them in action.

We know that we may have passed by important political and social programs within Los Angeles' religious institutions. We may not have had eyes to see, in spite of our intentions. Thus,

we invite the readers of this preliminary report to let us know about programs that we have missed. We would appreciate your written comments. We would also like to receive printed materials that describe programs.

Please refer to the inside back cover of this report for our address.



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## LA's Politics of the Spirit

When religious leaders speak about their ministries in central city neighborhoods, they often compare their situation with that of religious leaders in 1965—the year of the Watts riot: 1965 and 1992 are regarded as bookend years.

In assessing what has occurred in central Los Angeles in the period between those bookend years, most agree with Joe Hardwick, pastor of South Central's Praises of Zion Baptist Church. "The problems are the same," he argues, "except they've gotten worse." Especially the problem of racism. Hardwick believes that racism is increasingly pervasive in Los Angeles and that it is the core issue in city politics. Racism even permeates central city neighborhoods. It poisons the relationships among Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans, who live and work side by side in multiethnic communities.

"Racism works for the whites," Hardwick says, "so they do it, too." Dr. Kenneth Ulmer, pastor of the Faithful Central Missionary Baptist Church, agrees: "Institutional racism has to be acknowledged. The problems of living together in neighborhoods can never be solved unless someone affirms and acknowledges that the main problem is racism."

Hardwick and Ulmer are expressing the deep cynicism which we encountered over and over in our interviews with Los Angeles religious leaders. Most clergy believe that things have become worse—far worse. Hope has eroded. Unlike in the 1960s, people can no longer reasonably expect that government programs will raise the quality of life in the central city. "Let's face it," Rev. Billy Ingram says, "we don't put any hope or stock in the government. I don't think, for example, the government has the power to do anything for the family, and most of our problems in one way or another have to do with barriers our families are facing."

Government programs take too long to be delivered, and, once delivered, they never seem large enough to address community needs realistically. They are underfunded, and, therefore, they are unstable. They disappear. Even at their

best, they do not and cannot address racism—the pervasive illness that destroys the self-esteem of central city residents, that hampers efforts to develop the central city economically, and that drives central city populations to isolate themselves from each other. They do not and cannot address the feelings of powerlessness that are experienced by inner city residents whose neighborhoods are marked by gang violence, massive unemployment, drug addiction, and far too many dysfunctional families.

In the face of this deep and pervasive cynicism, fed by memories of unfulfilled political promises, the political spirit of the 1990s in Los Angeles' religious communities is aggressively populist. Direct action is no longer viewed as the reserve of left-leaning community organizers. Community organization, from the ground up, has entered the main stream. It is the day-to-day agenda of local churches, synagogues, and mosques. Rev. Tim Safford, Minister of Mission and Parish Life at politically-active All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, expresses this mood succinctly: "Traditional power structures have relied on the church to provide dissent, and the oppressive forces of evil have expected a little dissent. We're no longer going to do them that favor. We're going to go



out there, identify a need, and begin to work, like termites in the woodwork. We're going to be less in the moral indignation business. It's more important to get the work done."

How religious leaders identify the work that needs to be done has also changed. If racism and feelings of powerlessness are the core issues that multiethnic Los Angeles faces, then the core issues are, by definition, moral and spiritual, because political and social issues are at their base moral and spiritual. "We have to change the hearts of the people within," says Mark Whitlock, Director of the Renaissance Program at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Central.

That does not mean the city's religious leaders are turning away from practical programs that deal, for example, with the distribution of food and clothing, or from programs that provide low-income housing, drug rehabilitation, gang violence, or entrepreneurial training. To the contrary, many Los Angeles churches, synagogues, meditation centers, temples, and mosques are filled, often daily, with activities designed to meet concrete community needs. What has changed is that many, if not most, of these programs are simultaneously directed toward the spiritual *as well as*

the political/social transformation of individuals and of Los Angeles neighborhoods. "The foundation of the long-term solution to our community's problems," says Kenneth Ulmer, "will have to be on a one-to-one personal level. People have to change; hearts have to be changed; biases have to be addressed; prejudices have to be addressed."

"People have to feel empowered. These days there's no other way to go," says Larry Foy, interim pastor of Lincoln Memorial Church in South Central. "We just have to find ways to help people feel that they can take control of their lives—their own lives, their neighborhood's, and the city's."

Harvey Fields, rabbi of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, strikes the same chord. At a question-and-answer session at the University of Southern California, Fields argued that religious organizations should pay more attention to the way people *feel* about Los Angeles. "We have to start there, with the city's spirit, with encouraging the feeling that all these different groups really belong to our city, and that all of us together can take control of our city's future."

One highly visible expression of Fields' beliefs about the need for a new politics of the spirit in Los Angeles was "Hands Across LA," organized by the

Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA, a multiethnic, multi-faith coalition which he chairs. The event turned out to be imperfect. There were large gaps in the chain of hands that organizers hoped would cross the entire metropolis. But the event, as projected to the city through the media, was visually dramatic and emotionally moving. Only weeks after the April 29 uprising, the Interfaith Coalition was announcing that the city's religious communities valued pluralism. The Coalition wanted to show people that we were not mourning the loss of the traditional dominance of the city's Anglo-European populations, Fields explained. It wanted to show that, after all the fires and violence, we still intended spiritually to be one city. It wanted to show people that we could work together.

The Interfaith Coalition's attempts to encourage a love of the city's diversity is mirrored in the activities of a complex network of cross-cultural church/synagogue covenants that has dramatically expanded since the uprising. Before the uprising, for example, only four Jewish synagogues had forged covenant relationships with African-American churches. By the end of 1993, there were twenty, with more in the making. Covenant groups encourage individuals in religious

communities to cross cultural boundaries. They enable the city's minority groups to interpret the injuries of racism for persons whose homes are far from the central city. They make communication possible among people who would otherwise be strangers.

The current tilt toward programs that attempt to conjoin political/social and spiritual transformation is most apparent, however, in the dozens of self-help programs that are sponsored by central city churches and religious centers. Persons who attended a seminar at South Central's Zoe Christian Fellowship in mid-July, 1993, for example, were told, "Governments know how to create new jobs, but they don't know how to motivate people to want to work, to be decent people, to take care of themselves. They don't know that people have to be changed. To do that takes faith in God." In Eastside Los Angeles, Dolores Mission's outreach to gang members involves prayer and invitations to become engaged religiously. In fact, church-based gang rehabilitation programs characteristically emphasize the importance of self-esteem and religious conversion in addition to the importance of achieving educational and occupational skills.

While it can be observed that religion *always* and *inevitably* has been con-

cerned about spiritual transformation, there has been a profound shift in the orientation of the political/social ministries and the human services programs of the Los Angeles religious community. Since the 1930s, observers of American religion have noted that liberal to middle-of-the-road religious organizations have tended to be politically realistic. They have emphasized the importance of exercising political power on behalf of oppressed populations. They have been concerned about institutional bias against people who are politically weak. When they have spoken about liberation, they have generally meant political and economic liberation. Conservative religious communities, on the other hand, have emphasized spiritual transformation, one person at a time. They have believed that political systems will be transformed only when morally conscientious people oversee public institutions.

This rough distinction between liberal and conservative styles of religious political activity has probably always been overdrawn—insensitive to the complexity of what has really been occurring in religious communities. But in central city Los Angeles' religious communities, particularly in the 1990s, the distinction hardly makes sense at all. Left and right have converged toward the creation of

political ministries that merge the search for practical political and economic solutions to urban tensions with the search for city-wide, racial, ethnic, and individual spiritual/moral transformation.

No one can claim that right-leaning trigger issues, such as abortion and homosexuality, have disappeared from the agenda of the central city's Pentecostal, evangelical and Roman Catholic churches. These are watershed issues, which divide the city's religious communities, separating Right from Left. However, in the central neighborhoods of the city, the neighborhoods that were most severely affected by the April 29, 1992 uprising, there is a theological coming-together of religious communities around liberationist themes. The language is holistic, emphasizing spiritual, political, economic, and self-development concerns. Religious conversion is viewed as "empowering," in the broadest possible sense of that term. Individuals, for example, are empowered to escape from poverty. African-American males are empowered to discard negative self-images. Families are empowered to accept accountability for their own well-being. Religious congregations are empowered to take accountability for their own neighbor-

hoods. They are empowered to organize credit unions, entrepreneurial training programs, and food and clothing distribution networks. Spiritual renewal, community organizing, personal hygiene, and entrepreneurial skills are of a piece.

Los Angeles' emergent politics of the spirit is drawing mixed reviews among religious leaders and parishoners, both on the right and the left. Pastors in evangelical Protestant churches, especially in South Central, are regularly criticized by parishioners for mixing politics and religion, even in the face of the well-established tradition of political activism among African-American churches in America. In more liberal religious circles, there is suspicion that the pervasive concern for "loving the city" and for spiritual transformation represents a step backward—perhaps even a new way of avoiding the huge economic and political problems generated by the city's multi-ethnic character. Rabbi Laura Geller, Director of Los Angeles' American Jewish Congress, for example, has expressed uneasiness. She agrees that political work by religious leaders has to come out of a spiritual center, that, without that center, "political work disappears." She is concerned, though, that a preoccupation with spiritual transformation in post-uprising Los Angeles may

turn into a form of narcissism, what George Regas, rector of All Saints Episcopal Church, calls "inversion." She is particularly uneasy about the difficulties which the Interfaith Coalition has experienced in forming a political agenda. Coalitions do not hold together around the production of media events, she argues. They hold together when everyone fixes on a concrete political or economic issue and agrees to work on it.

Both evangelical Protestants, many of whom insist that religion and politics should not be mixed, and political liberals, many of whom insist that spirituality draws attention away from structural political/social abuses, may be undervaluing Los Angeles' new politics of the spirit. There are solid grounds for thinking that this kind of activity is what we should expect—even hope for—in a city where the experience of neighborliness has degenerated, where citizens are prone to worry about immigrant invasions, and where citizens wonder whether there is any political program at all that can "turn lives around" in the central city. Political scientist Ronald Inglehart, for example, argues that this is the case. In his recently published *Culture Shift*, Inglehart asserts that we are in a transitional period in American politics. Issues like physical security and economic

growth no longer totally dominate the political agenda. People want more. They want things that have been missing in public life—programs that are not driven by interest-group deal making, an experience of community, a sense that people can care about each other. Stephen Toulmin, the Henry R. Luce Professor in the Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies at the University of Southern California, agrees. In an Ethics and the City Forum at USC, Toulmin suggested that public policymakers in Los Angeles might well consider whether there is any way at all to nurture the experience of “neighborliness” among the city’s disparate populations. Politics are about hope and shame in our relations with each other, he said. They are about moral and spiritual issues. Like Inglehart, Toulmin believes that cities such as Los Angeles may be laboratories for working out new forms of political relationships—forms which express different possibilities for what the political process may become. Interestingly, Toulmin sees a role in this process for non-governmental, religiously-based, philanthropic institutions.

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### **The Civic Love of Pluralism**

In the months after the 1992 uprising, it did not take long for Los Angeles watchers to develop a kind of loose consensus: Los Angeles is not Sarajevo. It is not on the verge of breaking up into balkanized, warring enclaves.

Xandra Kayden, who regularly provided interpretations of the 1992 uprising for the *Los Angeles Times*, saw grounds for at least guarded long-term optimism. The racial and ethnic communities of Los Angeles, she believed, were producing a population of leaders whose activities were offering grounds for hope. No one had pointed to the need for such a group. A non-traditional form of political leadership was simply appearing to fill an obvious need. “Each era calls for its own style of leadership,” she wrote in the August 28, 1992 *Los Angeles Times*. “In this transition period, the city has ‘translators’: articulate (particularly important

for immigrant groups who have trouble with English), usually young people whose task is to represent their communities’ interests to the broader world....By describing and explaining their communities’ pain and needs, they help design government responses.”

By and large, leadership roles in Los Angeles’ religious communities seem to be in the same kind of constructively-experimental mode as that described by Xandra Kayden. Somewhat unconsciously, religious communities have been making room for a new and unconventional style of leadership—“civic spirituality.” “Civic spiritualists” are persons who understand the importance of ideology in helping the citizens of Los Angeles to value, even to love, their multiethnicity. They are people who appreciate the potential power of the media in nurturing a civic love of pluralism. They plan and produce media events that help people rid themselves of feelings that their city is being invaded by strangers. They organize cross-cultural covenant groups, where individuals from different parts of the city speak to each other about their experiences. They organize coalitions with the expressed intent of increasing cross-cultural understanding. “Civic spiritualists” want people to love multiethnic LA, even in

the face of the city's perennial violence.

Political scientist Benjamin Barber has argued that there are lessons to be learned from the experience of those few societies in the world where multiethnicity and multi-lingualism have not spawned tribal warfare. The multiethnic society, he suggests, is frighteningly fragile, but there are conditions that make it possible. One of these conditions is a pervasive public belief that pluralism is a good thing, that diversity does not destroy a cultural homogeneity that was better. Stated bluntly, Barber says that certain moral and spiritual conditions are necessary to keep people from wanting to kill each other.

Religious communities, by definition, are concerned about morality and spirituality. So, in retrospect, it is not surprising that these Los Angeles communities should be spawning leaders who recognize the importance of spiritual foundations for peaceful co-existence in the city. Their activities seem fragile. They are often misunderstood and criticized. These unconventional leaders, however, are at least beginning to focus on ideological dimensions of the city's problems that have been overlooked, or at least under-emphasized.

### *Media and Civic Ideology*

Immediately after the uprising, following the lead of actor Edward James Olmos, religious institutions, universities, and other organizations turned out legions of volunteers to sweep South Central's streets, to pick up the rubble. The event was carried by the media. This was the city's first post-uprising taste of the power of civic rituals to generate hope and cross-cultural good feeling. "Maybe the streets didn't have to be cleaned up just at that moment," Olmos told the *Los Angeles Times*, "but the city sure needed to know that people wanted to clean up the streets. People needed to see us doing it."

A few weeks later, the newly-organized Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA<sup>1</sup> staged "Hands Across LA," designed largely for media coverage. This event, however flawed, is now regarded in the Coalition as a prototype for future community-building efforts. It was the Coalition's first major media success, and it created a desire to produce a series of similar events.

Inspired by "Hands Across LA," the Coalition organized what is now projected as an annual event—the Religious Leaders Summit. Like "Hands Across LA," the 1993 Religious Leaders

Summit, held at Holman United Methodist Church in South Central, was visually rich. Its opening worship service involved costumed representatives from Los Angeles' traditional faith communities. Several languages were used. Jesse Jackson appeared. In the glare of media klieg lights, he requested that as much attention be given by the federal government to the reconstruction of Los Angeles as it was giving to the reconstruction of the Soviet Union. In that setting, his electric remarks, accompanied as they were by the jostling of cameramen, signaled that something of national significance was happening. Images of both the worship service and Jackson's speech were projected into thousands of homes that evening by almost all of the local television stations. The Coalition had done it again! It had successfully staged another powerful civic ritual.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, we have emphasized the efforts of the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA to create media events that encourage an "ideology of pluralism." In fairness, it is important to observe that the Coalition has done much more. It has, for example, also worked with the Los Angeles Unified School District in promoting education in cross-cultural understanding, and it has organized projects to create employment for central city residents.



Harvey Fields, rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple and chair of the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA, is a "civic spiritualist." He senses that the media can be used to counteract the fragmentation of the city. Not surprisingly, however, many leaders in the Los Angeles religious community express strong doubts about the value of the Coalition's media successes. They worry that the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA has become overly committed to a marketing approach, and that this approach has actually taken control of the group's agenda. John Wagner, pastor of the Hollywood Lutheran Church, for example, says that the Coalition should try harder to work out an advocacy agenda that addresses the abuses of poverty in the city. He acknowledges that the greatest success of the Coalition so far has been "Hands Across LA," because it was a well-conceived event which, at a particular point in time, was needed to counteract the fragmentation of the city. Still, he believes that people can become too enamored with media events. "Getting involved with the media can be deceiving." People can convince themselves that they are addressing real issues, while actually they may be avoiding concrete needs created by the city's inequitable social, political, and

economic structures.

Others, particularly African-American pastors in South Central churches, point to different problems in the Coalition's media efforts. Almost as a matter of principle, they are cynical about the value of media events sponsored by religious elites. Many of these pastors, especially in small churches, view themselves as being in the trenches, and they are concerned that Coalition media events focus too narrowly on top down forms of leadership and on happenings that are largely symbolic. Their spotlight seldom falls on the ministries of healing, usually starved for resources, that are going on every day in South Central and in Eastside LA. Dr. Kenneth Ulmer, pastor of the Faithful Central Missionary Baptist Church, expresses one version of this view: "The Religious Leaders Summit was very interesting," he says, "but it really didn't work. It did not attract the right players. I think Harvey Fields sincerely and diligently tried to make it as diverse as possible. We did not step up to the mike. It was seen as an exercise in futility."

Michael Mata, former Director of the Bresee Institute and Director of Urban Ministries at Southern California School of Theology, is more appreciative of the Coalition's media successes. Along

with others, he worries about whether the Coalition is being effective enough, but he is not cynical about media events. "I worked hard to recruit Hispanics, evangelicals, and conservatives for 'Hands Across LA,'" he says. "It was a success for communication."

Michael Mata is another of the city's "civic spiritualists," one of the new breed of religious leaders who are attuned to the power of mass communication. Speaking out of his experience as a leader of evangelical Protestant coalitions, Mata argues that the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA will break up if an advocacy agenda is tilted too far in the direction of liberal political issues. The Coalition cannot be a strong advocacy group, he says. "But it can be a group that brings conservatives, evangelicals, Jews, and liberal Christians together because of their concern for the health of the city." He argues that projecting images of multiethnic, multi-religious collaboration into the city's television sets is no small achievement.

Mata's point is one that members of the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA will have to face in the near future. The Coalition seems to be caught in a classic bind. If it continues to emphasize symbolic, media events, it runs the risk of subtly alienating members who seek a



more aggressive advocacy agenda. On the other hand, if it develops an advocacy agenda, it runs the risk of destroying the partnership, which currently includes representatives from a wide spectrum of LA's religious institutions. The Interfaith Coalition will have to decide whether or not it wants to become a kind of specialist in civic ideology. That is undoubtedly a role that will be developed in the future by *some* group, probably by some religious group, because the city so desperately needs a moral/spiritual ideology that encourages comfort with multiethnicity. The Coalition will have to decide whether this is the role that it intends to assume. If it is, the Coalition's membership will have to recognize that other possible agendas may not be compatible.

#### *Praying for LA*

Other "civic spiritualists" in the city are inventing non-media ways of encouraging citizens to love multiethnic Los Angeles. Jack Hayford, pastor of the Church on the Way in Van Nuys, and Lloyd Ogilvie, pastor of the Hollywood First Presbyterian Church, for example, have initiated a project called "Love LA." The project brings about 1800 pastors together on a quarterly basis to pray for

the health of Los Angeles, "to pray for our City, with a heart for its hurting multitudes and a love for each of its inhabitants." The coalition is loosely structured, because Hayford and Ogilvie claim that they want to avoid any form of organizational bureaucracy. Their intent, they say, is to demonstrate that prayer is a power that can heal LA's often-rancorous ethnic divisions. Religious leaders should pray for their city, and they should have confidence that political and economic reforms will be far more effective if accompanied by spiritual/moral transformation. "Some people feel prayer is not a program," says Bryce Little, minister of mission and community outreach at Hollywood First Presbyterian Church. "We feel otherwise."

So do we. Ogilvie and Hayford are "civic spiritualists." Their efforts, from our perspective, represent one more attempt to create a civic ideology. Through prayer, they are affirming that the leaders of Los Angeles' evangelical and charismatic churches can live with cultural pluralism and that they will contribute to the healing of ethnic tensions.

What Love LA has pioneered as a loosely structured project occurs even more loosely every day in Los Angeles's religious institutions. When researchers



from the Religion and Civic Order Project attended lectures, social gatherings, study groups, and worship services in churches, temples, and synagogues, it was impossible not to notice. People were perennially praying for LA. They were praying that the peoples of LA could live together in peace and justice. Their prayers seemed to be expressing a commitment. People in religious communities were *really* going to support enterprises that would make peace and justice possible in the city. They were telling God that their religious beliefs involve political obligations.

#### *Covenant Groups*

“Civic spiritualists” in churches, temples, and synagogues all over the metropolitan area are also trying to build an ideology of civic pluralism through the construction of a city-wide network of covenant relationships. Covenanting brings congregations from different economic, ethnic, and religious populations into sister/brother relationships—into partnerships between congregations, directed toward the nurture of cross-cultural understanding and of mutual assistance. Synagogues and temples covenant with African-American

evangelical churches. Latino churches covenant with Korean churches. Korean churches covenant with African-American churches. Suburban churches covenant with churches in South Central.

Covenanting is not a new idea. But it is an idea whose time has come in Los Angeles. If the city needs an ideology that values multiethnicity, people have to find ways to talk with each other. The need is obvious. Since the 1992 uprising covenanting has become a passion.

Covenant relationships that had been organized in the city before the 1992 uprising had run into serious problems. People from the suburbs, for example, were often afraid of being in the central city after dark, and their desire to get home before sunset irked central city residents. It seemed to be impossible to sustain covenants that cut across economic class lines, or at least covenants that did not include substantial numbers of middle class individuals.

These problems still continue in the post-uprising era. In spite of the fact that the number of covenant groups is growing rapidly, covenanting is an activity that is still fragile, tentative, and exploratory, like the city itself. There are very few covenants that mature to the point where cooperating religious institutions regard each other as equal

partners. Central city institutions do not want to be the missionary clients of suburban institutions. Charity is experienced as a humiliating form of paternalism. Covenants, in order to work, must be experienced by participants as *joint* efforts to find solutions for *each other's* problems.

The covenant between All Saints Episcopal Church, a largely Caucasian church in Pasadena, and Praises of Zion Missionary Baptist Church, an African-American church in South Central, is one that appears to be relatively successful. The covenant was initiated shortly after the uprising, when All Saints Minister of Peace and Justice, Marty Coleman, arrived at the door of Praises of Zion to offer assistance. Accounts of that first meeting have risen to the level of myth at All Saints, especially a remark made by Praises of Zion's pastor, Joe Hardwick: “We've had nice white women come here before with their help, and we never see them again. Where will you be a month from now?” Subsequently, Pastor Joe Hardwick made another remark, which has also become Holy Writ: “I believe the church is the only hope for creating changes in Los Angeles. We have to do this work with our own hands, but we have to be partners.”

According to Marty Coleman, the

partnership started that day has moved through countless awkward moments to a point where people seem to believe that "we will make it." Members of both congregations have attended each others' worship services. They have established an annual joint worship service. They have initiated a program where members from both churches entertain each other in their homes. They have sponsored a joint camping event. Members of All Saints have offered consultation in the preparation of grant proposals, and they have supported programs with money and volunteers. The two congregations have worked cooperatively to establish a day care center at Praises of Zion. The two congregations have mutually sponsored a food distribution program, which feeds 350 families a week.

Marty Coleman, Jack Hayford, and other covenant organizers are "civic spiritualists."

### *Regional Inter-Cultural Coalitions*

What is occurring among church members in covenant groups is also occurring among clergy and other religious leaders who are organizing an impressive network of overlapping cross-cultural coalitions. Each coalition brings together

a different set of people, and each has a different purpose.

Billy Ingram, African-American pastor of the Maranatha Community Church, for example, pulled together 100 African-American, Korean, Caucasian, and Latino leaders (mainly from independent and Pentecostal churches) a few days after the 1992 uprising to pray together and to develop a reasoned response to the city's violence. They formed the Southern California Coalition of Religious Leaders. The group immediately organized inter-cultural worship services. Soon after the riot, 3,000 people attended a service in the hard-hit Crenshaw area. Later, a service led by David Yonggi Cho of Korea attracted 5,000.

Another coalition, the Collaborative, has tried to encourage personal inter-racial friendships among pastors, but, more recently, it has moved on to institutional matters, organizing, for example, a credit union for small businesses and an educational program for persons who want to start businesses.

The Community Conversation, a group led by African-American pastor Madison T. Shockley III, met once a week for an extended period of time to monitor the progress of the city in responding to the Christopher

Commission's findings about policing in the central city. The inter-racial group of 20 participated at hearings sponsored by the police department and the city. Then Community Conversation moved to address the differences among persons in its own group. They faced, for example, conflicts between Caucasian fears about plum-meting property values and African-American aspirations to use that occasion to purchase homes at reasonable prices.

The African American/Korean American Christian Alliance, organized in 1991, brings ministers and lay members together to discuss growing tensions. It has established committees to work on behalf of the area's economic development, to offer scholarships to African-American and Korean students, to provide educational seminars that study African-American and Korean-American history and culture, and to develop youth ministries that empower youth in both communities "to become religiously, politically, and economically conscious." The Alliance has sponsored tours by African-American pastors to Korea.

The Hispanic Evangelical Coalition, one of several coalitions drawn together under the leadership of Michael Mata, has been succeeded by the

Hispanic Association of Bilingual and Bicultural Ministries—a national association concerned about the level of service programs available in Hispanic neighborhoods. Mata is also trying to establish a new, unique form of coalition, City Link, a computerized network among “cluster grouped” churches in Eastside LA and central LA, that will share information about food and clothing services, educational services, and economic development services that can be used by churches.

A significant irony should not be missed: each of these coalitions includes pastors and lay people who for years have been working to counteract English-European biases in the way people worship, study, and work within non-Caucasian churches. Many feel they have succeeded. The Rites of Passage program in South Central churches has actively promoted an understanding of African-American culture. All over South Central, Jesus is portrayed in churches as Black.

Central city clergy report that church life in Los Angeles is now far more ethnically-sensitive than it was even in the very recent past. This achievement, they believe, has now enabled non-Caucasian religious leaders to enter a new era, when they can reach

out to leaders in other ethnic and racial groups to develop a higher level of multiethnic comfort and understanding.

The leaders of inter-cultural coalitions are “civic spiritualists,” and, ironically, it has been their success in affirming ethnic differences that has enabled them to assume this unifying role.

We believe that their increased comfort with their own ethnic distinctiveness should be regarded as a source of hope. In a period when literature about multiethnicity often suggests that our civic future will be culturally fragmented and filled with tension, the experience of Los Angeles religious communities suggests almost the opposite. Ethnic and racial pride does not inevitably foreshadow cross-cultural conflict. Instead, at least in the context of religious communities, ethnic and racial self-affirmation appears to be the precondition of efforts to achieve peace and mutual understanding.

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### **Religious Institutions and Human Services**

A story largely ignored by the press after the 1992 uprising was the serious disruption of South Central’s food supply. Supermarkets had been burned down. Many of the ones that survived had been looted. For days, whole neighborhoods were left without stable sources of food.

“One of the miracles that happened during the days of the uprising,” Kenneth Ulner, pastor of the Faithful Central Missionary Baptist Church, recalls, “was the way that churches in the city were able to get food to us.” Five days after the uprising, an eighteen wheel truck, loaded from top to bottom with food, arrived at our front door from the Church on the Way in Van Nuys. Then, for almost a month, there was a convoy of vans and trucks, and cars.”

The scene was repeated all over the affected area. The Episcopal Diocese, for

example, activated an extensive food/clothing distribution program. So did the Salvation Army. So did the Interfaith Hunger Coalition. So did a number of Jewish agencies. So did Catholic Charities. So did Foursquare churches. So did the Mormons. So did Seventh Day Adventists. So did dozens of other church agencies, denominations, interfaith coalitions, and individual churches and synagogues. In the first two weeks after the uprising, Catholic Charities alone served 6,350 persons, delivered 46 truckloads of food to 32 church distribution sites, and used 200 volunteers.

The miracle that Kenneth Ulner described was a miracle of organizational preparedness, managerial skill, and volunteerism. Even before the uprising occurred, religious institutions had already been organized to provide food and clothing to South Central. Inventories were already in place. Volunteers were already recruited. The distribution mechanism had already been charted. The distribution sites were already identified—religious institutions, located on almost every square mile of the affected area. These were places where hungry and frightened residents could feel comfortable.

Reflecting back on the experience,

Joanne Bell, Coordinator of Emergency Response for the Presbytery of the Pacific, expresses amazement: “We may not have had preventive programs in place,” she confesses. “But there certainly was an infrastructure that could be activated at a moment’s notice.” It was a highly decentralized infrastructure, reflecting the decentralized character both of Los Angeles religious communities and of the city itself. “It stood the test, though,” Bell says. “It worked very, very well.”

The vastness of the social service infrastructure that has been created by the city’s religious institutions rarely becomes visible. To some extent, it was visible during the period after the uprising, when media representatives were hungrily searching for any and every story related to central city frustrations. But ministers and rabbis who frequently speak about their activities as “invisible” are correct. The media spotlights tend to fall on only a limited number of programs. “The media have decided to take it upon themselves to point out certain groups or churches that are more prominent and more visible,” says William Martin of the Inner City Christian Church.

The feeling of invisibility experienced in many spheres of the religious

community’s social service infrastructure translates into funding problems. “Many of the [religious human service programs] have structures set up for the media,” Martin observes. “We are working here very diligently to do some things that the media can see, so we can bring some of the resources down this way. We would like our church to be a clearing house for others. But you have to set things up for that.”

Martin’s frustration reflects pressures associated with the changing situation that religious providers of human services have experienced in Los Angeles. The religious social service infrastructure has become vast, because the needs of the city have been vast, and because California’s publicly supported infrastructure has been drastically cut back in the face of the state’s tax revolt and of its long-lasting recession. All over the city, especially in South Central and Eastside LA, churches are stepping in to fill the vacuum created by declining public institutions. All of their programs need resources, so religious leaders are cast into a marketing-oriented race for funding. William Martin’s frustration is understandable. To be invisible in the religiously-based civic infrastructure is to be placed at a disadvantage in the competition for scarce funds.

Nevertheless, LA's religious institutions have established an impressive track record in building civic infrastructure. The extensiveness of their effort and achievement is almost beyond belief, especially in light of the fact that much of this infrastructure has been built by relatively small groups, "invisible" groups, who, as William Martin claims, "are struggling to make ends meet."

Especially in Mid-City and in the northern neighborhoods of South Central, dozens of religious institutions—some large, some hardly more than a few dozen people—are functioning as comprehensive social centers for immigrants—Ethiopian, Belizean, Armenian, Filipino, Indian, Iranian, Pakistani, Palestinian, Russian, Polynesian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and others. Churches, synagogues, and temples that serve these populations experiment with ways to create language-speaking enclaves within their larger parish populations. All try to offer safe havens. Immigrants can worship in their own languages, carry on social lives, make business contacts, learn about their new homeland, eat familiar foods, and collectively discuss the strains which American culture places on their traditional ways.

Dozens of these groups seem almost

to be hidden. They are minority enclaves within established religious organizations, or they rent space from existing churches, temples, synagogues, and commercial buildings. "They are fluid," a Wilshire corridor Protestant minister says. "They fit into off-times. They move into empty spaces in buildings used for other purposes."

Some of these immigrant enclaves are among the largest churches and religious centers in Los Angeles. The Islamic Center, for example, provides support for large numbers of Muslim immigrants (from many ethnic groups) as well as for long-time Muslim Americans. The Islamic Center functions both as a support system for Muslims and as a player in the cultural affairs of the city. It offers worship. It interprets Islam and Muslim perspectives to the wider community. It actively promotes discussions about Islamic perspectives in city, state, national, and international affairs. It cooperates with neighborhood development programs, such as those sponsored by the Mid-Wilshire Parish.

The Korean religious community is dominated by Young-Nak Presbyterian Church and the Oriental Mission Church, both of which are mega-churches with memberships in the thousands. In spite of the fact that Korean-American

churches are often large and thriving, however, they are experiencing strains in their identity as immigrant institutions. They function as comprehensive religious, social, political, and economic centers for both new immigrants and established Korean-Americans. After the uprising, for example, a quickly-invented Korean American Food and Shelter Service provided food, clothing, and shelter for Korean-Americans. The Service also established "listening stations," so that Korean-Americans could vent their angers and worries. During the first month after the uprising, over 1,000 families were served. Even today, about 250 people are being served each week.

A growing number of young, professional Korean-Americans express frustration with their community's churches, and some are rechanneling their civic energies to non-religious institutions. They complain that their churches are insulated, turned in on themselves, and that they must accept at least a degree of blame for not being sensitive to the conditions that turned Korean-Americans into victims during the 1992 uprising. Contrasting Korean churches with African-American, they note that their religious institutions have not been able to produce church-based political spokespersons like Cecil Murray at First



AME. Korean-American social services mainly extend helping hands to their own kind.

These young, professional Korean-Americans are only partially correct. Already there are signs that Korean-American churches are taking steps to integrate themselves into Los Angeles' larger multiethnic religious community. Although the religious coalitions established at the initiative of Korean-American pastors have often taken on the appearance of public relations efforts on behalf of their community, these coalitions are bearing multiethnic fruit. For example, they have participated in the organization of the Asian Pacific Law Center on Flower Street. Initially funded by the United Methodist Church, the center offers services for the area's multiple Asian groups, for Latinos, and for African-Americans.

Most African-American and Latino-majority churches in the areas affected by the 1992 uprising have taken on many characteristics of immigrant churches, albeit with significant differences. There hardly seems to be a single narrowly-conceived religious institution left in South Central, Mid-City, and Eastside LA. During the past decades, churches have reinvented themselves as comprehensive human service centers, which,

supported by a web of regional coalitions and regional human service programs, commingle spiritual and social service ministries. Clergy are preaching a politically-oriented theology which legitimates this commingling.

Indeed, we have begun to wonder whether the very title of our Religion and Civic Order Project involves a redundancy. In Los Angeles' central city neighborhoods, religion, by definition, now involves a wide range of human service activities. Religion, by definition, involves commitments to the building of congregation-based forms of civic infrastructure.

Some of this civic infrastructure is frankly directed toward religious conversion. Nevertheless, especially in evangelical Protestant churches and non-denominational centers, programs consistently merge conversionist strategies with human services that encourage life saving self-esteem among individuals caught in poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, and gang violence. Joe Sandoval, who operates the Fresh Start Training Program in Carson, for example, believes that "only God can change lives." But, for Sandoval, inviting individuals to accept Jesus is part and parcel of a process that informs people that they are valuable—that they can find their way out of the hell they are



living. At Fresh Start, conversion and boxing are complementary dimensions of spiritual transformation. Boxing, like conversion, bolsters self-esteem.

In the central neighborhoods of the city, however, the profile of religiously-based community infrastructure is dominantly philanthropic, directed toward making fundamental human services available to neighborhood residents. Supported by city-wide public and private programs, religious institutions have been able to raise funds and to recruit substantial numbers of volunteers for activities that support basic human needs: food, clothing, housing, recreation, medical and mental health, education, literacy, employment, and, to some extent, neighborhood economic development. Although these programs indirectly witness to the failure of public and other private support systems, they characteristically do not attempt to involve volunteers in overt attempts to restructure these systems.

Some of these programs *do* have a political edge. Although the Interfaith Task Force on Central America, for example, has devoted much of its energy toward creating immersion-type educational experiences related to the Third World community life of South Central Los Angeles, it has been involved in

political efforts to protect the rights of Central American immigrants, especially the economic rights of LA's Latino street vendors.

Likewise, programs associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a community-organization enterprise that utilizes neighborhood churches as their operational bases, are concerned both with creating human support services and with empowering neighborhoods to change victim-producing political and economic systems. That is the case, for example, at Dolores Mission, a politically active Roman Catholic center in Eastside Los Angeles. Clergy and lay members associated with the Dolores Mission are involved in the organization of neighborhood "base communities." These encourage residents to view their own situation through the lenses of a liberating Bible, and, in light of their insights, to accept political accountability for their neighborhood's development. According to Leonardo Vilches, Coordinator of Base Communities at Dolores Mission, "People in our neighborhoods don't feel needed as either consumers or producers. The economy is changing to a degree that in fact they are no longer needed....Out of our faith, we are working to transform these neighborhoods into a political situation where every one has

dignity, where everyone has some control over his life."

Only a few religious institutions have formulated comprehensive plans for the systematic development of their neighborhoods' human services infrastructure. The ones that have done this have generally been affiliated with regional coalitions, such as the New City Parish in South Central and the Mid-Wilshire Parish in Mid-City. Each of these groups is already implementing wide-ranging plans for economic development, housing, education, and other human services in their neighborhoods.

In their efforts to create civic infrastructure, religious institutions in Los Angeles have created non-profit corporations to ease their access to corporate, foundation, and public sources of funding. In the 1960s, under the leadership of Thomas Kilgore, pastor of the Second Baptist Church, African-American churches pioneered the use in Los Angeles of non-profit corporations to secure funding for affordable housing. Today, the use of non-profit corporations, loosely associated with religious institutions, has explosively expanded. Non-profit corporations constitute the backbone of religiously-based community services in the central areas of the city. Catholic Charities, for example, is a

non-profit corporation, which secures funds from corporate, foundation, and public sources. New City Parish has created a non-profit corporation. So have dozens of other churches, synagogues, temples, regional parishes, regional religious agencies, denominational agencies, and coalitions.

Religious leaders are very clear that their use of non-profit corporations (which accept public funds) requires that their human service activities be guardedly secular, both in design and in execution. But most are aware that they are working in a gray area. The boards of many of these non-profit corporations are made up of clergy and of persons associated with churches in the areas served. Church sites are used to distribute services.

When pressed, a pastor who works with one of the city's regional parishes said, "We are in an awkward position. Most of us want to maintain the wall of separation between church and state, and every day we remind ourselves of that. The fact is that churches are natural places for people to get help. People who need services feel comfortable in coming to churches. A lot of them, who come from countries where governments have been repressive, are afraid of going to public service agencies." Churches work

better, he claims. "They have low overhead, and they are everywhere. They get the job done."

In their use of non-profit corporations to provide civic infrastructure in central city neighborhoods, Los Angeles's religious institutions seem to be pioneering new legal and political cultural frontiers. Historically, religious institutions have been regarded as voluntary associations belonging to the private sector, and religiously-based human services, self-help groups, and political action groups have been regarded as a healthy democratic buffer between individuals and the state. Political scientist Benjamin Barber argues that the proliferation of private sector political and human service activities is a precondition of a peaceful multiethnic society. People need to feel that they are in control of their own societies. Voluntary groups reinforce that feeling of control.

If Barber is right, the network of religiously-based human services, then, can probably be regarded as a harbinger of very good things to come in multiethnic Los Angeles. But Los Angeles citizens are having to think in more complex terms about the voluntarist character of their social ministries. Their religious institutions increasingly seem to require the presence of publicly (and privately)

supported non-profit corporations for their community development chores. It appears that a new kind of public/private partnership-institution is being created to service Los Angeles's central areas.

The following four chapters are intended to provide what religious leaders call an "urban plunge." That is, they are intended to offer an impressionistic tour of efforts within religious communities to build civic infrastructure in relation to various dimensions of the central city's public life—crime, education, economic development, and community health services. We could have explored other dimensions—low income housing, senior citizen housing, child care services, parenting education, and family planning services. Still, we would probably never be able to do justice to the full range of community-building activities currently underway in churches, synagogues, and temples. We have decided to settle for an "urban plunge."



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## **Gangs, Addicts, and Inmates**

**T**here's a saying," says Robert Cota, pastor of Faith Outreach Church in Eastside LA. "You can get a pig and take him inside your home and wash him up, even perfume him. But if you put him back in the street, he'll jump right back into the mudhole." Cota is speaking about himself. "I was a pig like that," he says. "I used heroin. I was a drug addict." Robert Cota's ministry begins with that premise. He believes that gang members and drug addicts also feel that they are unchangeable pigs. "Once a drug addict, always a drug addict." They are imprisoned by their own self-perceptions.

Cota was transformed. "One night I asked God to help. God changed my life. I'm no longer a pig. I'm no longer that way." Cota's transformative experience motivated him "to go into the streets and tell gang members and drug addicts that God could help them, too."

His ministry at first was rocky. His newly organized Faith Outreach Church moved from location to location in Eastside LA, but now the church has settled in facilities across the street from Cal State, Los Angeles. The Church has a large worship area, offices, and facilities for child care. Seventy-five to eighty percent of Faith Outreach's members are former gang members, prison inmates, and drug and alcohol abusers, who regard themselves as living proof that people can be changed by God. The church's Living Proof Ministry operates a training center/home for individuals who are in transition. It arranges visits to schools and detention centers. It also organizes neighborhood crusades.

Joe Sandoval, who has worked with Robert Cota as a pastor in the Faith Outreach Church, now runs Fresh Start Training Program, a men's home in Carson. Joe Sandoval, who is heavily tattooed, had been incarcerated twelve years after being convicted for murdering four people. Like Cota, he was transformed by God. Now he is married and has a twelve-year-old son. He takes a practical, street-smart approach to his ministry in Fresh Start. He supplements evangelistic crusades with programs that emphasize hygiene, grooming, job skills, and self-esteem.

Cota's and Sandoval's ministries expand each year, when they embark on a state-wide evangelistic tour—California for Jesus. Faith Outreach Church is the main coordinator for this annual operation, a coalition of 67 organizations (including, for example, Foursquare churches, Assemblies of God churches, Presbyterian churches, rehabilitation centers, prison ministries, and Vineyard congregations). Teams of clergy and lay members go into inner city neighborhood to witness, to hand out fliers, and to connect people with neighborhood religious groups.

Faith Outreach's ministries embody what is becoming an important dimension of the religious community's ministry to people who are caught up in addiction and violence. Their work is populist. It is close to the street. It requires little institutional overhead. It depends on the energy of people who have also experienced the hell of those who are the targets of their ministry. Its organizational styles are self-consciously contrasted with those of programs that are funded and sponsored by public agencies and mainline religious groups. According to Joe Sandoval, "No matter how hard those other programs try to be of help, they run into trouble. People in the street don't really believe that they



understand their problems. We've been there. We can be role models."

The pastors who are associated with Faith Outreach ministries try not to be critical of other programs for addicts, gang members, and inmates, Robert Cota claims. "There's more than enough work for all of us to do." He believes, though, that Faith Outreach has something distinctive: "Because we ourselves have been addicts and in jail," he says, "we know for sure that only God can change people. People have to be changed, or nothing will change." Faith Outreach works on that assumption. Cota and Sandoval think of themselves as realists.

Mark Lazenby, who formerly worked as director of Dolores Mission Alternative, a County school for gang-impacted youth, says that he has a degree of sympathy for the evangelistic activities at Faith Outreach. Dolores Mission programs, he claims, also assume that people who are caught up in addiction and in gangs are in need of spiritual transformation. Mothers from the Dolores Mission, for example, regularly go into the streets to pray with gang members and to invite them into the Mission's community life. But Mission workers are just as concerned about addressing the conditions that produced the neighborhood's

victims in the first place. According to Lazenby, "Young people join gangs to find a home. We want to be sure, if we can, that this home is in a place where institutions that are supposed to affirm youth will not in reality be abandoning them." Dolores Mission is trying to develop a network of institutions that are supportive of the neighborhood's youth. As just one example, it has organized a tortilla factory that employs gang members. It tries to offer economic hope.

Just down the street from the Mission, Dolores Mission Alternative school tries to offer educational hope for gang-impacted youth. Although it is loosely associated with the Mission, Dolores Mission Alternative is run as a secular school. "It has to be," Lazenby says. "It's County supported." But, in one important respect, administrators in the school feel that they are on the same track as members of the Dolores clergy. They, too, are seeking justice. The school depends on the Mission to help students meet the day-to-day needs that will keep them in school. The school also depends on the Mission to cultivate other institutions in the neighborhood that will pay attention to youth-related political and economic issues.

Dolores Mission's agenda for merging spirituality and justice mirrors

the approach being taken by the Hope in Youth campaign. The campaign is a partnership among eight of Southern California's largest religious groups: American Baptist Churches, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Archdiocese, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. The campaign is also sponsored by four Industrial Areas Foundation community action organizations in Los Angeles County—the East Valley Organization, Southern California Organizing Committee, United Neighborhoods Organization, and the Valley Organized in Community Efforts.

Hope in Youth is a very, very large initiative. It will be expensive (107.5 million dollars over a period of five years). It has already been massively funded (almost 20 million dollars from private, city, county, state, and federal sources). Even in a metropolis that is accustomed to campaigns that know how to manage media exposure, Hope in Youth makes eyebrows rise. Hope in Youth is a major happening. Larry Foy, an African-American United Church of Christ pastor, expresses what many religious people in the central city now regard as a truism: "Hope in Youth is

where-it's-at in Los Angeles."

From one perspective, in the current populist climate of the Los Angeles religious community, Hope in Youth is an anachronism, or at least an oddity. It is the largest top-down, religiously-based, establishment project that has ever been launched in the city. The campaign had its origins in Cardinal Roger Mahony's horrified reaction to a set of statistics. In Los Angeles County, he learned, more than 100,000 young people had become gang members, affiliated with 800 to 1,000 active gangs. In a single year, 1991, there had been 771 gang-related killings in the county. Gang violence had reached epidemic proportions. Families were losing control of their neighborhoods. Parents in central city areas of the county were losing control of their own children.

Early in 1992, Mahony called together representatives from LA's major religious communities. They conceived Hope in Youth. In the face of anger from representatives of a host of underfunded gang intervention programs, one of whom claimed in the *Los Angeles Times* that public officials were being pressured by "Big Religion," Mahony and his colleagues skillfully lobbied for funds. They succeeded, and Hope in Youth was launched in 1993, at a media-covered

rally at Salesian High School in Eastside LA. Mayor Riordan, a close friend of Roger Mahony's, was present.

Hope in Youth is an establishment campaign, yet its ethos is populist. Mahony, it turns out, had enjoyed longstanding ties with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a collaboration of community organizing groups whose tactics had been inspired by the late Saul Alinsky, author of *Reveille for Radicals*. To implement Hope in Youth, Mahony turned to the Industrial Areas Foundation, which, in the last few years, has been depending on local churches, synagogues, and temples as bases for its affiliate-groups' community organizing efforts. One of the priests, whose parish is cooperating with Hope in Youth, expresses amazement. Everybody knew, he reports, that Roger Mahony was liberal on social issues, especially on immigration issues, but few people were quite prepared for Mahony's astonishing vote of confidence in congregation-based community organizing. Mahony and his religious establishment friends had correctly diagnosed the populist mood in Los Angeles congregations. From the top down, they had created a bottom-up campaign.

According to Father David O'Connor, co-chair of the Southern California Organizing Committee, Hope

in Youth turns to congregations in neighborhood churches, synagogues and temples, because “they are often the only stable institutions in the neighborhood. They have people who have values and are concerned about the neighborhood and about young people.” The campaign is not intended to be a social work project. “It has to be much more,” he says. “We have to get all the adults in a neighborhood involved again, making sure that the youths in their neighborhood have what is needed to get them out of the gang culture, to get them into jobs, and to get them to attend school.” According to O’Connor, religious congregations in the neighborhood are the only groups that make any sense for that kind of effort.

Literature published by Hope in Youth identifies the campaign’s top three priorities as: (1) to build a new constituency for young people, centered in religious organizations, which will organize and advocate for young people; (2) to create a minimum of 160 congregationally based Family Outreach Teams to work directly with young people and their families; and (3) to establish a minimum of 80 Primary Education Centers in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The fundamental unit of Hope in

Youth is the Family Outreach Team, composed of four members. One member of the team deals with parents to empower them and to help them identify what is needed to help youths in the neighborhood. Two members organize parent groups to empower them to get involved once again in our school system. They will encourage the Los Angeles School District to expand its Primary Education Centers program, which establishes neighborhood centers for pre-school through second grade students who currently are bussed outside their neighborhoods for education. The fourth member works directly with young people who are in gangs or are at risk of getting into gangs. Each team is supported by a cluster of 50 people, drawn from neighborhood religious organizations. Their job is to do whatever is necessary to get involved with youth, to make sure that youth have neighborhoods that care about them.

The campaign has established quotas for members of Family Outreach Teams. Each of the individuals who work with parents will deal with at least 50 parents a year. The school/parent organizers will work with all high schools in their neighborhoods and with all their feeder junior high schools and elementary schools. Individuals who

work with youth will deal with at least 25 gang members a year.

During Hope in Youth’s projected five-year lifetime, the campaign leadership intends to involve more than 320,000 people.

Carl Washington, an African-American pastor who now works as an aide to Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, has taken another direction than that taken by Hope in Youth. He has worked directly with members of the Crips and the Bloods to help them negotiate truces. Like Robert Cota, Joe Sandoval, and the leaders of Hope in Youth, Washington insists that members of the clergy “can no longer hide behind the doors of churches. They have to go to the streets where the people are and reach out to them.” Washington himself confesses that gang members had to pull him into the streets. “I didn’t approach them,” he says. “They approached me. They wanted to stop the killings....They called me in to help because they saw something—enough to say, ‘Can you help us get the message across that we want to stop the killings?’”

Shortly after he began working as a mediator among gang members, Washington had to confront the fact that the media in Los Angeles were not help-

ing. While he was involved in delicate negotiations, for example, Washington claims that the *Los Angeles Times* reported that gang members were planning to attack law enforcement officers. "The very people who were talking to me about ending the killing were being pictured as blood-thirsty killers," Washington says. "They were described as wanting to kill police officers." That made for trouble on the street. That reinforced the belief held by many gang members that nobody in the system is listening to them.

Washington has tried to help gang members understand that Latinos and Asians are facing the same problems that they are. "They have a problem, too," he has told them. "Bloods and Crips shouldn't move against Latinos and Asians. All of us are minorities. We all have common goals."

Four weeks after the Crips and Bloods announced their truce, Washington organized the Ministers Coalition for Peace. At that point, almost everyone in South Central was afraid of what would happen if the Rodney King trial verdicts had the effect of creating an explosion in South Central. The group worked to get the word out that lawlessness would only hurt South Central, not the suburbs. "I told them," Washington

claims, "You'll be the ones without a liquor store. You'll be the ones without the market. Grandma won't be able to buy milk. Mama won't be able to buy anything for her kids."

Washington, of course, was right. "It just goes on and on," he says. He and colleagues in the Ministers Coalition for Peace are going on and on, too. They are still trying. They are pioneers. Gang mediation is a kind of human service that is relatively undeveloped within religious Los Angeles. They are attempting to offer that service in an unyieldingly violent setting.<sup>1</sup>

One cannot help but be impressed with the spirit of religious institutions that have addressed issues of gang violence and drug addiction. Their programs are on-the-street, low-overhead ventures that take seriously the need to transform human spirits as well as to address structural, institutional problems. Their leadership, by and large, is radically non-bureaucratic, hope-filled,

and experienced in the tragic ways of the central city world. This is populist religion at its very best.

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<sup>1</sup> The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is also pioneering in the area of mediation. Its Project Mediation is a non-violent conflict resolution program for inner city youth. The program trains youth to apply non-violent coping skills in potentially violent situations.

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### **The Three R's, Including Religion**

In the face of widely shared perceptions that the Los Angeles Unified School District is in decline, educational services being offered at churches, synagogues, and temples are proliferating rapidly. These services are designed either to provide religiously-based alternatives to the public school system, or to provide supplementary support services for students who are attending public schools.

Ever since the early nineteenth century, religious institutions have sponsored parochial schools as alternatives to the state-supported public school system. Today, particularly in the central cities, many of these schools are experiencing financial stress, falling victim to the same forces that are undermining public schools. There are rumors that some of these schools may have to close down, or at least merge with others in

the near future.

In a counter trend, churches like First AME are establishing new educational academies, usually in their own facilities—schools whose governance, curriculum, and discipline hold academics and spirituality in a close relationship. They emphasize the involvement of parents in their children's education. The new academies are designed with particular neighborhoods and racial/ethnic/ gender populations in mind. They do not attempt to be academically excellent-in-general. They are trying to break educational molds, even molds that have characterized traditional parochial schools. They intend instead to be excellent in relation to particular needs.

The Cecil L. Murray Educational Center at First AME, for example, is designed as an institution that will fit the needs of African-American families in South Central Los Angeles.

After it opens in September, 1994, it will require daily student assemblies that emphasize religious and moral development. It will strictly enforce standards of discipline, grooming and dress. It will provide for practice and drill in communication skills, and will require after-school tutorial activities for students who are performing below grade

level. Through the use of computer technologies that are not widely available in public schools, it will attempt to orient students to skills that will be directly useful in the workplace. Parents will be required to participate actively in the education of their children.

Many evangelical Protestant churches in South Central and Mid-City are organizing support groups for families who have opted to educate their children in home schools. They are helping parents with the procedures that are necessary to secure formal permission from the Los Angeles Unified School District to establish these schools. They are providing information concerning services that are available in the Los Angeles Unified School District for families who are running home schools. And they are helping families develop teaching/learning plans, based on published curricular materials that are made available to families in the home school movement.

A significant variation in the home school movement within central city neighborhoods has been initiated by Catholic Charities under the rubric of its Soledad Enrichment Action (SEA) program. SEA is a network of alternative schools for gang-impacted youth. Some of SEA's students, who have been referred by probation officers, have chosen to pur-



sue their education at home. They have declared themselves to be participants in the home school movement. SEA provides them with educational materials, tutoring, testing, and other support services. The majority of students at SEA, however, are offered the full range of educational services at SEA sites, which receive funding from Los Angeles County.

In Eastside, Dolores Mission Alternative also offers educational services for gang-impacted youth, many of whom have been expelled by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Dolores Mission Alternative is a Los Angeles County School, supported by public funds, although its facilities are provided free of charge by the church and a portion of the school's budget must be covered by the church. As a public school, its teaching program is secular, and its staff does not attempt to draw students into church membership. Most of the school's support services for students are provided by student volunteers from UCLA, Loyola, and Mt. St. Mary's College, but priests and religious teachers *do* provide services, like transportation to and from school and transportation for field trips.

Both SEA and Dolores Mission Alternative have worked out extraordi-

narily interesting forms of church-state relations. They are public institutions. There seems to be no doubt about that fact. But they are public institutions that have worked out accommodations with religious institutions that allow Los Angeles County to use church sites for the delivery of their public educational services.

There are many churches, like St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Compton and the Inner City Christian Church in South Central, that have created after-school educational programs for students in their neighborhoods. St. Martin's has a computer room, because many of the local schools do not have computers, or if they do, there are not enough to go around. Inner City Christian Church has a tutorial program, which involves both the pastor and a committee of credentialed teachers. It and other churches provide safe (i.e., gang free) and quiet study space, and, just as important, an atmosphere that makes it clear that the churches are very serious about the quality of the students' lives. "I ask for report cards," William Martin, Inner City's pastor, says. "The report card tells me a lot about what is going on at children's homes and schools. I care about what's going on in both places."

Religious leaders in Los Angeles

have not been extensively involved in political issues related to public education. Although a large percentage of evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics, for example, individually express support for some kind of educational voucher system, there was little organized religious support for the school voucher initiative that was defeated in a recent statewide election. Mark Slavkin, a member of the Los Angeles Unified School District School Board, offered the following explanation: "The religious community hasn't wanted to be self-interested. A lot of evangelicals and Roman Catholics would like to have the voucher system, but they don't want to have it at the expense of public schools that are serving most of LA's minority students."

Religious leaders were active participants in the Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN)—the committee of community leaders that, with the blessing of the Los Angeles Unified School District, produced a plan for site-based decision making in schools. Most of the clergy representatives in LEARN had previously been active in Kids First—a reform-oriented program, organized by the Industrial Areas Foundation, which operates in loose cooperation with the

Roman Catholic Archdiocese. Many of the ideas that were espoused by Kids First were subsequently appropriated by LEARN. When LEARN was being organized, the Industrial Areas Foundation board decided that it had no desire to guard the issue of educational decentralization as its own turf. Clergy associated with Kids First were absorbed into LEARN committees. They have expressed satisfaction that Kids First proposals were supported by LEARN's constituencies.

The kind of political activism represented by the religious leaders who participated in LEARN was a rare exception. Central city religious leaders, by and large, have steered clear of getting involved in the politics of Los Angeles public education, in spite of the fact that most of them have believed that the school district is not serving African-American and Latino students well. About fifteen years ago, there were serious discussions in South Central churches about launching a whole new Christian school system, located in church facilities, but the projected costs were enormous, and the effort soon died. Hope in Youth, which is currently using religious institutions as sites to build a central city constituency in support of neighborhood youth, represents a new attempt to bring

religious institutions into the politics of the Los Angeles Unified School District. The future of this campaign, of course, cannot be known. Hopefully, it will succeed. Perhaps it can serve as a vanguard project—one capable of providing leadership for religious institutions in an area where their record has not previously been impressive.

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## **Spiritual Entrepreneurialism**

**T**ravis Jackson, pastor of South Central's Gospel Truth Church, complains, "The area of our church is still predominantly Afro-American. Why don't we have our own businesses? Well, they say, we can't get loans. Other groups come in and they can get loans. We can't get financing."

By and large, the religious leadership of Los Angeles agrees with Jackson. Against a backdrop of cynicism concerning the ability or willingness of government agencies, insurance companies, and banks to support the economic self-development of South Central, religious institutions are moving into the vacuum to try to create, neighborhood by neighborhood, a financial infrastructure for South Central. There is no coordinated plan. Nevertheless, religious institutions all over the city appear to be on the same track. Churches, denomina-



tional agencies, regional parishes, and coalitions are organizing and incorporating credit unions, making seed-money grants, providing business education, and providing pilot project training experiences for African-Americans and Latino immigrants.

"If people want to start a business," Frank Stewart, pastor of the Zoe Christian Fellowship, says, "we don't want them to feel lost. We want them to know what to do, and we want them to have resources to get started." In the summer of 1993, the center initiated a unique self-help experiment "to try to keep people from feeling lost." Pastor Stewart invited 50 men to contribute \$100 each as a down payment for a piece of property. The group divided into four sections, each with a specialization: acquisition, finances, refurbishing, and resale. The property was to belong to the church, with potential profits to be used to provide scholarships for African-American students. "The objective was not to make personal money," Stewart says, "but to learn how to work together and to do investment. The main purpose was to see how things work."

More than any other non-denominational network of Christian centers, Zoe Christian Fellowship has patiently been putting permanent institutions into

place that will support African-American entrepreneurialism. In Cerritos, about fifteen miles from South Central, a Zoe School of Economic Development has been established. The school specializes in training for entrepreneurialism. Now Zoe Christian Fellowship is cooperating with the Southern California Coalition of Religious Leaders to organize a credit union. According to Louis Edwards, a banker and a member of the board at Zoe Christian Fellowship in Cerritos, the credit union will raise money from members of the Zoe congregation and from members of other churches. It will make funds available for the startup and expansion of minority businesses. It will also make money available for Zoe members to purchase homes or "for whatever financial needs there may exist."

Through its Renaissance Entrepreneurial Training Program, First AME has also been extremely active in supporting African-American economic development. Mark Whitlock, the program's director, argues that South Central residents could do far worse than to turn to the African-American Church to learn financial lessons. "In the Black community," he says, "churches are probably the only institutions that have consistently made it financially. The churches have marketed their product, and they

have survived."

Working out of this philosophy, First AME has attracted grants from corporations like Arco and Walt Disney to fund 37 neighborhood-based businesses. Steve Johnson views this effort as one of First AME's most significant ministries. "We believe it is our religious obligation to come to you and say, 'Give us some money so we can lend it to our people to open new businesses.' We feel that we must walk up to the persons who have money and be just as bold as any salesman....And when you give it to us, we have to have the wisdom to use it wisely and share it with the community."

"We first teach [African-Americans] about business," Whitlock says. "Then we help them with their business plans, and then we fund their businesses." First AME goes one step further. According to Whitlock, "Then we promote those businesses from the pulpit. We ask our members to go and support those businesses."

First AME's and Zoe Christian Fellowship's vision for a church-built financial infrastructure in South Central is shared by dozens of other religious institutions. Many, like the Episcopal Diocese, are creating credit unions. A fewer number are developing comprehensive economic development plans.



The New City Parish, a coalition of five Lutheran churches in South Central, is one of these. It has already started to implement the following long-term, three-front plan: (1) The New City Capital Corporation will provide assistance to South Central residents who are trying to start commercial enterprises. It will encourage entrepreneurs to offer stock ownership programs for their employees "to ensure maximum community wide participation and cooperation." It, also, will create a network of support and technical help. (2) The Revolving/Bridge Loan Fund will generate a loan pool. This pool will be administered in ways designed to provide leverage for central city residents in attracting financial support from other traditional sources of capital. (3) The New City Parish will try to strengthen African-American banks and S&Ls.

The Parish does not want to build an infrastructure that will have the effect of undermining existing neighborhood financial institutions. To the contrary, the Parish's leaders want to build working relationships between their own projects and existing African-American financial institutions. "We don't want to reinvent the African-American financial system in South Central LA," says Madeline Richards, who works with the

New City Parish. "That wouldn't be smart. We want to try to make the system work better for our community."

In some South Central churches, just as much energy is being directed toward nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit of their parishioners as is directed toward creating various forms of financial infrastructure. Speaking to a group at Pentecostal Zoe Christian Fellowship in South Central, Star Parker made a point that is repeated over and over in African-American churches: African-Americans in LA have to be transformed. They have to want to be entrepreneurs. "Historically, Blacks have had a lack of economic power," Parker said. "Now that's something that is real. But we're Christians. God isn't into poverty. Why are we buying into what the past has told us. We're supposed to be new creatures in Christ."

Although few African-American churches go as far as Zoe Christian Fellowship in making economic prosperity into a dominant theological theme, self-help programs offered in South Central Protestant churches suggest that African-American leaders agree in general with Parker's point. Crenshaw Christian Center offers an extreme example. "God isn't into poverty" is a theme that is everywhere in its programs.

At Sunday worship services, parishioners are told that economics cannot be divorced from spirituality, because God promises that salvation involves sharing in the bounty of the earth. The theme is not left at the level of abstraction. Crenshaw Christian prepares young people, in practical ways, to get themselves into a position to share in God's bounty. Sunday services are supplemented by weekday programs that teach personal grooming, resume writing, interview skills, and self-esteem. "Crenshaw Christian is doing a terrific job," a previously critical African-America political figure says. "Crenshaw Christian Center is not my kind of church, but what they are doing to get African-American young people ready for the work world can't be faulted."

Los Angeles' religious institutions are working from the ground up, using populist strategies for their economic development programs. Disillusioned with the payoff of large corporate, city, state, and federal programs, they have adopted strategies that start with the transformation of neighborhood youths, that are preoccupied with initiating small businesses, and that involve churches, synagogues, and temples in planning for the economic future of their own neighborhoods.

The leaders of religious institutions in the central city simply assume that they have an economic function to perform: they have accepted Star Parker's claim that "business is spiritual." Salvation is "holistic." Salvation involves the economic empowerment both of individuals and of neighborhoods. Religious institutions that ignore their role in a community's economic development are performing only a part of their mission.

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## Neighborhood Health Care

A coalition of fifteen churches in the Greater Hollywood area of Los Angeles, in cooperation with the Queen of Angeles-Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, is attempting to bring preventive medicine and health education to Hollywood's multiethnic neighborhoods. The Greater Hollywood Health Partnership's programs include nutrition seminars, prenatal care classes, childhood immunizations, flu shots, and forums on health care reform. In offering these activities, the medical center operates through the existing network of neighborhood churches.

Participating churches cut across denominational lines. They include, for example, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Disciples of Christ, Foursquare Gospel, Armenian Orthodox, and Salvation Army congregations. The Partnership also reaches out to

educational, social, and government related agencies that are attempting to provide community health care services: the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, Free Clinics, the Community Health Council of Rebuild LA, Biola University Nursing School, and the Azusa Pacific University Parish Nursing Program, and the Assistance League of Los Angeles.

Born out of the successful Parish Nurse Program, sponsored for over a decade by the Hollywood Lutheran Church, the Greater Hollywood Health Partnership is reshaping the identity of member churches as institutions that “join with the hospital and other health and human services providers to meet the social, spiritual and physical needs” of their communities. “What the Partnership is trying to do,” explains Father Stephen Ryan, the medical center’s head chaplain, “is minister to the whole person—body and spirit—at the place people are most likely to come.” When leaders of the Partnership meet for their annual planning retreats, they discuss theological issues related to the “total well-being of persons.”

According to Ryan, “It is difficult for the poor and elderly, especially immigrants, to get to health centers. But they are accustomed to coming to churches,

which are a safe haven even for the undocumented and the homeless. While they are there for food and clothing,” Ryan says, “we’re able to reach them with health programs.”

Speaking in the *Los Angeles Times*, Ryan reported that a widely publicized campaign was able to draw only 50 people over a period of three weeks to receive free flu shots at the medical center. In contrast, nearly 300 parishioners and homeless people appeared at Partnership churches for immunization shots on one weekend in October, 1993.

In other parts of the central city, there is nothing to compare with the Greater Hollywood Health Partnership, although other religious institutions actively cooperate on a smaller scale with health service providers. St. Johns Episcopal Church, for example, sponsors Saturday morning well-baby clinics. All over the central city, health care professionals and volunteers from neighborhood churches offer their services in support of American Red Cross health fairs—events that are staged in neighborhood parks.

The Greater Hollywood Health Partnership is a model that deserves to be imitated. The program is consistent with efforts in the central city to restructure religious institutions as sites for integrat-

ed religious/social services, and it is consistent with the current efforts of religious leaders to provide community development services through institutional coalitions or “regional parishes.” The Greater Hollywood Health Partnership has already refined its service delivery system. The system works. In neighborhoods where public and private health service agencies are scarce and where getting to health services can be a discouraging, complicated task, the Partnership offers an inspiring alternative.

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## **New Leaders, New Era**

**T**om Kilgore, pastor-emeritus of the Second Baptist Church in South Central, often reflects on changes in the city's religious-political leadership. "Leadership moves around," he says. "After the Watts riot, a few of us worked together with the city to help our area's people. Our churches were the leadership churches. Now Cecil Murray's church is taking a great deal of initiative. It's one of the main leadership churches now."

"Leadership is changing in the whole city, too," Kilgore added. "We have a new mayor. We have a new city councilman. Things are very different now than they were after the Watts riot." Kilgore is right. In South Central, time inevitably has changed the cast of ministerial characters whose visions have historically set the tone for African-American city politics. The appearance of a new mayor after Tom Bradley and

the appearance of a new city councilman after Robert Farrell have altered the chemistry of how South Central's churches interact with city hall.

These changes belong to the natural order of civic affairs. Political seasons change. Issues come and go. Political emotions ebb and flow.

From the perspective of the members of the Religion and Civic Order Project, however, a far larger change has been occurring in the leadership of Los Angeles' politics of the spirit. To describe this transition, we use the term "seismic," because it is associated with a cultural earthquake, experienced most vividly in the phenomenon of declining memberships and resources within mainline Christian churches.<sup>1</sup>

The power of the coalition of regional mainline headquarters, Jewish agencies, and civil rights organizations in Los Angeles which had framed the religious community's response to the 1965 Watts riot is eroding. During the past three decades, many of these institutions have had to cut back in the size of their regional staffs. Some have had to rent space in their regional headquarters to

non-religious institutions. They have had to reduce the number of full-time staff members who organize and coordinate political ministries. Few can afford to employ media specialists to draw attention to the role of churches in the city's efforts to reinvent itself as a multiethnic metropolis.

The leaders of this coalition, together with leaders from business, the Los Angeles Unified School District, higher education, labor, county government and city government, constituted the so-called "downtown establishment" during the 1960s and 1970s. This was the group that, after the Watts riot, organized the Greater Los Angeles Urban Coalition to coordinate the use of public and private resources for the development of South Central. This was the group that launched Tom Bradley, and it was Tom Bradley, as mayor, who worked closely with South Central clergymen like Tom Kilgore, H.H. Brookins and Jim Lawson in utilizing African-American churches for the development of civic infrastructure. Regional religious leaders had important roles to play in the "downtown establishment's" plans for the enhancement of LA as a world class commercial center, and, just as important, as a city with the energy and the will to rebuild its impoverished

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, and Congregational.



central neighborhoods.

Among the regional religious headquarters and agencies that were major players in the post-Watts years, only the Roman Catholic Archdiocese and (to a lesser extent) Jewish agencies have been able to maintain central bureaucracies that are sufficiently staffed to support large-scale forms of political leadership. As Xandra Kayden argued during a seminar at the University of Southern California, it is difficult for religious leaders to play prominent regional political roles when they are slashing their staffs. They need staff support to devise strategies, to plan events, to coordinate events, to bring resources together, and to assure media coverage.

Surrounded by effective staff members, Cardinal Mahony has emerged as the city's only consistently visible mainline religious-political leader. He has strongly supported the right of immigrant street vendors to possess business licenses. He has argued that people have a moral right to cross national boundaries for economic reasons. He has urged Californians to reject politically popular forms of anti-immigrant legislation. He has convened mainline denominational leaders and, with them, has initiated Hope in Youth, a congregationally-based community organizing effort to build a

broad coalition in support of LA youth. He has lobbied city, county, state and federal political leaders to secure public funds for Hope in Youth.<sup>2</sup>

It is too soon to tell whether Cardinal Mahony's friendship with Mayor Richard Riordan will have the same significance for church-state relations in Los Angeles as did the "establishment" friendship of Tom Bradley with Kilgore, Lawson, and Brookins (who, in turn, were backed by the city's coalition of regional religious leaders). There are signs, however, that it might. Mayor Riordan has been an open supporter of Mahony's Hope in Youth. He has been present at several Hope in Youth events to give his political endorsement.

It is also too soon to tell whether Mayor Riordan's political friendship with E.V. Hill, pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, will have long-lasting effects on

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<sup>2</sup> One Protestant denominational executive, who asked that his name not be used, suggests that Cardinal Roger Mahony is trying to breathe new energy into the city's coalition of mainline regional leaders. To do so, this executive says, he is turning to programs like Hope in Youth, which, ironically, fit a populist era where centralized mainline leadership is not highly valued.

the political leadership of LA's religious institutions. E.V. Hill has been tapped by Mayor Riordan as a special advisor on South Central issues. In solidly Democratic South Central, Hill has been what the *Los Angeles Times* calls a "gung ho Republican." In the past, he endorsed conservative Sam Yorty, professed his loyalty to Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, and opposed homosexuality and abortion from Mt. Zion's pulpit. He offered the prayer in Riordan's inauguration ceremony.

E.V. Hill will be an interesting figure to watch—for several reasons. Even in the face of his intractable conservatism (e.g., he believes that the term Black is "theologically, philosophically, and ophthalmologically unacceptable"), Hill has won the respect of liberal African-American neighbors. "He has not let his Republicanism get in the way of his Black-ism," says Danny Bakewell, president of the Brotherhood Crusade. Like other African-American clergy, he has helped his church to establish a food distribution center, the Lord's Kitchen. He has built senior citizen housing. And he has organized a credit union to fund South Central entrepreneurialism.

In his political friendships with Roger Mahony and with E.V. Hill, Mayor Riordan is straddling the fault

line that runs across the city's religious-political landscape. His ties with Mahony are Old School ties, the association of a successful Catholic businessman with his mainline Cardinal. Riordan's ties to E.V. Hill are different. They are Republican. More than that, they are politically-astute attempts on Riordan's part to connect with the diverse, theologically conservative population of central city evangelical leaders. These are leaders that one would expect to be through-and-through New Rightists. But they aren't. In interesting ways, they hold New Right ideas together with populist commitments to the economic, spiritual, and political empowerment of their neighborhoods.

The city's regional mainline, Jewish agency, and civil rights leaders continue to launch innovative, bold community development programs. They are good civic citizens. But there is a change in ethos. A new era seems to be in the making. The roles that mainline regional leaders have traditionally played are now being assumed also by individuals whose bases are in well-funded "para-church" institutions—in the interactive network of organizations whose financial and spiritual foundations are firmly set in the city's evangelical/Pentecostal communities. Organizations like World Vision,

World Impact, Bresee Institute (sponsored by the First Church of the Nazarene in Mid-City), and even the Urban Ministries program at Azusa Pacific University are doing many of the same things that people habitually associate with mainline headquarters and regional agencies. For example, they are helping churches and groups of churches initiate neighborhood development programs. They are helping churches respond flexibly to the changing character of their home neighborhoods. They are collecting demographic data and are training religious leaders to interpret these data. They are setting up networks for the delivery of food, clothing, and social services. In performing these tasks, their style of leadership is consistently populist and collaborative.

After the 1992 uprising, World Vision, for example, established a network to distribute food and other supplies to more than 36,000 families in the areas most affected by the riots. The network brought together churches, non-profit organizations (like World Impact, Union Rescue Mission, the Los Angeles Mission, and the Salvation Army), and a state senator's office. It initiated a Korean-American Alliance to assist in the development of plans to respond effectively to the needs of



Koreans, and, also, a Hispanic Unity Rally of 200 pastors to consider possibilities for developing a Hispanic coalition. It cooperated with the evangelical-oriented Southern California Coalition of Religious Leaders to develop long-term strategies for the social, spiritual, economic and educational needs of the Los Angeles multiethnic community. It established a center to provide job-placement, small business development, housing development, and financial assistance in central city neighborhoods.

Michael Mata, Director of Urban Ministries at Southern California School of Theology, and Jesse Miranda, Director of Urban Ministries at Azusa Pacific University, are two figures that deserve particular mention. They are consummate crafters of coalitions, particularly among evangelical and Pentecostal groups that are inexperienced in the political affairs of the city. Both are ecumenical, interested in encouraging conservatives to participate in coalitions that cross the city's ideological spectrum. They do not protect their own turf. Their theologies embody ways of thinking that are familiar to central city churches: holistic, practical, spiritual, political, economic, all at the same time.

The city's new evangelical/Pentecostal leaders, like Mata and

Miranda, are performing a civic miracle. Their peace-making, pragmatic style of leadership is having a profound political effect in LA's religious community, where the coalitions that they are building encourage the blurring of boundaries between Right and Left. Mata's active participation in the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA, for example, has helped to make it one of the broadest coalitions of religious groups ever to have been assembled in the city.

The pattern of Los Angeles' religious leadership, in almost every sector of the city's religious life, is predominantly bottom-up. Mainline Protestant churches, whose memberships and resources have been declining, have had to adopt decentralizing strategies, which empower local churches to function independently. With only a few notable exceptions, evangelicals and Pentecostals fiercely protect the independence of local congregations. Para-church organizations do not try to create top-down organizational forms. Neither do the city's Jewish agencies. Roman Catholicism, in spite of its hierarchical structure, grants a high level of autonomy to parish priests in formulating community development strategies.

The culture of the city's religious community promotes congregation-based

entrepreneurialism. The culture anoints leaders who are able to bring visibility to their own civic ministries or who are able to organize coalitions among local religious institutions.

Harvey Fields, Fred Price, Cecil Murray, E.V. Hill, Charles Blake, and (in Pasadena) George Regas hardly belong to the same theological club, but they all have in common the fact that they are highly visible. In the current populist mood of the city, their visibility often spawns resentment among other religious leaders, many in store fronts, whose heroic projects are starved for funds. Many, if not most, of these fund-starved pastors and rabbis regard themselves to be invisible, and, consequently, disadvantaged in attracting resources for their community development activities. Generally speaking, experiences of visibility and invisibility have a geographical definition. The larger, visible churches and agencies tend to gather in Mid-City and in the northern part of South Central. The further south one moves, the greater the population of religious leaders who say they are struggling to make ends meet.

The gap between visible and invisible and between weak and strong congregations seems inevitable. No one can devise a plan to equalize the ability of



institutions to gather resources for the programs they envisage. Nevertheless, it seems significant that large numbers of religious leaders in Los Angeles are speaking about their invisibility, and that they are angry, not just disappointed, about this situation. They are looking for villains, for example, media that are uninterested in reporting the positive contributions of religious institutions, a "marketing" culture that prizes appearance over substance, and/or funding agencies who are uninterested in small-scale religious institutions.

The big problem is funding. As religious leaders press their congregations to expand their community service functions, their expenses soar. Visibility is perceived to be the key that provides access to funding sources. Visibility becomes both an end and a means. A visible religious institution functions well, because it attracts resources that allow it to function well.

Visibility is a long-term problem for almost all institutions within the Los Angeles religious community. Very few people in the city are aware, for example, of the extent to which religious institutions are building an infrastructure of social services for central city neighborhoods. Very few people have images of the saints who are working sacrificially to

build a peaceful and just multiethnic Los Angeles. The complaints of "invisible" leaders are merely straws in the wind, indicators of a hunger for media exposure that is pervasive, mainly because such exposure translates so directly into opportunities for the expansion of community services.

The need for greater media savvy should be faced head-on. In a city whose religious community is already a complex network of coalitions, there is a need for one more kind of coalition—a coalition of large, visible religious institutions that are willing to share their media skills and that are willing to assist "invisible" religious leaders gain easier access to funders. Perhaps this is a role that is appropriate for the Interfaith Coalition to Heal LA, which has already proved itself to be expert in these matters.

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### **Changing Congregational Forms**

This is a time for imagination in Los Angeles churches," says Michael Mata, former director of the Bresee Institute at the First Church of the Nazarene and Director of Urban Ministries at Southern California School of Theology. "Unfortunately, imagination seems to be in short supply. There are so many churches that are victims of inflexibility. I often wish that I could just shake them and tell them to pay closer attention to what is happening in their communities."

Michael Mata is not engaging in sermonic rhetoric. He is speaking realistically about the situation in which religious institutions in Los Angeles find themselves. South Central Los Angeles, for example, is changing into a Latino community, largely inhabited by recent immigrants from Central America. The



area's roughly 1400 African-American Protestant churches are having to confront the fact that only about 20% of these new residents are Protestants, and that, within this Protestant Latino minority, individuals often do not want to affiliate with predominantly African-American, evangelical churches.

Michael Mata estimates that about half of the area's African-American churches have become "commuter churches." Surprisingly, many of these "commuter churches" are thriving, because they have been flexible in building programs that make sense in their new environment. They have offered programs that directly serve the needs both of the African-Americans who have remained in South Central neighborhoods and of African-Americans who feel that South Central is their spiritual home. Some, like First AME and Crenshaw Christian Center, have become regional churches. They have attracted support within Southern California's geographically-dispersed population of middle class and upper middle class African-Americans. First AME's pastor, Cecil Murray, has been tapped by the media as a spokesperson for the entire African-American community in Southern California. His efforts have attracted public and private funding for First

AME's community programs.

Other "commuter churches" in South Central have been less imaginative. Many barely function. They are closed during the week. They spring to life only on weekends, when ministers and members drive into South Central, often from distant locations.

Further to the north, an even more complex process of demographic change is occurring. Today, the Wilshire corridor is the site for Koreatown, which, in turn, is now home to Central American immigrants. There are also substantial numbers of Ethiopian, Armenian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Filipino, African-American, and elderly Caucasian residents. Throughout the area, there are enclaves of expensive condominiums, which house individuals who are attracted to downtown lifestyles. Some of these condominiums function as second homes, many of which are empty on weekends when most religious institutions conduct their worship services.

Within the Wilshire Boulevard corridor, huge Protestant church buildings stand as visible reminders of a not-too-distant-past, when it was possible to speak of Wilshire Boulevard as "a boulevard of cathedrals," or as "the Protestant-Jewish miracle mile." Now, according to one Wilshire area pastor, these cathedrals

are “yawning lions, ever-ready to consume dollars for expensive maintenance.” Many of the affluent parishioners whose dollars once supported the active ministries of Wilshire Boulevard religious institutions have now moved elsewhere, and relatively few of them are willing to drive back into Mid-City LA for religious activities. The less flexible of these churches are living off rapidly diminishing endowments that were amassed in an earlier era. Some are leasing space to non-profit corporations. Others are leasing valuable church property for commercial uses.

Thus, as in South Central, substantial numbers of Wilshire corridor “commuter” churches have pastors who are trying to find ways to minister to populations that do not traditionally affiliate with mainline denominations and are experimenting with an interesting new organizational form that takes account of the stresses created by demographic change. They are reinventing themselves as churches with multiple ethnic congregations, each congregation functioning with a high level of organizational autonomy.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church, for example, is renting space in its cathedral-like facility to non-Presbyterian congregations, including a Korean congregation

that is far larger than Immanuel’s own membership.

“Presbyterians have always been ecumenical,” says John Bodo, who has served as interim pastor at Immanuel. “It is a part of the Presbyterian character to acknowledge that the religious needs of our neighborhood may require the ministry of sisters and brothers in other kinds of churches. They need space. We have space.”

The clergy whose congregations occupy the Immanuel cathedral occasionally cooperate in leading shared worship services. But John Bodo hopes for more. “We probably should be regarded as a post-modern church,” he says. “We don’t seem to worry very much about the separateness of our congregations. Perhaps in time we will plan together. We probably will, because all of us want to serve our neighborhood better.”

In John Bodo’s vision, Immanuel Presbyterian Church will always be the landlord for the cathedral’s space. But he seems convinced that Immanuel’s plan to open its doors to other congregations is not merely a scheme to bolster the church’s vulnerable budget. He believes that Immanuel is a church that is trying to invent a new organizational form—an alliance of churches, which ultimately will discover some form of common life.

“Our challenge is the same as Los Angeles’ challenge,” Bodo argues. “People are looking for ways that our different populations will find common ground. Right now, that is Immanuel’s situation. We are holding the doors open. Right now it just seems important to hold doors open.”

Immanuel’s Heart of Los Angeles youth program is not ethnically segmented. Its activities, which include arts, education, and sports for at-risk youth in the entire Mid-City, cut across ethnic boundaries. HOLA specializes in the arts. Its Youth Theater is well known for the imaginative ways in which Mid-City youth are encouraged to find self-expression. Seventeen year old Mercedes Mijares, for example, will present her science fiction play, *Taqwa*, at USC’s Bing Theater. The play mirrors her neighborhood’s daily struggle with multiethnic tensions. Mijares says that she writes to change people’s minds. In principle, arts programs should not be segmented, Mitchell Moore, HOLA’s director, believes. The arts are about the human spirit.

Along the Wilshire corridor, other churches have developed more tightly knit multiple-congregational forms. First Church of the Nazarene (on Third Street), for example, supports four

relatively autonomous congregations: English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Filipino, and Korean. The Spanish-speaking congregation serves at least twelve major Hispanic nationalities, ranging geographically from the Argentinean tip of South America to the northern borders of Mexico. The English-speaking congregation is multiethnic. It includes African-Americans, Caucasians, Latinos, Filipinos, and a variety of other Asian-Americans, who wish to participate in a congregational life that affirms the value of cross-culturalism.

Each has its own pastor; each has its own budget; and each has its own church board. Since the congregations share space, however, they require the services of their Multi-Congregational Board, which assures that the buildings are maintained and that the facility's many uses are coordinated.

The clergy at First Church of the Nazarene understand their multiple-congregational organization in theological and philosophical terms. Just as Los Angeles is *one* city with a variety of ethnic populations, they insist that First Nazarene is *one* church with a variety of congregations. Each of these congregations feels an obligation to help the others. Although the autonomy of each is valued, so is the health of the whole

church organism. Ethnic, language, and racial differences are important. But even more important is the unity of the Christian community, given expression in the essential Oneness of First Nazarene.

The pastors want to keep the boundaries among their multiple congregations fluid. Twice a year the congregations worship together—occasions which require a complicated system for language translation. The pastors regularly meet to coordinate the church's ministries. The church's youth programs are directed toward serving the entire population of young people in the neighborhood, not particular ethnically-homogenous segments.

In South Central, a number of Protestant churches are interested in developing multiple congregations. A few have employed Spanish-speaking ministers and have already initiated Spanish speaking services—actions which inevitably have the effect of creating two or more congregations with separate-but-cooperative ministries. Dr. William Martin, pastor of the Inner City Christian Center, for example, expresses a strong interest in developing both Spanish-speaking and Korean ministries "in order to facilitate racial

harmony in our neighborhood."

South Central's St. Thomas the Apostle is experimenting with a Catholic variation of the multiple-congregational church. As do all Roman Catholic parishes, St. Thomas defines its mission geographically. It serves all Catholics who live within its boundaries, and it tries to encourage a spirit of community among all ethnic and national groups within its parish. "In a neighborhood like this, however, not everyone can be served well by one church," says Dennis O'Neil, St. Thomas' priest. The neighborhood's Koreans, for example, usually choose to go to nearby St. Agnes, St. Gregory, or St. Basil. St. Thomas' specialization is to encourage regional (or national) groups of Latinos in the parish to enjoy high degrees of congregational autonomy. All of these groups celebrate mass together, although some of St. Thomas' masses are informally ("by the grapevine") designated for particular groups. Apart from worship, parish life is experienced as a cluster of virtually-autonomous congregations—e.g., of immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and from various regions (including Indian) of Mexico. Each of these groups is encouraged to celebrate regional holidays. Each is encouraged to have its own officers. Father Dennis seems to enjoy

cultural diversity. He believes that immigrants need to have a place in their new city "where they don't have to give up all of their cultural traditions." But he does not want St. Thomas to break into cultural and national fragments. He encourages parishioners to cross boundaries. "We try to be a community of cultures," O'Neil says. "We want people to enjoy each other's celebrations."

In Los Angeles, Ron Benefiel, pastor of First Church of the Nazarene, has become a counselor for churches in neighborhoods that are experiencing demographic change. "Not every multi-congregational church works well," Benefiel explains. "It makes a big difference as to whether the various congregations feel dignity, whether they feel equality in their use of the church's facility."

"Multi-congregational churches are not the answer everywhere," Benefiel says. Sometimes a church has to recognize that it will never be able to serve a particular kind of community. In that case, it should find ways to leave. "What churches cannot afford to do, he says, is to close their eyes to what is happening in their neighborhoods. "If churches do that, they won't last very long."

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### **The Regional Parish**

**R**egional parishes attempt to nurture spiritual, economic, social, and political health in an area of the city. Individual religious institutions have formed alliances to coordinate strategies for broad scale neighborhood development. They are organizing neighborhood credit unions, economic development programs, counseling services, low income housing programs, gang intervention programs, and regional programs to offer educational support services.

Regional parishes fit the central city. Their member churches are trying to accommodate to demographic changes in their neighborhoods. The annual operating budgets of the more fortunate among them are subsidized by earnings from endowments that were amassed in earlier, more affluent periods, or they are subsidized by earnings from property that has been allocated to other uses.

Most are struggling financially. Many have buildings that are too large for the everyday activity of their congregations. All have made commitments to their neighborhoods. All have decided that they must ally with other institutions in order to meet the needs of service-starved neighborhoods.

The first regional parish in Los Angeles, the Mid-Wilshire Parish, was organized in 1948 as a coordinating group for "grand men," pastors of Wilshire Boulevard's magnificent Protestant cathedrals. The group quickly expanded to include another "grand man," Rabbi Edgar Magnin, leader of another magnificent Wilshire Boulevard edifice, the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. In the 1950's, the pattern for what would later become a pluralism of regional parishes had already been set. The religious leaders of Wilshire Boulevard had already moved beyond their original intent to coordinate cathedral calendars to initiate a well-conceived program to provide housing for the area's senior citizens.

To some extent, the character of the Mid-Wilshire Parish appears to have remained constant. It still functions as a coordinating and planning group for the leaders of the area's large religious institutions. But the mission of the parish has

expanded. Parish leaders have organized Hope Net (an agency which provides food and housing services), the University of Los Angeles (which offers literacy services), and a counseling center. Lydia Martinez, Associate Minister for Hispanic Ministry at the First Congregational Church, who also works with immigrants from El Salvador in the adjacent Pico-Union area, describes the Mid-Wilshire Parish as a "gathering"—a group of religious institutions whose parishioners worship together and plan together for their neighborhood's economic, political, educational, housing, spiritual, and emotional well-being. The Parish, she explains, has a comprehensive vision. It refuses to draw boundaries between various dimensions of the region's life. The "gathering's" mission is "inclusive."

The Parish itself is now more inclusive, also. It no longer functions as an exclusive association of leaders from magnificent Protestant and Jewish edifices. Its activities now involve Unitarians, Muslims, and representatives from the area's Religious Science Church.

Just to the south, another comprehensive regional parish is in the making. The New City Parish is a coalition of five South Central Lutheran congregations, who have decided that they need each

other to meet the needs of their communities. They maintain a small office at their denomination's central headquarters. They employ a part-time office staff, and recently they have employed a full time director.

The New City Parish's long term goals are impressive. Its leaders intend to establish neighborhood Ministry Centers, that will provide food, health support, child care, counseling, and an information/agency referral service. They also intend to establish neighborhood education centers to offer preschool service, adult literacy and job training, youth business training for at-risk youth, tutorial services, and—ultimately—a new day school for students at the elementary, junior high, and senior high levels. They are already implementing programs to encourage the economic development of their neighborhoods.

The regional parish is an organizational form that makes sense. If, as the Religion and Civic Order Project has observed, churches, synagogues, and temples are increasingly functioning as community development agents in the central city, the regional parish encourages the possibility of economies of scale for participating religious institutions that are financially strapped. Neighborhood development programs do not have

to be reinvented in each and every religious institution. Individual churches, synagogues, and temples can enjoy the luxury of serving as neighborhood specialists (as, for example, Immanuel Presbyterian Church is doing in its "Heart of LA" youth program, which specializes in the arts). Religious institutions can plan together. They can pool their resources. Together they can do a far better job in assuming new community-oriented roles than they can do separately.



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