

*The University of Indianapolis
and Its Legacy of Service
1902-2002*

Crossings Project Booklet #1



By Frederick D. Hill

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Indiana Central University, renamed University of Indianapolis in 1986, was the third college to be founded in Indiana by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Hartsville College, the first, had failed after the denomination split in 1889. North Manchester College, the second, was sold to the Church of the Brethren in 1895.

Although Otterbein University in central Ohio and Westfield College in east central Illinois were eager to enroll the church's Indiana youth, they were judged by many to be unacceptably inconvenient because of their respective locations. At the same time, numerous parents and church leaders feared that if their young people enrolled in nearby colleges of other denominations they would abandon their United Brethren connections. They also feared that enrollment at state schools would undermine the Christian faith of the youth. Therefore, despite considerable internal opposition and indifference to higher education, by the turn of the century most of the church's leaders had come to believe in the necessity of a United Brethren college in Indiana.

For financial reasons, however, the prospects remained bleak until 1902 when William L. Elder, an Indianapolis realtor and land developer, came to the rescue. Four miles south of downtown Indianapolis, near the intersection of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Indianapolis, Columbus & Southern Traction Line, Elder was planning to develop a subdivision named Marion Heights. When he became aware of the effort to found a college, he offered to change the name of his proposed subdivision to University Heights; to name all the streets of the subdivision for United Brethren bishops, past or present; to donate eight acres of land for the college campus; and to erect \$40,000 worth of campus buildings. In return he asked the college's trustees to sell the remaining 446 building lots for him.

The White River and St. Joseph conferences of the United Brethren Church accepted Elder's offer in September 1902; the Indiana Conference joined the venture a year later. Indiana Central University was created by the Board of Trustees on October 6, 1902, and was chartered by the State of Indiana the next day. The first building lot was sold on November 4, 1902, and a single \$40,000 building was erected in 1904. In the fall of 1905 the University opened its doors to seventy-four students.

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Although the United Brethren Church in Indiana finally had a centrally located and easily accessible college of its own, many tasks had been left for the trustees to do. For example, the gift had not included funds for the cleanup of construction debris, for interior decorating, or for the purchase of furnishings for the new building. By the time school opened in 1905, Indiana Central was \$2,000 in debt. With the addition of fifty acres to the campus in 1922 and the construction of four dormitories and a gymnasium between 1921 and 1926, the debt rose to \$300,000. Students came, however, and the college enrolled 517 students in 1935—a record that stood for two decades.

Repeatedly threatened with lawsuits and foreclosures by creditors large and small, the first three presidents of Indiana Central became masters of debt management. They purchased frugally; spent endowment monies; ignored or made false promises to creditors holding open accounts, including faculty members whose salaries were rarely paid in full; deferred routine maintenance of the physical plant; and refinanced secured indebtedness as necessary.

In 1927, Railroadmen's Building and Loan Association loaned Indiana Central \$190,000, allowing the University to consolidate all of its debts. After this loan was paid down to \$180,000, it rose to \$240,000 through the accumulation of unpaid interest at the rate of \$14,000 per year. In 1934 Railroadmen's agreed to scale the debt back to the original \$190,000, to charge no interest on the loan, and to extend the term for twenty more years. The final payment was made in January of 1945, about ten years before it was due. Thus Indiana Central survived the Great Depression and World War II.

In 1956, after more than a decade of aggressive image-building and fund-raising, the college broke ground for a new Academic Hall, the first new building on the campus in thirty years. During the 1960s the college erected five new buildings and razed the forty-year-old "temporary" gymnasium. Since then the college has looked only upward and forward. In thirty-one years (1970-2001) it razed three dormitories from the 1920s, saw another burn to the ground, erected ten buildings, renovated and remodeled five (two of them twice), and gave the campus a new appearance by moving the central parking lot and re-landscaping the entire campus.

Fiscal progress and enrollment growth provide further evidence that the University of Indianapolis is thriving. Between 1970 and 2001 improvements in the physical plant raised the University's capital value from \$8,430,364 to \$77,680,017. Net assets grew from \$10,492,574 to \$106,288,605. Annual operating expenses that totaled \$3,136,620 in the 1969-70 fiscal year rose to \$38,537,796 thirty years later, while student financial aid increased from \$359,998 to \$8,911,858. The Endowment Fund experienced the most phenomenal growth, from \$1,113,292 to \$60,303,125. In each category more than half of the increase occurred between 1990 and 2000.

Between 1970 and 2000 the enrollment balance shifted from part-time to full-time, and by 1995 the latter exceeded the former. Whether measured by head-count or by full-time equivalence, student enrollment had grown decade by decade. In the fall of 1970 the Indianapolis campus registered 2,456 students, and in 2000 the number was 3,418. Full-time equivalents of these dates were 1,544 and 2,820. [*Editor's note. "Full-time equivalents" is a measure that allows part-time students to be converted to full-time.*] At branch campuses established on Cyprus in the middle 1980s and in Athens, Greece, in 1992, the combined enrollment was 90 in 1992 and 748 in 2000. The 2001-2002 academic year opened with 3,489 students registered at the Indianapolis campus with a full-time equivalent of 2,898.

Fortunately, the administration and the Board of Trustees did not confuse means and ends. They recognized that residence halls and dining rooms, libraries and laboratories, athletic fields and exercise facilities, parking lots and a beautifully landscaped campus are only means. The "ends," as revealed in the University's statement of philosophy, mission, and purpose, are to "prepare its graduates for effective, responsible, and articulate membership in the complex society in which they live and serve, and for excellence and leadership in their personal and professional lives" (*2001-2002 Catalog*, pp. 4-5). Though occasionally reworded, these ends are in reality as old as the University.

Although the University of Indianapolis motto, "Education for Service," is only a little more than fifty years old, its essence can be traced to the nineteenth century. In 1888 the White River Conference of the United Brethren Church affirmed the role of church colleges in "elevating both the ministry and laity to a higher and more effective sphere of usefulness in the service of the master" (*White River Conference Journal*, 1888, pp. 7, 18). A few years later the conference led the movement that culminated in the opening of Indiana Central University in 1905.

In 1908 President John T. Roberts, in brief remarks prior to the conferring of the first degrees, used the word "service" five times, including his declaration that "life's richest blessings are found in service" ("Talk to the Graduating Class of 1908," U of I archives). Two years later President Lewis D. Bonebrake closed his commencement address with this appeal: "In the name of education I bid you...to go forth imbued with the spirit that you are each his brother's keeper, and that each has a work to do in making the grand sweet song of civilization" ("Training for Supremacy," 1910, U of I archives).

During his twenty-nine-year tenure, President I. J. Good repeatedly spoke and wrote of society's need for service-oriented Christian citizens in the homes, schools, churches, civic affairs, and businesses of every community. In 1947 President I. Lynd Esch said, "We seek to build a continuing structure of minds adequately trained and lives spiritually motivated for unselfish Christian service" (*Oracle*, 1947, p.8).

"The Essential Difference," a brochure published in 1951, documents the success of the service legacy. At the conclusion of a public meeting addressed by President Esch, a stranger approached President Esch and introduced himself. He was neither an alumnus nor Evangelical United Brethren, but he had been superintendent of schools in a southern Indiana city for thirty-eight years. "I employed many teachers," he said, "but of all the teachers I employed those who were graduates of Indiana Central College gave the best service. They not only served well in the classroom but they were willing to be of real service in the community as well. Your school gives them a spirit of service which they do not seem to get in other schools" ("The Essential Difference," ICC, *Bulletin* [44:1], Mar 1, 1951).

In 1962 the College's statement of purposes was revised in order to clarify and facilitate their implementation. A newly expressed purpose was to "lead students toward an ... acknowledgment that man realizes his essential humanness in the giving of his talents in service of others" (*ICC Catalog, 1962-64*, pp. 11-12). Although reviewed by the faculty from time to time with the intent to revise it, the 1962 statement remained in place for twenty-six years. By then the University's name had been changed; new departments of instruction had been added; graduate programs had been created; and the faculty had taken on a new face as a result of rising enrollment, program expansion, and the replacement of retirees. Nevertheless, when the statement of purpose was revised in 1988, most of the changes were literary. The service theme remained, and remains, firmly in place.

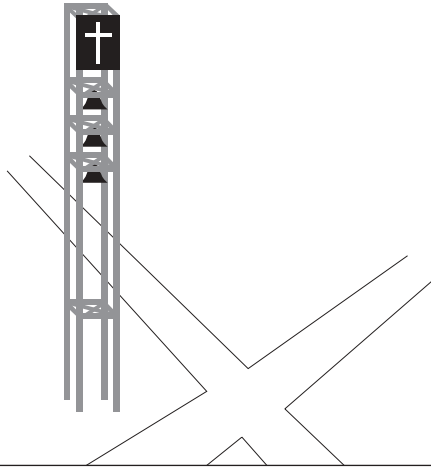
Each president has promoted the legacy of service in his own way. President Roberts offered correspondence courses to those for whom on-campus study was not possible. President Bonebrake initiated summer school in 1910. In the 1920s President Good offered extension courses in both Hamilton and Madison counties northeast of Indianapolis. In 1954 President Esch opened the Evening Division to “provide to all persons within commuting distance of the college, who cannot register for regular day classes, the opportunity to advance their professional, vocational or cultural status” (ICC Brochure, “Evening Division, 1954-55.” Extended Programs, Registrar’s Papers). Indiana Central became the first college in Indianapolis to offer a baccalaureate degree through evening studies exclusively.

In recent decades, under the leadership of President Gene E. Sease, President G. Benjamin Lantz, Jr., and President Jerry Israel, the University has launched many community service programs; a few are described below. In 1976 the “Give Yourself Credit” program was created to help persons who wanted to begin or resume collegiate studies but were apprehensive about the pressures of a campus atmosphere. The only admission requirement was a high school diploma or its equivalent, and the courses were offered in a church or a community center in a residential neighborhood. One could earn up to fifteen hours of credit as he or she eased into college work and gained confidence before setting foot on campus. Since 1985, graduates of Emma Donnan Middle School, located near the campus, have been guaranteed a financial aid package that will meet all of their financial needs if they attend U of I. Thirty to fifty percent of the package is a gift, and students who show interest receive encouragement and support from the University’s Student Affairs staff from the time they enroll at Emma Donnan until they graduate from the University.

Since 1997 the “University’s Bridge from High School to College” program has been working with students who are, but do not believe themselves to be, capable of attaining a college degree. The Bridge program director works with interested students in eight area high schools to encourage them in their academic preparation for college; to assure them of the availability of financial aid; and to help them believe that a college education for them is both desirable and possible. The director continues to encourage and assist those who enroll at the University of Indianapolis throughout their undergraduate years and during the placement process.

Since 1998 the Community Programs Center, an outgrowth of the 1977 Office of Community Services, has been a valuable resource for volunteers, would-be volunteers, and faculty who want to design service-learning experiences for their classes. It also coordinates both the new academic minor, “Civic Engagement and Community Leadership,” and the University’s partnerships with various community centers in the area. The Lantz Center for Christian Vocations, founded in 1998, prepares laypersons, especially youth, to live Christian lives personally and in their vocations, whatever their calling.

On June 17, 1908, President Roberts challenged the graduating class and all who attended the first commencement with his declaration that “life’s richest blessings are found in service.” The challenge was accepted and the legacy was born. The concept of service is deeply rooted in the heritage of the University of Indianapolis and is alive and well at the beginning of its second century. It is both a benchmark from the past and a beacon for the future, a legacy **from** preceding generations and **for** those yet to come. □



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