

## GOD WOULD TAKE CARE OF ME

By A. James Fuller & Rebecca Blair '80



A

# *Roy H. Turley '20*

The Rev. Dr. Roy Turley is a legend in the history of the University of Indianapolis. A graduate of Indiana Central College in 1920, he went on to a long career of ministry as a preacher, missionary, and administrator. Throughout his years of service, Dr. Turley exemplified the practical meaning of the college values. He leaned on his Christian faith, believing that no matter what the situation, "God would take care of me."

Born in 1896, Roy H. Turley was raised on a farm near Harrison City, Indiana. He attended a one-room schoolhouse before moving on to Corydon High School. After his graduation in 1914, he took the train to Indianapolis, the farthest Turley had ever traveled from home, to attend a twelve-week summer teacher's training course at Indiana Central College. This program, which prepared students to take the state teaching examination, was designed to help fill the statewide need for qualified educators.



B

After teaching for a couple of years and continuing to take summer courses at the college, Turley decided to pursue a degree full-time in 1917, enrolling for the spring semester. With U.S. involvement in World War I looming large, however, he opted to quit school to go home to be with his family in case he might have to become a soldier. When his concerns about the war did not materialize, Turley returned to Indiana Central in the fall where he majored in math and physics. He was given credit for his previous coursework and was admitted as a sophomore. In fact, President Good asked him to teach in the Academy, which was then operating at the college. Designed for students who had dropped out or never gone to high school, the Academy was especially attractive to ministerial students who were behind in their preparation for college. So, Turley threw himself into his studies and teaching at the college, living close by with a University Heights family since the campus contained little student housing. Not only did his external life follow the typical pattern for Indiana Central students of this time period, but his internal vocation life did as well.



C

During his senior year, Turley felt a call to the ministry. He had thought about preaching before, but worried that he couldn't make a living doing it. He enjoyed teaching and had experience in that field. Indeed, he already had several job offers waiting for him after graduation in 1920. But in his final year of college, he took a course called "A Synopsis of the Bible" taught by the pastor of the University Heights United Brethren Church. Turley, like most of the students, attended the church and enjoyed a close relationship with the pastor, Reverend S. E. Long. In the course, the pastor "stressed the fact that God made provision for his own." As he listened to lectures, read, and studied, Roy became "convinced that if God could care for his people across the centuries, He would take care of me if I surrendered my will to Him and became a minister." This vocational understanding came to him clearly one night in his room, overwhelming him. The young man went out into the night and knelt down in the middle of Castle Avenue, named for the United Brethren bishop who had discerned a similar straightforward call to ministry, where he began to pray about God's calling for his life. It was there in the street that he affirmed his vocation to become a minister.

Like so many other young men from Indiana Central, Turley went on to Bonebrake Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. And, like most who attended the seminary, he was appointed to preach as a student pastor, which gave him valuable experience. He graduated from seminary in 1923. In the same year, he married his wife, Ola. The couple was blessed with four children before her untimely death in 1936. The loss of his wife left him with a young family to care for. Turley soon married his second wife, Vesta, in 1937. By that time, he was an established minister.

While still in seminary, the bishop appointed Turley to serve two small, rural congregations near Muncie, Indiana. Following his graduation from Bonebrake, he moved to the First United Brethren Church in Hartford City, one of the largest and most influential churches in the conference at the time. There, he found the church divided over various issues, including whether or not to build a new building and the role of the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK was at the height of its power in Indiana at the time as it strove for respectability by portraying itself as a patriotic organization that supported American values. Riding the wave of nationalism following World War I as well as a social impulse to join clubs and societies, members of the Klan soon reached the pinnacle of power. The most famous Klansman in Indiana was Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson, who organized the KKK in the state and served as a political powerbroker in the early 1920s.

In Indiana, the Klan was less concerned about race than immigration, its rhetoric more anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic than anti-black. The rise of the Klan divided many Protestant congregations, as some saw it as a pro-Christian organization and others decried it as an evil, destructive force in society. Klan members often held prominent positions in society, politics, and the church, making the issue an important one



at the time young Roy Turley entered the ministry. Despite some tense moments, God did provide in this crisis, guiding Turley as he worked to heal the divisions, keeping the Klan at bay, and building a new church building during his nine-year tenure. His efforts to contain Klan influence were greatly helped by the downfall of Stephenson, who was convicted of murder. The resulting scandal took most of the steam out of the Klan's momentum, relegating it to a lesser role statewide.

Although he was quite successful at Hartford City, the strain of service proved too much for Turley. In 1932, he suffered a nervous breakdown in the pulpit and had to be moved to a smaller congregation. He took a church in Muncie for three years, which allowed him to recover from his breakdown. In 1935, the bishop requested that he assume the pastorate at the University Heights Church. Rev. Turley did not want the job. The congregation was divided, one contributing aspect to the church's reputation for short pastorates. Most of the problems stemmed from the church's location right next to the campus of Indiana Central College. Pastors found themselves

overshadowed by the forceful presence of President I. J. Good as well as other college faculty and administrators. Furthermore, while the students were an active part of the congregation, this influx of part-time congregants brought constant change in the makeup of the body. In short, some of the local members generally resented the power of the college over the church. The bishop wanted Turley to go to University Heights because he had served as the chair of the finance committee for the college and was an alumnus of the school. The conference officials hoped that he might be able to heal the divisions and bring unity by working with the college rather than against it, while still having the respect of the local membership.

He took the job and set out to sort through the conflicts. His ministerial service continued into World War II when he was asked to serve on the local Draft Board. Some difficult decisions arose for him in this role, as he was asked to decide the draft status of young men who attended the college or were members of his own church. Somehow, with God's help, Turley managed to carry out this service without alienating the community. The war years also brought more difficulties with the college. The campus was home to airmen seeking academic training, so the administration consulted with Turley about designing a ministry to meet the needs of the servicemen. Before any consensus could be reached, however, President Good, known for his autocratic ways, made the decision himself, inviting others to fulfill these special ministerial duties. As University historian Dr. Fred Hill has shown, Turley took this action as a personal slight and actively worked to replace Good as president of the college. When Good left the presidency in 1944, Turley sat on the committee that oversaw the interim administration, supporting the candidacy of the new president, Dr. I. Lynd Esch.



It was not always an easy task, but Turley managed to restore a sense of unity between the college and the University Heights church, remaining in ministry there for seventeen years. After World War II, Turley realized the influx of GI Bill students was changing the cultural and religious diversity of campus life. To address this challenge he invited engaged couples to marriage classes at the Heights Church. The response was slow, but the effects “for better or for worse” could have been a long-range service.

His successful ministerial leadership at the church won Turley a reputation for diplomacy, leading to new fields of endeavor farther afield. In 1952, he left Indiana to become the administrator of the Española Hospital in New Mexico. This was a mission hospital supported by the United Brethren Church, which had become an important training ground for many Indiana Central graduates who sought careers as nurses or missionaries. Dr. Turley served there for thirteen years, initiating a period of expansion at the hospital. He did not find the transition easy, as he had to learn the ropes of an entirely new job. He found that being the hospital administrator was a balancing act, as he juggled the interests of patients and their families with the concerns of the staff, church, and community. The hospital served a poor community that was very diverse, including some Anglos, but mostly Hispanic and Native American constituents. This diversity brought opportunities for service, to be sure, but also many challenges for the preacher from Indiana.

Despite his trepidation, Turley proved to be an able administrator and fundraiser. In 1953, shortly after his arrival, he oversaw the construction of a new pediatric wing, which was built in response to the needs of the community. In 1958–59, he helped to



secure a Ford Foundation Grant of \$50,000 that was used to remodel the small hospital kitchen as well as build a new cafeteria, new business offices, a chapel, and laboratory facilities. Since the grant represented only seed money, Turley worked hard to secure the total amount of \$165,000. His fundraising abilities were useful again in 1960 as he raised \$100,000 to build a new obstetrics wing for the hospital. In 1958, he served as president of the New Mexico State Hospital Association, a position that signified the prestige he had gained from his dedicated work on behalf of the Española Hospital. Moreover, during his tenure at the hospital, Turley encouraged dozens of Indiana Central students to come work at Española. Some spent a summer or two while some came after graduation to start their nursing careers there. Dr. Turley’s kindness and able leadership helped them adjust to their new surroundings and guided them in their own vocational paths.

Ever attentive to God’s calling and care, Dr. Turley left Española, retiring and returning to Indiana in 1965. Even in retirement, he remained active, serving as associate pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Hartford City, where he had once been senior pastor. He continued in that position until 1978. By that time, Dr. Turley was something of a legend, so much so that friends encouraged him to write his autobiography, titled, *Never Wanting Any Good Thing: My Life Story*. Throughout the book, he points to the fact that, despite the challenges he faced, God had always taken care of him. He never wanted for anything and did not regret his decision made that fateful day in 1920, when he knelt down in the street and took up God’s call for his life.

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- B (p. 71) Roy H. Turley from *The Oracle* (1920). Photograph used with permission of the Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- C (p. 71) Roy H. Turley and his wife, Vesta, on sidewalk near University Heights Evangelical United Brethren Church (ca. 1939). Photograph used with permission of University Heights United Methodist Church.
- D (p. 72) Roy H. Turley and other students from *The Oracle* (1920). Photograph used with permission of the Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- E (p. 73) Roy H. Turley and his wife, Vesta. Family photograph provided by Shirley Turley, daughter-in-law of Roy Turley, used with her permission.