A Flourishing Congregation is... 

What are the characteristics of a flourishing faith community? Our decade of work with hundreds of congregations of every tradition and size has taught us that flourishing congregations aren’t defined by the number of persons in the pews or the location of the congregation. Congregations that flourish—and we’ve encountered scores—are those whose leaders and members fully embrace their missions and enthusiastically live out their callings.

In this year’s annual report we visit five congregations from throughout Indiana that are flourishing in their unique ways. As different as they are in location, beliefs, and worship practices, they share two characteristics. First, they are building on their strengths and assets as they envision their future. Second, they have invited the Indianapolis Center for Congregations to walk alongside them as they select tools and techniques, resources and methods to help them in their efforts.

The featured congregations are representative of the record number that we’ve collaborated with this year. In 2007 we handled 862 new cases, an increase of almost 100 over the previous year. Some of these cases merely required a quick referral or a word of advice; others touched off dialogues that continue to unfold. Our constituency has expanded and is as diverse as the religious landscape of Indiana. We currently serve long-established mainline congregations, nondenominational mega churches and start-up groups that meet in storefront settings.

Among this year’s highlights:

• Our strong affiliation with the Alban Institute continued, made evident in a tangible way with the release of Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Ministry. Written by three staff members here at the Center and published by our friends at Alban, the book draws from our work with more than 300 congregations on issues related to facility construction, renovation, and expansion. Our shared hope is that the congregations featured in Holy Places will serve as models to other faith communities that are undertaking building projects.

• We hosted a hands-on educational experience called Flourishing Congregations that introduced teams from more than 50 congregations to a concept called “positive change processes.” The conference was so successful that we produced and will distribute a DVD and workbook that capture the content of the gathering. For congregations in the northern part of the state, our Fort Wayne office will offer a similar Flourishing Congregations conference in April 2008.

• With support from our funder, Lilly Endowment, we stepped up our educational services in the southern part of Indiana. Congregations in that region welcomed us warmly, responded to our events with enthusiasm, and applauded our decision to establish a permanent presence. We anticipate opening a satellite office in Evansville sometime in the summer of 2008, with a Flourishing Congregations gathering to follow in September.

• Our new major grant initiative, Life Together—Thinking and Acting Strategically, invited leaders from 30 congregations to attend a series of classes to prepare them to design strategic plans. After they complete their long-range plans they will be eligible to apply for implementation grants of up to $30,000. We will report more fully on their progress in next year’s report.

Now in its second decade of service, the Indianapolis Center is well on its way to creating a network of support that will reach every region of the state. We see this effort as collegial, shaped by the congregations that we’ve served and informed by the experiences that we’ve shared. Our goal is to help strengthen all Indiana faith communities as they fully embrace their missions and enthusiastically live out their calls.

Timothy Shapiro  
President

Folding chairs, stacked at the back of the sanctuary, accommodate the overflow crowd of worshippers who gather each Sunday at Northside New Era Missionary Baptist Church in Indianapolis. Since Pastor Clarence Moore arrived in 1990, the congregation has grown from 60 to 1,400 members, causing the shortage of seating and prompting the addition of a second service. “We’ve come a long way,” Moore says modestly. To make room for an expanding choir and multimedia equipment, he has rearranged the altar and swapped the bulky wooden pulpit for a slim Plexiglas model. He jokes that he’s keeping improvements to a minimum because “I don’t want people to be too comfortable; then I can’t get them to go to the next level—a new sanctuary.”

The “next level” is already underway. The congregation is adding a 22,000-square-foot addition that will provide classrooms, offices, and a daycare center to serve neighbors as well as commuters who pass the church daily en route to downtown Indianapolis. In a strategic move, the church gradually has purchased more than 30 homes that surround church property. For now, the cleared area offers much-needed parking space. Eventually it will be the site of a new sanctuary:

“This was a community church in the old days,” explains Moore. “People would walk out their doors and down to church. Then the highway came through, a lot of businesses left, and the neighborhood changed. As our congregation grew, we thought we’d have to relocate, but the Lord said, ‘Stay. We did, and that was when the projects started opening up to us.”

Currently the church is developing a long-range plan for its future. Moore and lay leader Willie Horsley have assembled a team to reassemble the church in the Indianapolis Center for Congregations’ major grant initiative, Life Together—Thinking and Acting Strategically. Moore welcomed the initiative as a way to involve the full membership in the planning process. “In the African-American church the pastor typically casts the vision and the people follow,” he explains. “I wanted the congregation to help me develop the strategy that will accomplish the vision. I’m taking a risk because I may hear some things I didn’t want to hear, but this is more about the ministry than it is about me.”

Congregations on the brink

McCordsville United Methodist Church is one of several Hoosier congregations with long, and proud histories that are adjusting to change and taking steps to refocus their missions and live out their calls in the 21st century. To help them in their decision-making, they’ve asked the Center for Congregations to walk with them as they use innovative tools to respond to the opportunities and challenges they encounter in their journeys.

McCordsville United Methodist Church

“Last summer we received a grant from the Center to help us figure out what God is calling our church to be,” says the Rev. John Myland, pastor of McCordsville United Methodist Church. The church building, dedicated in 1922, is located in the center of McCordsville, a one-sleepy town that is experiencing a population explosion because of its proximity to Indianapolis. Long-time church members were aware of the changes occurring around them, understood that their vintage facility couldn’t keep pace with the surge, but weren’t sure how to respond. “They knew if we didn’t do something to be part of the growth of the community, we’d be passed by,” says Myland.

The church’s physical shortcomings range from limited seating in the sanctuary to tiny classrooms, narrow halls and multiple steps that are difficult to navigate for older members. The congregation considered and rejected the options of demolishing the structure or relocating to a site outside of town. Myland, a former Indianapolis business executive newly called to the ministry, had barely settled into his pastoral role when church trustees presented their wish list that included a fellowship hall, elevator, new narthex and handicapped-accessible restrooms. “I remember saying something like, ‘This might cost $5 million’... and nobody batted an eye.”

With assistance from a consultant and an architect, church members completed a strategic plan, conducted
Creating a new story

Although separated by more than 200 miles, St. Paul’s United Church of Christ and the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation share several characteristics with McCombville United Methodist Church. Both were founded in the mid-1800s to serve small farming communities, both are located a short distance from a large city—Evanston for one, Indianapolis for the other—and both are using Center for Congregations’ resources as they prepare for new eras of ministry. In addition, both congregations are “graying,” and members recognize the need to initiate change if their churches are to flourish in the future as they have in the past.

All the resources that I’ve accumulated from the Center for Congregations in the last couple of years have been with an eye toward helping us work through a visioning process,” explains the Rev. Dan Sather, senior pastor at St. Paul’s for almost five years. “Our members need to create a new story for themselves because the story they are living out today isn’t as relevant to younger families as it once was. We have a core group of people who are willing to work, but they aren’t going to stay if we don’t have forward movement.”

Sather became acquainted with the Center when he visited the website of Alban Institute, which provided information about how to become a post-modern church. He made contact with Center President Tim Shapiro and began acquiring resources and attending Center education events in Indianapolis, Louisville and Evanston. Particularly helpful were Holy Conversations, which explores the strategic planning process, and Beyond the Ordinary, which focuses on identifying a congregation’s strengths and building on them.

At every event that Sather attended he was accompanied by a sizable delegation from the congregation. Hearing experts present new concepts and explain the rationale for the concepts boosted members’ acceptance. “I’ve found that people are very open to progressive ideas when they are informed of the ‘why’ behind the ideas,” notes Sather. “Then they’re likely to say ‘Yes, that makes sense; I can get on board with that.’”

A history of welcoming

“To say there is a lot going on at Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation (IHC) would be an understatement,” is the way IHC president Mike Kirschner characterizes 2007. A year after celebrating their congregation’s 150th anniversary, members are streamlining the temple’s governing board structure, considering a major remodeling project and preparing for a capital campaign drive. Grants from the Indianapolis Center for Congregations have supported IHC’s strategic planning and organizational development processes, and the Center’s Sacred Space DVD has offered guidance to initiate change.

“We showed the DVD at a meeting attended by a lot of people,” recalls Rabbi Jon Adland. “It laid out the process—discern, decide, do—and helped us get to our current place. We’ve been through the discerning phase and are at the decision phase.”

A Center-sponsored workshop called The Welcoming Congregation, conducted at IHC and led by visionary Jewish educator Dr. Ron Wolin, also has influenced the difficult decision to fire facility faces. The challenge of creating a warm and welcoming environment in a 50-year-old building that has undergone various renovations prompted discussions about moving out of the city and into the suburbs. The idea was “very enticing,” according to Adland, who admits he was captivated by the notion of designing a new building that precisely fits the needs of the city’s oldest and the state’s largest temple. Two factors changed his mind.

“Interestingly, the kids in the congregation sent a letter to the board saying they didn’t want to move even though most of them live north, in another zip code,” says Adland. Second, members knew that “once you have a Meridian Street address you shouldn’t give it up. If we moved, there would be no visible Jewish presence in Indianapolis.”

Neighboring congregations applauded the temple’s decision to stay. IHC has a long history of collaboration with nearby faith communities and often serves as the catalyst for joint projects that transcend religious traditions. The temple recently launched a “senior university” for retirees of all faiths to gather and study topics of interest, and members made headlines this year when they hosted their first Easter service. The historic event occurred after Adland heard that neighboring St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was under renovation during Christian holy week. He contacted the rector and offered the use of the Hebrew sanctuary.

“About 20 members of our congregation came and served as greeters, and then I made breakfast,” recalls Adland, who sat in on the service, admits it seemed “odd” to see a cross at the front of the temple, but describes the occasion as a resounding success. “There was a big crowd; they have an amazing choir, and they even brought their own organ.”

Poised for change

The same kind of hospitality that is evident along Meridian Street in Indianapolis is present on Reed Road in Fort Wayne. A parking lot of 24 acres, Joseph United Methodist Church reads: “Where visitors are expected.” Guests this year have included a group of 35 Kenyans who were looking for a place to conduct worship services in their native Swahili language. St. Joseph’s members welcomed the East Africans and opened their sanctuary to them on Sunday afternoons.

Now, the former guests are a full part of the church, according to Senior Pastor Russ Abel. “We see the possibility of this ministry becoming the center for the Kenyan community in Fort Wayne.”

Abel joined the staff a year ago and has found the Center for Congregations helpful as he has experienced two transitions. The first was personal—moving from a town of 7,500 residents in southwestern Indiana to a city of 200,000 in the northeastern portion of the state. Brian Wilwer, who directs the Center’s satellite office in Fort Wayne, was among the first to welcome him to Allen County. “When I came here I didn’t know anyone,” he says. “The Center has provided a sort of networking hub.”

The second transition relates to his leadership role at the 800-member congregation. The church is at a pivotal point in its long and successful history. Members have spent several months looking at the church’s mission statement and talking about creating a vision for the future. Abel says, “Although ‘change is built into the congregation’s DNA,’ members are determined to take their time and act thoughtfully and deliberately. ‘We want to step back and ask, ‘What does God want our church to look like in five years?’ Once we get that picture, we can ask, ‘Does our mission statement continue to lead us toward that?’”

In preparation for a new era of ministry, the congregation has purchased 30 acres of land across the street from the church’s current location. Members have watched the Center’s Sacred Space DVD and are anticipating the upcoming Finishing Congregations event sponsored by the Center’s northeast office. All of these educational efforts will help inform their future decisions. “I think within six months or so we’re going to have a clear picture of where we want to be,” says Abel. “We expect the picture to include the property across the street and, in time, a new building. For now, we want to make sure our mission is first and that the building supports the mission rather than the mission supporting the building. We want to get everything in the right order.”

The Center is also a partner in the process—a unique resource that operates beyond and between denominations. “We face all the challenges and opportunities,” he says. “The Center is the place where we become connected.”

St. Paul’s United Church of Christ

Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation

St. Joseph United Methodist Church

Paul’s United Church of Christ
Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation
St. Joseph United Methodist Church
Financial Report

The following is summary of the statement of financial position and the statement of activities of the Center as of December 31, 2007 and for the year then ended. This financial information was extracted from the audited financial statements of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, Inc. It does not, however, include all disclosures normally associated with financial statements prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles. The complete financial statements, including footnotes and the report of our auditors, BKD, LLP, are available upon request.

### Summary Statement of Financial Position

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| **Liabilities**                 |      |      |
| Accounts payable                | 81,648 | 81,648 |
| Accrued expenses                | 47,073 | 47,073 |
| Total liabilities               | 128,721 | 128,721 |

| **Net Assets**                  |      |      |
| Compiled                       | 34,410,767 | 34,410,767 |
| Less: Restricted                | 34,410,767 | 34,410,767 |
| Net assets                      | 0       | 0     |

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### Summary Statement of Activities

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<td><strong>Revenues and Other Support</strong></td>
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<td>Total</td>
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| **Change in Net Assets** | 472,419 | 472,419 |

| **Net Assets, Beginning of Year** | 15,403,827 | 15,403,827 |
| **Net Assets, End of Year** | 34,410,767 | 34,410,767 |

**Notes to Financial Statements** – The Center’s net assets are derived from an operating grant for year 2005-2006 and satellite operations grant for years 2005-2015 from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. These assets are recorded as temporarily restricted net assets as they are used by the Center has been limited by the donor for the quarter for the period 2005-2015. Net assets are released from temporary restrictions by incoming expenses satisfying the restricted purposes or by occurrence of other events specified by grants during the years 2005-2010.
Mission
The mission of the Center for Congregations is to help strengthen Indiana congregations by helping them find and use the best resources available to address the challenges and issues they identify — and then to share what we learn nationwide.

Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. Affiliated with the Alban Institute

The Indianapolis Center for Congregations is a supporting organization of the Alban Institute. Alban is a research, publishing, education, and consulting organization based in Herndon, Virginia. Founded in 1974, Alban is an independent center of learning and leadership development with a focus on congregations.

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Acknowledgements

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