"Something Decent and Daring Must Be Done"
Toward an Integrated Church

Upon returning to the United States in 1935, twenty-nine-year-old Maurice McCrackin spent several weeks visiting relatives en route to Monmouth, hoping his depression would lift before he returned to his mother and aunt. He was discouraged about the way his missionary work had ended and oppressed by an almost overwhelming sense of the suffering of the world. Against these pressures he felt powerless and ineffective. It is possible that he had inherited a tendency toward periodic depressions from his father, who had also suffered from bouts of melancholy. At this, the low point in his life, he needed the closeness of family and the predictability of the Monmouth setting to renew his spirit. And he needed to consider the direction his ministry would take.

After several months of rest, McCrackin was able to serve a Presbyterian parish in the village of Kirkwood, just seven miles from Monmouth. Kirkwood, where his mother had been born and raised, had the reputation of being a very religious community. Some people there were so literal in their interpretation of biblical injunctions that legends grew up about their piety. The word "Sunday," for instance, would not be used by the faithful of Kirkwood because it referred to a pagan god; "Sabbath" was the preferred term.\footnote{There is an apocryphal story--a rather typical McCrackin tale--that a matron from Kirkwood one day went into the drugstore and ordered a "chocolate Sabbath." Kirkwood Presbyterian was the Reverend McCrackin's first church, and he took his responsibilities as preacher seriously. His early sermons there, written by hand or typed on small sheets of notebook paper, tended to be biblically based. Many concerned the centrality of the family for developing moral character in children. Family discipline and family love were presented as the basis for participation in the redemption of the larger world.}
In one sermon of the 1930s, McCrackin expanded on the theme of Christian living. Christians are to concern themselves with the whole of life and not their own individual souls, he said.\(^2\) Remembering that our souls are only "temporarily equipped with bodies," we should nevertheless concern ourselves with matters of this life. Although individual salvation is not enough, "social salvation" as envisioned during the Russian Revolution is also not enough. "Social change is the only condition under which individual salvation can be realized and . . . it is the fruit of salvation." Social change in America was going to be the new pastor's mission. In 1935 such ideas meshed well with New Deal philosophy, although McCrackin was certainly more inspired by the church's teaching than by political ideology.

On November 28, 1937, at Kirkwood Presbyterian, the Reverend McCrackin delivered a sermon on prophecy. He stressed God's call to the Israelites through Hosea and others, saying that everything hinged on people's choice to accept or reject God's way of life. When we do not follow God's laws, God suffers with us. And then McCrackin expounded on one of his consistent themes: "The individual must be redeemed and the society must be redeemed. There is not a social gospel and a personal gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus." We cannot redeem murderers by executing them, nor can we redeem young people without providing wholesome recreation, drinkers without closing taverns, exploiters of child labor without boycotting their businesses. "Re redeeming love," said McCrackin, "is a love which in forgiving an offender changes him."\(^3\)

Although the sermons developed grand themes, McCrackin's work in the church was built on common friendship and the day-to-day details of pastoral service. McCrackin then, as later in his ministry, put his primary effort into building strong personal relationships. He was especially proud of building up the Kirkwood youth group by stressing healthy fun as well as serious study. When the youngsters played "Murder," their pastor joined in with them as they ranged around a darkened room waiting to be touched--"killed"--by the person designated the murderer. When McCrackin was selected he took on grotesque postures that set them all to laughing when the lights came on. Some adults in the congregation were not so easily amused. The experience at Kirkwood introduced McCrackin to congregational politics and denominational pettiness. There were rival Presbyterian congregations in town, one United Presbyterian, one Presbyterian U.S.A. McCrackin would sometimes preach on the idea of church union, since each congregation was struggling financially. Once a member of his congregation offered to pay for a new roof if he would stop preaching about church union, but he refused to be bribed. Cooperation in the work of the Lord was a theme McCrackin would embrace from that time forward, even as petty squabbles and divisions festered around him.

\(^2\) 
\(^3\)
McCrackin enjoyed his service in Kirkwood, but he also hungered for a more self-sacrificing ministry. He was drawn, for example, by the life of Toyohiko Kagawa, a Japanese Christian who lived and worked among the poor in downtown Tokyo.\textsuperscript{4} When Kagawa spoke in Peoria, McCrackin drove over to hear him and returned with much to think about. Kagawa had given up wealth and health to serve the poor, yet he retained a wonderful sense of humor. He joked about his Japanese accent, saying that when he pronounced the word "denomination," some people mistook it for "damnation." That was Kagawa's way of saying that the work of Jesus, rather than the theologies of denominations, should be the primary focus of Christians. Keeping Kagawa's example and words in mind, McCrackin spent two years in Kirkwood and then accepted a call from a United Presbyterian church in the Hessville section of Hammond, Indiana.

Hessville, a residential community of blue-collar oil refinery and steel mill workers set near the sooty, smoke-belching factories of Hammond, represented a dramatic change from the prairie village of Kirkwood. America was in the depths of the Great Depression, and industrial regions like Hammond were profoundly blighted. The members of McCrackin's church there had made up for this by being especially clever in the way they had designed and furnished their new church building. It was made almost entirely of used or recycled materials and built with their own labor.

Shortly after her son moved to Hessville, Bessie McCrackin decided to retire from the boarding house business. Now the house she shared with her sister would be too large for the two of them. As they talked over plans for selling the house, it occurred to the young minister that it would be unwise for his mother and aunt to stay in Monmouth. His brother and sister were still abroad in Africa, and there would be no close family member in Monmouth to look after the older women should they need help. Besides, he didn't have a hostess in the manse in Hammond. Why couldn't his mother and aunt join him there? The two women readily embraced the idea of moving to Indiana, and they soon created at Hessville a very lively household. His mother and his aunt participated fully in the activities of the church and provided the necessary domestic support for McCrackin's civic and social involvement.

Many of McCrackin's sermons at the time took note of the economic conditions around him and called attention to the signs of impending war: economic hardships worldwide, pogroms against Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe, and the universal build-up of armaments. In one sermon, he lamented the dishonesty of advertising, especially when the products exploited the workers who made them. He advocated cooperatives, businesses owned by the workers, citing many successful examples in Europe and noting that Sherwood Eddy, the speaker who had inspired him as a youth, had purchased 2,100 acres of land as a cooperative for twenty-four sharecroppers in the South. McCrackin felt that U.S. cooperatives deserved enthusiastic Christian support because they help those who need help the most, and because they promote understanding among individuals, which is the foundation of peace.

During his Hessville pastorate, McCrackin regularly attended Fellowship of Reconciliation meetings, held in Evanston at the church of Ernest Fremont Tittle. The FOR spoke to McCrackin's emerging understanding of the Gospel. Anticipating the outbreak of war,
McCrackin also became active in the Pacifist Ministers Fellowship. Each month a dozen or so pacifist ministers "shared news, stories, preaching ideas and concerns and anxieties for the future." McCrackin's sermons at the time reflect this influence.

McCrackin concluded one service in his Hessville church with a condemnation of munitions manufacturers and all who profit through the suffering of others, including the makers of "the type of motion pictures and other amusements which ruin character." This was McCrackin at his most prophetic and provocative, and he must have known how some at least would react to it, for he referred to the way Jesus was persecuted for speaking the truth:

When Christ entered Jerusalem they scoffed at him, they sought to twist his words and entangle him in what he was saying; they were not interested in the truth he brought, but because that truth made them uncomfortable, threatened their holdings, they sought to silence the voice that spoke it.

While in Hessville, McCrackin became aware of America's racial problem. "It was then," he later recalled, "that I began to be aware of discrimination. You aren't aware unless you come to have black people as friends." He discovered to his horror that just a few years before his arrival in Hessville, the Ku Klux Klan had held services in his own church. McCrackin joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and became friends with its local president, a black physician named Dennis Bethea. Dr. Bethea's gentle manner and the fire of his belief in racial equality attracted McCrackin. Here was a member of an oppressed group with a perfect grasp of what needed to be done and a willingness to accept the hand of friendship across cultural barriers. Dennis Bethea became Maurice McCrackin's first close black friend.

McCrackin came to realize that although American blacks were making some progress, the going was slow and frustrating. During the 1930s Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps camps were addressing some of the country's unemployment problems, and CCC camps in New England and the Pacific states were being integrated. In the fields of sport and entertainment, some symbolic successes were meaningful to American blacks. Jesse Owens, to the chagrin of Adolf Hitler, had won four gold medals at Berlin's 1936 Olympics. In 1937 Joe Louis became heavyweight champion of the world in boxing. And in 1939 singer Marian Anderson turned an ugly racial insult into a victory for blacks and all oppressed people. Denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution, she sang on Easter Sunday before 75,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. Eleanor Roosevelt was in that crowd and had helped arrange for the alternative concert setting.

The hardships of the Great Depression and the ongoing struggle of blacks to achieve equality were suddenly upstaged by the outbreak of war. World War II had begun in Europe in September 1939 with Hitler's invasion of Poland.

On December 29, 1939, McCrackin preached against the British food blockade in Europe. He had learned from the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker outreach program, that it was able to distribute food directly to people in Poland, France, Norway, and Holland. Starving these civilian populations by means of a blockade would only create suffering and ill will, and he
quoted Ernest Fremont Tittle, his friend in the Pacifist Ministers Fellowship: "What does it mean to preserve civilization? It surely means (among other things) to keep alive in the world a high regard for human life, a deep sense of responsibility for the welfare of other human beings, an unrelenting demand for human decency." For McCrackin, the cornerstone of Jesus' ministry was his regard for the individual. The people being hurt by the blockade were the victims of opposing governments. We cannot overcome the evil done by governments by doing more evil, he said. But McCrackin did not stop there. Again he quoted Tittle, saying, "Something decent and daring must be done." Words alone seemed insufficient in such a crisis.

McCrackin yearned to demonstrate in some way his willingness to take action in opposition to the war. As a minister, he was automatically exempt from the draft. Wanting to speak out against war preparations, however, he chose to register on Military Registration Day, October 16, 1940, so that he could file a letter of protest with his registration. A little over a year later, Pearl Harbor brought the country into World War II. Four days after Pearl Harbor, a second front was opened when Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. McCrackin's worst fears had come to fruition.

In a sermon delivered in Hessville soon after war was declared on Japan, McCrackin exhorted his congregation to distinguish between the Japanese war machine and the people in Japan who might be eager for peace. He urged them to remember that the United States was not guiltless and to think of the Japanese soldiers as ordinary farmers or factory workers like themselves. It was another chance for him to remind people that in time of darkness, God suffers too. He encouraged the congregation to preserve and respect the contributions of Japanese culture, and, above all, he asked them to look forward to the end of the war when there would be a temptation to crush the enemy as was done after World War I with the Versailles Treaty:

As disciples of our Master, we will not permit the presence of wholesale suffering in the world to make us cold or indifferent to the neighbor who looks to us for understanding and sympathy. Jesus lived in an empire that held life in the utmost disregard. Slavery and the most brutal cruelties were common, yet Jesus quietly, and he would have liked to have had it unobtrusively, went about from day to day healing, cleansing, speaking the word of cheer and comfort, giving people hope and a reason for living.

Thus McCrackin made the connection between the global and the personal. He sought to offer a larger picture in order to free his listeners from the myopia of anti-Japanese propaganda. At the same time he was explaining the way of life he had selected for himself in imitation of Jesus, complete with the rationale linking pacifism and civil rights. If we are to have peace, all who suffer must be helped.

How much of this message could be heard by the congregation in the early 1940s is hard to discern. These were only words, after all; it was not until McCrackin fleshed out the words with action that he got into trouble for his beliefs. Later, however, he found out that his increasingly ardent pacifism had so offended some in the Hessville church that although they were fond of him, they were relieved when he moved on to Chicago.
While McCrackin was immersing himself in a working-class community and learning more about racism from Dr. Bethea, his friend Roy Linberg was in the midst of a ministry that addressed the same issues. Linberg, a member of the "Co-operative" that had sent so many letters of support to "Mercy McCrackin" in Iran, was now pastor of an inner-city Chicago church that supported a settlement house on the order of Jane Addams's Hull House. McCrackin visited Linberg's settlement house often and yearned for an opportunity to serve in a similar setting, a place where the Christian message could be directly applied, where the people could meet to share and learn and take action against the injustices surrounding them.

After five years of service in Hammond, McCrackin accepted a call to be pastor of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Chicago--primarily because the church supported a settlement house. The Samaritan House, located beside the church and run by an independent staff, was one of twelve such settlement houses in the Chicago area.

There was an interesting philosophical link between the Waldensian Church and McCrackin's developing radicalism. The Waldensians were founded by Peter Waldo of Lyon in the twelfth century; a group of them lived in the isolated French-speaking valleys of the Cottian Alps in northwestern Italy. They believed in simple living and Christian charity similar in spirit to the Franciscan practice, and they had a history of persecution long before they affiliated with the Reformed Church and then Presbyterianism. Now their descendants were part of Chicago's great mix. About one-third of McCrackin's Waldensian congregation had been born in Italy, and he was the first non-Italian to serve as the church's minister.

Part of McCrackin's job as minister was to work in the youth program of the settlement house. He once teased a young boy in the program for doing a sloppy job on his woodworking project. Said McCrackin,

If a job is once begun,
Never leave it 'til it's done.
Be the labor great or small,
Do it well or not at all.

The youth, teasing right back, retorted, "You're right, Reverend McCrackin. Since I'm doing such a lousy job, I might as well quit!"

Although McCrackin was enthusiastic about Samaritan House, he soon realized that it could never be the center for serving and healing the community that he had hoped for. The Waldensian Church and Samaritan House were located in an Italian neighborhood near Chicago's Grant Avenue, then the dividing line between black and white residential areas. McCrackin came to realize that this isolation kept it from realizing its full potential, for, as he later said, "A true settlement house is established on a completely nonsectarian and integrated basis." Sensitized through his friendship with Dr. Bethea in Hessville, McCrackin could see the limitations of the all-white program being offered at Samaritan House.

After moving to Chicago, McCrackin again sought out the acquaintance of blacks. He became friends with Frazier Lane, a staff member of Chicago's Urban League. Lane, a big and powerful man, inspired McCrackin with his method of imaging nonviolence: when provoked by a racist taunt, Lane said, he tried to imagine one of his white friends patiently standing nearby and
gently touching his arm. Lane understood the effects of social segregation. He said, "The problem with black people is visibility. You just don't get familiar with the person you hold prejudices against." People living in totally segregated neighborhoods never get the opportunity to break down their ignorance and prejudice. With Lane, McCrackin tried to bring blacks into his church and the Samaritan House, but without great success. Ironically, the Waldensian Church was destined to perish in its isolation. In 1967, twenty-two years after McCrackin left, the church building and the settlement house were burned to the ground by neighborhood youths incensed at the inclusion of a black family in the congregation.

Reverend McCrackin worked hard to plant the seeds of racial tolerance among members of his congregation, but he faced another challenge in trying to make pacifism acceptable during an era of great fervor for the war effort. Almost every family included somebody involved in the military. McCrackin wanted to show his respect for them as people while introducing, by his example and his words, his belief that participation in war is wrong. From discussions in the Pacifist Ministers Fellowship, he had learned the value of letting people tell their own stories. Charles G. Chamberlain, a seminary student who interned at the Waldensian Church in the 1940s, described how McCrackin served as pastor to those in the military and their families while yet witnessing to his pacifism: "Every Sunday during worship we'd read letters from around the world, and pray for peace and the safe return of all who were involved in war. Whenever servicemen . . . were home, they worshipped with us. They were greeted and shared their stories." 

In the midst of World War II, McCrackin's pacifism faced more challenges than occasional objections to his sermons. Increasingly active in the FOR, he began to think that he was a hypocrite to counsel young men not to enlist in the armed forces while he himself had a ministerial exemption. He was haunted by the example of eight students at Union Theological Seminary who had not merely filed a letter of protest with their registration board but had refused to register for the draft on Military Registration Day. For this they had not only been socially ostracized, but also imprisoned.

After he had thought about their protest for some time, McCrackin reopened the issue with his own draft board, waiving his ministerial exemption and requesting reclassification as a conscientious objector. But just as he was ready to go to the Civilian Public Service camp in lieu of military service, word came from his sister in Africa that her son Robert would be returning to the United States to continue his studies and would require his uncle's guardianship. At the last moment McCrackin was reclassified, after all, as "3C"--ineligible for military service. Although he never achieved conscientious objector status, the negotiations with the draft board had been important. McCrackin was moving closer to bringing his values and his actions into alignment. The self-sacrificial aspects of such an alignment also seemed to satisfy him at some deep level. Certain lifetime patterns were emerging, shaped by his goal of imitating Jesus.

The settlement house experience and his work in the Urban League made McCrackin want to learn more about working with groups. He knew the power of close friendships between individuals from groups that normally do not associate with each other. He was also beginning to realize that such friendships led quite naturally to work on projects of mutual concern. He was even beginning to realize that setting the stage for such friendships and projects might be more
important to doing Jesus’ work than preaching sermons. And so he began taking classes in social work and community development at George Williams College, the YMCA institution in Downers Grove, Illinois.

Life in Chicago seemed to agree with McCrackin. Not only did he have the regular pastoral responsibilities of counseling, visiting shut-ins, preparing sermons, and conducting services, but he had the Samaritan House to think about as well. His mother and aunt, who had moved from Hessville with him, continued to support his ministry and now had an additional reason to be glad they had moved from Monmouth: his brother Bob, along with his family, had returned from Africa to do a special medical residency in Chicago.

In Chicago, McCrackin gave one more nod to the possibility of marriage. His close friend Ila Reuter, a student at the Presbyterian College of Christian Education with whom he had shared many long discussions and lively church events, seemed a logical matrimonial choice. They became engaged, but there the relationship stalled. After a while, she felt that he did not spend enough time with her, and she made it clear that when they married she did not intend to share a house with McCrackin’s mother and aunt. He realized that these demands were reasonable, but he also thought that if their emotional bond were stronger these problems could be overcome. They eventually broke off their engagement, and McCrackin gave up on marriage from that time on, immersing himself instead in the work of his church.

As World War II wound down, McCrackin felt that his apprenticeship as a minister was drawing to a close. He had tried to live by the great beliefs of his teachers: George Robinson, Kirby Page, Sherwood Eddy, and Toyohiko Kagawa. He had lived by and with the poor and with working-class people. He had experimented with pacifism and dallied with the idea of marriage. Furthermore, he had been part of the great settlement house experiments of Chicago, and he had developed a rapport with and an affection for the people among whom he found himself. All the strands of his great ministry had been introduced: exposure to suffering, discouragement with the established social order, and the experience of living within a loving community. Now he was ready to find a ministry that would combine all these strands, an opportunity to test his mettle, a place that would allow him to live simply, to work hard, and to bring harmony to diverse groups through the old-fashioned process of being good to people and drawing them into fellowship with one another. In short, Maurice McCrackin was ready for the challenge of Cincinnati.

In June 1945, as the war was ending in Europe, Maurice McCrackin was made an offer he could not refuse. Dr. Earl North, Stated Clerk of the Cincinnati Presbytery, having heard about McCrackin’s settlement house work and his dedication to interracial justice, made a trip to the Waldensian Church in Chicago. He hoped to interest McCrackin in a kind of urban mission experiment. North offered McCrackin the position of co-pastor of a newly federated Presbyterian-Episcopal congregation in the West End of Cincinnati, an aging neighborhood of three- and four-story tenement houses near the downtown business district. Once the home of wealthy Cincinnatians, the West End by 1945 was predominantly black and increasingly poor. It was a lively and interesting neighborhood, teeming with children and situated in the city’s basin near Crosley Field, home of the Cincinnati Reds.
McCrackin enthusiastically welcomed the call to West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas Church; it seemed to be the ministry he had been preparing for all his life. In August 1945, then thirty-nine years old, he moved from Chicago with his elderly mother and aunt. He held his first worship service at West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas on August 5, 1945, the day before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Later he would link the two events as antithetical responses to the world's desperate problems, seeing that if individuals in communities are to survive, something must be done to eliminate the threat of nuclear holocaust.9

While the Presbyterians and Episcopalians were discussing church union at the national level, Cincinnati was actually implementing it at the local level. It was McCrackin’s job to carry out the experiment in ecumenical cooperation that had been initiated the year before. Two dying parishes, one Episcopal, the other Presbyterian, were going to become the focus of mission work in the inner city. Maurice McCrackin, the new Presbyterian minister, would share pastoral responsibilities with Albert Dalton, a member of the Episcopal Church Army. The Presbyterian building on Poplar Street was to become the federated congregation’s worship and education center. The Episcopal building would be transformed into the Findlay Street Neighborhood House. Church leaders could not have selected a better-prepared or more enthusiastic person for such a job than Maurice McCrackin. The Episcopal and Presbyterian leadership that brought McCrackin to Cincinnati was cautiously interested in fostering interracial cooperation but wary of genuine integration. Cincinnati was so completely segregated in 1945 that no mainline Protestant church there was integrated, and the Greyhound bus station and Frisch’s Restaurants were among the few places black people could get something to eat alongside whites. The schools, too, were almost completely segregated, and black teachers could not teach white students.10 Black passengers traveling south from Cleveland or Columbus by rail remember Cincinnati’s Union Station as the place where they had to enter segregated train cars before crossing the Ohio River into Kentucky.11

When Reed Hartman, a civic leader and chairman of the Presbyterian Church Extension Board, welcomed McCrackin to Cincinnati, he warned him about meddling too much with the racial situation: “Remember that we are a northern city, but we have a southern exposure.”12 Hartman also warned him against getting involved with Herbert Bigelow, a Congregationalist minister active in politics and a vociferous advocate of civil rights.13 Hartman was a vice-president of the Cincinnati Gas and Electric Company; Bigelow was adamantly and publicly opposed to private ownership of utilities. Although McCrackin later became friends with Bigelow, the two never worked on a big public project together. What Hartman could not have guessed at the time was that McCrackin would become a more notorious gadfly than Bigelow ever was.
It did not take McCrackin long to discover that he had stepped into an unworkable racial situation. “Before the federation of the two congregations,” he once commented, “Negroes were not welcome at either church. Here were two segregated white congregations in a neighborhood which was then about 65 percent Negro.” The original intent was to lead the two separate, segregated congregations toward a cooperative effort that would establish a program of integrated social activities to serve the local community.

On October 10, 1945, two months after arriving in Cincinnati, McCrackin opened the Findlay Street Neighborhood House with the support of the Episcopalians and Presbyterians and also that of the local Community Chest. McCrackin was lucky in attracting an experienced recreation leader, Helen Lee, to serve as program director of the neighborhood house. She wondered what she had gotten herself into when she arrived, all dressed up, for her job interview and found McCrackin in his unshined shoes. Although he was less formal than she had expected, it did not take her long to be infected by his vision of what they could accomplish together.

One organization that regularly helped out at the Findlay Street Neighborhood House was the Woman's City Club of Cincinnati, a philanthropic group made up of professional women and women from Cincinnati’s prestigious families. The club was not integrated at the time, but the social issues in which it took an interest included the nurturing of harmonious race relations.

An episode in November 1946 quickened its interest in racism and served as a lesson to McCrackin about inequality in law enforcement. Nathan Wright, a student at the University of Cincinnati who later earned a doctorate and became an Episcopal priest, was apprehended by two plainclothes detectives, John Schmitt and Fred Elfring, simply for carrying a typewriter down Lincoln Park Drive in the West End. The police assumed that he was stealing it—what else would a black youth be doing with a typewriter? They were unaware that Wright had arranged with the staff of West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas to use their typewriter at night to type his college papers. For his part, Wright was skeptical that these men were really policemen and asked to see their badges. Detective Schmitt showed his badge, but Detective Elfring was angered by the request. As he got out of the car, he said, "Oh, you're one of those God damn smart niggers."

The policemen ordered Wright to come with them to Central Station. As he was about to be taken away in the patrol car, Wright shouted to some neighborhood children to get Reverend McCrackin. They did just that, and McCrackin rushed to police headquarters to find out what was going on.
The two detectives were annoyed at Wright's behavior and McCrackin's presence. At one point Elfring remarked to Wright, "When I get done playing on your head with the black jack, you'll know how to respect the law," and he asked McCrackin what right he had to meddle in this situation. McCrackin responded that Wright was employed by his neighborhood house, at which Elfring ordered McCrackin to get out or be put in jail for interfering with the prosecution of the law. However, McCrackin's presence caused them to reevaluate their case against Wright, and they soon released him.

Without McCrackin's intervention, the youth would surely have been locked up overnight. This incident was minor, but it was sickeningly familiar to many blacks. McCrackin's response prompted the involvement of the NAACP and an inquiry before the City Council about the possibility of training police officers to acknowledge and overcome their racism.

In 1947, after a long internal battle over whether it should openly advocate racial integration, the Woman's City Club established Fellowship House, a meeting place for interracial and interdenominational discussion and activities. Among its most popular programs were the "Fellowship Trios," made up of one black person, one Jew, and one "member of the majority group," who made presentations in schools or before church groups on the theme of promoting racial and religious understanding. McCrackin was an enthusiastic participant and he formed lasting friendships with many influential women from the Woman's City Club, who remained benefactors of his projects for years to come. Many of his new women friends also served as music teachers and tutors at the neighborhood house.

Other groups besides the Woman's City Club also volunteered to help with neighborhood house programming. Presbyterian churchwomen from outlying communities participated in the after-school program. Members of the Catholic laywomen's community at Grailville, in nearby Loveland, came downtown to teach square dancing and lead singing. Jewish students from Hebrew Union College helped staff the summer camp. And youth leaders of various denominations set up outings that allowed adolescents from predominantly white suburbs to get acquainted with young people from the predominantly black inner city. McCrackin actively encouraged these liaisons.

The neighborhood house played an important role in the West End, offering classes in sewing, crafts, nutrition and sports. When the church and neighborhood house held entertainment nights, McCrackin was not above playing a few tunes on his harmonica. He learned to square dance and did so with great zest. And, of course, he joined in the singing. He loved performing before an audience--there was something of the vaudevillian in his soul.

A network of mutual empowerment began to emerge from McCrackin's various involvements. The way T. T. Clement became director of the neighborhood house illustrates how this spirit worked in solving the various problems that confronted McCrackin and his colleagues as they went about their business of easing the city's racial tensions. Almost daily McCrackin conferred with Dr. Vera Edwards, a black psychologist assigned to nearby Bloom Junior High School. Her job was to mediate between a racist principal, who sometimes had black parents ar-
rested for entering the school building, and the people of the neighborhood that the school was supposed to be serving. Among the worries that she confided to McCrackin was one of a more personal nature. Her brother, T. T. Clement, had just moved to Cincinnati. Clement, a former employee of the 4-H Club, was deeply grieving over the death of his wife and had no particular direction in his life. Edwards correctly surmised that something might be found for her brother to do at the neighborhood house. McCrackin soon had him building bookshelves there. Recognizing in Clement the leadership abilities that directorship required, McCrackin eased him, bit by bit, into that role. It was not long before Clement became the director of the Findlay Street Neighborhood House.

One day around 1946, Anna Starkey, a young black girl from the neighborhood, knocked on McCrackin's back door and asked plaintively, "Can colored come to your church?" More than forty years later, McCrackin remembered that question: "Can you imagine--a child having to ask!" The question itself settled the issue: church services would be immediately opened to all races, and McCrackin would strive to bring blacks into the church community. To this end he sometimes knocked on doors in the neighborhood to assure people that they were welcome to worship in his church. Many of them, he later found out, thought he was slightly touched for approaching them in this way, but they remembered his offer. Usually it was the children, like little Anna Starkey, who first broke down the old patterns. Church worker Dorothy Ratterman helped them love coming to Sunday School by escorting them all home afterward, singing to each at his or her own doorway. Having the children involved gradually drew in their parents.

As time passed, more and more activities were integrated, including the Christmas party, the Boy Scouts, and the Girls' Club. McCrackin liked to take youngsters on outings to parks or out for ice cream. He often took them to Frisch's, one of the few restaurant chains that made black children feel welcome. Sometimes McCrackin would buy tickets ahead of time so that when one of his groups arrived for some special event, they would not be turned away. Proprietors would usually admit ticket holders, even if they had not expected a racially mixed group. But the process of integration did not always proceed smoothly, and buying tickets in advance did not always work. A roller rink once refused entrance to McCrackin's group and, in fact, though located in a black neighborhood, eventually closed rather than admit black children.

Camp Joy, originally an agency of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, was held at Kroger Hills Fresh Air Farm--eighty city-owned acres in suburban Terrace Park. Run on a shoestring and subsidized by various benefactors, this summer camp was open to all neighborhood children for a nominal fee. Helen Lee served as camp director from 1946 through 1958. She inherited a program that scheduled black campers and white campers into separate sessions. During 1947, the second year of her directorship, the white girls asked if they could stay on into the black girls' session--after all, the girls already knew each other from the neighborhood. McCrackin rejoiced at the request, and Camp Joy was integrated. As with Anna Starkey, the children initiated reform. The impulse had not been imposed by the leadership; McCrackin's and Lee's role was simply to establish a social setting where something like this could happen. Once Camp Joy was integrated, the Girl Scouts and other neighborhood house groups followed suit.

The young people at Camp Joy idolized McCrackin. They liked his ability to kid around and to take part in the games that were going on. When he visited the camp, they all wanted to hold his hand and show him what they had been making. One youth, Wilson Hampton, recalled...
later that he always sensed a quietness about McCrackin. When McCrackin would touch him on
the head with his strong but tender hands, he felt blessed.22

There was another important dimension to McCrackin's West End ministry. When the
people in the neighborhood got upset about an injustice, they knew that McCrackin would help
them redress the wrong. Vivian Kinebrew, a young mother of five had heard about an unfair
practice from neighbors with loved ones behind bars at the Cincinnati Workhouse.23 In those
days the prison was only open for visitors during weekdays. White women could visit on Mon-
days, Wednesdays, or Fridays, but black women could visit on only two days--Tuesdays or
Thursdays. McCrackin's response was immediate: "We've got to do something about that!" He
and the women drafted letters to officials, pointing out the inequity. They eventually succeeded
in integrating the visiting hours.

Soon afterward Mrs. Kinebrew brought it to McCrackin's attention that the health clinic
associated with their own settlement house was also segregated. McCrackin walked right out of
his office and over to the clinic to negotiate a change in policy. Within a week both races were
welcome every day. People were beginning to get used to the idea that the new minister got re-
sults.

He was not so successful at the local swimming pool, where black children were only al-
lowed to swim after the white children left at three o'clock. One evening at supper, John Rollin-
son, president of the Men's Club at West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas Church, took a look at his chil-
dren's flaking skin and bloodshot eyes and said, "What've you kids been doing that you got your-
selves all whitened up like that?"24

---

22
23
24
"We've been swimming," they said, "and they put all kinds of stuff in the water before they let us in." Incensed, Mr. Rollinson brought this problem to McCrackin. Both were upset, not only because of the insult of the extra chemicals, as though the water needed to be purified against black skin, but also because of the limited hours the pool was open to blacks. Several meetings and a letter-writing campaign later, the pool was opened two full days a week—the inevitable Tuesdays and Thursdays—for black children, and the usual three days for white children. This far from satisfactory arrangement precipitated further complaints. Finally the pool was opened to blacks on Saturdays to even things up. This concession added so much extra expense, however, that eventually the pool was closed rather than fully integrated. Such were the machinations in Cincinnati and other segregated cities before the country committed itself to genuine integration. McCrackin confronted another problem in the late 1940s. City Council had decided to create a new parking area for Crosley Field to accommodate fans of the Cincinnati Reds, and hundreds of neighborhood people were faced with the loss of their homes. This was the first of several waves of urban renewal that would lead to the destruction of neighborhood housing in the West End and over-crowding elsewhere. Characteristically, McCrackin called a meeting at Findlay Street Neighborhood House to see what could be done. This was one of the first issues tackled by the new West End Community Council, a group that McCrackin had helped to organize. Although the council did not succeed in blocking the parking lot, they did gain the kind of visibility that would help them compete in the future with the other neighborhoods and special interests that influenced City Council.

As people began noticing inequalities and speaking out against them, there seemed to be no end to the projects that called for action. Patterns for segregation were so ingrained in Cincinnati that it took deliberate planning to avoid them. McCrackin encouraged others by his example as much by anything he said. He tried in little ways to model open acceptance of individuals without regard to race. It soon became evident, for example, that he never used racial designations to describe anyone. Around the church even children learned to say, "I'm looking for the short woman who works here and always wears a skirt and blouse" rather than "I'm looking for the Negro secretary."

Another aspect of McCrackin's work was his hospital ministry. Whenever a member of his congregation or a neighborhood friend faced sickness or surgery, McCrackin would be there. If he could not be there when the person came out of the anesthesia, he would leave a flower. His accessibility was consistent and legendary. A friend of Irene Johnson took her aside at the Fellowship House and said to her, "I want you to meet my minister—that white man over there. If he ever let me down, I'd never trust another white man." After the introduction, Johnson was struck by the fact that her friend addressed the man as "Mac" instead of "Reverend." Several weeks later and with no further contact with McCrackin, Johnson faced surgery. She was alone in the hospital and suddenly panicked. "What if I should die?" she thought. On impulse she dialed McCrackin's number, and he asked what he could do for her.

"Do you want me to pray for you, Mrs. Johnson? Would you like me to come over to see you before your surgery?"
"Yes," she told him, greatly relieved. So he went over and was the last person she saw before going into surgery and the first person she saw afterward. Johnson never forgot this response in her hour of need.

In fact, McCrackin's accessibility and responsiveness soon made him an ally of the women in the neighborhood, many of whom were struggling to raise large families under trying circumstances. He assured one that it was not wrong to leave her husband after being threatened with a gun. He helped another find an apartment, after which church members pitched in with furniture. Such ministry established a personal loyalty among the women, and also attracted some women to the church in the hope of striking up a romantic relationship with McCrackin. He never seemed to realize that his quiet ability to listen and his infectious sense of humor were sometimes mistaken for romantic interest. Sometimes he faced a challenge in dealing with those who hoped for more than a pastoral relationship with him.

One day several women, including one who had a crush on McCrackin, were waiting for him in the front room of the manse. Trying to avoid this woman without hurting her feelings, he burst into the room and singled out Vivian Kinebrew, saying, "Let's hurry up, Vivian, or we'll be late for that meeting!" She caught on right away and left the building with him. There was, of course, no meeting. Once outside, he seemed to have forgotten why he left in such a hurry.

McCrackin put in extremely long working days. It appeared that he was on call both day and night; even when he returned home at mealtimes, his eating would often be interrupted. Sometimes he would be called away before he had a chance to eat at all. Bessie McCrackin, reflecting on her son's life, would sigh and say, "I like all the things he's doing, but I do wish he'd take care of himself" Yet she would be laughing while she said it: there was no slowing down her son. He always worked with energy, passion, and purpose, and he did not take her help for granted. More than once he rushed out of a meeting at West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas at the first sound of thunder so that he could run the several blocks to the manse in time to remove the wash from the clothesline.

Yet, as in Iran, he was several times visited by a nagging depression. At such times he lacked confidence and felt unworthy of people's high opinion of him, but he persevered, trying to live according to what they expected of him. He was helped by imagining that he was in a tunnel and that if he could just keep going, he would eventually see the light at the end.

The programs of the church and the neighborhood house succeeded not only because of McCrackin's hard work and leadership, but also because of the vigorous efforts of the women of the church. Dorothy Ratterman, Helen Engel, Emma Rolf, Alice Lefker, Martha Lawrence, and other longtime Presbyterians remained part of the congregation after many of their white friends had left the area. Ratterman, for example, not only taught Sunday School but also offered piano lessons at the church, allowing the children to practice there or in her home. Vivian Kinebrew, Eula Hampton, Grace Jenkins, and Virginia Davidson were among those drawn to the church from the neighborhood as their children got involved and it became evident that blacks were genuinely welcome. Jean Weaver later surmised that the reason McCrackin's church was such a success was that every woman in it had been in some way in love with him.

---

27
28
29
Years later, as McCrackin looked back on the integration process in the church and neighborhood house, he realized how much he had learned: "This shows how naive I was . . . . I hadn't had that much working relationship with blacks. I came to the West End with the idea of forming a black congregation and a white congregation which would be under the jurisdiction of the joint churches and then we could have more and more activities together. After describing this situation, a friend asked me incredulously, 'How did you ever get mixed up in that kind of arrangement?'"

"You don't integrate by segregating," McCrackin realized:

You integrate just as completely as you can, wherever you can. The only way to eliminate discriminatory practices in a society is to get rid of segregation. Intellectually we may have little prejudice, we may believe that discrimination is wrong; but until people of different racial backgrounds become friends through a breakdown of social segregation, there is not an awareness of the extent or nature of discriminatory acts. Dorothy [Ratterman] would say when something would happen that was unjust to black people, "Well that isn't right. It shouldn't happen." When she came to know Helen Lee, the woman who served as program director of the Findlay Street Neighborhood House and director of Camp Joy, the same thing would happen and she would say, "They can't do that to Helen!"

The integration of his church and, more important, the social integration and development of friendships among blacks and whites associated with the church and neighborhood house, began to change people. A black woman who visited his church remarked after the service, "Here for once I feel like a whole person." This same transformation occurred to whites getting to know blacks for the first time.

As West Cincinnati-St. Barnabas became integrated, it also became increasingly ecumenical. People who joined the church automatically became members of both denominations and could decide how to refer to themselves. McCrackin often joked about the denominational confusion that developed, with some calling themselves "Pres-copalians" or "Episcogerians." Most worship services followed the Presbyterian format, but Episcopal Eucharists were also scheduled regularly. And at least one person from a Baptist background was favored with the traditional immersion baptism, for which the family had to gather at the nearby Union Baptist Church to use the baptismal tank. Such cooperative arrangements were possible because McCrackin had become friends with the local Baptist minister, Wilbur Page.

For the first time in his life, Maurice McCrackin felt that he was doing the work he had been created to do. He had never been happier. Surrounded by the teeming city, with all its hardships and discrimination, he was helping to build a genuine community of people who would care for each other through good times and bad, who were regaining their voices, who were organizing and taking action against discrimination, and who would see him through the difficulties that lay ahead.
At this point he could never have guessed what personal suffering would result from his work for justice in the inner city. Fear of racial integration still gripped most Cincinnatians, and this fear would eventually bear bitter fruit.

**Notes for Chapter 4**

1. In his voluminous correspondence during his missionary years, McCrackin consistently used the word “Sabbath” instead of “Sunday.”
2. This chapter makes much use of McCrackin's sermons, which were typed and filed among his personal papers. These are now in the McCrackin Collection at the Cincinnati Historical Society.
7. Ibid.
9. “All the while our community work was expanding, cold war tensions were increasing. Nuclear bombs were fast being stockpiled, and reports were heard of new and deadlier weapons about to be made. Fresh in my mind were the bombed areas of these two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the crowded, deprived areas of these two cities were people working as we were now working in Cincinnati to build a happier, healthier community. There were nurses, teachers, domestic workers, laborers, and secretaries. There were babies, children, young people and adults living together, playing and working together, and praying together. The bomb fell and they, their institutions, their community organizations, all were destroyed. It came to me that if churches, settlement houses, schools—if anything is to survive in Cincinnati or anywhere else—something must be done about the armaments race, a race which has always resulted in war.” This statement was made in 1961 before the Cincinnati Presbytery during McCrackin’s defrocking proceedings and recorded on the official transcript of his church trial: “Proceedings of the Judicial Commission of the Presbytery of Cincinnati vs. Maurice McCrackin,” Cincinnati Historical Society, pp. 67-68.
10. A progressive superintendent of schools, Dr. Claude V. Courter, had just begun a program to integrate the teaching staff of the Cincinnati public schools.
15. Interview with Helen Lee, May 1986.
17. Lincoln Park Drive, now known as Ezzard Charles Drive, goes through the heart of the West End, past the dozens of public housing units, and ends by the Central Police Station and Music Hall.
19. Ibid.
20. Such a program was developed; it involved McCrackin and Episcopal Bishop Henry W. Hobson in the training of city personnel.
21. Pete Rose, the famous baseball player, began and ended his amateur boxing career at the Findlay Street Neighborhood House in the mid 1950s.
23. Kinebrew was to remain one of McCrackin’s most faithful co-workers for the next four decades.
24. This story is reconstructed from comments during a group interview with women from West Cincinnati Presbyterian Church, August 1987.
25. This organization is still functioning. For years it met in the former West Cincinnati church building on Popular Street.
29. Interview with Jean Weaver, 1983.
30. Ratterman’s experience was cited by McCrackin frequently when he spoke to young people or whenever he was interviewed about integration.