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The institutional church in transition: a study of First Congregational Church of Atlanta, Georgia

David Alexander Russell Jr.

Atlanta University

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THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH IN TRANSITION:
A STUDY OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
DAVID ALEXANDER RUSSELL, JR.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
AUGUST 1971
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

The general purpose of this study is to examine changes in the structure and function of churches located within the urban centers of American cities as they occur over a period of time. The specific aim of this inquiry is to delineate these changes as they have occurred in a particular urban church located in the downtown section of a leading metropolis. The church studied is the First Congregational Church of Atlanta, Georgia, which recently celebrated its centennial year of service.

At one time First Congregational Church was an institutional church. An institutional church has been defined as a Protestant church which renders non-worship services to persons living within the immediate vicinity of the church. Such a church renders social services to its members and the people of the neighborhood to such an extent that it becomes, as McConnell puts it, a non-sectarian community center.¹

... In the United States such a church is ordinarily located in a rapidly changing neighborhood characterized by the fact that its original members have moved to the suburbs, giving place to a low income . . . population. The old membership

continue their support and occasionally attend regular services, but the activities of the church tend to become more social, cultural and recreational and to operate primarily for the benefit of the new population.\(^2\)

The fitness of this classification for First Congregational Church is documented by the fact that it began an orphanage for homeless children, sponsored music festivals in City Auditorium (1909-1912), operated a gymnasium and performed other such projects of community service. More will be said about this in the chapter on the history of First Congregational Church.

Furthermore, it should be understood that the philosophy of First Congregational Church requires that when secular organizations are capable of carrying on programs of community welfare, originating in the church, these functions are relinquished by the church to the care of those organizations that are more completely organized to fulfill these functions.\(^3\) In accordance with this principle many of the programs and functions initiated in the city by First Congregational Church have been transferred from the church to other agencies designed to carry out such functions.

For instance, until the advent of the Atlanta Urban League, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, and other civic agencies, First Congregational Church maintained the following programs: a public library, a gymnasium, a cooking school,

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Rev. Dr. Homer C. McEwen, private interview held at First Congregational Church, Atlanta, Georgia, September 4, 1966.
a business school, a working girls' home, an employment bureau, a kindergarten, public water fountains for man and beast, secretarial service for illiterate soldiers at Camp Gordon during World War I and a playground. At present all of these programs have been relinquished to the custody of community organizations.

In addition, the church maintained health centers in three mission districts of the city as early as 1873, which have since been discontinued. It provided classrooms for the Metropolitan Blind Association until they secured a building of their own. First Congregational Church provided furnishings for a room in the new building of the Y.M.C.A. in 1919 and was the only sponsor of the Carrie Steele Orphanage until civic agencies became active in its behalf.

First Congregational Church, often called "First Church" by its members due to its primacy as the first Congregational church to be organized and erected in the City of Atlanta, was situated in that ecological sector of town which Burgess in his study of Chicago describes as the "zone of transition." Gist and Halbert, in their study entitled *Urban Society* make the following assertion:

The area immediately surrounding the business district has been designated by Burgess as the area of transition, so named because it is in the immediate path of business and industrial expansion, which gives the district an ephemeral or transitory character. Unlike the business district, which is nonresidential for the most part, the zone in transition tends to be heavily populated by the lower income classes, by Old World

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5Kathleen R. Adams, private interview, Atlanta, Georgia, September, 1967.
immigrants by unconventional folk and by social outcasts, such as criminals and prostitutes.\(^6\)

First Congregational Church, located in a block encompassed by Ellis and Courtland streets to the north and west respectively and Houston Street and Piedmont Avenue to the south and east respectively, is now located within the central business district. Located on the northeast corner of Houston and Courtland streets, First Church was, when founded, situated in what was considered a better residential area, "by those living in the community during that time."\(^7\) Presently, most of the families formerly living in the vicinity of the church have migrated to new sections of the city farther to the west.\(^8\) Residences have been displaced by highways, motels, and business and commercial enterprises.

Not only has the neighborhood in which First Church is located changed in population but in function and physical character as well. At present the church is located in a neighborhood of service stations, warehouses, truck garages, factories and motels. There are almost no housing units in the immediate vicinity of the church for some distance. The few home-sites that do remain in that area have been condemned and are uninhabited.

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\(^7\)C. T. Carruthers, private interview, Atlanta, Georgia, July 26, 1966.

While visiting the neighborhood in which First Congregational Church is located one notices at the present time that in that same block situated along Houston Street is an array of business establishments. Proceeding from the church, eastward on Houston Street one finds the Cathcart Allied Storage Company which serves as an agent for the Allied Van Lines Shipping cern. Adjacent to it is the Southern Poster Printing Service, and on Piedmont Avenue is to be found a Gulf Oil Service Station.

Located in the block on the corner directly opposite the church is the Uniroyal Home & Auto Center of the American Tire Company. In that same block is the Russell Distributing Company, the All-Right Auto Park, the Triumph Atlanta Motorcycle Sales, a 6,394 sq. feet (0.1458 acre) lot for sale, the Georgia Hospital Association office building which is presently under construction on the corner of Houston Street and Piedmont Avenue, the Charles N. Walker Roofing Company, and a number of other business establishments.

In the block to the right of the church on the wester side of Courtland Street is located a Sinclair Service Station, the Atlanta Athletic Garage Auto Transmission Service, the Parliament House Motor Inn, an American Oil Company Service Station and a large number of other business establishments of varying size and function. Directly behind the church is to be found the church's parking lot, the Avis Rent-A-Car Agency, Municipal Fire Station No. 4, Southern Sporting Goods Distributor (Wholesale Only), a Saab Auto Dealer and a government office building which also is presently under construction. Also in the neighborhood of the church is the Marriott Motor Hotel, a Hertz Rent-A-Car Agency
and several smaller businesses, some presently under construction.

Among the other business and cultural establishments also to be found in the vicinity are the Georgia State University, Radio Station WAOK and the city's old municipal auditorium. First Church is a very short walking distance from Peachtree Street, the city's main business sector.

Cognizant of these changes that have taken place we ask is First Congregational Church any longer entitled to be designated as an institutional church? It is hoped that this inquiry will provide an answer to this question.

Methodological Notes

The method employed in this study is what is termed the "case-study" approach. This method is defined as an "intensive study of selected instances of the phenomenon" which, in this case happens to be the various structural and functional characteristics of First Congregational Church of Atlanta, Georgia. The reader's attention is focused on such matters as Church programming, community building, local organization, traditional functions, changing functions, etc.

A considerable number of methodological procedures are employed in this study. The procedures taken in this study may be explained as follows:

The Ascertainment of the Character of Church Programs

In order to determine how First Congregational Church stands in relation to other urban churches around the country, programs, organizations

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and activities sponsored by First Church are checked in accordance with a list of sixty programs and activities conducted by twenty-six churches in various sections of the country (see Table 1) as provided by Douglass in his study *The Church in the Changing City*.

These churches were selected on the basis that each of them sponsored programs, activities and organized groups that were thought to be developed beyond the average level and were, in fact, under special pressure from their individual urban environments.

**Sources of Historical Information**

During the initial phase of this study the researcher endeavored to examine all literary and historical data that could be found on the subject. Much of this historical information available was obtained from details in studies related to the subject and from data published in connection with the celebration of anniversaries by committees of church members assigned to that task. Other available data has been secured by direct interviewing procedures.

**Methods of Studying the Ecological Factors Affecting First Church**

Much of the data explaining the socio-economic status of the membership and the ecological characteristics of the vicinity in which

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11Ibid., p. 445.


13Kathleen R. Adams, private interview, Atlanta, Georgia, September, 1967.
### TABLE 1

**ACTIVITIES OF TWENTY-SIX PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number Of Churches Maintaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside bulletin board with weekly notices</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young People's Society League, Union or equivalent</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church office open daily</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School completely graded (class for every 3 years)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual every-member financial canvass</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar or bulletin issued weekly</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized athletic teams or contests</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts or equivalent</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation class on Catechetical instruction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Welcome (by ushers or others definitely delegated)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular paid newspaper advertising</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church choir (8 voices or more)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal cooperation with organized churches</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious education formally organized as separate department (with special board)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Women's Clubs (Service League, Girl's Friendly, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium instruction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls or equivalent</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's congregation meeting separately for services</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Guild--Ladies' Aid Society, etc.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's Club, Brotherhood, or equivalent</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Vacation Bible School (2 weeks or more annually)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School financed by church as part of regular budget</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Missionary Society (Home, Foreign or both)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls' Clubs (other than Scout type)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday evening social gatherings or teas</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic organization</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular use of motion pictures</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts (periodic or frequent)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys' Club (other than Scout type)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church receptions or dinners (4 times per year or oftener)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library (general or reference) in regular use</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Study Classes (separately organized)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures (periodic or frequent)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified women's organization (combining missions and parish aid)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Number Of Churches Maintaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers' or parents' organization</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church open daily for private devotions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation farm or country property used for outings</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Agency</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music-classes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatics (as phase of social service interest)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local church paper (issued monthly or oftener)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week-day religious school (2 days per week, 3 months or more)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing or millinery classes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra or band</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Science or home-making instruction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English classes for foreigners</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum (public discussion by general audience or large group)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health classes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's sermons regularly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic vocational advice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dormitory or boarding facilities for constituents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics or economics classes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services in more than one language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting nurse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensary or clinic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch church (served in whole or part by church staff)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Nursery</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special services for industrial or other employees</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor or street preaching (periodic or frequent)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Church is located were secured by interviewing selected individuals charged with such responsibilities as the keeping of membership records (such as the pastor and the church secretary), inquiry into available literary material pertinent to the occupational status of individual members of the congregation\textsuperscript{14} and unstructured observation.

\textsuperscript{14}Merlissie R. Middleton, "Residential Distribution of Members of An Urban Church (unpublished Master of Arts thesis, School of Arts & Sciences, Atlanta University, 1953), p. 10.
of the ecological patterns and functions of the vicinity in which First Church is situated.

In the field work of this present study the following ecological points were appropriately observed: present use of land in the area in which the church is located—by industry, business or residential occupancy on different social levels; zoning; available transit facilities and the system of major traffic streets. Also included in the survey were other institutions located in the vicinity of First Church—e.g., schools, churches and other social agencies (playgrounds, parks, philanthropic, social centers, orphanages, old folks homes, hospitals, health clinics, etc.); and the most presumable form the structure of the city and the neighborhood will assume in the future.

Method of Studying Church Groups and Specific Activities Sponsored By Such Groups

Under this category were included the group-sponsored programs and activities occurring as frequently as once a month. In addition, such seasonal activities traditionally sponsored by the church as the operation of summer camps, Daily Vacation Bible School, and youth conferences, were taken into consideration.

Procedures Pursued in the Study of Formal Community Relations

Again in reference to the study made by the Institute of Social and Religious Research the following scheme was employed:

... all institutions and interests of the community with which the church might properly have cooperative relationships were listed and classified. Five questions were then asked with respect to each: (1) Has the church contributed money
to this organization within a year? (2) Has it had members on the paid staff or board of directors? (3) Has it appointed official representatives in the organization? (4) Has it advocated the work of the agency in its pulpit or publicity?\textsuperscript{15}

In addition, a number of observations were made in respect to the amount of activity and the extent of influence the church has on the life of the community-at-large.

Guidelines Pursued in the Study of the Denominational Status of First Congregational Church

The denominational status of First Congregational Church was studied in respect to two significant factors: (1) the degree of influence First Church exerts in district conferences, conventions, counsels and other such bodies of the United Church of Christ and (2) the status of the church in respect to financial interests (that is, whether the church is able to rely on its own financial resources or whether it is on a more or less extreme dependence upon denominational support, so as to be classified as a missionary enterprise).

Review of the Literature

A number of works have been written by others who have done research in the area concerning the inner city parish. An examination of these works should enable one to gain a better perspective of the nature and function of urban churches in general, and of First Congregational Church in particular. In their study entitled The Protestant Church as a Social Institution Harlan Paul Douglass and Edward de S. Brunner assert

the functions of the urban church to be as follows:

... the church's function is determined, first by what the social group is and by the things which its nature requires it to do. Secondly, the church's function is determined by what its transcendental insight and relationships demand, and is interpreted, on the other hand, by accepted tradition and, on the other, by the innovating prophetic consciousness. Thirdly, the church's concrete functioning is the work of thoughtful experimentation which devises and sets before the church its practical program. It is the function of the church to be and to do all things which the co-working of these threefold forces brings forth as its total expression in the modern.16

One may ask, in what way are these characteristics related to First Church? First Church has exhibited all three of these qualities thus mentioned. In terms of social status, First Church includes in its membership some of the people considered most influential in the city's Negro community. These people serve on the boards and in other organizations of the church, and in many instances have been staunch supporters of its program.

Secondly, in regard to such criteria as the "transcendental insight" and the "innovating prophetic consciousness" of the urban church, the First Congregational Church, under the auspices of the American Missionary Association, has made a significant impact on the development of the Negro community throughout the State of Georgia.

First Church was a vital link in what became known as the "Open Door," a new educational center in Atlanta established for the newly emancipated Freedmen. The church was principal factor in the development of Atlanta as a major educational center for Negroes in the State

of Georgia. Edmund A. Ware, one of the founders of First Church, was also the founder of Atlanta University.17

Thirdly, in respect to the formulation of practical programs, First Congregational Church is the first church to inaugurate social service programs in the South. Following the race riot of 1906, Doctor Proctor donated a yearly sum of $1,100.00 in his will. Two paid workers were employed in the department, and the church itself supplied many volunteers to assist the two paid workers. These features will be more fully discussed in the chapter dealing with the history of the church.

Douglass, in The Church in the Changing City, maintains that, except when other fairly recognizable influences intervene, exceptional environmental pressure may be expected to result in institutional evolution on the part of the Protestant Church. He further asserts as follows:

The more important and consistent of these intervening influences are: (1) a less than average degree of numerical and economic strength; (2) exceptional fixity of religious and theological tenets; and (3) especial tenancy of a racial or social group maintaining its customary behavior.18

Many of the insights of Douglass can be seen in the light of the history of First Congregational Church. First, in regard to the first intervening influences thus mentioned, one must be cognizant of the fact that during its first Historical period (1867-1894), First Church was


a community church serving the residents of the neighborhood in which it was located. Records show that there were only ten original members of First Church, and the only aid they received was supplied by the American Missionary Association.19

Secondly, First Church has conducted its work in accordance with the Christian principles of love and service and the sentiments of "The Mayflower Compact," the first written American constitution. Adams provides the following note on the principles and doctrines which has motivated the work of First Church through the years:

The First Congregational Church has given signal service to its membership and to the City of Atlanta thru /sic/ out the years. Having the Christian principles for its basis and the sentiments of 'The First Democratic Covenant in America'--The Mayflower Compact for its extension, the goal has always been (1) to win ones to loyalty to Christ; (2) to enrich its membership and prepare it for leadership in service--both religious and secular; (3) to elevate and fraternize its community.20

At this point brief mention should be made of the history of the Congregational Church. The Congregational Church in America was established in 1620 by the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony and the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was during this time that the Mayflower Compact, the first American written constitution, came into being. In 1892 the Congregationalists were joined by the Congregationalists, in 1923 by the Evangelical Protestants, and in 1925 by the German Congregationalists. In 1931 the Congregational Church and the Christian

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Church were united through the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches.21

On June 25, 1957, the United Church of Christ was formed by the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States.22 The United Church of Christ is now composed of more than 6,500 local churches with a total membership of over 1,950 members.

First Congregational Church is significant part of the United Church of Christ. The Rev. Homer C. McEwen, pastor of First Church offers the following:

First Congregational Church, Atlanta, Georgia, is a member in full standing of the United Church of Christ. This standing is structured through the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, 675 Piedmont Avenue, N. E. Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. William Andes, Conference Minister. Two laymen are members of Conference Commissions (The Ministry and Church Extension).

In the larger church the pastor is a member of the board of directors of the Board for Homeland Ministries. Mrs. Maxwell McEwen is a member of the Board for World Ministries. Mr. E. L. Simon is a member of the national Board of Directors of the National Council of Churches.23

Again in reference to Douglass' theory on the institutional evolution of the Protestant Church, namely, the "especial tenacity of a racial or social group in the maintenance of customary behavior,24 First


22Ibid.

23Homer C. McEsen, private interview, Atlanta, Georgia, September 23, 1966.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies' aid or guild</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's missionary society</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people's society</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus choir</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General social events</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's organization</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission study classes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Welcome</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra or band</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys' club (not scouts)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls' club (not scouts)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scouts or equivalent</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers' or parents' organizations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women's organizations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Club</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium classes</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sewing classes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic science classes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Office</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music classes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting nurse</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health classes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English classes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic classes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Nursery</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensary or clinic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics and economics classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Church has for some time been a predominantly Negro middle-class church embracing many of the prominent people of the Atlanta Negro community.

25Ibid., p. 335.
These factors have all played a significant role in the development of First Church as an urban institutional church.

Activities

In his 1000 City Churches, Douglass lists thirty-three activities and organizations, exclusive of preaching, of three-hundred and fifty-seven urban Protestant parishes. These activities and organizations range from such interests as Boy Scout troops and gymnasium classes to libraries and employment offices (See Table 2).

Ericksen, in his Urban Behavior, explains the present-day institutional complexity of the urban parish as follows:

While in small communities people are more socially oriented for they feel secure in the close ties that obtain within the family and community, in the city, with its impersonality of contact and its loosely integrated family life, the situation is quite different. Thus many churches, in making the difficult adjustment to the city environment, have tried to meet the challenge of urbanism by adding those functions that might promote individual and group integration.26

Furthermore, Ericksen contends that the great expense of these new functions must be taken into account in any consideration of what the urban church may be expected to do in the way of adding new responsibilities. However, in Ericksen's estimation, competition from secular agencies may eventually relieve the church of most of the added functions. "In fact," says Ericksen, "the low percentage of Protestant churches which sponsor the bulk of activities listed above marks the difficult adjustment to the urban environment."27

26Ibid., p. 334.

27Ibid., pp. 335-336.
In his study entitled, *The American City and Its Churches*, Kincheloe renders a somewhat popular presentation of the impact of cities on their churches and the functions of the church in the urban environment. More of Kincheloe's findings will be mentioned later. With reference to the Congregational faith, E. Franklin Frazier, in his *Negro Church in America* asserts that the Congregational Church is historically one of the so-called "high status" churches among Negro Americans; that is, most Negroes of upper class status are affiliated with the Congregational, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches.

In addition, Frazier testifies to the fact that children of the upper class in the Negro community have generally attended schools established by the Congregational Church. The Storrs School, an adjunct of First Church, was a school of this type of which further mention will be made.

A number of theses have been written on the character of churches within the urban community of Atlanta. In 1953, Mrs. M. R. Middleton submitted a thesis entitled "Residential Distribution of Members of An Urban Church," in which she indicates that the residential center of the membership of First Church has shifted over a period of fifty years from an area within a few blocks of the church westward.

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30Ibid

Miss L. E. Torrence, in 1934, did a study of the social activities of the Negro church in Atlanta, Georgia. Miss Torrence reported how various churches throughout the Negro community of Atlanta and other cities contribute to the social, educational and cultural uplift of the Negro people by sponsoring such activities as citizenship training, cooking schools, forums, observances of Negro History Week, etc. . . .

In his thesis entitled "Some Social Status Dimensions of Selected Churches in a Southern Metropolis," William L. Stanley, Jr. posits the notion that one's social status, to a great extent, determines one's church affiliation and that such factors as education of the minister, value of the church building, the minister's salary and the size of the membership determines the status of a particular church.

In addition Stanley contends that in any urban society, where people are found in heterogeneous groups, there will be found some kind of hierarchical pattern. He affirms as follows:

The criteria for such an arrangement may be socio-economic indices or other selected behavior indices. Regardless of the criteria used or the number of differential groups which result from the ranking or division, it is evident that the urban society, ..., is a fruitful and productive laboratory through which sociologists can get at the nature of social status.

It is believed that these and other studies of the urban church will enhance our understanding of the transition in institutional status of First Congregational Church.

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34Ibid.
CHAPTER II

THE URBAN CENTER CITY CHURCH
(PROTESTANT)

Organisms of all kinds adopt structurally and functionally to the environment in which they live. It has also been discovered that social institutions display patterns that are related to the culture of the local habitat in which they live and grow. The urban church is of a varied sort. Kincheloe lists a number of classifications under which churches are categorized.

A church located in the center of an urban area which does not minister exclusively to an immediate local neighborhood is designated as a downtown church. Although it will reflect, at least to an extent, the atmosphere of its environment its adaptation will be to the outlying region from which it draws its membership. Sources maintain that the truly downtown church of the large urban area specializes in great voices, in the cases of both preachers and musicians, and sermon themes adapted to the larger community. Such a church tends to develop a metropolitan rather than a parochial character.

The earliest churches in a city usually have been located in the downtown section, from which the population is later forced to move by

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36Ibid.
encroaching urban physical structures. However, for historical or sentimental reasons there is reluctance to abandon the central location, and many members living in suburbs retain the downtown affiliation. Hence, the downtown church remains in the heart of the city, taking on the characteristics of the metropolitan community.

A church situated in that region around the heart of the city considered as the zone of transition is the inner-city church. Kincheloe informs that the inner-city church is located in the so-called changing community from which churches "move, or in which they may die, federate or become institutional churches or neighborhood houses." It has often been discovered that frequently a church in the inner-city area becomes a community church for Protestant people, simply as a means for survival. Nevertheless, according to Kincheloe, the only significant Protestant churches of the inner-city region which have maintained their earlier character are those which have had general financial support from wealthy individuals.

The fate of inner-city churches is said to vary with the movement of racial and cultural groups living within the area, the invasion of business or manufacture, and the shifting from single homes to apartments. It is contended that they may on occasion entertain people from all over the city with great musical performances. The ministers may

\[37\text{Ibid.}\]
\[38\text{Ibid., p. 12.}\]
\[39\text{Ibid.}\]
\[40\text{Ibid., p. 14.}\]
be well-known men. "In these ways," says Kincheloe, "they are behaving as a metropolitan church would behave." However, while these churches have endeavored to draw parishioners from distances, as a metropolitan church would do, many attempt some work at least with people who reside in their immediate vicinity.

Churches that relocated themselves in another section of the city, or in a suburb in order to preserve their memberships, or as a means of escaping unfavorable environmental conditions are called moving churches. Frequent instances have been found to take such procedures due to urban renewal, threatening social hazards and other disturbing circumstances.

Federated or united churches are often found in cases involving the unification of two or more churches or denominations for the purpose of mutual survival in an area where former members may have been deceased or emigrated to other sections of the city. A community church is one which, on a missionary and philanthropical basis, contributes to the social, educational, economic and spiritual welfare of an immediate neighborhood or community.

There are several kinds of community churches. Again Kincheloe affirms as follows:

There is the denominational type which uses the term community for its advertising value but plainly states that the church is related to some particular denomination.

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 76.
There are community churches which omit the sectarian label but one really denominational. There are union congregations while others have considered it impractical or of no merit to advertise their former names.44

Churches of this type have been known to own and operate day nurseries, working girls' homes, classes for the impotent, schools, residences for old folks, recreational facilities, employment agencies, libraries, etc. Those churches that refuse to make the necessary adaptations to the changing patterns of the community surrounding them are designated as dying churches. They die because they refuse to accept the fact that they must change in accordance with the times. Such an attitude cannot be taken by any urban institution in a growing city with new populations surrounding it. Such churches refuse to maintain pace with the times and simply let the rest of the world go by. Their life diminishes as old members become deceased and younger ones affiliate with other churches.

The church that dies in the changing urban community is often the church that emphasizes the more or less traditional aspects of church life, e.g., the Sunday service (preaching and church school), young people's societies, the midweek service, and very little else.

Such a church exercises very little foresight in that it refuses to inaugurate any programs that will insure its future in the community and remains content with its present status with little if any thought for tomorrow. Its work is carried on by its members for their own sake with little attention devoted to the outside community.

44Ibid.
Furthermore, the membership of such a church tends to relinquish whatever concern they have for their denominational affiliation and therefore ceases to fight back when attacked. "If these churches persist in being conventional churches in changing communities and make no adaptations," says Kincheloe, "they face declining membership and death.45

The urban church is in a state of transition.46 It is considered being altered and modified not only by its internal membership but by pressure exerted upon it from its environment. Ericksen observes that many of the functions and activities previously sponsored by the church are now conducted by other organizations such as recreational agencies (the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, etc.), clubs (Hi-Y, etc.) occupational groups (Police Athletic League) and other such groups that do not have any religious sponsorship.

Libraries, parks, municipal playgrounds, theaters, bridge clubs, museums, movies, and professional athletics now provide better facilities and attractions for recreational and social activities. "Most church leaders," says Ericksen, "would not welcome back these functions if they were offered them since there are other groups that can manage them, just as well or better."47

Hence, the question arises as to what the function of the contemporary urban church is. As cited earlier a number of churches located

45Ibid.


47Ibid., p. 333.
in the downtown business districts of metropolitan communities have relinquished their denominational characteristics and dedicated themselves to the needs of the nearby homeless, destitute and transient populace.

Ericksen observed the prevalence of the following matter:

... the pastor is a specialized person giving assistance to the 'socially and spiritually disinflicted' with the aid of social workers and even psychiatrists. He is intent upon helping men and women to reorganize their spirits, regain self-confidence, in a changing unpredictable social setting. Thus psychiatric assistance, moral reinforcement, and economic aid, comprise the central functions of many of the downtown non-denominational churches.\(^{48}\)

The urban church of today is said to have gained wide acceptance in the city. Reason, rather than ritual, is of cardinal importance. Religion is regarded as something to be sought after rather than to be transmitted. Worshippers enter the portals of the church in search not only for a system of religious doctrine to adhere to and to pass on to their children, but for an answer to the complicated problems of our era.

The same is equally true of the denominational churches. The downtown urban church is situated in the presence of a critical and reflective membership which is more rational than traditional in perspective. In the primitive and more rural cultures the authority of the religious leader was undisputed in that it was based on the premise that he spoke of God and not of man. In such a context God was primarily and exclusively considered as the master of men's fates. However, in the urban environment no value system or institution exists in its own right or survives for its own sake.

\(^{48}\)Ibid., p. 333.
One must be cognizant of the fact that it is in the city that schism of religious doctrines occur.\(^49\) Furthermore, the urban man tends to be functional in his attitude toward religion. He asks: "Is religion good? If so, for what?" \(^50\) Ericksen makes the following observation of the urban man:

He feels as though he has been liberated psychologically from the control of sacred institutions of the past. He has created a man-made world of instrumentalism. The pulpit, he feels, is not the only place to obtain moral guidance. The only way to preserve an urban institution that it may better serve the community of the future is to change it.\(^51\)

Hence, the urban minister or religious leader finds himself in the presence of a critical membership which feels that it is his moral and professional responsibility to conceptualize and speculate on issues of theological significance and to expunge any erroneous beliefs prevalent in the group. In order to gain a more precise conception of the situation one must ask the following questions: First, what functions and characteristics must a church in a large urban area assume if it is to survive and, secondly, how do these traits distinguish it from churches in smaller cities and rural areas? H. P. Douglass provides the inquirer with tabulated data explaining the following principle:

\[\ldots\] the more complex institutions, judged by the constituent organizations, exist in the more complex environments of cities, whereas in the open country and less rural areas

\(^{49}\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 333.\)

\(^{50}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{51}\text{Ibid.}\)
are found simple and conventional organizations.  

The table below (Table 3) taken from Douglass' *1000 City Churches* supports Chapin's theory that churches located in areas more urban than others tend to be more complex in their organizational structures.

**TABLE 3**  
FREQUENCY OF CERTAIN SUBSIDIARY CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS IN RURAL CHURCHES AND IN CHURCHES IN SMALL CITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Per Cent Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some subsidiary organizations besides Sunday School</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's organization</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one women's organization</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed sex organizations (usually Young People's)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one mixed sex organization</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's organization</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys' organization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls' organization</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


53 Ibid.
FIGURE I

DIVISION OF FUNCTIONS BETWEEN CHURCHES AND NON-CHURCHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAJOR FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>CHURCH</th>
<th>BY WHOM PERFORM</th>
<th>NON-CHURCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worship and Evangelism</td>
<td></td>
<td>USUALLY</td>
<td>RARELY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct of social life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct of recreation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General social service</td>
<td>RARELY</td>
<td></td>
<td>USUALLY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technically specialized social service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fig. 2, Chapin, *ibid.*, p. 444/
Figure 1 illustrates functions which the church shares with other institutions and the frequency these activities occur in churches in comparison with secular institutions. In general, worship, evangelism and religious instruction are, to a great extent, exclusively conducted by the church. Such functions as social welfare, social gatherings (parties, teas, luncheons, etc.) and recreation are equally shared with non-church institutions. But specialized social service functions of a technical nature are seldom carried on by churches and are usually conducted by non-church institutions.
CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The history of First Congregational Church may be divided into two periods: the period 1867-1894 and the period 1894 to the present. A look at the events which took place during these two periods may prove to be helpful in understanding First Congregational Church as an institutional church in transition.

The First Historical Period: (1867-1894)

Following the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln in 1864, three young theological students in the Yale University Divinity School decided that they would devote their lives to the spiritual and educational development of the Freedmen. Two of these young men, the Rev. Erastus Cravath, later the founder of Fisk University, and the Rev. Edmund Asa Ware, the founder of Atlanta University, enlisted in the service of the American Missionary Association and went South where they began their work. These two young men along with the Rev. Cyrus W. Francis, an American Missionary Association spokesman, traveled throughout the state of Georgia in an effort to recruit Freedmen for what was to be known as the new "Open Door," an educational center in Atlanta, Georgia.54

54Kathleen R. Adams (ed.), *Let's Take A Look At Our History* (Atlanta: First Congregational Church, 1967), p. 1
The recruitment process involved women as follows:

'Key Mothers' were selected from the more populous sections to come to the city. They were to canvass the homes as they were established and find boarding-homes for the many expected pupils—some to be sent by their families, others /sic/ to come unattached.\[55\]

Freedmen migrated from all over the state to the City of Atlanta. Here the American Missionary Association had organized a primary and secondary school for Freedmen and their children.

This school, the Storrs School, situated on the northern side of Houston Street near the corner of Piedmont Avenue was a social service center for the ever-growing community. Its chapel became a focal point for religious-minded patrons. They looked forward eagerly to the 'Worship Service' conducted by the New England missionaries. Ere long they expressed a desire for a church of their own in which their children could be trained to that type of reverence and quiet dignity in worship.\[56\]

On May 22, 1867, a committee of persons affiliated with the school voted to organize a Congregational Church. The following Sunday, May 26, 1867, was the date of the first Congregational Church service to be held in the City of Atlanta, Georgia. Services were held in the chapel of the Storrs School, conducted by the Rev. Erastus M. Cravath, then secretary of the American Missionary Association.\[57\]

First Church was presided over subsequently by pastors recommended by the American Missionary Association. These men had been trained in the leading colleges and divinity schools of New England. Most of them were graduates of Yale University. The following are names of each

\[55\]Ibid.

\[56\]Ibid., p. 2.

\[57\]Ibid.
pastor presiding during the initial period: the Rev. Frederick Ayer, the Rev. Cyrus W. Francis, the Rev. Simon S. Ashley, the Rev. Charles W. Hawley, the Rev. Evart E. Kent and the Rev. Samuel H. Robinson. The first church edifice was erected during the pastorate of the Rev. Ashley on the corner of Houston and Piedmont streets. The first parsonage was built during the ministry of the Rev. Evart Kent. The construction of both the church and the parsonage was financed by the American Missionary Association.

The Second Historical Period: (1894-1968)

In 1894, the second historical period began. The Rev. Henry H. Proctor, a graduate of Fisk University and a student of Yale Divinity School, became the first Negro pastor. It was at this time that the church became independent of the American Missionary Association. However, it served as a beneficiary of that organization for some time.

Under the leadership of Dr. Proctor, First Church is reported to have become the largest and most progressive Negro Congregational Church in the nation. In his autobiography, Between Black and White, Dr. Proctor discusses the racial problem of the South and the need for a church to minister to both the temporal and spiritual needs of men living in that part of the country.

58 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 4.
61 Ibid.
Dr. Proctor believed both the white and the Negro peoples of the South to be religious. He declared that southern white people of the South were religious because of their devoted observance of the Sabbath, their regular attendance at church and their reading of the Bible. Dr. Proctor was well aware of the fact that the South formed the backbone of American orthodoxy. But Dr. Proctor referred to Negroes as "the most religious people in the world. "We colored people are nothing if not religious," says Proctor. "We have a genius for religion, and it is not too much to say that we are the most religious people in the world."\(^6^2\)

Proctor realized, however, that the religion of the South was, as he put it, "sentimental rather than practical, individual rather than social."\(^6^3\) Proctor felt that if the religion of the South were to be applied to the racial problem a great transformation would take place.

It was only after the bloody Atlanta race riot of 1906 that the real needs of the Negro people became clear. Then Dr. Proctor with the aid of friends and members of First Church endeavored to build a church whose ministry would serve the needs of the city's people, both black and white.

Dr. Proctor discusses those early days as follows:

The first step in this direction was to secure a church building adapted for the purpose. The result was the structure that now stands in the heart of the city. I saw this building that now stands in the heart of the city. I saw this building rise from the foundation to the capstone, and much of


\(^6^3\)Ibid., p. 106.
my life is built into its very walls. There is a basement, containing Sunday-School facilities, a library and a reading room, a gymnasium, a kitchen, a shower bath, the engine room, and lavatories. On the main floor is an auditorium with a seating capacity of one thousand. Here are also the office of the church and the study of the pastor. On the third floor are a gallery and a ladies' parlor. In this industrial temple we dedicated the pulpit and the parlor, the auditorium and the organ, the dumbbell and the needle, the skiller and the tub, to the glory of God and the redemption of a race.

Hard by the church stood the parsonage, next to which was the home for colored working girls. This was the first home in the world opened by any church for colored girls. The colored girl is the most unprotected woman in all the world, and it was an inspiring occasion when the home was opened for service to the needy group. This was the best equipped church plant for colored people anywhere in the world, and is conservatively estimated to be worth $250,000.

Dr. Proctor cited the specific needs of the church to be met through its program:

At the time it was opened it met in each of its facilities a special need. There was no Y.M.C.A. for colored young men in the city, and ours was the only gymnasium in the city for that group. There was no Y.W.C.A. in the city, and our home for young colored women was the only one of its kind in Atlanta. There was an employment bureau, and in this we served the people of both races in the city. A water fountain outside the church (breaking the color line) was the first water fountain opened in the city. Our trouble bureau was a clinic for all sorts of ills. Our prison mission served the man at the very bottom. Our Music Festival brought the best musical talent of the race to the city, and attracted great audiences of both races. As a matter of fact, we found that music was a great solvent of racial antipathies just as David found it a solvent for personal antagonism with Saul.

The testimony offered by Dr. Proctor himself should provide sufficient evidence as to how and why First Congregational Church initially became an institutional church. Dr. Proctor recognized the needs of
the community and in an effort to meet those needs he inaugurated a program that would be of service to the community.

The following sub-section mentions the many functions of service rendered to the community by First Church. Each facet of the church's community building program was designed to meet a specific need. After having served their purpose many of these functions were discontinued. Others became unnecessary when the proper Civic Agencies came into being.

Community Building

Services rendered by First Congregational Church to the Atlanta community may be classified into three categories: (1) religious endeavor, (2) social welfare, and (3) cultural promotion.

Religious Endeavor

First Congregational Church has sponsored a vast number of projects designed to enhance the religious life of the community. According to Mrs. K. R. Adams, the historian of First Church, the church conducted three missions in different sections of the city during the First Period. The missions were used for conducting Bible classes in which the scriptures were taught to the general public.66

From 1894 to 1920 First Congregational Church conducted five missions known as "Afternoon Sunday Schools" throughout the city; namely, the Betsy Woods Mission at 123 East Cain Street; the Irwin Street Mission on the corner of Irwin and Hogue streets; the Carrie Steele-Pitts Orphanage on East Fair Street; and the Prison Mission (Vespers) for inmates of

the Federal Prison at Fulton County Tower.

Furthermore, Mrs. Adams reports that First Church sponsored a number of other religious projects in the community. An annual Vacation Bible School was organized and conducted by the church and a weekly pastor's column was printed in the Atlanta Daily World. The church continues to maintain an annual Vacation Bible School in the summer but the pastor's weekly column in the Atlanta Daily World has been discontinued. Instead the church began a thirty-minute radio broadcast of the morning service on Radio Station WERD on Sunday afternoons from 2:30 to 3:00 p.m.

Another broadcast called "I've Got A Question" featuring young people on Saturday afternoons was started on that same radio station under the management of a former student assistant to the pastor. Both of these broadcasts were recently discontinued and the writer has been informed by the pastor that the church is looking for another radio station with which to continue its radio ministry.

Social Welfare

As mentioned earlier First Congregational Church has exhibited the characteristics of an institutional church, as defined by McConnell, from time to time. As early as 1873 health centers were conducted in three districts of the city by the church. The first was located in the vicinity of the church on Houston Street, the second was situated in a wagon yard on Decatur Street, and the third was in South Atlanta.

First Church was also instrumental in the founding of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home for orphans. The present director of the home, herself a member of First Church, informs the author that many of the early
founders of the home were members of First Church. Another member reports that the church rendered financial support to the home during those early years. At present the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home for orphans is a private institution but many members of the church, including the pastor, serve on the board of trustees.

First Church played a significant role in the reconstruction of the Negro community following Atlanta's race riot of 1906. Bruce Barton describes that riot as follows:

Enough destruction was achieved to leave its eternal mark upon the glory of the city and to plunge a portion of the population, at least into complete despair. There were 51,902 Negroes in Atlanta, over one-third of all the people in the city.

... After two or three days the terror died on the street, but it raged still in the hearts of the people. And particularly of that first class of colored folk, who had come out of the country to make their homes in Atlanta and to acquire money to educate their children and be credit to their kind. 'We shall have to move,' they said one to another, repeating it over like frightened children. 'There will be no opportunity for us in Atlanta from now on; the disease is checked, but there remains the wound, ugly, glaring, a bitter reminder forever that we are set behind the veil, that we may go thus far and no farther. Whatever we have gathered together here that cannot go must be sacrificed, for we must seek out a new city where there is no scar.'

So the comment ran, and all over the city—that is, the colored city of 51,902 with which the story deals—men began trembling to gather their gooda about them preparatory to flight. For a few hours a whole city of 51,902 souls hung in the balance. One day it was there, prosperous, contented, aspiring; and the next day it shuddered on the brink of oblivion.

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67 Mrs. C. R. Yates, private interview held at Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, Atlanta, Georgia, July 30, 1968.

68 Mrs. J. Q. Carruthers, private interview held at First Congregational Church, Atlanta, Georgia, July 31, 1968.

Of First Church's role in the restoration of the city's Negro community Barton comments as follows:

But between those two days there moved in and through Atlanta the great towering figure of Henry H. Proctor of the First Congregational Church, colored, in Atlanta, graduate of Yale, successor to two white preachers and a figure in the city as unmistakable and as unavoidable as Piedmont Hotel or Union Depot. To one stricken business man after another he went with this message: 'Now is no time to think of leaving Atlanta. This riot gives us our opportunity. It is over. The city is forever sobered by it. Out of it will come a better understanding between races and a glorious progress for us. This is our appointed time if we can show ourselves worthy of it.' 'What do you mean worthy of it?' they questioned. And he answered them:

Now's our chance to show them the stuff we're made of—that we're real men, not grown-up children as they want to believe us. Let's show them the men we are. Let's begin by erecting a church as has never been erected by colored men before, an institutional church embodying all that is modern and approved in church work. Let that be our answer to the riot; and let's begin now.'

So there arose out of the havoc of the riot this monument to the courage and manhood of a people, a voice still but by no means small, following the earthquake and the fire. It is hardly too much to say that the City of Atlanta—the colored city of 51,902 souls found itself in the building of that church. Fixing its vision and determination on that, eager to show to the white city the substance of the soul, it forgot terror, forgot all the thoughts of desertion and stood fast. It is the only church I know that has the right to claim for itself that it saved a city.70

In 1908 Dr. Proctor erected the present structure of First Church located at Houston and Courtland streets in what is now downtown Atlanta. During his pastorate the church organized an Institutional Department which served the Negro people of Atlanta during that time. In 1917 Dr. Proctor went to New Haven, Connecticut, and solicited the help of Ralph J. Minor, a wealthy friend of his, who before his death included First Church in his will. Of this matter Mrs. Adams provides the following note:

70Ibid.
Dr. Proctor went north and found friends to aid. Ralph J. Minor of New Haven, Conn., and his wife, became the most substantial donors during his lifetime. By his will the department received $1100.00 yearly. The church supplied many volunteers to assist the two paid workers. Miss Nellie Watts, a social worker, of the membership, was paid by the Phelps-Stokes Fund, N. Y. Rev. Fletcher Bryant was financed by The Social Service Commission of Congregational Churches of the United States. The Cooking School and the Working Girls' Home paid the teacher and the matron respectively.71

With the financial aid provided by the Ralph J. Minor estate the church operated an employment bureau, a business school, a kindergarten, public water facilities, a playground and secretarial service for illiterate soldiers at Camp Gordon during World War I.

The employment bureau was successfully instrumental in helping people coming into Atlanta to find jobs in the city. Its clientele is said to have included white as well as Negro persons seeking employment. At the request of Mrs. Proctor, the wife of the pastor, the Remington Typewriter Establishment in Atlanta agreed to furnish typewriters for business classes at the church. Mrs. Proctor, who had been trained in business at Fisk University, conducted business classes in typing and shorthand.

The library of the church was supplied with books donated by Congregational churches in the northern states. It was situated in what is now the primary Church School room of the church.72 The gymnasium was housed in the rear of the basement and the working girls' home and cooking


72Kathleen R. Adams, private interview, Atlanta, Georgia, August 1, 1968.
school were located next door to the church. In front of the church on the Houston Street side were a drinking fountain for passersby and a trough for horses.

It is also reported that on Saturdays two young ladies from the church would go to Camp Gordon where they served as secretaries for illiterate soldiers stationed there. These young ladies also operated a postal service at the camp. All of these projects comprised what was called the Ralph J. Minor Institute, named after the church's late friend and donor, Ralph J. Minor of New Haven, Connecticut.

In 1920 the church discontinued its institutional ministry as such due to the advent of the Urban League and other civic agencies. With the close of the Ralph J. Minor Institute, the money that had financed the department was forfeited. However, it is understood that by 1921 4,200 persons were still using the curtailed institutional facilities.

In regard to the membership of First Church, Barton makes the following declaration:

Many city churches I have seen whose pastors could name over to me prominent and wealthy men among their members, or the husbands of their members. But I do not know where else there is a church that seems so thoroughly to have permeated the life of the city--as has the First Congregational Church in Atlanta. For a whole day I went back and forth in its city and up and down in it. The largest Negro printing establishment is owned by one of its members and the only Negro newspaper is edited by him. The oldest drug store in the city, the one singled out by the government to be a sub-postal station, is presided over by one

73ibid.


75ibid.
of the church's staunch supporters. I talked with a church trustee, a grocer who in his forty years and more of active business life has gathered a clientele more largely white than colored and accumulated a fortune of more than 40,000 [sic] dollars. Stationery stores, tailoring establishments, theaters, meat markets, photograph galleries— it seemed to me as we passed among them that everyone of particular merit bore upon its face the name of a member of First Church.

... In three cases the principals were members of the church and teachers in the Sunday School; and half of all the teachers that I saw, it seemed to me were connected in one way or the other with the life of the church as well.  

The first scout troop for Negro boys in the city was organized at First Church. In 1910 members of the church made petition for a charter for a troop. However, it was not until 1931 when Rev. William J. Faulkner, the third Negro pastor of the church, went to the proper authorities and strongly pled for the charter it was granted. In 1934 the troop received a 100% standard rating. "The troop won every honor in Scouting and the scout-master the highest award in Scouting," says Mrs. Adams. However, for some unexplained reason scouting was later discontinued at First Church, and now the church is without a scout troop.

First Church also played a vital part in the organization of Metropolitan Atlanta Association For The Blind. During the pastorate of Dr. Proctor the church accommodated the classes of the association until they were able to get a building of their own. First Church contributes financially to the organization and Dr. McEwen, the present pastor, is a deacon for the association.

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76Bruce Barton, The Church That Saved A City (Boston: By the author, 1914), p. 4.

First Congregational Church has figured prominently on both local and national levels. The Atlanta Interracial Commission was organized in First Church under the leadership of Dr. Proctor and Dr. Plato Durham, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of the city. Pastors of First Congregational Church have traditionally been civic and welfare leaders. Mrs. Middleton, in her thesis, states that:

Pastors of First Church have served on the following: Board of Directors and Executive Committee, Atlanta Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Executive Committee of the Atlanta Urban League; the Board of Management of the Butler Street Y.M.C.A., Atlanta; Advisory Committee, Fulton and Dekalb County Child Welfare Association; Board of Directors, Carrie Steele Logan Home for Orphans; Troop Committees of Troops 90 and 140, Atlanta Council Boy Scouts of America; Board of Directors and Executive Committee Atlanta Civic and Political League; Negro State Planning Committee; State Interracial Commission; State Advisory Committee Federal Forums, and Atlanta Vocational Guidance Council.

On the national level First Congregational is credited for the founding of the National Medical Association which includes most of the black doctors in the United States. The association began among Atlanta medical men under the inspiration and leadership of First Church. Also the National Convention of Congregational Workers for Colored People had its origin in First Church.

Cultural Promotion

As mentioned above First Church has sponsored programs of cultural entertainment for the city. Artists of both local and national fame have been featured in the concerts and festivals of those early years. Among

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the artists featured by the church were Joseph H. Douglass, violinist; Richard B. Harrison, dramatic reader; Mme. Azalia Hackley, soprano; William Bush, organist and Adrienne Herndon who along with Truman K. Gibson was featured in the play "Everyman." This was the first play given in the new building, thus pioneering the black theater in the city.

Looking in retrospect Mrs. Adams writes:

Memorable, in the minds of Atlantans and many adjacent smalltown lovers of good music, are the 1909-1912 Music Festivals. While visiting his Alma Mater, Fisk University, Dr. Proctor noticed a tenor voice of exceptional quality. Quick as a wink the City Auditorium, still under construction in Atlanta, flashed in his mind: 'A city-wide Music Festival; Star this tenor; Have an inter-denominational choir' — The Music Festivals were born.

Roland Hayes, that golden-voiced tenor made his debut thru First Congregational Church in 1909. It was the first public concert staged in the City Auditorium.  


During the first period, 1867-1894, the following ministers served as pastors of First Church: Rev. Frederick Ayer, Rev. Charles S. Ashley, Rev. Enoch E. Rogers, Rev. Charles W. Hawley and Rev. Samuel H. Robinson. These men served in the first edifice which was located on the corner of Houston Street and Piedmont Avenue. During the second period, beginning in 1894, First Church was served by the following men of the cloth: Rev. Henry H. Proctor, Rev. Russell S. Brown, Rev. William J. Faulkner,

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79Ibid., p. 13.
Rev. John C. Wright and Rev. Homer C. McEwen, the present pastor.

On June 25, 1957, the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States merged to form the United Church of Christ. One source informs that this union was brought about in order to "express more fully the oneness in Christ of the churches composing it." Shortly after the General Council voted to merge with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, First Church also voted to take part in the merger providing they could retain the word "congregational" in their name and that they could continue to manage their own affairs on the local church level.

The reader is asked to take note of the fact that in 1920 First Congregational Church discontinued its institutional church program due to the emergence of secular agencies designed to perform those functions. Therefore, it may appear that First Congregational Church no longer warrants the distinction of being an institutional church. However, before a conclusion can be reached all of the structural and functional components of the contemporary church must be examined.
CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURAL COMPOSITION

OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Local Organization

First Congregational Church is a highly organized structure with a considerable number of boards, auxiliaries and other organizations working under the leadership of the pastor and his associate. Its leadership consists of two highly trained ministers, both of whom possess both the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Divinity degrees from accredited institutions of higher learning. The church is composed of five official boards and ten auxiliaries which represent a total membership of 633 parishioners. A more detailed account of these facts should prove to be helpful in gaining a more meaningful understanding of First Congregational Church.

The Leadership

The Rev. Dr. Homer C. McEwen, pastor of First Congregational Church, received the Bachelor of Arts degree (Summa Cum Laude) from Straight College of New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1934. He then matriculated at the Chicago Theological Seminary from which he was graduated with the Bachelor of Divinity degree, cum laude, in 1940. He was awarded a Ford Fellowship on which he completed two years of additional study at the University of Chicago (1940-42), and in 1963 the Chicago Theological Seminary conferred on him the Doctor of Divinity honoris causa.

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As pastor of First Congregational Church, Dr. McEwen functions as the spiritual leader of the fellowship and as the head of all boards and organizations in the church (see Figure 2). At the present time Dr. McEwen has served as the pastor of First Congregational Church for twenty-four years. During his pastorate First Church has continued its ministry to the community.

The ministry of First Congregational Church is also conducted by the Rev. Donald S. Daughtry. Rev. Daughtry functions as the associate pastor and is directly responsible to the pastor for all the work that his position entails. Rev. Daughtry graduated with the Bachelor of Arts degree from Furman University before finishing Southeastern Seminary with the Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Before accepting his present position at First Congregational Church Rev. Daughtry was employed as the manager of an insurance company and served as a missionary for the World Ministries department of the United Church of Christ in the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. Rev. Daughtry came to First Congregational Church in August, 1967, as a part-time assistant pastor of First Congregational Church. During worship services on Sundays Rev. Daughtry assists in the order of worship and during the week works with the youth of the church in various programs and activities. Both of these men of the ministry are properly employed by the membership of the First Congregational Church from whom they receive their wages. Their leadership provides an interracial ministry for the church.

The Official Boards

The ministry of First Congregational Church is assisted by five official boards made up of laymen of the church; namely, the Board of
Deacons, the Board of Ushers, the Board of Women Ushers and the Boards of Trustees (see Figure 2). All members of these boards are nominated and elected by the members of the church who meet in a church conference which is held biennially.

**Board of Deacons**

Closest to the pastor in the conduct of the spiritual life of the church is the Board of Deacons. They work with the pastor for the "strengthening and upbuilding of the spiritual life of the communion." They meet monthly with the pastor in order to prepare the worship program of the church. They accompany the pastor when he administers Holy Communion to the convalescent and recommend to the congregation the name of the next person to serve as pastor whenever there is a vacancy to be filled.

**Board of Deaconesses**

The Board of Deaconesses is a group of ladies whose function is to give invaluable assistance to the Board of Deacons and the pastor in looking after the spiritual life of the fellowship. Through the proceeds of the Thanks offering which is contributed by members on each First Sunday they seek to encourage and assist the sick, aged, bereaved and distressed members of the church. They are assisted by an active Auxiliary to the Board of Deaconesses which meets with them quarterly.

**Board of Ushers**

The Board of Ushers is a male group which sees to the orderliness of the worship services, accommodates visitors with hospitality, provides reasonable comfort for worshippers and endeavors to create a wholesome atmosphere for fellowship.
Board of Women Ushers

The Board of Women Ushers is a female group which assists at various worship services and takes charge of the monthly Fellowship Hours which follow the worship service the second Sunday of each month.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the financial organ of the church. All of the financial and business phases of the church's life are its responsibility. They encourage stewardship, the wise planning of the budget, and overlook the care of the physical properties of the church.

The Auxiliaries

First Congregational Church also consists of ten auxiliary organizations which support the general program of the church in a number of different ways. Membership in these organizations is open to all members of the church depending on the age and sex of the person desirous of affiliation.

One of the most notable of these organizations is the Missionary Society. This group of adult women is responsible for missionary education and the raising of mission funds for both home and foreign mission fields. One of their most significant projects is the Adaline Miller Nursing Scholarship which is awarded to African girls desirous of entering nursing as a career. The Annual World Missionary Tea is one of their chief sources of income. The money gained by this project supports the world wide missionary service of the United Church of Christ. The Missionary Society is open to both men and women, but it is predominantly a woman's organization.
Another auxiliary which figures in the life of the church is the Altar Guild. This group of ladies bears the chief responsibility for aesthetic aids to the worship services. One of their most notable contributions to the church is the pulpit furniture which they purchased through the assistance of members and friends of the church. The Guild also sponsors the Annual Women's Day Service.

A third organization listed in this category is the Covenant Club. The Covenant Club is a men's organization whose membership is open to all adult males of the church. One desirous of affiliation may apply and be voted into the organization by the body. The objectives of the Covenant Club are as follows:

1. To promote and develop fellowship among the members.

2. To offer a channel for the easy mobilization of the manpower of the Church whenever and however needed.

3. To increase the pride and interest of the members in their church.

4. To make a definite financial contribution to the Church's annual budget.

5. To familiarize members with the background, history, faith, beliefs and achievements of Congregationalism.

6. To familiarize ourselves /e.g. members of First Congregational Church/ with the efforts of other denominations to develop a stronger lay interest and leadership in the church.80

Other adult auxiliaries of the church include the Social Club, the Servette Club, and the Ever-Ready Club. These clubs were formed for the purposes of Christian fellowship and evangelism. By evangelism it is meant that these clubs attract persons outside of the church who may

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later on become members of First Church.

Among the youth auxiliaries of the church are the Young Adult Fellowship, the United Church Youth and the Young People's Choir. The Young Adult Fellowship is open to young people of both sexes with ages ranging from eighteen to thirty years. They sponsor forums and other such activities geared around topics of interest to young people in this age bracket. The United Church Youth consists of young people in their early teens of both sexes. This group sponsors all of the youth activities of the church. They go on outings and send delegates to youth conventions of the United Church of Christ. First Church also has a Young People's Choir which provides music for the worship service every fifth Sunday. They go on outings and send delegates to youth conventions of the United Church of Christ. First Church also has a Young People's Choir which provides music for the worship service every fifth Sunday. They also sing at the offertory every other week.

Another organization found in the church is the Senior Choir. This choir, under the direction of Dr. G. Johnson Hubert, choral director of Morris Brown College, furnishes the music for every Sunday except the fifth Sunday when the Young People's Choir takes over.

Church School

First Congregational Church maintains a Church School which convenes every Sunday morning at 9:45 a.m. in the first unit of the church. The Church School is completely graded with classes for every three years. A staff of volunteer Church School teachers attempt to conserve and instruct the youth of the church in the teachings of the Christian faith.
FIGURE 2

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

PASTOR
Asst. Pastor

OFFICIAL BOARDS

| Board of Deacons | Board of Deaconesses | Board of Ushers | Board of Women Ushers | Board of Trustees |

AUXILIARIES

| Social Club | Altar Guild | Covenant Club | Servette Missionary Club | Ever Ready Club | Senior Choir | Young People's Choir | Young Adult United Youth Forum |

SUNDAY SCHOOL

CONGREGATION
All of these organizations contribute to the church's ministry, to the community by sponsoring programs and projects of their own which contribute to the cause and mission of the church. No organization here illustrated, however, bears any similarity to the institutional department which went out of existence in 1927. The ministry of First Congregational Church is now performed within the structure that has been described in this chapter and that structure alone.

Relations With the United Church Of Christ

As mentioned above, First Congregational Church is a member of the United Church of Christ. The United Church of Christ is organized on four levels; namely, the local church, the Association, the conference, and the General Synod. The local church is the basic unit of the United Church of Christ (see Fig 3). In the denomination each local church is autonomous; that is, it has the right to determine its own course of action. A booklet published by the denomination states as follows:

The United Church of Christ recognizes the inherent autonomy of the local church in the management of its own affairs, an autonomy that is to be exercised under the headship of God in Christ and in dependence upon guidance by the Holy Spirit. These functions include, but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship, and education; its own charter and name; its constitution, covenant, and confession of faith; the reception and dismissal of members; the choice of its pastor; the ownership of its property and the control of its funds; and the right of withdrawal from the United Church of Christ without forfeiture of ownership of control of any real or personal property owned by it. 81

An association is defined as follows:

An Association is composed of all churches in a geographical area and of all ministers who have standing in that Association. Its chief functions are to license and ordain ministers and to determine, confer, and certify the stand of both local churches and ministers in the United Church of Christ. It is concerned with the welfare of all local churches within its boundaries and correlates its work with that of the Conference and the General Synod and instrumentalities.

A Conference is composed of all local churches in a geographical area, usually according to state lines, and of all ministers who have standing in the Associations of that Conference or in the Conference itself. The Conference serves as an instrument through which the local churches take their part in the total task of the United Church of Christ and through which the fellowship as a whole may channel its programs, leadership, and resources to local churches.

Most Congregational Christian Associations are now Acting Associations of the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical and Reformed Synods and Congregational Christian Conferences are now Acting Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

The General Synod and the Executive Council are as follows:

The General Synod is the national representative body of the United Church of Christ and is composed of both lay and ministerial delegates elected by the Conferences.

The General Synod, , has the responsibility to carry on directly and through its Executive Council, instrumentalities and other bodies, the work and concerns of the United Church of Christ and to provide for the financial support of this work through a central treasury. No power vested in the General Synod, however, shall invade the autonomy of the Conferences, Associations and local churches or impair their right to acquire, own, manage and dispose of property and funds.
The Executive Council, composed of 21 persons, not more than one of whom shall be from any one Conference /sic/, is elected by the General Synod to serve on behalf of the General Synod and in the interests of all who compose the United Church of Christ in the interim between General Synod meetings. It implements the decisions of the General Synod, serves as its business committee when General Synod is in session, and is entrusted with the responsibility of submitting to the General Synod any recommendation it may deem useful for the development of the effectiveness and efficiency of the life, work, and organization of the United Church of Christ. Funds for the work of the General Synod and the Executive Council are included in the United Church budget.

In respect to First Congregational Church's position in the United Church of Christ Rev. Homer C. McEwen, the pastor, provides the following note:

First Congregational Church, Atlanta, Georgia, is a member in full standing of the United Church of Christ. This standing is structured through the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, 675 Piedmont Avenue, N. E., Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. William Andes, Conference Minister. Two laymen are members of Conference Commissions (The Ministry and Church Extension). 85

In the larger church the pastor is a member of the board of directors of the Board for Homeland Ministries. Mrs. Maxwell McEwen is a member of the Board for World Ministries. Mr. E. L. Simon is a member of the national Board of Directors of the National Council of Churches. 86

Figure 3 illustrates the position of First Congregational Church in the United Church of Christ. First Church is totally independent of the United Church of Christ. It does not rely on the denomination for any financial sustenance on policy-making decisions. Rev. McEwen, the pastor, provides the following notes:


86 Ibid.
First Church is a financially self-sustaining fellowship, giving each year the amount of missions monies which is requested by our Mission Boards. It has no dependence on denominational or other support from outside.87

The denominational affiliation of this church does not have any bearing on its ministry to the community as an institutional church. Both independent churches and churches that are affiliated with denominations have sponsored institutional church programs with or without the aid of outside help. Nevertheless, in order to get a total picture of First Congregational Church it was thought wise to say a word about its denominational affiliation in this study.
FIGURE 3

DIAGRAM OF THE DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, ATLANTA, GA.

GENERAL SYNOD

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

ASSOCIATION

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
CHAPTER V

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

As mentioned earlier in Chapter III of this study, First Church maintained a large number of functions which it relinquished to civic and welfare agencies which became active in the community. However, a few of the old projects started by the church have survived to this present time.

First Church still maintains its annual Vacation Bible School. Recently the school was moved from the church to the Carver Homes Community Center where children of that community along with children of First Church learn together. The Vacation Bible School functions for a period of four weeks and the church invites all members of the Carver Homes Community to participate.

In addition to the Vacation Bible School Program First Church has enlisted the services of a professor from Atlanta University to tutor high school students in mathematics at Carver Homes. The author understands that a similar effort will be made in Perry Homes sometime in the near future. Other than these, all of the community related programs of the church sponsored during the institutional church period (1908-1927) have been discontinued due to the advent of secular agencies.

But, First Congregational Church is affiliated with a large number of religious, civic, and social welfare agencies in the city of Atlanta. First Church has upon several occasions been featured on television by
the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, Inc. The pastor has delivered meditations on WAGA-TV, Channel 5, a number of times. The church also works in cooperation with the National Council of Christians and Jews and the Ecumenical Fellowship which embraces churches of the Presbyterian, Episcopal and United Church of Christ denominations. The pastor represents the church in each of these organizations.

First Church is also affiliated with such civic organizations as the Atlanta Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Executive Committee of the Atlanta Urban League, and the Board of Management of the Butler Street Y.M.C.A. The church was formerly affiliated with "Operation Breadbasket" of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. However, due to some misunderstandings in that organization this affiliation is no longer maintained.

Among the social service agencies with which the church is affiliated are the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home and the Metropolitan Atlanta Association For The Blind. The pastor of First Church serves as the trustee and the deacon for these agencies respectively. Lay members of the church serve in the following city-wide organizations: the Gate City Day Nursery; the Young Men's Christian Association; the Young Women's Christian Association; the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home; the Metropolitan Atlanta Association For The Blind; the Atlanta Girls' Club; the Door of Hope; the Atlanta Branch of the National Urban League; the Metropolitan Children's Center; the Family Service Association; the Atlanta Voters League; and the Big Brothers of America, Inc.

Worship services are held at the church every Sunday beginning promptly at 11:00 a.m. The services are of a high caliber featuring
music written by some of the world's greatest composers. The pastor's sermons are mostly addressed to the social and civic issues of the day. None of the functions currently conducted can be said to qualify First Church as an institutional church.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study of First Congregational Church as an institutional church in transition has focused on the various structural and functional changes which the church has undergone over a period of years. The data here gathered were secured by various methods collectively known as the case-study approach.

The basic assumption underlying this study is that organizations of all kinds adapt structurally and functionally to the environment in which they live. It has been indicated that First Congregational Church has adapted its ministry to changing times and situations as it has shifted from being a neighborhood church attending to the religious, social and economic needs of a small black community of about 51,902 to a large metropolitan parish situated in the downtown section of a leading metropolis of a million or more people.

It has been shown that this church has relinquished the first-hand services it once pioneered in the community to become a downtown metropolitan church affiliated with various religious, civic and social welfare organizations which carry on various aspects of the ministry it once conducted. It has been revealed that the church maintains relations with these agencies both by official representation on the boards of directors and executive committees of a number of these organizations and/or by participation of its individual members on the programs of
Therefore, following a careful examination of the evidence, it is clearly seen that First Congregational Church is no longer an institutional church due to changes in its ministerial program, its population, and its ecology. Although it remains on the same site the church no longer has a community in the immediate vicinity to serve. Most of the membership resides at a distance from the church and commutes. It is now located not in an interstitial neighborhood, but in the downtown section. It is in process of developing more fully its functions as a downtown church. This is suggested as its role, so long as it retains the present site. The findings of this research are much in accord with the views of Douglass, Kincheloe, Ericksen, Chapin and other observers of the urban church.
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