

Side 1

City Church

In the early 1900s, immigrants, white migrants, and black southerners came to Gary for work in the steel industry.¹ Rev. William G. Seaman founded City Church downtown in 1926 to serve as a Christianizing influence on the diverse population.² The ornate Methodist cathedral, funded in part by U.S. Steel,³ housed a gym, theater, music studio, cafeteria, and commercial unit.⁴

Side 2

City Church

Open seven days a week,⁵ the church served as a meeting space for many events in the city.⁶ Although the congregation remained segregated, the church offered programs for African Americans and immigrants.⁷ Membership peaked in the 1950s,⁸ but fell in the 1960s when white residents fled Gary for the suburbs.⁹ The church struggled to adapt to the community and closed in 1975.¹⁰

<https://940.on.worldcat.org/oclc/28414197>

For a comprehensive history of City Church, see James W. Lewis, *The Protestant Experience in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1975: At Home in the City* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

Founded in 1906 by the United States Steel Corporation, Gary quickly found itself dominated by the city's steel mills. This expanding market for steel shaped the city's built environment and encouraged population growth there. Between 1906 and 1930, increasing numbers of European immigrants, Black Southerners, Mexicans, and white migrants flocked to the region looking for work in the steel industry. With rapid social and population change taking place, the First Methodist Episcopal Church, under the vision of white pastor William Grant Seaman, initiated plans in 1917 to move into the heart of the segregated city. According to historian James W. Lewis, Reverend Seaman felt "the modern city was plagued by a breakdown of traditional community and social control, resulting in an anonymous, mobile, materialistic, hedonistic population. The city church's role, he inferred, was to develop programs which would provide some of the support, guidance, and satisfaction characteristic of traditional communities." To help meet the spiritual and recreational needs of Gary's diverse population, Reverend Seaman convinced the Centenary of Methodist Missions and United States Steel Corporation to donate funds for a downtown church.

In October 1926, Seaman's goal to provide an "oasis" in "which seven days of the week instead of one will continue ministerings to Gary's religious and creature-comfort need" was realized. City Church, as it became known, opened to much fanfare on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Washington Street. Reporters marveled at the ornate cathedral, which boasted of a social-educational unit, gymnasium, community hall equipped with a "moving picture outfit" and a modern stage, rooftop garden and tennis court. It also contained retail stores and a commercial cafeteria, which generated income for church expenses, necessary as the downtown church ministered to groups with fewer resources. Although

Reverend Seaman sought inclusivity, sources indicate that the congregation remained white until the church's closing, although foreign and Black residents utilized its amenities and programs. According to Lewis, Reverend Seaman promoted the "community hall 'as a religiously neutral ground for artistic and civic events' and was 'reasonably successful' in this, although foreign and black groups tended to use it independently, and there was little mixing of cultures."

Throughout its history, City Church provided a forum for civic, social, and political gatherings. The church hosted race relations meetings, musical and theatrical programs, Boy Scouts events, and prohibition group meetings. When Reverend Seaman left in 1929, the church became increasingly insular and ministered less frequently to Gary's immigrant and Black populations. Church records and bulletins from the 1950s to the 1970s denote renewed interest in ministering to the church's diverse neighbors, although the degree and frequency to which the church undertook this is unclear. In the 1960s, Reverend S. Walton Cole, who perhaps came closest to fulfilling Reverend Seaman's mission, wrote frequently in City Church newsletters about confronting one's personal prejudices and the role of the church in integrating minority groups. In 1964, the church hired Aurora Del Pozo to work with Gary's Spanish-speaking population. A 1968 newsletter noted the church's involvement in redeveloping the downtown area in collaboration with the Inner City Task Force, with a goal to "maintain a peaceful and developing community by improving race relations." Photos from City Church's later history document the operation of an immunization clinic, which served both African American and white children, as well as cooking classes for Spanish girls.

Despite the efforts of some City Church pastors, members of the white congregation largely did not support, and sometimes opposed, their goal to integrate the congregation. With Steel City's influx of African Americans and immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, City Church congregants fled to the suburbs, taking tax revenues from the urban core. Racial polarization became so profound that City Church reported in the 1970s that "Evening sessions are difficult without police protection. Most folks are afraid to come downtown." As membership sharply declined, church leaders realized they needed to build meaningful relationships with the local community. It became apparent they had waited too long and the 1973 Pastor's Report to the Administrative Board noted:

Most residents in the immediate area will already have found a convenient church where they are welcome . . . Furthermore Blacks are not likely to come to a church which they 'feel' has excluded them for several years. The neighborhood may have continued to change from one social class group to another, so that there is an almost unbridgeable gap between the white congregation and the persons living in the community.

In vain, City Church leaders considered merging with a local Black or white church, but closed in 1975.

¹ Unpublished Report, Rev. W.G. Seaman, The Calumet Region, ca. 1910-1920, p. 2-3, Box 1, Folder 9 "Report, 'The Calumet Region: Unusual Advantages for Industry,' by W. G. Seaman, n.d.," Calumet Regional Archives, CRA020; William Grant Seaman, Minister, First Methodist Episcopal Church, to Rev. D.D. Forsythe, D.D., Philadelphia, PA., December 1916, Box 1, Folder 12?, CRA020; "Open Program Dedicating \$800,000 City Church," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 4, 1926, front page, Indiana State Library (ISL) microfilm; The Reverend William Grant Seaman, D.D., Ph.D., Pastor, "The City Church, Gary,

Indiana,” inserted between 1926 and 1927 *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ISL; James B. Lane, *“City of the Century:” A History of Gary, Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), Chapter 3: Pioneer Life; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000), Chapter 2: The Great Migration and the First World War.

² Unpublished Report, Rev. W.G. Seaman, The Calumet Region, ca. 1910-1920, p. 2-3, Box 1, Folder 9 “Report, ‘The Calumet Region: Unusual Advantages for Industry,’ by W. G. Seaman, n.d.,” CRA020; Rev. W.G. Seaman to Capt. H.S. Norton, ca. 1920, Box 1, Folder 6 “Correspondence, Regarding Methodism in Gary, ca. 1920s,” CRA020; Untitled document about community service, ca. 1910-1920s, Box 1, Folder 12 “Correspondence, Capital Campaign and Construction (1908-1926),” CRA020; Rev. W.G. Seaman, First Methodist Episcopal Church, to Captain Norton, Gary Land Company, July 6, 1920, Box 1, Folder 6 “Correspondence, Regarding Methodism in Gary, ca. 1920s,” CRA020; “Trumpet Call from Gothic Tower to Open New Church at 10:15 Sunday Morning,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 1, 1926, ISL microfilm; Program, *The City Church, First Methodist Episcopal Church, Opening and Dedication, October 3rd to 10th, 1926*, p. 4-5, Box 1, Folder 31 “Bulletins, Opening and Dedication, The City Church, First Methodist Episcopal, October 3, 1926,” CRA020; “Open Program Dedicating \$800,000 City Church,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 4, 1926, front page, ISL microfilm; The Reverend William Grant Seaman, D.D., Ph.D., Pastor, “The City Church, Gary, Indiana,” inserted between 1926 and 1927 *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ISL; “Church Presents \$1,000 to Seamans as Farewell Token,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, September 19, 1929, 1, 9, ISL microfilm.

³ Copy, United States Steel Corporation, New York, Finance Committee Meeting, June 24, 1924, Box 1, Folder 12 “Correspondence, Capital Campaign and Construction (1908-1926),” CRA020; Excerpt, Minutes of The United States Steel Corporation, December 18, 1924, Box 1, Folder 15 “Resolution, U.S. Steel Corporation Finance Committee Regarding Payment to the Methodist Episcopal Church at Gary . . .,” CRA020; The Reverend William Grant Seaman, D.D., Ph.D., Pastor, “The City Church, Gary, Indiana,” inserted between 1926 and 1927 *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ISL; “Address by M.E. Leaders End Program,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 10, 1926, front page, ISL microfilm; James W. Lewis, *The Protestant Experience in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1975: At Home in the City* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 178-180.

⁴ Blueprints, “City United Methodist Church, Gary, Indiana,” no date, DePauw University Libraries Digital Library, accessed [PALINI Content DM Digital Collections](#); Rev. William Grant Seaman, Pastor, *Our Church*, p. 2-3, Box 1, Folder 31 “Bulletins, Opening and Dedication, The City Church, First Methodist Episcopal, October 3, 1926,” CRA020; “M.E. City Church Adds Gothic Beauty to New Era In Construction of Gary,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 4, 1926, front page, ISL microfilm; “Three Units Included In Church Group,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 7, 1926, 7, ISL microfilm; Lewis, 173.

⁵ Rev. William Grant Seaman, Pastor, *Our Church*, p. 3, Box 1, Folder 31 “Bulletins, Opening and Dedication, The City Church, First Methodist Episcopal, October 3, 1926,” CRA020; “Bishop Burns in Reply to Welcome,” *The Times* (Munster), September 28, 1927, 1, 9, accessed Newspapers.com; “First Services Held Sunday; Continue Week,” *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 4, 1926, 10, ISL microfilm; Roy J.

Gibbons, NEA Service Writer, "How a New Church Has Set About Installing Christ in a City's Heart," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 15, 1926, 10, Box 5, Folder 12 "News Articles," CRA020.

⁶ Edward F. Janson, "A Church Built for You," *Epworth Herald*, February 19, 192?, Folder "History," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; "Cite Progress of Colored Race at City Church Meet," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, February 14, 1927, 5, ISL microfilm; "Bishop Burns in Reply to Welcome," *The Times* (Munster), September 28, 1927, 1, 9, accessed Newspapers.com; The Reverend William Grant Seaman, D.D., Ph.D., Pastor, "The City Church, Gary, Indiana," inserted between 1926 and 1927 *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ISL; "Repertory Players Hold Rehearsals," *The Times* (Munster), May 19, 1932, accessed Newspapers.com; "Local Chapter Plans Attend," *Vidette-Messenger of Porter County*, June 9, 1932, accessed Newspapers.com; "Tina Florios Will Sing in Gary," *The Times* (Munster), September 30, 1932, accessed Newspapers.com; "Large Group Enjoys Talk of Dolly Gann," *The Times* (Munster), October 27, 1932, accessed Newspapers.com; "To Open Dry Drive in Gary," *The Times* (Munster), April 28, 1933, accessed Newspapers.com; *This Year's Program at City Methodist Church, 50th Anniversary Year—1956-1957*, Box 1, Folder 51 "Booklets, 'This Year's Program at City Methodist Church, 50th Anniversary Year,' 1956-1957," CRA020; Allen D. Byrne, City Methodist Church, to Friends, September 12, 1963, Box 1, Folder 61 "Correspondence, Methodist Committee on Interracial Problems, 1963," CRA020; About, Calumet Pastoral Care and Counseling Centers, ca. 1965, Folder "Pastoral Care," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; Booklet, *The City Church (United Methodism)*, no date, Box 1, Folder 11 "Booklet, The City Church (United Methodism), n.d.," CRA020; Lewis, 160.

⁷ Edward F. Jansson, "A Church Built for You," *Epworth Herald*, February 19, 192?, Folder "History," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; "Roumanians Are Guests at City Church Services," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, October 29, 1926, front page, ISL microfilm; "Cite Progress of Colored Race at City Church Meet," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, February 14, 1927, 5, ISL microfilm; The Reverend William Grant Seaman, D.D., Ph.D., Pastor, "The City Church, Gary, Indiana," inserted between 1926 and 1927 *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Session of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ISL; "Bishop Burns in Reply to Welcome," *The Times* (Munster), September 28, 1927, 1, 9, accessed Newspapers.com; "Gary Holds First Interracial Meet," *Indianapolis Recorder*, February 15, 1930, 3, accessed Hoosier State Chronicles; "Local Chapter Plans Attend," *Vidette-Messenger of Porter County*, June 9, 1932, accessed Newspapers.com; *This Year's Program at City Methodist Church, 50th Anniversary Year—1956-1957*, Box 1, Folder 51 "Booklets, 'This Year's Program at City Methodist Church, 50th Anniversary Year,' 1956-1957," CRA020; Allen D. Byrne, City Methodist Church, to Friends, September 12, 1963, Box 1, Folder 61 "Correspondence, Methodist Committee on Interracial Problems, 1963," CRA020; S. Walton Cole, "Minister's Message," *Tower Talk* 10, no. 6 (October 22, 1964): front page, Box 4, Folder 15 "Newsletters, Tower Talk, September 24, 1964-May 26, 1965," CRA020; S. Walton Cole, "Minister's Message," *Tower Talk* 10, no. 7 (October 29, 1964): front page, Box 4, Folder 15 "Newsletters, Tower Talk, September 24, 1964-May 26, 1965," CRA020; "Second Mission Program to Include Four Speakers," *Tower Talk* 10, no. 10 (November 19, 1964): front page, Box 4, Folder 15 "Newsletters, Tower Talk, September 24, 1964-May 26, 1965," CRA020; "A Day at City Church" and "An Active Church," ca. 1969,

Box 1, Folder 43 "Directories, Membership, 1934, 1969?," CRA020; "Three Ministers Receive Transfers," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, May 22, 1970, A4, ISL microfilm; Lewis, 160, 166, 186, 190.

⁸ *Minutes of the Northwest Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 19, no. 3-vol. 27, no. 4? (1926-1958), ISL; State of the Church Report, Charge Conference, November 21, 1971, Box 1, Folder 38 "Report, State of Church," CRA020; "Downtown Landmark Will Close," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, April 20, 1975, submitted by applicant; Table 5. City Methodist Church Membership, 1908-1975 in Lewis, 150.

⁹ Division of Research and Planning, Indiana Council of Churches, *Reconnaissance Study of the Inner City, Gary, Indiana*, ca. 1964, p. 15, 50, 53, Box 4, Folder 23 "Report, Reconnaissance Study of the Inner City, Gary, Indiana, Indiana Council of Churches, ca. 1964," CRA020; Survey, Research and Planning Office, North Indiana Conference, "The United Methodist Church, Gary, Indiana, June 1970," 3-5, Box 1, Folder 37 "Reports, City United Methodist Survey, 1970," CRA020; State of the Church Report, Charge Conference, November 21, 1971, Box 1, Folder 38 "Report, State of the Church," CRA020; "Possibilities for City Church," p. 1, Folder "Future Planning, 1973-1974," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; Lane, 83; Lewis, 150, 191, 194, 198, 200.

¹⁰ Pastor's Report to the Administrative Board, City United Methodist Church, "Where Do We Go From Here?," February 4, 1973, Folder "Future Planning, 1973-1974," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; "Downtown Landmark Will Close," *The Gary Post-Tribune*, April 20, 1975, front page, 5, ISL microfilm; The Order of Worship, Final Service, City United Methodist Church, October 5, 1975, Folder "Church Programs, 1927-1975," City United Methodist Church Collection, Roy O. West Library, Archives and Special Collections, DePauw University; "Resolution," Box 1, Folder 41 "Resolutions, Regarding Dissolving City Methodist Church, ca. 1974," CRA020; Lewis, 143-145, 191, 201.