

**Grant Us Wisdom, Grant Us Courage:
A Historical Summary of Highland Baptist Church;
Louisville, Kentucky; and Race, 1893–2021**

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HIGHLAND BAPTIST CHURCH

A thinking, feeling, healing community of faith

Louisville, Kentucky
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Introduction

In the spring of 1961, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a crowd of seminary students and faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, a mere two miles from Highland Baptist Church's sanctuary. At Southern, King called his fellow Baptists to take up the work of racial justice and reform—work that King was becoming increasingly well-known for in the early 1960s. “We have the privilege of standing between two ages,” he declared, “the dying old and the emerging new.” “The old order of segregation is passing away,” he went on, “and the new order of freedom and equality is coming into being.” For King, the church had a “moral responsibility” to address injustice and to guide the transition from the old order into the new. The church, King made clear that day, “cannot evade its responsibility in this very tense period of transition.” He called on Christians to work along two planes of reform: first, they must challenge the very ideas that form the roots of racial prejudice, and second, they must develop an “action plan.” “Wherever there is injustice in society,” he concluded, “the church must take a stand.”¹

Sixty years later, American society still stands at this juncture. The “old order” King referenced has maintained a firm grasp and has evolved in new and nefarious ways. King's words remain relevant today as some—not all—Americans work to end systemic racism.

King was speaking directly to Southern Baptists that day, which, at the time, included Highland Baptist Church. His visit did not pass without protest. One Alabama pastor openly

¹ Martin Luther King, “The Church on the Frontier of Racial Tension,” speech delivered at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 1961, accessed at <https://equip.sbts.edu/audio/full-text-church-frontier-racial-tension/>, July 6, 2021.

called for the resignation of Southern Seminary president and former Highland member Dr. Duke McCall if additional Black pastors spoke at the school.²

But what of the Highland Baptist congregation? This report will explore the extent to which Highland’s members answered King’s call to actively dismantle injustice in their local community, the nation, and the world. To what extent has Highland Baptist Church, from its inception 130 years ago until now, supported and bound itself to racial injustice? How has Highland Baptist Church supported nonwhite communities, both locally and globally? This report—the result of exhaustive research by Highland Baptist Church’s Reparations Task Force—seeks to answer these questions.

Louisville in the 1890s and the Founding of Highland Baptist Church

Many Louisvillians—and Kentuckians more broadly—have held onto a murky reputation as a welcoming city and state for nonwhites. In the decades after the Civil War, Southern apologists concocted this appealing-yet-inaccurate storyline. Several Kentucky Baptists joined this chorus including a Lexington pastor and newspaper editor, John W. Porter, who wrote in the Baptist-run *Western Recorder* in 1918 that Blacks were treated better in the South than the North.³

In recent years, scholarship by Blaine Hudson, Tracy K’Meyer, George Wright, and others have upended this narrative.⁴ The Equal Justice Initiative, for one, has documented over 169 reported lynchings taking place in the state between 1877 and 1950, though none were

² “Seminary Ouster Asked If More Negroes Speak,” (no author), *Courier-Journal*, April 23, 1961, vol. 213, no. 113, p. 25.

³ J. W. Porter, “The Negro Problem North and South,” *Western Recorder*, 38 (June 27, 1918), p. 8, quoted in Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917–1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 56–57.

⁴ See Mervin Aubespin, Kenneth Clay, and J. Blaine Hudson, *Two Centuries of Black Louisville: A Photographic History* (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 2011); Tracy E. K’Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); George Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890–1980* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); and George Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865–1930* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

reported in Jefferson County in that period.⁵ King himself challenged this mythology while in Louisville for open housing demonstrations in 1967, stating that he “encountered more white hatred in Louisville, a border city, than in any city in the Deep South.”⁶

Founded in 1893, Highland Baptist Church emerged at the apex of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination. After the Civil War, Kentucky’s state general assembly—populated by a sizable majority of ex-Confederates—kept in place a number of laws discriminating against Blacks. Kentucky legislators ensured that slave codes from before the war remained in place, while voting against landmark Reconstruction-era constitutional amendments including the thirteenth (abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude), fourteenth (granting citizens equal protections under the law), and fifteenth (granting the right to vote for male citizens).⁷

In the 1880s, Black Kentuckians were excluded from many public accommodations and denied basic social services.⁸ When it came to healthcare, public hospitals in Louisville refused to increase the numbers of beds Black patients could use, despite the influx of freedmen and women from the South. No private hospitals in Louisville would treat Blacks. White Kentuckians also excluded Blacks from theaters, baseball games, racetracks, and fairs, among other locales.⁹ Blacks in Louisville were sequestered in overcrowded and dilapidated housing and were woefully underpaid for their labors. Established white churches also refused nonwhite membership, and nonwhites who dared visit were expected to sit in the back of the sanctuary. As a result, Black churches—many of which were established before the Civil War—continued to proliferate in Louisville and across the state, with over twenty-four distinct congregations in Louisville alone.¹⁰

⁵ See <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>, accessed July 6, 2021; lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore/Kentucky/, accessed July 20, 2021; George Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 2.

⁶ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 1.

⁷ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 28.

⁸ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 59.

⁹ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 60–61.

¹⁰ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 61; Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 79.

In 1891, the same year that the land on which Highland Baptist would later be built was purchased, the Kentucky state legislature authorized the creation of separate state schools for Black residents. Black schools did not receive the same amount of funding as white schools, and Black teachers—though they taught more students and had the same credentials—were paid less than their white counterparts.¹¹ This segregated foundation was expanded in 1904, when State Representative Carl Day (D-Breathitt County) introduced a bill designed to segregate education at all levels in Kentucky. The measure, which became known as the Day Law, passed with little objection in the legislature. The interracial Berea College subsequently challenged the law (*Berea College v. Commonwealth of Kentucky*), but in 1908 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the measure, effectively banning the college from re-opening its doors to African American students.¹²

It was into this local and regional atmosphere of racial segregation and discrimination that Southern Baptist Seminary professor Basil Manly Jr. and his wife, Hattie Manly, purchased a tract of land in the Cherokee Triangle neighborhood with the intention of building a Baptist church. The land the church now claims is part of the historic homelands of Cherokee, Shawnee, and Osage peoples. These Indigenous peoples were violently pushed back from these lands by settlers and British and American soldiers in the late 1700s. Today, these Native Nations are located on reservations in North Carolina and Oklahoma.¹³

A brief review of the land's purchase history reveals concrete connections to Indigenous dispossession. Much of what would become the Cherokee Triangle neighborhood was initially deeded to Richard and Sarah Taylor. Taylor was awarded the land for having fought alongside George Rogers Clark against Shawnees and other Indigenous freedom fighters. In 1789,

¹¹ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 80–81.

¹² Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 90.

¹³ See https://heritage.ky.gov/Documents/Native_History_KyTeachers.pdf; also see <https://native-land.ca/>.

Cadwallader Slaughter purchased four hundred acres from the Taylors.¹⁴ Eventually, the Highland plot fell into the ownership of R. A. Robinson Jr., who sold it to Manly Jr. for \$3,300 (roughly \$95,000 in today's money) in 1891.¹⁵ Juliette Norton Marvin, an heiress of the wealthy Norton family, was also critical to Highland's founding as, among other things, she paid for the church building to be constructed. Her family made its wealth in banking and speculating in what was once Indigenous lands¹⁶ and had enslaved people before the Civil War.

Highland's founding members included individuals who held racist views, enslaved people, and defended the Confederacy and the institution of slavery. Basil Manly Jr., who died before the church was formally organized but had prepared the way for the church by starting a Sunday school in the area, was Highland's founding trustee, a Southern Baptist Seminary professor, and the son of a prominent Charleston, South Carolina, pastor and "Confederate statesman." His father enslaved more than forty people, and according to some evidence, Manly Jr. also enslaved people.¹⁷ John Broadus, who instructed Basil Manly Jr. to buy land for the church whose building Juliette Norton Marvin offered to finance, was president of Southern Seminary from 1889 to 1895 and had "served Southern soldiers,"¹⁸ including Confederate general Robert E. Lee, during the Civil War. Broadus enslaved two people and defended the "righteousness of slavery." Like many Confederate sympathizers, Broadus would go on to

¹⁴ Samuel W. Thomas, *Cherokee Triangle: A History of the Heart of the Highlands* (Louisville, KY: Cherokee Triangle Association, 2003), 96–97. For more on George Rogers Clark, see William Nester, *George Rogers Clark: "I Glory in War"* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Peter Smith, *The Cloud of Witness: 110 Years of Faith, 1893–2003, Highland Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky* (Louisville, KY: Highland Baptist Church, 2003), 2–3.

¹⁶ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 4.

¹⁷ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 2–3, 6; Dr. Celucien Joseph, "The Problem of Memory of Slavery and Racism at Southern Seminary: An Urgent Call to Remove the Four Founders-Slave Owners from the Seminary's Current Memory," online here: <https://drclucienjoseph.com/2020/06/20/the-problem-of-memory-of-slavery-and-racism-at-southern-seminary-an-urgent-call-to-remove-the-four-founders-slave-owners-from-the-seminarys-current-memory/>, accessed July 7, 2021. Joseph references the Southern Baptist Convention's report created by Jarvis J. Williams and Kevin M. Jones titled "Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention" (see next note for link).

¹⁸ "John Broadus," <https://archives.sbts.edu/the-history-of-the-sbts/our-presidents/john-a-broadus-1889-1895/>.

repudiate slavery after the war, while still working to preserve the racism baked into the “Lost Cause” narrative of the war. Broadus lionized Confederate soldiers, calling them “heroes,” while also speaking about the “difficult task” of evangelizing to the “lower races.”¹⁹ Another founding member and future president of Southern Baptist Seminary, John Sampey, was born in Alabama to a family where “Confederate loyalties were almost literally an article of faith.”²⁰ He viewed Robert E. Lee as his patron saint and mentioned him regularly in devotionals.²¹ Seminary professor and Highland member George Eager was sixteen when he enlisted in the Confederate Army, where he served as a courier.²² Lastly, Highland’s Richard Wyatt worked for Louisville’s city railway, a notorious site of race-based discrimination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²³

It is unsurprising that these early church founders were steeped in pro-slavery and segregationist ideologies given their close ties with the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, an institution that, according to a recent report by the Southern Baptist Convention, “is intertwined with the history of American slavery and the commitment to white supremacy which supported it.”²⁴ The Southern Baptist Convention itself was formed in 1845 when Baptists in the South split from Baptists in the North over the issue of slavery. Southern Seminary was its first seminary. Southern Seminary’s earliest trustees and leaders defended slavery, and opposed the abolition movement, and later the Reconstruction efforts, to enact racial equality. They

¹⁹ Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865–1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 40. See also Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” available here, <https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/sbts/uploads/2018/12/Racism-and-the-Legacy-of-Slavery-Report-v4.pdf>/accessed July 7, 2021.

²⁰ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 19.

²¹ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 19.

²² Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 19.

²³ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 1; Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 52.

²⁴ Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Report on Slavery and Racism,” 5.

supported white political candidates who would maintain “order” and white rule in the South. In short, this was an organization that held racist views and took overtly discriminatory actions.²⁵

The initial church deed described the intention of the Highland Baptist trustees to hold “to the doctrines of the Long Run Baptist Association,” another prominent organization of Baptist churches in Kentucky.²⁶ In the late nineteenth century, the Long Run Baptist Association was an integrated assembly of segregated churches. No record was found to explain to what extent Black churches in the organization had decision-making power and influence in the organization. It is worth noting that an earlier iteration of Long Run—the Salem Association—openly refused to weigh in on the question of slavery. In 1789 Rolling Fork Church asked Association members if it was “lawful” for a church member to hold another person in perpetual slavery. The Association responded, declaring it “improper to enter so important and critical a matter at present.”²⁷

In the early decades of the church, Highland Baptist historian Peter Smith writes, “Highland lived in a segregated state of mind.”²⁸ Despite the challenges of the post-Civil War era, the church’s main prophetic witness was temperance, and it fiercely advocated for government restriction of alcohol sales and individual abstinence. Many Highland members made up the leadership of the Anti-Saloon League, led efforts within the Long Run Baptist Association, and canceled prayer services to go to organizing meetings.²⁹ The passage of the Day Law (1904) and most major political events of the first eighteen years (1893–1911) went

²⁵ Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Report on Slavery and Racism,” 5–8.

²⁶ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 3.

²⁷ Ira V. (Jack) Birdwhistell, *Gathered at the River: A Narrative History of Long Run Baptist Association* (Louisville, KY: Long Run Baptist Association, 1978), 1.

²⁸ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 18.

²⁹ See Long Run Baptist Association’s Statement, <http://baptisthistoryhomepage.com/ky.jefferson.long.run.temperance.html>, accessed July 10, 2021; see also Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 18.

unmentioned in the annals of church activities.³⁰

Early Twentieth-Century Racial Legislation in Louisville

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, Highland archives leave virtually no record of racial justice activities, despite significant organizing efforts unfolding in Louisville. In 1917 Louisville's Residential Segregation Ordinance was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Buchanan v. Warley*). Backed by Louisville's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a Black Louisvillian named William Warley challenged Louisville's 1914 ordinance prohibiting a person from moving into a block where the majority of the residents were of another race. He partnered with a local white real estate agent sympathetic to the cause, Charles Buchanan, and contracted with him to buy a lot on a predominantly white street. After Kentucky courts upheld the ordinance, Warley appealed to the Supreme Court, which concluded that the ordinance violated the due process law of the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The *Buchanan v. Warley* decision was a significant win for Louisville's open housing movement, though the case would not substantially change housing segregation in the city.³¹ Historian of Black Louisville George Wright makes clear that "restrictive covenants and violence were used to maintain lily-white neighborhoods," adding that "housing discrimination remained so widespread that very few blacks would live west of Thirtieth Street before the 1950s."³²

Buchanan v. Warley inspired Black activists to continue fighting discriminatory laws and push for legal protections. The local NAACP, in addition to the Louisville Urban League and the

³⁰ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 18.

³¹ George C. Wright, "The NAACP and Residential Segregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1914–1917," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 78 (Winter 1980): 39–54; "Buchanan v. Warley," in *The Kentucky African American Encyclopedia*, Gerald Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John Hardin, ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 72–73.

³² Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 243.

Commission on Interracial Cooperation, began working to improve conditions in Black neighborhoods. Though these organizations and several prominent Black leaders did not always agree on the timing and methods of each other's activism, they made several important gains. In 1920, the NAACP successfully pushed an anti-lynching bill through the state legislature, making Kentucky one of the first states to pass such a law.³³ Louisville city officials also passed legislation banning Ku Klux Klan demonstrations in the city after local activists pushed for protections.³⁴ This last ordinance was significant given that the KKK claimed over three thousand members in Louisville, including several prominent policemen and business and community members. Rev. E. W. Parkes of the Portland Avenue Baptist Church (a member church of the Long Run Baptist Association), stated that 90 percent of the men in his congregation belonged to the Klan at the time.³⁵

These legislative measures, however, did not translate into significant material improvements for the Black community in Louisville or the state of Kentucky. Black industrial workers, for example, had made gains in industrial employment during the First World War, but once soldiers returned, the Black workers were pushed back to unskilled labor positions with poor pay. In 1925, the Louisville Urban League reported that most Blacks employed in Louisville industries worked as laborers.³⁶ Segregation in public and private spaces continued unabated, while private and public funds continued to support white communities.

³³ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 241.

³⁴ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 243.

³⁵ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 240.

³⁶ Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 216.

The Practice of Redlining

A federal, government-instituted practice that would have a lasting negative impact on Black homeownership—redlining—began in 1933 with the creation of the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation. Created as part of the New Deal to help protect home owners at risk of foreclosure, 40 percent of the U.S. population sought aid from this government entity. Color-coded maps were created in U.S. cities, including Louisville, to show which neighborhoods were “worthy” of investment and which were risky. Neighborhoods with African Americans, immigrants, and low-income families were often rated C or D and were colored yellow and red on the maps. People living in these neighborhoods were not eligible for mortgage insurance or credit and were denied both for decades. The neighborhoods given the highest ratings, and whose families were eligible for mortgage insurance and credit, also had the highest number of deed restrictions against selling their homes to Blacks.³⁷

Highland Baptist was in a strip of blue-coded land, a B grade. Across the street and behind the church, the land was coded yellow, a C grade. The Russell and Portland neighborhoods were colored red on the map, the eastern section of Russell being characterized as the “worst area of the city.” This area was later targeted for urban renewal and became the Beecher Terrace and City View housing complexes. Despite a 1951 study finding that more than 60 percent of the houses in this area were acceptable and only 16 percent considered “slums,” the houses in this area were considered substandard in the assessment reported on the map.³⁸

Early Twentieth-Century Mission Work at Highland

During the First World War and the interwar years, Highland Baptist Church was not tending

³⁷ Joshua Poe, “Redlining Louisville: Racial Capital and Real Estate,” on Louisvilleky.gov website, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/redevelopment-strategies/redlining-community-dialogue>.

³⁸ Poe, “Redlining Louisville.”

to racist practices in Black Louisville but focused its efforts elsewhere. In the 1910s, meeting minutes and bulletins make mention of raising funds for the Hope Rescue Mission (HRM), an inner-city ministry for men down on their luck that was started by the pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church. Highland pledged \$2,000 in 1913 to support a Baptist church in the center of the city, which was supervised by the HRM.³⁹ In 1921 Highland Baptist Church became responsible for a white mission congregation at 38th and Market, a mission that in two years became Shawnee Baptist Church. In 1939 Highland began another white mission church, Baxter Avenue Mission.⁴⁰ Highland did donate to the Baptist Fellowship Center, a mission for Blacks in West Louisville run by Clarence Jordan, who later started Koinonia Farm, a biracial Christian farming community, in rural Georgia in 1942.⁴¹ The one clear-cut record of Highland giving directly to a local nonwhite-led organization was the decision in May 1929 (before the stock market crash that October and the onset of the Great Depression) to give “a discarded blackboard sign” used on the lawn in the front of the church to a Black church in Louisville.⁴²

A resolution adopted by the church in the spring of 1914 reflects the institution’s desire to stay out of any activity that was not overtly religious. It reads:

The Official Board of the Highland Baptist Church learns with pleasure of the good work of the Men’s Federation of Louisville, and while recognizing that the Church, as such, cannot properly be engaged in purely social and secular affairs, it also recognizes that it has an inevitable interest in all movements looking toward public betterment, and is gratified to know that this congregation is represented in the Federation, and is assisting in it’s [sic] endeavors.⁴³

³⁹ Highland Baptist Church Meeting Minutes [hereafter HBC meeting minutes] for December 22, 1912; 1914–1915 budget; July 7, 1915; and November 7, 1917, Highland Baptist Church Archives, Louisville, Kentucky [hereafter HBC archives].

⁴⁰ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 35–36, 68.

⁴¹ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 70; Highland Baptist Church Deacons Minutes [hereafter HBC deacon minutes], January 6, 1941; October 5, 1942; and October 4, 1943, HBC archives.

⁴² HBC meeting minutes, May 8, 1929, HBC archives.

⁴³ Resolution signed by M. R. Neel, Secretary, HBC meeting minutes, April 22, 1914, in vol. April 18, 1906–March 17, 1915, HBC archives. The Louisville Men’s Federation, founded in 1910, had as its purpose “to unite men of the

The resolution plainly states that Highland “cannot properly be engaged in purely social and secular affairs.” The “inevitable interest in all movements looking toward public betterment” portion offers hope for participation in the civil rights movement growing within Louisville, Kentucky, and the nation, as does the involvement of individual Highland members—yet Highland as an organization remained largely silent, inactive, and disengaged. Almost thirty years later, the deacons had a similar response to a request by the Louisville Council of Churches to participate in a study of institutions such as prisons, hospitals, workhouses, and jails with the aim of undertaking a rehabilitation program for those in the institutions. The deacons decided it was more a “social than a religious undertaking and too far reaching for the church to engage in.”⁴⁴

Highland did support several missions to nonwhite countries. This support reveals a concerted effort in expanding Christian fellowship across the globe. In the early decades of the twentieth century Highland supported missions to China, Africa, Brazil, Korea, and Japan.⁴⁵ Members of Highland during these years who became missionaries were Louise Tucker, who served in China, Mary Sampson, who also served in China, and William and Daisy Jester, who met at Highland and were missionaries in Tanganyika, Kenya, and later Nigeria.⁴⁶ At times, these and other missionaries were given audience at the church and sent off with blessings for fruitful work abroad.

churches for the improvement of the religious, moral, and physical condition of the people of Louisville.” See “Ecumenism,” *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, ed. John Kleber (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 283.

⁴⁴ HBC deacon minutes, March 2, 1942, HBC archives.

⁴⁵ HBC meeting minutes, August 1, 1917; Highland Baptist Church Bulletins [hereafter HBC bulletins], February 7, 1926; February 14, 1926; August 5, 1928, HBC archives.

⁴⁶ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 10, 92–93, 105.

Mid-Twentieth-Century Black Activism

During and after World War II, Black activists in the United States continued to organize. In 1941 Philip A. Randolph, a leader of the Brotherhood for Sleeping Car Porters, organized the March on Washington Movement (MOWM). It was the first large-scale organization committed to nonviolent, direct-action tactics. Active throughout the 1940s, MOWM successfully pressured President Franklin D. Roosevelt to desegregate the armed forces in the early 1940s, with the signing of Executive Order 8802. Black veterans, however, would be cut off from the major benefits outlined in the landmark postwar G.I. bill, which provided substantial funds for education, vocational training, and home loans for WWII vets. A provision in the bill, authored by a notorious segregationist from Mississippi, authorized states to implement the bill's provisions. Granting implementation rights to state agencies meant that in the American South (and elsewhere) the bill's many resources would not fall into nonwhite hands. In addition to lacking these critical government resources, Black veterans returned from war to segregation and increased racial violence. Reports of lynchings and beatings of Black veterans were so common in the immediate postwar period that civil rights activists organized the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence in 1946. Members met with President Truman and sought anti-lynching legislation. It never passed.⁴⁷

Locally, the Louisville activist community—led by Lyman T. Johnson and others—continued the desegregation fight and made notable gains. In the 1930s and '40s, Black and white educators and leaders lobbied for an amendment to the 1904 Day Law. In 1948, training opportunities for physicians and nurses were desegregated. Louisville libraries were officially desegregated in 1948, and the desegregation of Louisville hospitals began that same year, when

⁴⁷ For a brief overview of discrimination with G.I. bill distributions and violence against returning soldiers, see Alexis Clark, "Returning from War, Returning to Racism," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 30, 2020.

St. Joseph Infirmary, a Catholic hospital, admitted Black patients.⁴⁸ In 1955, Louisville’s mayor, Andrew Broaddus, signed an executive order desegregating all public parks. And in March 1950, after Lyman Johnson was admitted to the University of Kentucky, the state general assembly amended the Day Law. The University of Louisville then decided to close the all-Black Louisville Municipal College. All Louisville colleges and universities desegregated by 1951.

Highland’s Response to Racism, Mid–1940s to Mid–1950s

In this postwar atmosphere defined by Black activism locally and nationally, Highland openly addressed—albeit briefly—racism and race issues. The February 10, 1946, bulletin proclaimed it was “Inter-racial Sunday” and made plans for an interracial program that night. The next Sunday night the bulletin reported that a local African American, Mr. R. S. Stout, would speak about the prominent Black scientist George Washington Carver, whom he knew personally, in the Sunday night Training Union Assembly.⁴⁹ No further details or reactions to the event remain, but the following Sunday, February 25, the church bulletin printed a statement of personal responsibility that, for the first time, suggested that the congregation held an interest in racial justice issues. The front page reads:

I will respect all men and women regardless of race and religion.
I will protect and defend my neighbor and my neighbor’s children against the ravages of racial or religious bigotry.
I will exemplify in my own life the spirit of good will and understanding.
I will challenge the philosophy of racial superiority by whomsoever it may be proclaimed, whether they be kings, dictators or demagogues.
I will not be misled by the lying propoganda of those who seek to set race against race or nation against nation.
I will refuse to support any organization that has for its purpose the spreading of anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, or anti-Protestantism.

⁴⁸ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 167.

⁴⁹ HBC bulletins, February 10, 1946, p. 2; and February 17, 1946, p. 2, HBC archives.

I will establish comradeship with those who seek to exalt the spirit of love and reconciliation throughout the world.
I will attribute to those who differ from me the same degree of sincerity that I claim for myself.
I will uphold the civil rights and religious liberties of all citizens and groups whether I agree with them or not.
I will do more than live and let live—I will live and help live.

—Dr. Walter W. VanKirk⁵⁰

Later that year the Highland bulletin promoted a monthly, interracial, interdenominational worship service at Trinity-Temple Methodist Church.⁵¹ Through the rest of the 1940s there is little mention of racial matters in Highland bulletins, deacon meetings minutes, and church business meeting minutes. On two occasions, Highland donated to Black communities. In 1949, \$50.00 went to the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky to “assist them in erecting a building for Simmons University,” Louisville’s historically Black university, which had been founded in 1879. In 1950 Highland leaders also recommended that \$37.50 go to the Virginia Baptist Church (a Black church) from funds initially designated for mission work.⁵²

Highland’s brief acknowledgement of racism and racial injustice coincides with a moment of reflection within the Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC appointed a committee on race relations in 1946, headed by Dr. J. B. Weatherspoon (a former Highland minister). The committee was set to study “the whole race situation, especially in its moral and religious aspects and meaning, to consider the responsibility of Baptists in the problems of adjustment of interracial relations.”⁵³ Louisville hosted interracial conferences at the seminary and elsewhere in the city in 1946 and again in 1956.⁵⁴ Highland was potentially involved in these efforts, but no

⁵⁰ HBC bulletins, February 25, 1946, HBC archives.

⁵¹ HBC bulletins, May 12, 1946, p. 2, HBC archives.

⁵² HBC deacon minutes for July 5, 1949 and April 3, 1950, HBC archives.

⁵³ HBC deacon minutes, April 24, 1949, HBC archives; and J. B. Weatherspoon, “Studying the Whole Race Situation,” *Western Recorder*, October 31, 1946, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Erwin L. McDonald, “Southwide Interracial Initial Conference Held in Louisville,” *Western Recorder*, May 2, 1946, p. 23; and “Interracial Fellowship Sets Louisville Meeting,” (no author), *Western Recorder*, March 29, 1956, p. 17.

church records discuss the initiative in detail. The church records focus instead on Highland's commitments to supporting relief work in Europe, protesting any national legislation that interfered with separation of church and state, particularly in regard to Catholics getting aid for their private schools, and funding Southern Baptist Convention missionaries, both foreign and domestic.⁵⁵

Desegregation of Schools in Louisville

Following the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court ruling to desegregate schools—and thanks to decades of work on the ground by the NAACP and other Louisville activists—the Louisville Public School System embraced desegregation on September 10, 1956. In a plan that gained positive national recognition, students were assigned to schools that did create some integrated schools, but the city's plan also included a “freedom of choice” option that essentially allowed students to opt out of their designated school and choose which school to attend. In the end, the school desegregation plan did not transform into a desegregated reality, and Louisville remained a deeply segregated city. Residential segregation all but ensured that only two of the district's school zones had a chance of integration, the two where Blacks and whites lived in close proximity to one another.⁵⁶

The Struggle for Open Accommodations in Louisville

In the mid-1950s, the “second phase” of civil rights activism kicked into high gear. This second phase, according to Mervin Aubespain, Kenneth Clay, and J. Blaine Hudson, was characterized

⁵⁵ HBC bulletins, January 16, 1949, p. 3; April 24, 1949, p. 4; HBC meeting minutes, January 9, 1952; January 9, 1957; HBC deacons minutes, July 5, 1955, p. 1; January 7, 1957; *Highland Baptist Herald* [newsletter, hereafter HBC *Herald*], March 5, 1950, vol. I, no. 9, p. 2; July 19, 1957, vol. VIII, no. 29, HBC archives.

⁵⁶ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 174; K'Meyer, *Gateway*, 49–51.

by “more frequent use of direct action, public protests, confrontation, demonstrations, boycotts, and other tactics to overcome more intransigent and often violent resistance to change.”⁵⁷ The desegregation of schools in Louisville fueled Black activists to push for open public accommodations and open housing. The drive for open accommodations proved to be the easier fight.

Early attempts at passing an open accommodations ordinance, beginning in 1957, failed. Black young people began holding sit-ins at lunch counters in stores, and in December 1957 stand-ins at the Brown Theatre. In January 1961, many students from Male High School joined the demonstrations, leading to five of them being arrested in February. In the following days more students showed up for demonstrations at cafeterias and theaters; many were arrested.⁵⁸ In April 1961—the same month Dr. King spoke at Southern Seminary—the *Courier-Journal* reported that Louisville police arrested 149 Black activists in connection with demonstrations in prominent eating establishments. Only three of the nine places targeted served Black patrons.⁵⁹ “By April 27, 1961, more Louisvillians—685 in all—had been incarcerated during demonstrations than anywhere else in the nation to that point.”⁶⁰

One of those high school demonstrators, Raoul Cunningham, said of the students’ activism, “We weren’t thinking of history. We weren’t thinking about making a difference. We were thinking about breaking the barriers of segregation. Because we wanted to go to these restaurants and eat, we wanted to go to the movie theaters. . . . Segregation made me angry.

⁵⁷ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 185.

⁵⁸ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 80–82, 87–88.

⁵⁹ “149 Seized, Including 9 Adults, In Eating-Place Demonstrations,” *Courier-Journal*, April 21, 1961, vol. 213, no. 111, p. 1.

⁶⁰ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 90–91.

Simply because I was denied what I considered to be a right. . . . [Segregation] made you feel less than a human being.”⁶¹

Black adult leaders were also involved in the push for an accommodations ordinance. Getting nowhere with the mayor and Board of Aldermen, they turned their efforts toward voter registration, and in the fall of 1961 the resistant mayor and aldermen were voted out of office. For more than a year Black activists continued to prod elected officials to action. When faced with the fear of becoming another Birmingham where in the spring of 1963 images of fire hoses and police dogs unleashed on young demonstrators had caught the nation’s attention, The Board of Aldermen finally passed an open accommodations bill on May 14, 1963.⁶²

Lyman Johnson of the local NAACP, who had put pressure on the mayor, later told *Look* magazine, “Everything the Negro has won in Louisville has been won by fighting. Not by violence, but by insistence.”⁶³

Just as the peaceful integration of schools in 1956 brought the city national attention and praise, so did the passage of the open accommodations bill. The mayor boasted that it was the first of its kind “in any major city in the South.”⁶⁴ The passage of the bill marked the high point of Louisville’s reputation as a leader in race relations in the region.⁶⁵

The Struggle for Open Housing in Louisville, 1954

In Louisville, gains in desegregating public spaces galvanized leaders to push for open housing.

The struggle to desegregate housing in Louisville and Jefferson County would prove exceedingly

⁶¹ Interview with Raoul Cunningham in *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky*, Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K’Meyer, eds. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 93.

⁶² K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 88–90, 99–101.

⁶³ Chester Morrison, “City That Integrated without Strife,” *Look* magazine, vol. 27, no. 16, August 13, 1963, p. 44, quoted in K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 104–105.

⁶⁴ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 77.

⁶⁵ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 77.

challenging and ultimately not as successful as the fight for open public accommodations. Louisville remained (and remains) segregated, though with urban renewal and white flight the shape of housing segregation shifted. “In Louisville,” historian Tracy K’Meyer explains, “most whites grudgingly accepted the desegregation of public, tax-supported spaces while remaining openly hostile to the breakdown of Jim Crow in private spaces—especially housing.”⁶⁶ A 1948 article in the *Courier-Journal* noted that roughly 75 to 80 percent of land in Louisville was covered by real estate agreements restricting persons on the basis of race.⁶⁷

An early test of open housing occurred in May 1954, one week before the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling to desegregate schools. A local white couple, Carl and Anne Braden, purchased a home in the white neighborhood of Shively and sold that home to a Black family, headed by Andrew and Charlotte Wade. Andrew Wade was a veteran, and he and his wife were having trouble locating adequate housing in the Black sections of town, so they appealed to the Bradens for support. Almost immediately after the Wades moved in, whites began harassing them, throwing rocks and sending bullets into their home. A month after the Wades arrived in white Shively, a bomb exploded underneath their home destroying part of the structure.⁶⁸

In response to the bombing, many white moderates distanced themselves from the Bradens and Wades, including local ministers. K’Meyer recounts that ministers invited to discuss the bombing on a local radio show, *Moral Side of the News*, spent most of their time condemning the Bradens’ decision to sell the home to a Black family, rather than denouncing the violence.⁶⁹ Anne Braden, for her part, remained committed to recruiting the white church into civil rights

⁶⁶ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 146.

⁶⁷ “75 pct. Of Land Here Covered By Restrictions,” *Courier-Journal*, May 4, 1948, vol. 187, no. 125, p. 1.

⁶⁸ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 64–65.

⁶⁹ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 64–65. See also article condemning Bradens, “A Forced Issue Can Foil Progress,” editorial, *Courier-Journal*, May 18, 1954, vol. 199, no. 138, p. 8.

work. “Unlike many people concerned with social problems,” she wrote, “I had not written the white church off.” In Braden’s mind, the church “held the potential for helping to make a better world.” When it came to the violence unfolding in the Shively neighborhood, Braden felt it was “more a job for the church than for the police.”⁷⁰

Blockbusting and Urban Renewal

After World War II the construction business picked up, and many new homes were built—primarily in the east and south ends of the city. Blacks were not allowed in these new areas, and as whites living in the West End started moving to these new subdivisions, they sold their homes in the West End to Blacks. When a Black family moved into a white neighborhood in the West End, unscrupulous real estate agents encouraged white home owners to sell their homes quickly, playing on white fear of Blacks and causing many white families to sell their homes at a lower price to the agents. The agents then turned around and sold the homes at a much higher price to Black families. This practice, known as “blockbusting,” defined the creation of West Louisville as a Black community. By 1960 many Blacks had moved out of the center of Louisville to the West End.⁷¹

Blockbusting was paired with “urban renewal” efforts designed to push out Black enterprise and support white businesses and communities. Known as the Civic Center Project because of the numerous public buildings within its 316 acres, this extensive government endeavor destroyed many commercial and residential properties, including Black Louisville’s central economic and cultural center on Old Walnut Street.⁷² In response, several Black Baptist

⁷⁰ Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 72.

⁷¹ *Kentucky’s Black Heritage: The Role of the Black People in the History of Kentucky From Pioneer Days to the Present* (Frankfort, KY: Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1971), 125.

⁷² Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 196.

leaders and community members formed the West End Community Council in 1963.⁷³ A citywide interfaith and interracial “home visits” program began in the same year in an effort to support better race relations in the city. These efforts, however, would not curtail the significant economic and cultural damage wrought by postwar gentrification projects.⁷⁴

The Continued Struggle for Open Housing

Just as Black activists and white allies and accomplices staged demonstrations for an open accommodations ordinance, after that ordinance became law they pressed the local and state communities to desegregate housing and other private spaces. Young people, including high school students, continued to participate in demonstrations to put pressure on the city to act. Many were arrested. “We did a lot of marching in South Louisville. We marched on Fourth Street. We had sit-ins in the middle of Sixth Street between city hall and the county courthouse,” former Metro councilwoman Cheri Bryant Hamilton recalls of the open housing demonstrations. “There was fear too. . . . [W]e were meeting hecklers out there wherever we’d go.”⁷⁵

The push for an open housing ordinance would take longer than that for the open accommodations law. In April 1967, the Board of Aldermen defeated a proposed open housing ordinance. Black activists took to the streets in protest, as did a large and sizable anti-ordinance crowd. Anti-ordinance crowds ranged from six hundred to two thousand people.⁷⁶ In response to these segregationist measures, Black leaders started another voter registration campaign and threatened to disrupt the Derby. Martin Luther King Jr., who was in town supporting the protests, called off the Derby disruption. In August of that year, King visited Louisville again and

⁷³ “West End Community Council Seeks Answers,” *Courier-Journal*, August 4, 1963, vol. 218, no. 35, p. 9.

⁷⁴ “Interracial Home Visits Are Planned,” *Courier-Journal*, September 5, 1963, vol. 218, no. 67, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Interview with Cheri Bryant Hamilton in *Freedom on the Border*, Fosl and K’Meyer, 135–136.

⁷⁶ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 132.

urged the Black community to vote.⁷⁷ The voter registration drive resulted in the election of a new Board of Aldermen in November 1967. This new board passed an open housing ordinance on December 13, 1967.

By 1967, open accommodations and open housing ordinances—along with the stated efforts to integrate public schools—suggested that significant transformations in Louisville’s race relations were underway. The Black community in Louisville and across the country, however, began to get impatient with the slowness of change and to question the nonviolence movement espoused by King. As a result, they re-examined the ability of legislative and administrative measures to create tangible, lasting change. In 1968, race riots erupted across the country in response to the slow pace of reform, the assassination of King on April 4, 1968, and continued police violence. In May 1968 Louisville police detained a Black man who stopped to check on a friend pulled over by police, which resulted in the city’s own weeklong riot. The city sought to crack down on the riot and indicted six Black community leaders and activists for conspiracy to destroy private property. Known as “The Black Six,” the case mobilized community members to their defense. Bill Allison, a local lawyer and activist, explained that “the thing that was so stark about the Black Six case was that they arrested black leaders from all different segments of black society, so that they were sending a message to the entire black community.”⁷⁸ The judge later ruled that there was insufficient evidence for the case, which by then had received national attention thanks to the work of local activism.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 198–199; K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 136. See also Samuel Abramson, “Disorder at the Derby: Race, Reputation, and Louisville’s 1967 Open Housing Crisis,” *Ohio Valley History*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 2015), pp. 39, 43–44.

⁷⁸ Interview with Bill Allison in *Freedom on the Border*, Fosl and K’Meyer, p. 205.

⁷⁹ K’Meyer, *Gateway*, 190–198.

Southern Baptists' Response to Racism

During these pivotal decades, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) made small efforts to address race issues, but large tracts of its members remained ardent segregationists. A 1954 *Louisville Times* article reported that the SBC urged support for the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.⁸⁰ The SBC also voted that year to accept a report authored by the Christian Life Commission urging Southern Baptists to view the ruling positively and “adopt a Christian attitude toward the court’s decision.”⁸¹ It is notable that a former pastor at Highland, J. B. Weatherspoon, was the chairman of that commission. He added that disapproval of the recommendation would mean saying to the nation, “count the Baptists out in the matter of equal justice.”⁸²

By 1968 little had changed within the SBC. So little, in fact, that a group of students planned a large protest at the annual Southern Baptist Convention gathering in Houston, Texas.⁸³ The organization—Baptist Students Concerned—hoped that the demonstrations would mobilize SBC leaders to address what they called the “three basic weaknesses” in the convention:

1. Ignorance of what the (social) struggles are, where the needs are and how best to meet these needs
2. Racial barriers
3. Lack of involvement in the plight of the poor⁸⁴

Highland's Response to the Civil Rights Movement

Highland Baptist Church records contain no evidence of official church support or church member participation in the demonstrations and nonviolent protests that gripped Louisville in

⁸⁰ “Segregation Rule Gets Southern Baptist Okay,” (by the Associated Press), *Louisville Times*, June 5, 1954, p. 1.

⁸¹ “Segregation Rule,” p. 1.

⁸² “Segregation Rule,” p. 1.

⁸³ “Students Plan Protest Demonstration at Baptist Convention,” *Louisville Times*, May 23, 1968.

⁸⁴ “Students Plan Protest Demonstration.”

the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1960s Highland focused its ministry on the Highland neighborhood, starting a ministry to the local elderly and, with other area churches, a coffee house aimed at serving youth in the Highlands who were not part of a church.⁸⁵ In 1968 Highland opened a neighborhood activity center called The Highlander and also began a tutoring program for Bloom Elementary School students. It is not known if any of the Bloom students were nonwhite.⁸⁶ It is critical to note that the Highlands neighborhood in the 1960s was a white space; less than 2 percent of the neighborhood population was nonwhite.⁸⁷ This meant that Highland members were performing outreach and conducting service in a largely white community.

In the mid-1960s Highland pastor Nathan Brooks became the most outspoken leader on race issues in Highland's history to date. He was part of the interfaith, interracial "home visits" program in which whites, Blacks, and people of different faiths met in each other's homes to talk about race, and he encouraged Highland members to join him (see p. 22 of this report). Whether any did is unknown.⁸⁸

It does appear that racial justice issues were on the minds of some Highland congregants as well. In April 1965, Brooks shared that the Training Union Group at Highland had reached three conclusions on church ministry, with the final two holding the potential for meaningful action on racial justice:

2. It is our opinion that the congregation should concentrate on ministering effectively to people in the immediate church community. We believe, more specifically, that Highland church should provide a deeper ministry and fellowship to the underprivileged families who live in our vicinity, a few of whom are members of our congregation. Those who are not members should be heartily invited to our services of worship. We believe also that

⁸⁵ HBC meeting minutes, August 5, 1964, p. 1, HBC archives; Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 103.

⁸⁶ January 1968 Report of the Neighborhood Activity Center by Mary Frances Bailey, Highlander director, in HBC meeting minutes, vol. 1966–1968, HBC archives.

⁸⁷ Long Range Planning Committee Report, p. 14, included with November 6, 1968 HBC meeting minutes, vol. 1966–1968, HBC archives.

⁸⁸ Nathan Brooks, "Viewpoint," HBC *Herald*, September 13, 1963, vol. XVII, no. 37, HBC archives.

they should be welcomed in the spirit of love and Christian brotherhood, in spite of the differences of dress, education and outward appearance which tend to set them apart from the majority of our congregation.

3. Our study has also revealed the fact that several Negro families live in our immediate church community. Our union unanimously believes that Highland Baptist Church should discover ways to minister to these families, unless their spiritual needs are being met already by other churches in the community.⁸⁹

No church records were found that demonstrate funds or personnel were charged with making these tasks a reality. It is worth noting, however, that Highland's music minister, William Arnold Epley, helped form an integrated choir. The LaGrange Reformatory Choir was funded in part by the Missions Committee at Highland. The choir performed across the state and several times at Highland, beginning in the mid-1960s.⁹⁰

Brooks also openly supported the admission of Black members into Highland, a topic that—by the very fact it needed to be addressed—made it clear that Highland was decidedly white space. Other predominately white Baptist churches in the area—Crescent Hill Baptist and Deer Park Baptist—had stated their willingness to admit Black members. Yet, Highland's records do not indicate that any formal outreach to the Black community was created.⁹¹ In 1965 the first Black request for membership—from Mr. William Ojo, and later his wife—was submitted to the congregation. Mr. Ojo was from Nigeria and a current student at Southern Seminary. By the fall of 1965, he was involved in Highland's pastoral ministries.⁹² Up until this point, regular Black presence in Highland Baptist Church was primarily by the custodial staff, although there was a young Black man active in the youth group in the mid-50s.⁹³ Highland hired Black janitors beginning in 1946 (potentially earlier), hiring Lias Vance, who left in 1949, and Noah Reese,

⁸⁹ HBC *Herald*, April 2, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 14, HBC archives.

⁹⁰ HBC *Herald*, May 21, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 21; see also HBC meeting minutes, vol. 1964–1965, HBC archives.

⁹¹ HBC *Herald*, June 4, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 23, HBC archives.

⁹² HBC *Herald*, September 17, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 38; HBC *Herald*, September 24, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 39; HBC *Herald*, October 1, 1965, vol. XVIV, no. 40, all in HBC archives.

⁹³ Barbara Lee, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 26, 2021.

who took Vance's place and stayed through September 1969. No church records were found to indicate whether or not they sought membership or were allowed access to membership.⁹⁴

In 1966, Willis Bennett, an ethics professor at Southern Baptist Seminary and interim pastor at Highland in the early sixties who remained a Highland member, issued a clarion call for action in the Southern Baptist Convention's *Home Missions* magazine. "What are Southern Baptist churches and other churches doing or not doing," he asked, "to meet the needs of Negroes and Spanish speaking people?" He went on to state that most churches "are making no attempts" to meet the needs of nonwhite communities in their midst. "They are far more concerned over survival than they are over ministry," Bennett concluded, "and seem unaware that the two are actually related."⁹⁵ He preached on this matter at Highland in February of 1966. His report to the SBC was based on research assessing the state of the church in urban areas across the nation, as urban areas were ground zeros in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

The following year, 1967, Highland joined a pulpit exchange with Louisville Baptist Ministers Conference as part of the organization's "Race Relations Sunday" initiative.⁹⁶ Highland archives reveal that two local Black ministers, Dr. Frederick Sampson of Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church and Dr. Garland C. Offutt of West Chestnut Street Baptist Church (and the first Black graduate of Southern Baptist Seminary) preached at Highland in 1967. The bulletin reported that Dr. Sampson's church visit was well attended.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ June 1966 Membership Report, HBC archives.

⁹⁵ G. Willis Bennett, "The City Church in the Area of Transition," *Home Missions Magazine*, January 1966, vol. 36, no. 1; see also *HBC Herald*, January 21, 1966, vol. XX, no. 3, HBC archives; and *HBC Herald*, February 4, 1966, vol. XX, no. 4, HBC archives.

⁹⁶ HBC meeting minutes, December 14, 1966; and January 11, 1967, p. 2, HBC archives.

⁹⁷ *HBC Herald*, February 10, 1967, vol. XX, no. 6; *HBC Herald*, February 17, 1967, vol. XX, no. 7, all in HBC archives.

Busing in Louisville, 1970s

In the early 1970s, the city of Louisville again faced desegregation of the school systems and cross-district busing. The Kentucky Civil Liberties Union, Legal Aid Society, and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed lawsuits in federal court requesting desegregation of the Louisville and Jefferson County school systems.⁹⁸ On December 29, 1973, a Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling led to a merger of the Louisville and Jefferson County Public Schools. In 1974, directed by the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, U.S. District Judge James Gordon ordered the Louisville and Jefferson County school systems to desegregate. Demonstrations and riots rocked Louisville and Jefferson County in response to the federal court-ordered integration of the newly merged school system. In addition, cross-district busing, which aimed to equalize the racial makeup of Louisville's public schools, sometimes sparked violent reactions.

Several children of Highland participated in this busing experience. Barbara and Tom Lee's son and daughter were bused to a new district in the mid-1970s. Their daughter appeared on national television when she could not exit her bus because it was attacked at her school. Their son's class was bused across town to a predominately Black school, where they remained together as a class rather than intermingling with other classes, while a class of Black students from that same school was bused to a white school. So, integration did not happen for their son.⁹⁹ Jim and Rose Hawkins's daughter was bused to Park DuValle Junior High School, and given the threat of violence, there was a certain level of fear for her safety getting to and from school. The school itself had boarded-up windows, empty library shelves, and few textbooks. Rose and other parents offered to give whatever kind of assistance would help the principal, but he declined.

⁹⁸ Allison Ross, "JCPS Desegregation Timeline," *Courier-Journal*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/2015/09/03/jcps-desegregation-timeline/71637432/>.

⁹⁹ Barbara and Tom Lee, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 26, 2021.

Their daughter was fortunate to have a teacher, who was also a neighbor, look after her, making sure she had textbooks and that other needs were met. Rose reflected, “For the Black kids down there—they didn’t have that. I have often thought, ‘What could we have done that we didn’t do?’ It was all so new.”¹⁰⁰ Jim added, “The fact that all those years went by when Black schools were not furnished with equipment and books and taken care of because they—well, it was white privileged people running the show, and they let it be.”¹⁰¹

While Highland may not have been talking frequently about race at this point in its history, individual Highland members were confronting issues of race through their work and their children’s schools. As Carolyn King observed, “So many people here were already out ministering in their jobs.”¹⁰² In addition, an increasing number of church members worked in the helping professions. “Highland was a church that ministered to those people who did ministry to people, and I do not think that should be underestimated. Maybe we were not going out as a group from Highland, but we were nurturing people that were going out ministering in the streets and agencies and with the homeless,” King continued.¹⁰³ Teachers such as Pat Ramsey, Paul Whiteley, and Ulan Rose, school administrators such as Jim Hawkins, and social service workers such as Carolyn King and Barbara Lee were involved in the lives of Black students, adults, and families.

Jim Hawkins and two other people started Jefferson Community College in 1968, and Jim served seventeen years as registrar. The school’s African American president made intentional efforts to enroll Black students and hire Black teachers. Pat Ramsey taught Blacks in Head Start, elementary school, junior high school, and college during her teaching career. Her

¹⁰⁰ Rose Hawkins, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, June 29, 2021.

¹⁰¹ Jim Hawkins, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, June 29, 2021.

¹⁰² Carolyn King, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 15, 2021.

¹⁰³ Carolyn King, interview.

passion was empowering Black and poor white children through education. She went beyond the classroom when she taught at Martin Luther King Elementary School, hosting a sleepover for the girls in her fourth-grade class. When she taught at Shawnee Junior High, she started a Natural History Club for her students and took them camping. While at Indiana University Southeast, she offered caregiving training to students who were parents in addition to her other teaching responsibilities.¹⁰⁴ Paul Whiteley taught Black students for the first time when he started teaching at Eastern High School in 1968. In his years of teaching, he stressed the importance of African American history for both Black and white students. In addition, he wrote letters prolifically to the *Courier-Journal*, mostly about racism, encouraging readers to get involved in civil rights.¹⁰⁵

Life at Highland, 1970s

In 1970, Rev. Don Burke became pastor of Highland, and during his early years of ministry, artist Robert Markert created and installed Highland's beloved sanctuary stained-glass windows. The church left it up to Burke to select the people honored in the windows, and he chose biblical characters and figures from church history, including from Baptist history. In addition, as Peter Smith notes, "There was some debate over whether to honor the recently martyred Martin Luther King, but the church did include another African American Baptist: the pioneer missionary Lott Carey."¹⁰⁶ Carey remains the only Black figure in the sanctuary windows.

Though Highland members continued to show sensitivity to African Americans in their work, there were instances of blatant insensitivity. Church records indicate that in June of 1972

¹⁰⁴ Pat Ramsey, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 6, 2021; Pat Ramsey, phone call with Nancy Goodhue, July 9, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Whiteley, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, June 30, 2021; Paul Whiteley, "Let the Dialogue Begin," *Courier-Journal*, vol. 281, no. 105, October 13, 1995, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 118.

and again in June 1973, the church hosted an event entitled “Slave” Auction, which helped fund the youth group’s trips to Canada and Atlanta. These events likely involved youth auctioning their labor for donations.¹⁰⁷

A few steps toward welcoming Blacks into church membership were made. Burke recalled that a Black teenage boy was a part of the youth group during his time as pastor. When he accepted Christ, Burke baptized him, and the church was not bothered by this act of inclusion. Soon after, a couple—one partner Black, the other white—joined Highland, and they were members for a couple of years. In 1973 Highland again accepted William Ojo, his wife, and three children into membership—the Southern Baptist Seminary student from Nigeria who had initially joined Highland in 1965. The chair of the deacon board chastised Burke for welcoming Blacks as members. Burke countered that the church would welcome anyone who believed they could grow spiritually at Highland and God was leading them to Highland. When the deacon responded that he was not raised to believe this way, Burke replied, “Neither was I. But we talk about being born again.”¹⁰⁸ Burke also helped found Highlands Community Ministries in the early 1970s, and Highland was very involved with its work, as it still is today.¹⁰⁹

During this time, Highland employed three Black people. The church hired Hazel, who was Catholic and not a church member, as the cook. She also prepared meals for any weddings, funerals, or other events at the church, giving her supplemental income. Highland also employed two Black janitors, who were not Highland members, and part of their responsibility was to work on Sunday mornings. They would greet and open the car doors for arriving worshipers.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ HBC *Herald*, June 23, 1972, vol. 28, no. 25; HBC *Herald*, June 24, 1973, vol. 29, no. 25, HBC archives.

¹⁰⁸ Don Burke, interview by Mary Alice Birdwhistell and Lauren Jones Mayfield, July 26, 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Don Burke, interview.

¹¹⁰ Don Burke, interview.

Unfortunately, church records do not provide the names of these two janitors or Hazel's last name.

Current Highland Baptist members do not recall much discussion about race at church during the last few decades of the twentieth century. There was certainly not a concerted effort on the part of the church to respond to racism. Pastors Don Burke, Paul Duke, and Phil Christopher preached about racial justice occasionally, not as a significant theme, but more in relation to a specific racialized event occurring in the city or the country.¹¹¹ Rather, the church confronted other issues such as women deacons, Southern Seminary's increasing conservatism, and some emerging LGBTQ issues. The church remained involved with agencies like Highlands Community Ministries, including housing their day-care center; Kentucky Refugee Ministries; and Habitat for Humanity. The women's mission groups prayed and raised money for missionaries, both overseas and domestic.¹¹²

Black Response to Developments in Louisville, 1980–1990s

Locally, Louisville in the early 1980s dealt with the contentious issue of a city/county merger. A group of ten Louisville Black leaders interested in pooling Black political and economic forces created a political action committee known as PAC-10 to multiply their effectiveness.¹¹³ PAC-10 commissioned a study about the merger of city and county governments in other cities. This study confirmed that urban residents in metropolitan areas like Louisville had not benefited from merged governments or other consolidation strategies. Therefore, PAC-10 opposed a merger in the referendums. By organizing a broad-based coalition of African Americans and working-class

¹¹¹ Phil Collier and Tracy Holladay, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Ryan Eller, August 8, 2021.

¹¹² Carolyn King, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 15, 2021.

¹¹³ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 216.

whites, the merger plan was defeated in 1982 and 1983.¹¹⁴ Until the merger of Louisville and Jefferson County in 2003, African Americans had increased visibility in city and county leadership positions. For example, from the 1970s until the city/county merger, African Americans occupied roughly one-third of all seats on the Board of Aldermen, one seat on the local Board of Education, and in the 1980s and 1990s, one of the three county commissioners was an African American.¹¹⁵ These leadership positions diminished after the city/county merger.

While Louisville citizens lived in largely segregated neighborhoods, by the late 1980s working and shopping patterns for African Americans had changed. Because legal segregation had ended, Blacks no longer had to duplicate institutions from which they had previously been barred. Blacks shopped and worked in white-owned businesses, and Black businesses shut down. As a result, neighborhoods in the West End became bedroom communities, places where people lived but neither worked nor shopped.¹¹⁶

In the 1990s, the newly passed Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and other court decisions around the nation raised the tension between those who worked for desegregation and those who wanted strong neighborhood schools. KERA seemed to support neighborhood schools in order to enable effective longitudinal testing to evaluate a school's progress toward educational goals. The local Black community disagreed on the issue, with the Black Think Tank, formed in January 1991, promoting Afrocentric approaches to problems, including housing and schools. Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby, pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church, was a Black Think Tank member

¹¹⁴ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 217.

¹¹⁵ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 212.

¹¹⁶ Aubespain, Clay, and Hudson, *Two Centuries*, 232. (By 1910, Louisville's 80,000 African American residents were concentrated primarily in the West End; 45,000 others were scattered throughout the metropolitan area).

and advocated for Black institutions and schools. However, in the 1990s he eventually supported the school system's commitment to continue the existing plan for desegregation.¹¹⁷

A Partnership with West End Baptist Church

During the pastorate of Rev. Phil Christopher (1987–1995), Highland developed a partnership with West End Baptist Church, an African American church pastored by Rev. Dartanya Hill. This partnership resulted from deacon conversations about Highland's identity as a white church in a segregated city and the need to build ties with the Black community. The two churches participated in a pulpit exchange and a choir exchange. Highland helped raise awareness and funds for West End Baptist's mission church. Highland members knocked on doors in West Louisville, canvassing with members from West End Baptist. On the whole, Highland congregants responded positively to these efforts, though the partnership lasted only about twelve to eighteen months.¹¹⁸

Changes at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

The movement within the Southern Baptist Convention toward more conservative and fundamentalist stances began in the 1980s. In 1990, Highland began supporting the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship while maintaining its connection to the Southern Baptist Convention.¹¹⁹ Then, in 1993, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's President Albert Mohler began consolidating the "conservative takeover" of the seminary. As a result, the Carver School of Social Work closed in 1995. The Carver School had been critical in educating future missionary

¹¹⁷ Tracy K'Meyer, *From Brown to Meredith: The Long Struggle for School Desegregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1954–2007* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 118–119, 121–122.

¹¹⁸ Phil Collier, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Ryan Eller, August 8, 2021; Chris Sanders, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, August 3, 2021.

¹¹⁹ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 141–144.

and social service ministers to work with vulnerable populations. The school was known for its urban work and preparation of ministers and social workers with the “social gospel.” In that same year, Highland hosted a worship service celebrating the seminary’s past while lamenting the theological changes.¹²⁰

Early Years of Joseph Phelps’s Pastorate

Rev. Dr. Joseph Phelps became pastor at Highland in March of 1997 and brought with him an interest in social justice. “There was not a lot of social justice until Joe came,” Steve Brown recalled, and other members agreed. Margie Brown elaborated that there had been an openness to justice issues before but not an emphasis at the church.¹²¹

In December 1997, on the Second Sunday of Advent, Highland began the annual tradition of placing crosses on the front church lawn, one for each person killed in Louisville. This ritual sought to commemorate victims by drawing attention to the violence taking place in the city.¹²² Phelps and Highland member Barbara Sexton Smith together envisioned this worship service.¹²³ As the number of murders increased in the following years, with many occurring in the West End among the Black community, the church wanted to partner with a Black church.¹²⁴ Not until 2003 did Highland begin to partner with Forest Missionary Baptist Church in Newburg, a church affected by violence.¹²⁵ Both churches’ youth groups gathered on the front lawn of Highland to build and paint white crosses to be used by Forest Missionary. Afterward,

¹²⁰ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 144–145.

¹²¹ Steve and Margie Brown, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield, July 14, 2021.

¹²² Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 153.

¹²³ Chris Sanders, interview.

¹²⁴ Joe Phelps, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield, Margaret Pennington, and Nancy Goodhue, July 13, 2021.

¹²⁵ Smith, *The Cloud of Witness*, 153.

they shared a meal and conversed. Both churches displayed their crosses on the same Advent Sunday.¹²⁶

As murder cases spiked in Louisville, Phelps suggested holding vigil at the site of the crimes. At the first vigil, Rev. Clay Calloway and Rev. Frank Smith, Black pastors and members of the Interdenominational Ministerial Coalition, attended, and No Murders Metro was born. “That got Highland and me into the Black community,” Phelps recalled.¹²⁷ No Murders Metro helped Highland think about the racial issues at play as the church began to ask why the murders were happening in West Louisville and not in the church’s neighborhood. Congregants like Drs. John and Marilyn Sanders attended the vigils regularly.

One major event took place on March 14, 1998, when a local Black police officer, singer, and motivational speaker named Ray A. Barker (also known as Sir Friendly C) organized a five-and-a-half-mile march against drugs and violence. The march started at his home at Cecil Avenue and Broadway and ended at Highland. People from fifty-eight organizations, Blacks and whites, adults and children marched together. Barker aimed to show that different parts of the city could join efforts around common causes. Highland Baptist hosted a post-march service and luncheon for this community event.¹²⁸

During 1999 the Mission and Justice Ministry Group searched for places in West Louisville to offer vacation Bible schools as a way to partner with the Black community.¹²⁹ The idea was abandoned because churches in West Louisville were holding their own. “We were

¹²⁶ Joe Phelps, interview.

¹²⁷ Joe Phelps, interview.

¹²⁸ Kirsten Haukebo, “March Opposes Drugs, Violence,” *Courier-Journal*, March 15, 1998.

¹²⁹ See April 1999 Mission and Justice Ministry Group minutes, 1998–2003 Mission and Justice Ministry Group Minutes folder, HBC archives.

pretty clueless, but we did want to connect, and we did have something in us that was saying we've got to connect," Phelps remembered.¹³⁰

Challenge to Louisville's Desegregation Plan

In the early 2000s, some white families in Louisville joined a suit alleging that the desegregation plan for Jefferson County Public Schools had discriminated against their children by not allowing them to go to the school of their choice in order to maintain racial balance. The case eventually made it to the U.S. Supreme Court (*Meredith v. Jefferson County*). The U.S. Supreme Court ordered in 2007 that race could not be the sole factor in student admission decisions. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that "there was no compelling public interest in maintaining integration." However, Justice Kennedy allowed school officials to employ a "race conscious" plan to promote diversity. This is what Jefferson County used for their continuing work on integration.¹³¹

The Movement toward More Involvement at Highland

In the early 2000s, the Mission and Justice Ministry Group was active. However, there were few activities or events with African Americans, though there was interest and some attempts to work with Black churches. In March of 2000, two Mission and Justice Group members were following up on contacts with African American churches interested in a shared ministry with Highland. Joe Phelps had also contacted an African American church not far from Highland, but these co-ministry attempts did not lead to a partnership.

The Mission and Justice Ministry Group expanded its ministry to welcome refugees to the city of Louisville. In 2001 the church welcomed four Sudanese young men to Louisville,

¹³⁰ Joe Phelps, interview.

¹³¹ Tracy E. K'Meyer, *From Brown to Meredith: The Long Struggle for School Desegregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1954–2007* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 129–130.

sponsoring them with Kentucky Refugee Ministries and working with them for years, including helping two of them pay college tuition and housing three of them in Highland's Foree House after one of the young men was tragically killed.¹³²

Meanwhile, Highland served as one of several churches that volunteered to make and serve meals to neighborhood people at the Jeff Street at Liberty Church. Three or four times a year, a group from Highland would oversee the meal, serving an integrated crowd from the neighborhood. The ministry group was also involved in a gun violence forum, for which the group bought trigger locks that were donated to those attending the forum. Furthermore, in May 2003, the Mission and Justice group gave \$500 to an organ fund at an African American church, Temple Faith Baptist Church.

In the fall of 2004, Friday Church became another vehicle for Highland to get involved in the lives of some African Americans. Highland member Chris Sanders and Joe Phelps saw a need for a more informal worship service for people who could not attend Sunday morning. Phelps's idea was to schedule the service before the long-standing Friday night Narcotics Anonymous meeting at Highland in order to encourage NA folks to attend. Then, right before the first service, Tim Moseley, a church member and executive director of Wayside Christian Mission, telephoned Phelps to ask if he could bring some people from Wayside to the worship service. Phelps agreed but had no idea that busloads of people would attend from Wayside.¹³³ The service was not intentionally biracial, but because many of the people from Wayside were Black, they brought Black church worship into Highland.¹³⁴ People from Wayside continue to make up a large part of the Friday Church congregation today.¹³⁵

¹³² 1998–2003 Mission and Justice Ministry Group Minutes, HBC archives.

¹³³ Joe Phelps, interview; Chris Sanders, interview.

¹³⁴ Chris Sanders, interview.

¹³⁵ Joe Phelps, interview; Chris Sanders, interview.

As Highland's justice ministry evolved, and while Friday Church took shape, renovations were planned for the Fellowship Hall, providing an opportunity to do something different with the windows. In 2008 and 2009, Robert Markert returned to Highland to extend the "Cloud of Witnesses" theme to the Fellowship Hall. The windows broadened the scope of religious forebears to include figures between the first century C.E. and the Reformation era along with more gender, racial, and ethnic diversity. Nonwhite people honored in these windows include Martin Luther King Jr.; the martyred girls of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama: Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley; Sojourner Truth; Albert John Lutuli; Augustine and his mother Monica; Perpetua and Felicity; Pandita Ramabai; Oscar Romero; and Takashi Nagai. These windows engendered a greater sense of the global church's diversity.

In 2010 a group of young adults from Highland began showing up on a regular basis in Shelby Park, a mixed-race neighborhood not far from Highland. At first the young adults spent time in the park, walking and playing dodgeball, and then they began inviting children to play with them. Earlier, a church member had donated \$10,000 in seed money for Highland young adults to begin an urban ministry. The group, under the leadership of Rev. Emily Hull McGee, Highland's young adult minister, gradually expanded their activities to a weekly program for children in the Shelby Park Community Center that included crafts and games, then a tutoring component, several one-time classes by members of Highland, and meals/activities furnished by Highland's Bible Study classes and ministry groups. The majority of children were African American. After a few years, attendance started declining as other neighborhood activities and

opportunities pulled children away from the program. It became apparent it was time for Highland to conclude its work in Shelby Park.¹³⁶

In July 2011 the Mission and Justice Ministry Group was subdivided into three groups: International Ministries, Domestic Ministries, and Justice, the latter chaired by Margaret Pennington. The Justice Ministry Group mainly focused on systemic initiatives, many of which occurred in the arena of government. Members of the group attended hearings on various issues and educated others in the church, often bringing in speakers dealing with issues such as housing. Members from the Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression met with the justice group and reported on a case in which four young Black men had been arrested for a crime they had not committed, further opening the eyes of Highland's justice group to racial injustices in Louisville.¹³⁷

Antiracism Work at Highland, 2015–Present

In 2014 or 2015, Phelps and Kevin Cosby, pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church, began meeting a couple of times a week. Phelps recalls that Cosby had been involved with the Southern Baptist Convention but had begun to question his association after he took a stance supporting the LGBTQ community and began being disinvited to various engagements.¹³⁸ Reflecting on his weekly meetings with Cosby, Phelps stressed, “I felt like I was sitting in a PhD class on seeing race in a whole new way. He was awakening me to the realities of what now are obvious things like systemic racism and white privilege. It felt like I was born again *again* in that moment with

¹³⁶ Allison Keenan, Jill Ligon Davis, and Ryan Davis, Zoom conversation with Nancy Goodhue, August 23, 2021.

¹³⁷ Margaret Pennington and Carolyn King, interview by Lauren Jones Mayfield and Nancy Goodhue, July 15, 2021.

¹³⁸ Joe Phelps, interview; Chris Sanders, interview.

him. It was tough.”¹³⁹ Other white and Black ministers joined these discussions, and the group formed EmpowerWest. On February 29, 2016, this group sponsored the first annual city-wide book club to hear a speech by Edward Baptist, author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. The entire city of Louisville was invited to this event at Highland, including Mayor Greg Fischer. More people attended than the sanctuary could hold, so equipment was set up in the fellowship hall to accommodate all.¹⁴⁰ Annual events like the EmpowerWest book club became a way to encourage reading about ideas that previously had been read mainly by Black scholars. Highland members read the books and attended the annual book club as well as the monthly West Louisville Forums held at St. Stephen Baptist Church.¹⁴¹ Phelps frequently preached on what he was learning at EmpowerWest gatherings, and the church supported Phelps in his work with the group. However, one of Phelps’s frustrations was that EmpowerWest was basically for the ministers, and church members wanted to be a part of the work.¹⁴² That door for church members was to open in another way.

When the Highland members involved in the ministry at Shelby Park ended that work, they began looking at other options to share resources and stay engaged in community ministry. During this time of discernment, Highland welcomed Rev. Lauren Jones Mayfield as associate pastor of Young Adults and Mission to the ministry staff. She was already familiar with a national group called Crossroads Antiracism, which the Community Missions Ministry Group was considering hosting at Highland, and encouraged the group to bring antiracism facilitators from Crossroads to Highland. The group did so, and over eighty congregants attended the well-received, day-long workshop on November 5, 2016.

¹³⁹ Joe Phelps, interview.

¹⁴⁰ Joe Phelps, interview.

¹⁴¹ Chris Sanders, interview; Joe Phelps, interview.

¹⁴² Joe Phelps, interview.

As Highland stepped further into racial justice work, the nation had become increasingly aware of the police killing young Black people. The availability of smartphone cameras brought these killings to the whole world: Eric Garner in July 2014; Michael Brown, who had been murdered and left lying in the street for hours in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014; Tamir Rice in November 2014; Freddie Gray in April 2015; Sandra Bland in July 2015; Philando Castile in July 2016—and so many more. Highland members were concerned about these killings and primed to learn how to be antiracist.

The Crossroads antiracism training facilitators had encouraged Highland to form a group of people to keep the issues of race before the congregation. From that suggestion, Highland's Anti-Racism Team was created. The Anti-Racism Team hosted its first meeting on June 20, 2017, with Nancy Goodhue and Missy Smith as co-chairs. The mission statement of the team notes, "Highland's Anti-Racism Team seeks to educate its members and the members of Highland Baptist Church about racism and becoming antiracist, to find ways to stand against systemic racism, and to serve alongside communities of color to promote bridge building." The team sponsored several actions and events, including an event about redlining in Louisville at Highland presented by Jeana Dunlap, director of Redevelopment Strategies with Louisville Metro Government, on November 16, 2017; a reading of the play *Building the Wall* by Actors Theatre at Highland on October 15, 2017; a children's book club with members of Portland Memorial Missionary Baptist Church in the winter and spring of 2018; a voter registration drive in West Louisville with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth in August and September 2018; a contribution of \$2,000 to the Louisville Community Bail Fund through contributions by congregants purchasing gift cards during the Christmas season and supplemented by team funds, enabling a young man to be released from juvenile detention in February 2019 (the team continued to befriend the young man); a bail-bond training with Chanelle Helm of Black Lives

Matter Louisville, September 14, 2019; and the development of Black History Month lobby displays in 2018, 2019, and 2020, highlighting figures like Harriet Tubman, James Baldwin, and Ruby Sales. In August 2020 the team encouraged Sunday Bible study classes to take the 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge.

The Anti-Racism Team also hosted several Wednesday Night educational classes, including a book study of *No Innocent Bystander* led by the author, Rev. Dr. Shannon Craig-Snell, a professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; a discussion of James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* led by Highland member Dr. Tyler Mayfield, also a professor at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; a study on reparations led by Rev. Dr. Lewis Brogdon, professor at Baptist Seminary of Louisville and Simmons College of Kentucky (co-sponsored with Rev. Dr. Carol Harston, associate pastor of Faith Formation and Congregational Engagement); and a study on Martin Luther King Jr. by Lewis Brogdon (co-sponsored with Carol Harston). The team sponsored several worship events, including Crosses on the Lawn during Advent in 2018 and 2019 (former years sponsored by the Justice Ministry Group); a January 20, 2019, worship service honoring Martin Luther King Jr. (with Kathy Collier, minister of music and worship at Highland); and Crosses on the Lawn in memory of Blacks killed by police, June 25, 2020. The team studied many books and articles, including *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo, *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin, and "The Case for Reparations" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The team showed and led discussions of several films at Highland including *Armor of Light*, a documentary about gun violence; *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, a three-part PBS documentary about race; and *13th*, a documentary about mass incarceration.

Members of the Anti-Racism Team also attended and encouraged Highland members to attend events and activities such as Women's Day March, March 2017; Higher Ground Moral

Declaration Rally, September 12, 2017; March for Our Lives, March 24, 2018; Occupy ICE Louisville rallies and marches, summer 2018; West Louisville Forums (Simmons College, monthly); EmpowerWest City-wide Book Read (annually); and Angela Project conferences (annually from 2017 through 2019). Through the Anti-Racism Team, Highland provided financial contributions to the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (annual contribution); Simmons College of Kentucky (annual contribution); La Casita Community Center (before the Immigration Team was formed); Louisville Central Community Center; and funds to a local elementary school so that Black students could attend a showing of the movie *Black Panther*.

The Year of Disaster: 2020

The year 2020 unfolded with the disruption of normal life as a pandemic took hold of the nation and the world. On January 21, when the Center for Disease Control announced the first case in the United States, it still felt a long way from Louisville. On March 11 the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and two days later then-president Donald Trump declared the virus a national emergency.¹⁴³

Louisvillians joined people across the nation and the world in coping with new habits as they masked up, practiced social distancing, worked from home, helped children with distance learning, quarantined at home, were separated from older relatives in nursing homes, and were unable to be with dying loved ones quarantined in hospitals. Then too there was the backlash of doubters of the pandemic, and later of the vaccine, and those who felt protective measures violated their rights, including the Republican-dominated Kentucky General Assembly.

¹⁴³ “A Timeline of COVID-19 Developments in 2020,” *American Journal of Managed Care*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.ajmc.com/view/a-timeline-of-covid19-developments-in-2020>.

The bright spot for Highland Baptist during the pandemic was the arrival of its newest pastor, Rev. Mary Alice Birdwhistell, on August 10. As the pandemic had caused the church to stream worship services rather than having in-person services, she started her ministry preaching at a red dot on a camera rather than a sanctuary full of people.

COVID-19 was soon to share space with a horror that actually was not new but was thrust into the national spotlight once again—the murder of first Ahmaud Arbery in Glynn County, Georgia, on February 23, and later the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis on May 25, taped by a bystander on a smartphone for the world to see. But the killing of Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician, brought home the killing of Blacks by police for Louisville citizens, for she was one of our own. Her death was followed by that of David McAtee's on June 1 by a member of the Kentucky Army National Guard. Protests of anguished Blacks and whites, old and young filled the streets of Louisville for months.

Many Highland members joined other Louisvillians in protests of Taylor's death. Included in these protests was a group of congregants standing on the church's front lawn with signs during rush hour to raise awareness that Black Lives Matter and Breonna Taylor's family deserves justice. Racism became a common theme in Birdwhistell's sermons. And many members felt a desire to respond to the racism now vividly on display in cities and towns across the country, and particularly in Louisville. In early September three members of the Anti-Racism Team met with Mary Alice Birdwhistell and Lauren Jones Mayfield, the minister working with the Anti-Racism Team. In August Highland's Ministry Council had agreed to the Anti-Racism Team's proposal to study and make a recommendation on what to do about the presence of slave owners in Highland's stained-glass windows. Now the two ministers and three members discussed the possibility of having the task force study and suggest ways the church might do reparations owed to the Black community in addition to the work surrounding the stained-glass windows.

The new proposal was made to the Ministry Council, who approved the expansion of duties. The new reparations task force started meeting the end of October via Zoom until the pandemic precautions lifted and in-person meetings could resume in June 2021.

Taking to heart the many calls from African Americans for whites to learn their history regarding race, and in preparation of exploring ways the church might offer reparation, the task force began researching the church's history intertwined with that of Louisville and race, in addition to researching the figures depicted in the church's stained-glass windows. This report is the result of that research.

Louisville Today, 2021

Today, Louisville remains one of the most racially segregated¹⁴⁴ and economically segregated cities in the country.¹⁴⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed long-established inequalities in Louisville.¹⁴⁶ Ten organizations, including the National Fair Housing Alliance, sued Redfin, an online real estate brokerage firm based in Seattle, for “alleged discriminatory housing practices that perpetuate residential segregation in Louisville” and nine other cities and counties. The company was accused of using a minimum house listing price policy to qualify for its services. That price eliminated homes in 70 percent of the minority populated areas; most homes in 70 percent or more white-populated neighborhoods were eligible for services. “One example shows that on one day in November 2018 in Louisville, Kentucky, only 108 houses were listed in minority-populated neighborhoods and none of those houses qualified for their best available services. This case is still pending, and if successful, has the potential to address a clear form of

¹⁴⁴ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-9-most-segregated-cities-in-america_n_55df53e9e4b0e7117ba92d7f/.

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-04-02/the-u-s-cities-where-the-rich-are-most-segregated-from-everyone-else/>.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor Weiter and Dennis Ting, “COVID-19 Exposes Inequities Dating Back to Redlining Era,” WHAS 11 website, March 16, 2021, <https://www.whas11.com/article/news/local/louisville-redlining-health-inequity-problems/417-3b94a748-c089-4da2-bff2-44d6b3c95dfa/>.

structural racism that continues to create obstacles for Black and other marginalized households from accumulating wealth.”¹⁴⁷ Black residents experience disparate health outcomes, including a lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, and higher cancer and stroke death rates.¹⁴⁸ West Louisville remains polluted: “More than 80 percent of all the toxic air pollution released in Jefferson County is released in west and south Louisville.”¹⁴⁹ Poverty continues to be an issue for many: “The poverty rates among Black/African American residents and Hispanics/Latino residents are more than double the current rate for White residents. The poverty rate for White non-Hispanic residents is 9.5 percent in Louisville/Jefferson County . . . which is substantially less than for Black/African American residents, for whom it is 27.6 percent.”¹⁵⁰ Despite decades-long efforts toward school integration, Jefferson County Public schools are “slowly becom[ing] more segregated.”¹⁵¹ There continues to be a significant disparity among races in homeownership rates. In Louisville/Jefferson County, homeownership rates for white households is 71.1 percent; homeownership rates for Black/African American households are 36.7 percent, lower than the national rate of 41.8 percent for Blacks/African Americans. Similarly, Latino homeownership rates in Louisville/Jefferson County are 37.8 percent but 52.7 percent nationally. “In other words, the racial disparity in homeownership rates is even more pronounced in the Louisville area.”¹⁵² In 2021, an external audit of the Louisville Metro Police Department found that Black residents are more likely to be arrested than white residents, and

¹⁴⁷ *2020–2021 State of Metropolitan Housing Report: COVID-19 and the Struggle to Stay Safe at Home in Louisville, KY*, Metro Housing Coalition, https://metropolitanhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL_MHC_2020-2021-SMHR_web.pdf, page 41.

¹⁴⁸ <https://louisvilleky.gov/center-health-equity/document/2017healthequityreportpdf/>.

¹⁴⁹ <https://wfpj.org/unequal-despite-progress-louisvilles-toxic-air-still-mostly-affects-poor-black-residents/>.

¹⁵⁰ *2020–2021 State of Metropolitan Housing Report: COVID-19 and the Struggle to Stay Safe at Home in Louisville, KY*, Metro Housing Coalition, https://metropolitanhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL_MHC_2020-2021-SMHR_web.pdf, page 23.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/28/us/busing-louisville-student-segregation.html/>.

¹⁵² *2020–2021 State of Metropolitan Housing Report: COVID-19 and the Struggle to Stay Safe at Home in Louisville, KY*, Metro Housing Coalition, https://metropolitanhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FINAL_MHC_2020-2021-SMHR_web.pdf, page 31.

“Black individuals are treated disproportionately in every category—electronic stop data, paper stop data, field data, arrests, and citations.”¹⁵³

A Faith Response

When asked what his hopes for Highland’s future regarding racial justice are, former pastor Joe Phelps replied, “It sounds cliché, but I hope Highland remains faithful to the Gospel—God’s self-giving love—and as you do, what you are invited and called to do is revealed. . . . It always seems to me like what you ought to do is evident; it pops up to the surface. Yeah, just keep listening, turning over rocks, being willing to do the self-giving love thing. . . . I hope Highland, in the context of the Christian message, continues to beat the drumbeat, beat the drum of justice, and to do it with integrity, and I emphasize within the context of the Christian message. You don’t need to lose that—that’s where the racial energy and the work of healing is all laid out.”¹⁵⁴

Amid the pandemic, which precluded the Highland congregation from gathering in its building, Mary Alice Birdwhistell preached a sermon in view of a call to serve as Highland’s next pastor. In her first sermon to Highland, Birdwhistell shared her hopes for the church. She mentioned Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery by name and asked the questions: “What if the work of your anti-racism team is just the beginning of a church-wide movement to acknowledge our own complicity in racism and to work together for transformation, both within us and all around us, here in Louisville and beyond? . . .

¹⁵³ <https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/2021-01/hillard-heintze-report.pdf>, page 12.

¹⁵⁴ Joe Phelps, interview.

And how might you and I, together, live into that justice-bringing, kingdom-building work, so that we might help to bring about what very well may seem like an impossible dream of God's love for the city of Louisville and beyond?"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Mary Alice Birdwhistell, "Not Half Wild Enough!" a sermon preached in view of a call for Highland Baptist Church, Louisville, KY, June 14, 2020.