Oscar C. McCulloch Transforms Plymouth Church, Indianapolis, into an "Institutional" Church

*Genevieve C. Weeks**

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century a number of churches in older sections of major cities of the United States expanded their programs to include secular activities. They became known as "institutional" churches since, in addition to the usual religious activities, their programs included instruction in vocational and educational subjects, kindergartens, day nurseries, employment bureaus, dispensaries and clinics, reading rooms, and book clubs. They were characterized by the "open door" and free seats and were like other churches except that they laid "more stress on the total man as the subject of redemption, and the relations of men to each other."[1]

One of the very first of these institutional churches was established in Indianapolis, Indiana: the Plymouth (Congregational) Church.[2] The minister responsible for its development was Oscar Carleton McCulloch who began his ministry there in 1877. McCulloch's activities as a social reformer reached far outside his church, and his contributions to the development of social welfare in Indianapolis, the state of Indiana, and the nation warrant more space than can be allotted here. This article, therefore, will focus on the religious and secular program which he built at Plymouth Church, stressing particularly its innovative and unorthodox features.

Oscar McCulloch was born in Fremont, Ohio, July 2, 1843, the second child and first son of Carlton G. and Harriet L. McCulloch. His father was a druggist and young Oscar left school at fifteen to clerk in his store. At eighteen, after a business course at Eastman's Commercial College, he became a salesman for a wholesale drug company in Chicago and travelled widely through the South and West. From this experience he learned sound business organizational methods which he put to use in his later career, became a good judge of human character, and, more important, developed a deep concern for people. The foundation for this concern had been laid by his parents in the religious atmosphere of his home and was further developed through his work with the Christian Commission of Chicago and his service in a mission church of that city between trips during the years he was a salesman. Encouraged by friends who realized his effectiveness as a religious teacher, he

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* Miss Weeks is an associate professor at the Graduate School of Social Service, Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

[1] Charles L. Thompson, "An Agency in Accord with the Spirit and Method of the Gospel," *Homiletic Review,* XXXII (December, 1896), 561.

[2] Other early examples of "institutional churches" were the Plymouth Church in Milwaukee; Hope Church in Worcester and Pilgrim Church in Springfield, Massachusetts; Berkeley Temple in Boston; St. George's in New York City; the Fourth Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut; and All Souls Church (Unitarian) in Chicago.

Reproduced from Oscar C. McCulloch, *The Open Door* (Indianapolis, 1892), frontispiece.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 1877.

On Saturday evening I rec'd an invitation to preach in the Hanover St Ch. Milwaukee with a view to settling there. It occasions me more heart-burn than any previous calls I have had. The Ch. is small, poor, in a part of the city among the factories. It is a tempting field because of its hardness. A ch. might be built up like Beecher's. I feel in a sense, qualified for such work. My grasp on people, my power of objectivizing truth & making it interesting wd draw a good cong. about me.

But I cannot think it best to leave Ohio. I hope to pass my days here. Here is my home & that of Carl. I know none other. Here are my friends - the dearest of earth. It seems that all the years have been a getting ready to help people through my friendly relations. The Ch. wd suffer: or rather the united cong. for there are few who wd come here who could get their hearts. Some men are now in attendance who for six years never came to church. Now they cannot stay away. But I have a heavy heart at times because of the lack of a "sign". That is because of my weakness - which "seeks after a sign". Christ would work on - on.

A Page from McCulloch's Diary

Courtesy Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

decided to enter the ministry and enrolled in the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1867 at the age of twenty-four.[3]

McCulloch's first pastorate, which he assumed in 1870, was in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where he remained seven years. He received invitations to accept a ministry elsewhere but not until 1877 did he consider them seriously. In March of that year, the Hanover Street Church in Milwaukee asked him to be its minister. The opportunity attracted him: the church was poor, small, and located among factories. He felt qualified for such work and envisioned building a church similar to Henry Ward Beecher's in Brooklyn.[4] But he decided to remain in Sheboygan, which he felt was his home: he had come there with his bride; his two sons had been born and his wife Agnes had died there; and he had many friends, "the dearest on earth" in Sheboygan. He recognized that he had helped his parishioners through his sermons, his friendly relations with and understanding of them, his power to make religious truths relevant to them, and his ability to persuade them to accept these truths in their daily lives. He feared that if he left some in the congregation, who had not been to church for years until they came to hear him, would no longer attend church.[5] On the other hand, the Sheboygan church was not united. In it was a small, conservative group which acted as a "constant paralysis" to his preaching. They objected to his proposal that the form of receiving members into the church be changed to make it possible for persons to join without accepting the traditional creed, and they criticized his presentation of new religious tenets based on recent scientific developments such as Darwin's theory of evolution.[6]

About a month after receiving the Milwaukee offer, McCulloch was invited to preach at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Indianapolis. Commenting on his initial visit there, he wrote: "The church is much run down. The congregations have been very small. Today they were about 175 each sermon."[7] The Indianapolis invitation had come about through the suggestion of a close friend of McCulloch, the Reverend Myron Reed, who a few months earlier had become the minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. In describing the incident, Reed said that he had been mowing his lawn when a leading member of the Plymouth Church, Dr. O.

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[3] Isabel C. Barrows *et al.*, "Tributes to Oscar C. McCulloch," in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1892* (n.p., n.d.), 230-50; Oscar C. McCulloch, "Memoir," *The Open Door* (Indianapolis, 1892), vii-xxi.

[4] Henry Ward Beecher was the first minister of the Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. In 1847 he left Indiana and became the minister of the newly organized Plymouth Church (Congregational) of Brooklyn, New York. He used the pulpit for the discussion of public questions and for advocating reform.

[5] Oscar C. McCulloch Diary, March 13, 1877, Oscar C. McCulloch Diaries, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. McCulloch was married in September, 1870, to Agnes Buel by whom he had two sons. She died on August 31, 1874. His second marriage to Alice Barteau of Appleton, Wisconsin, took place on May 8, 1878. She had been a member of his church in Sheboygan and was the kindergarten teacher for his sons. Three daughters were born to this marriage.

[6] *Ibid.*, July 3, 1877, March 9, 1884.

[7] *Ibid.*, April 24, 1877.

S. Runnels, stopped at the gate and asked him if he knew of any minister who "would do for the Plymouth Church." He had referred him to Mr. McCulloch.[8]

On May 12, 1877, McCulloch wrote in his diary: "Last night I rcd a 'call' from the Plymouth Ch at Indianapolis which I shall have to consider. I wonder if I am to leave here." He proposed a trial month of preaching so that the congregation might have a better basis for evaluating him as its minister and he, a better basis on which to make his decision.[9] He was deeply perturbed about leaving Sheboygan and vacillated in his decision.[10] Finally, on July 15, he tendered his resignation to the Sheboygan church. He preached his first sermon as minister of Plymouth Church on July 30.

McCulloch saw in the Indianapolis church an attentive, united congregation, part of a growing church in a growing community. His impressions of Indianapolis were that it was a city started under the influence of churches, with strong ministers "who stamped the people with moral truths." He observed that the leading men, professional and business, were church attendants and that a strong moral sentiment pervaded the city. He commented, however, "As to the extent to which morals obtain, I cannot say," and then added the significant remark, "They have not had much hand in relieving the poor, I judge."[11] The opportunity to help the Indianapolis poor and to be free of the restraining influence in his Sheyboygan congregation was undoubtedly a deciding factor in his acceptance of the Plymouth Church ministry.

The Plymouth Church had been organized in 1857 as the first Congregational church in Indianapolis. Its founders held meetings, except for a brief period, in the senate chamber of the state capitol until the front part of their church was completed in 1859. The entire structure was not finished until 1867.[12] The church was located on the west side of Meridian Street opposite Christ Episcopal Church, between Ohio Street and the Circle. It was heavily mortgaged and the membership was small when McCulloch became its minister.[13]

The city of Indianapolis to which McCulloch came in 1877 was little more than a town in appearance and services—only a few miles of street were paved, there was no sewer system, and the telephone did not appear until late in 1877 and then only as a private enterprise.[14] At the time Indi-

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[8] *Centennial Memorial, 1823-1923, First Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana* (Greenfield, Ind., 1925), 167, 172.

[9] McCulloch Diary, May 22, 1877.

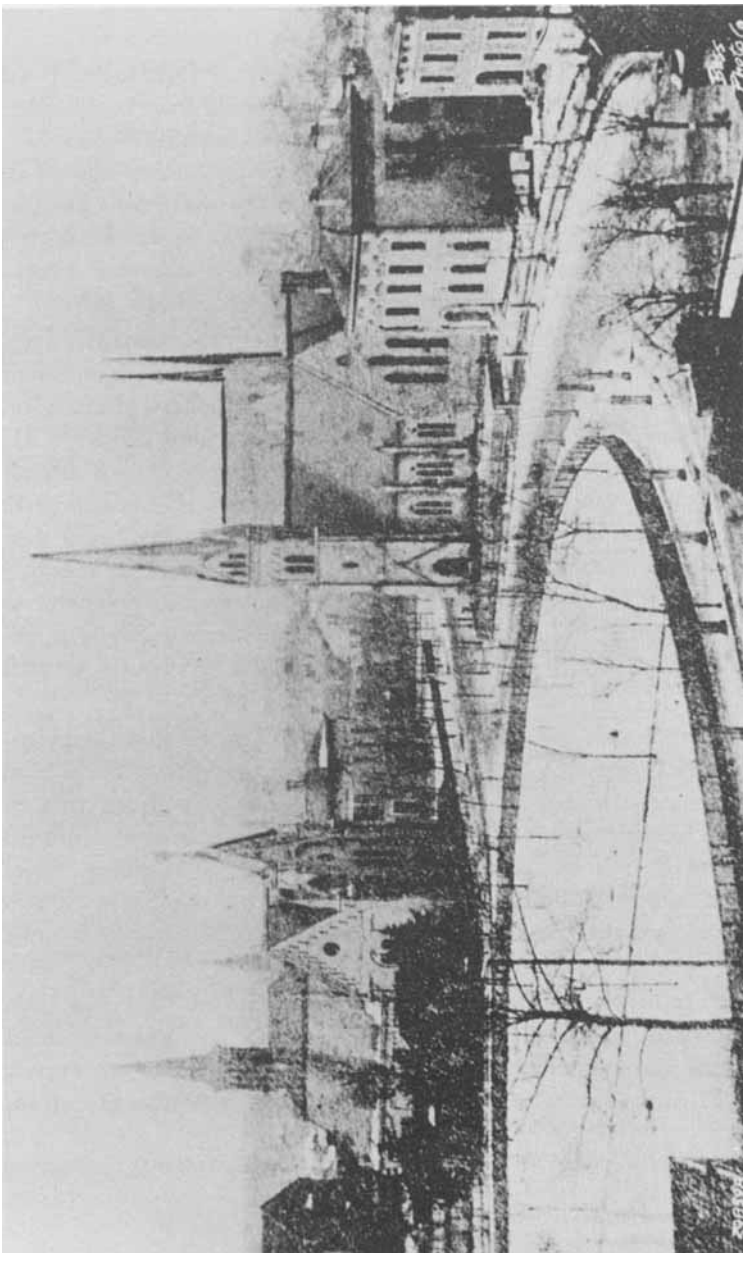
[10] *Ibid.*, May 29, June 3, 6, 10, 29, July 3, 10, 21, 1877.

[11] *Ibid.*, June 11, 1877.

[12] Ernestine Bradford Rose, *The Circle* (Indianapolis, 1957), 394; Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: the History, the Industries, the Institutions, and the People of a City of Homes* (2 vols., Chicago, 1910), I, 604-605.

[13] McCulloch, *The Open Door*, ix.

[14] Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, 311-12, 339.



THE FIRST PLYMOUTH (CONGREGATIONAL) CHURCH (LEFT), THE CIRCLE, INDIANAPOLIS, 1867-1882. CHRIST (EPISCOPAL) CHURCH IS ON THE RIGHT.

Courtesy W. H. Bass Photo Co., Inc., Indianapolis.

anapolis was a railroad center.[15] The monument to the war dead from which the Circle today takes its name had not been built; a simple park with benches and a flagpole occupied the Circle's center.[16] The community was growing rapidly; the population was approaching 75,000, having increased from slightly over 48,000 in 1870.[17] People were moving "uptown," northward. Most of the Circle's early homes had been torn down and replaced by office buildings or remodeled for a variety of uses. In this area were the Public Library, the Franklin Insurance Company, the homes of several newspapers—the *Journal,* the *Sentinel,* and the *News*—the Woods Stables and Livery Service, a publishing firm, and the Remay Hotel, on property now occupied by H. P. Wasson & Company.[18] Several of the firms responsible for the city's growth as an industrial and meat packing center were already in existence; among these were the expanding stockyards of Kingan and Company and the pharmaceutical house of Eli Lilly and Company.[19]

Soon after commencing his new ministry, McCulloch began working on ways to extend the usefulness of the church in the community. Printed cards "to be filled out as occasion may require, and placed in the Pastor's Box in the vestibule of the Church" were distributed. The card stated that the pastor welcomed information which would enable him to be more helpful to others or which would be useful to him in his work, and that he wished especially to be notified promptly of instances of sickness, destitution, or the presence of a stranger.[20] He drew up plans for organizations within the church which would help specific groups. These organizations were the Plymouth Christian Union for "general charitable and relief purposes" outside the church; the Plymouth Friendly Society to bring together the ladies of the church for "charitable, hospitable and general work" within the church; and Plymouth Institute, to be established for "literary and social culture of the young people in the city."[21]

Knowledge of the Reverend Dr. Edward Eggleston's Endeavor Club in Brooklyn, New York, gave McCulloch his idea for a Young Men's Club which was formed in January, 1878.[22] His plan for initiating the club illustrates one

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[15] See W. R. Holloway, *Indianapolis, A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City* (Indianapolis, 1870).

[16] Rose, *The Circle,* 395, 397-402.

[17] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population—Indiana, Fifteenth Census* of *the United States, 1930,* Table 2, "Number and Distribution of Inhabitants," 4.

[18] Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis,* 384-85, 419-20.

[19] *Ibid.,* 257.

[20] Plymouth Church, Indianapolis, *Pastor's Blank* (n.p., n.d.) Printed card pasted in McCulloch Diary, September 27, 1877.

[21] McCulloch Diary, September 26, 1877.

[22] Rev. Dr. Edward Eggleston formed the Endeavor Club at his Brooklyn, New York, church to bring together men of all classes without distinction as to wealth, social position, or occupation. The club rented two pews in the church which were free to any member and his friends. An important aspect of the club's program was its provision of social services such as aid to the poor, assistance to unemployed young men in finding work, and the provision of summers in the country for sick children. See clipping pasted in McCulloch Diary, January 2, 1878.

of the keys to McCulloch's success in attracting people to his church: a natural appeal, a lack of fanfare, and an offering of a service or program to which people could relate without strict conformity to rules or beliefs. The inauguration of the Young Men's Club was marked by a simple announcement that the minister would spend Monday evenings in the parlor of the church. McCulloch arranged to have a few church members present and to have magazines, books, and games available. Later, instructional talks were added, the first of which was on the "new 'Arithmetic' or calculating machine."[23]

While there was an initial response to the Young Men's Club, McCulloch's congregation, like those of Christian churches in general, was not ready to give wholehearted support to the development of a secular program. This lack of response may have been due in part to the difficult times. The prolonged depression which began with the financial panic of 1873 was still in force and Indianapolis had been particularly hard hit.[24] The church continued to be heavily in debt and to have difficulty in raising funds for the minister's salary. McCulloch himself had to collect pledges, secure loans, and repeatedly bring to the attention of the trustees the fact that his salary was not paid on time. It is no wonder that he wrote in his diary:

> These days lie upon me as a great burden. . . . It may be due to the depressed times, or to the dark grey days, I know not, but the people seem so miserable. The homes of the poor are dark and bare. There are many out of work . . . many sick, sorrowing and hopeless.[25]

He recognized that social inequities could not be changed in a moment because of "the shiftlessness of the poor or the indifference of the rich." But he was disheartened because those who attended church seemed to have no interest in helping their unfortunate fellow men. "They attend Church on Sunday," he wrote, "but . . . the mid-day meeting, the activities of the church receive no enthusiastic attention. The outlook is not altogether bright today."[26]

McCulloch's preaching, however, attracted to the church a larger congregation and, as had been true in Sheboygan, it included persons who were in agreement with his liberal interpretation of Christianity. Some asked to become members of his church. Among them was David Starr Jordan, a professor of natural history at Butler University.[27] In bringing Jordan's request before the church committee, McCulloch was uncertain whether approval would be granted, for he wrote in his diary:

> I brought the case before the Ch. Com. but did not think best to say anything of differences of opinion which might exist. I did not ask what Jordan's opinions were

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[23] McCulloch Diary, October 2, November 13, 22, 1878.

[24] For further information on the economic status of Indianapolis at this time, see Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (*The History of Indiana,* Vol. III; Indianapolis, 1965).

[25] McCulloch Diary, December 14, 1878.

[26] *Ibid.,* October 2, November 13, 22, 1878.

[27] Jordan became president of Indiana University on January 1, 1885. In 1891 he became the first president of Leland Stanford Junior University, now Stanford University.

believing these to be unnec'ry. . . . There were no questions asked by the Com. They were glad to have him come.[28]

McCulloch's liberal views and his respect for the opinions which others held may be seen in his description of Jordan's uniting with the church.

I asked if he had been baptised. He said 'No' but that believing in the *thought* he did not like the *form* as it was only a form. I thought best to waive it. It is one of the forms that will soon disappear resting as it does on a misconception of a text. It perhaps is needed by or for some, but others do not need it. I shall be glad when it disappears.[29]

He was particularly pleased by Jordan's concurrence in his religious teachings and commented that he thought it was "a specimen of many cases . . . ready to join an organization which stands for something in the world besides singing and praying."[30]

Less than a week later, McCulloch was further encouraged by the receipt of a letter from another Butler University professor, Melville B. Anderson, who also wanted to unite with Plymouth Church on the grounds that it was trying to carry out the truths on which Christianity was founded.[31] "There does seem a new activity," wrote McCulloch, who added, "The attendance upon the meetings of the activities seems much greater. I think that the dry bones are going to live."[32]

McCulloch was a slight wiry man who preached his sermons from a minimum of notes. His tone was more conversational and his manner less formal than that of most ministers. His texts were chosen from both the Old and New Testaments with the religious thoughts and lessons interpreted in terms of current issues or commonplace happenings. The message directed at his listeners was clearly expressed in well chosen but easily understood language. He did not hesitate to preach on the relation of capital to labor, on labor unions, shorter working hours, the widespread dishonesty existing in business practices, the exploitation of child labor and women workers, or the unsanitary and crowded living conditions of the poor.[33] He believed that anything which concerned the welfare of individuals concerned the church. These social issues, which stemmed from the industrial revolution and the unrest following the Civil War, caused growing concern during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They led to the rise of the Social Gospel movement to which McCulloch contributed but which was exemplified more widely in the preachings and writings of Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, Walter Rauschenbusch and others.[34]

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[28] McCulloch Diary, January 12, 1879.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Melville B. Anderson to Oscar C. McCulloch, January 13, 1879. Loose in McCulloch Diary.

[32] McCulloch Diary, January 16, 1879.

[33] These sermons can be found in the McCulloch Diary or in *The Open Door,* a collection of sermons given by McCulloch in 1890 and 1891.

[34] The definitive work on the Social Gospel movement is Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven, 1940).

McCulloch believed it was his business as a minister to concern himself with the cause of those who worked; he stated that his sympathies were with those who lived "close to the line of bare existence."[35] He saw social unrest as characteristic of the times; he believed the danger of this unrest threatening social institutions could be averted by organizing trade unions. One of his sermons on this theme was taken from the text, "There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master" (I Samuel 15:10). While he supported the formation of unions and emphasized that their members should know and dare to maintain their rights, he also stressed that they should know their duties, practice selfcontrol, nonviolence, and conciliation, and follow the cardinal doctrine of Christianity—selfsacrifice—submitting the good of the individual to the good of the class.[36] In a Sunday evening sermon on "The Right of Protest" he recognized the right of labor to strike and drew parallels with the Reformation and its leader, Martin Luther: "It is only by the protestants that the earth is kept alive. You and I must protest against religious wrong, against political wrong, against social wrong. Then will come the reformation. There is need of reformation, else there will be revolution."[37]

In an attempt to call the attention of capitalists to the need of social reform, he preached a sermon, "Boys Are Scarcer Than Dollars," based on the story of David and Absalom (IV Samuel 18:33). In it he stressed the evils of dollar worship, child labor, and twelve-hour working days.[38] That all employers—housewives as well as their husbands—should pay fair wages and abide by the Golden Rule was the message of another sermon entitled "The Well-To-Do and the Ill-To-Do."[39]

Messages touching the common things of life were frequently brought to the congregation in sermons with such subjects as "Freedom and Obligation," "The Value of our Institutions," "The Value of Common Things," and "Young Men and the Church."[40] Sometimes he spoke without a text to emphasize the problems of the poor in Indianapolis, the conditions at the county jail, the woman's prison, and the county home—all of which he had learned from personal observation.[41] He drew on local and national events to involve his congregations in working toward social justice. In his discourse, "Treatment of the Guilty," he criticized the people of the city for the feeling of satisfied revenge which was evident when two murderers were convicted and punished by execution. He urged his listeners to consider the conditions society allowed which contributed to crimes and urged them

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[35] Indianapolis *Times,* July 20, 1885.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] McCulloch Diary, November 11, 1883.

[38] McCulloch, *The Open Door,* 330-40.

[39] Indianapolis *Journal,* October 26, 1885.

[40] McCulloch Diary, March 4, May 25, 1884, October 6, 1885.

[41] McCulloch was in the habit of visiting these places to minister to the inmates and to make investigations of conditions. He was accompanied by the Rev. Myron Reed on some occasions.

to work toward the rehabilitation of offenders in prisons and reform schools. He believed capital punishment had no power in deterring crime, but his prediction that it must "soon be relegated to the past" because "better methods will supersede it" is still waiting fulfillment in Indiana nearly ninety years later.[42] The annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, held in Indianapolis in 1882, gave McCulloch suggestions for a sermon on "The Health of the People, a New Science," in which he referred to the interrelatedness of crime, vice, intemperance, the lack of adequate housing, pure water, sufficient and pure food, and recreation.[43] The Pullman and telegraphers strikes, the incident of the Chicago anarchists, the railroad disaster at Ashtabula, Ohio, the death of William Vanderbilt, "the richest man in all the earth," were all current events around which McCulloch built sermons.[44]

Not all of the sermons which have just been described were preached at the Meridian Street location of Plymouth Church. In 1880, when financial problems of the church continued to be serious in spite of two earlier canvasses of the congregation, a special meeting of the congregation was called during May to consider what should be done.[45] There is no mention of such a meeting in McCulloch's diary or in later minutes of the Board of Trustees, nor is there evidence that a memorandum in McCulloch's handwriting addressed to "Gentlemen of the Board of Trustees" and inserted in his diary under August 10, 1880, was considered by the trustees. This memorandum offered a plan for taking care of the mortgage and other indebtedness of the church amounting to $14,000 which would become due on May 1, 1881. Set out in detail, the plan indicated McCulloch's business acumen.[46] He candidly pointed out, however, that the first thing to consider was whether it was worthwhile to attempt to save the church, a decision for the board to make. He proposed the issue in such a drastic manner to force church members to take a stand and put the church on a sounder financial basis. In McCulloch's opinion this action—maintaining the church—was advisable. His reasons included the church's excellent central location and the "prestige attached to long occupancy."[47]

Since the minutes of the board do not reflect any discussion of McCulloch's proposal for amortizing the church debt, it seems probable that it was not presented to them because of plans William H. English had of

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[42] Indianapolis *Daily Sentinel,* February 3, 1879.

[43] Indianapolis *Journal,* October 28, 1882.

[44] Indianapolis *Sentinel,* July 23, 1883; Indianapolis *Journal,* November 29, 1886; Indianapolis *Times,* December 21, 1885.

[45] Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, May 4, 1880.

[46] The plan which McCulloch proposed for taking care of the debts of Plymouth Church involved the formation of a new organization which would take over the ownership of the church by selling shares to interested persons. Regular dividends wiuld be secured through the rent paid by the church. McCulloch indicated in the plan how much would be amortized each year from 1882 to 1891, when the entire debt would be paid off.

[47] McCulloch Diary, August 10, 1880.

extending and developing his real estate holdings on the northwest side of the Circle.[48] English offered to buy the Plymouth Church property and lease the building to the congregation for $900 a year. The purchase price of $15,000 was little more than the mortgage on the church but it was accepted since a proposed building to be constructed by English would have cut off air and light from the south side of the church.[49]

Plymouth Church continued to occupy its original building until January, 1883. McCulloch preached his last sermon there on December 31, 1882.[50] During his ministry at this location, the membership grew very slowly, financial support was difficult, and the "institutional" program became well established, but did not experience any outstanding period of expansion. To be sure, the Young Men's Club had been put on a firmer basis in 1879 with a more active program; weekday talks on social topics and Sunday evening lectures had been instituted. David Starr Jordan had delivered the first of these lectures on "Agassiz or the Religion of Science." The Ladies Union of the church had established an industrial school to teach sewing to young girls and a maternity society to help women during confinement.[51] In September, 1881, McCulloch proposed to the Board of Trustees a resumption of the Sunday evening service which had been discontinued in 1879 so that he could devote more time to the development of the Sunday School.[52] Like many other Social Gospel ministers, McCulloch was concerned that his church was not reaching the laboring classes. Therefore, he desired to have Sunday evening services devoted "especially to railroad men and mechanics and those who did not attend church anywhere," and to have a short address and a half hour's concert and song service with a quartet-choir.[53] The members of the board were wholeheartedly in favor of this plan and gave unanimous approval to McCulloch's request to have the proceeds of the evening collection set aside for the payment of the choir or other special uses of the service.[54]

Printed circulars were distributed to announce the resumption of Sunday evening services and the series of "Talks on Simple Subjects."[55] At the first service, about seventy-five attended and $3.68 was collected. Rationalization by McCulloch of the small attendance is indicated by the comment in his diary that the evening was "very rainy."[56] The following week, the congrega-

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[48] William H. English, a prominent and wealthy businessman in Indianapolis, had been the vice presidential candidate in 1880 on the Democratic ticket with General Winfield H. Hancock running for President. English was active in Indiana politics in the middle of the nineteenth century and was secretary of the convention that framed the Indiana Constitution of 1851.

[49] Minutes of the meetings of the Board of Trustees, December 3, 16, 1880.

[50] McCulloch Diary, January 1, 1883.

[51] *Ibid.*, March 2, 1879, March 29, 1880.

[52] Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, November 14, 1879.

[53] *Ibid.*, September 29, 1881.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] Plymouth Church, *Talks on Simple Subjects* (n.p., n.d.). Printed announcement pasted in McCulloch Diary, October 2, 1881.

[56] McCulloch Diary, October 2, 1881.

tion was about 300. "Too respectable," wrote McCulloch, "but with a strong sprinkling of the special class I wish."[57] And on the succeeding Sunday, he noted a larger representation of workingmen and their wives in the audience of 400.[58] A variety of topics was offered and speakers other than McCulloch were drawn upon. "Co-operation or How the Rochdale Weavers Made Money" and, on the succeeding Sunday, "Co-operation in Industry" were among the topics given by McCulloch.[59] Daniel P. Baldwin, attorney general of Indiana, spoke on "Lessons from the Life of [James A.] Garfield."[60] The following year, in a lecture series entitled "Workers with God," McCulloch discussed Charles Dickens, a writer whose life and characters exemplified charity and sympathy toward all human beings, and Alfred Tennyson, whom he characterized as a worker with God in poetry.[61]

McCulloch received both approbation and criticism as a result of the lecture series. The talks were hailed by the *Republican,* a local labor union newspaper, as a "move in the right direction," and the editor of the *Sentinel,* the leading Democrat newspaper in Indianapolis, praised McCulloch for instituting services at which programs would be devoted to the discussion of subjects related to the "betterment of society" and where the working people could listen to a theology that touched "heart and pocket, life and living."[62] David Swing, a progressive minister in Chicago, wrote McCulloch praising him for his ability to start a lecture course in Indianapolis and added, "In many good acts you are a master workman."[63]

The editor of the *Iconoclast,* a weekly free thought journal in Indianapolis, in agreement with, but overstating McCulloch's position on orthodox Christian beliefs, referred to him as one of the progressive ministers of the age, describing him as "a searcher after truth," a man who was "struggling to free himself from the fetters of orthodoxy," and who was "little, if anything, more than an Orthodox Christian in name." He predicted that as a student of Huxley, Tyndal, and Darwin, McCulloch would soon find his services as a preacher of Congregational doctrines no longer needed and that he would be "invited by his brethren to step down and out from the pulpit."[64] The editor asked McCulloch to engage in a dialogue through the columns of the *Iconoclast* with Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll on the truths of the Christian religion.[65] In contrast, the general secretary of the YMCA, Reverend Leander

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[57] *Ibid.,* October 9, 1881.

[58] *Ibid.,* October 16, 1881.

[59] *Ibid.,* November 13, 20, 1881.

[60] *Ibid.,* November 6, 1881. President Garfield had died two months previously.

[61] Indianapolis *Journal,* April 24, 1882.

[62] Indianapolis *Republican,* October 15, 1881; Indianapolis *Sentinel,* November 13, 1881.

[63] David Swing to Oscar McCulloch, November 11, 1882. Pasted in McCulloch Diary.

[64] Clipping from the *Iconoclast,* n.d., in McCulloch Diary, 1882.

[65] McCulloch Diary, April, 1882. McCulloch sometimes did not indicate the specific date on his entries in the diary. Articles by Robert G. Ingersoll, noted agnostic, orator, and lawyer, were featured in the *Iconoclast.*

W. Munhall, was outspoken in condemning McCulloch, saying that he was "doing more hurt in Indianapolis than all the ministers can do good," and criticizing him for his reference to Dickens as a "worker with God."[66] Munhall was often in conflict with McCulloch because McCulloch did not preach atonement. While he was sensitive to challenge and criticism, McCulloch did not engage in discussions of religious controversy. Referring in his diary in April, 1882, to the *Iconoclast* editor's request, McCulloch wrote: "I declined, quoting from Jeh 'I cannot come down.' For the past month he [the editor] has been at church once or twice each Sunday. He is evidently a man with a crack in his head. Thinks he has a mission."[67]

The question of a new home for Plymouth Church and a proposal presented by McCulloch for a cooperative society to purchase the lot on the southeast corner of Meridian and New York streets, where the Federal Building now stands, were discussed in informal meetings of church members in June and July, 1882. During the remainder of 1882 and early 1883 at meetings of the Board of Trustees, the church membership, and a building committee, the purchase of property at the corner of Meridian and New York was effected. The plans for the new building were approved, and sufficient funds were assured through subscriptions and the sale of bonds to warrant letting of the contract for the new building in April, 1883. Because English's proposition for renewal of the lease of the old church building had objectionable features, the Board of Trustees approved an offer to rent the Grand Opera House until the new church was completed. This plan was later affirmed by the membership and during 1883 all church services and programs were held in the opera house located at Pennsylvania and Market streets.[68] At this location, the size of the morning congregations averaged 500 and although in the first few months the attendance at the Sunday evening service was between 200 and 300, it later ranged from 650 to 1,000 when the "weather was good."[69]

Plymouth Church held its first service in its new building on January 27, 1884. Over 1,000 persons were in attendance at the opening services, both morning and evening.[70] McCulloch received a number of congratulatory letters, one from a friend in Jacksonville, Florida, who referred to his "good judgment to plan, and skill, perservance and *grit* to complete a church which is an ornament to Indianapolis, and a credit to you personally." The author continued: "I am proud of you as a man, and admire you as a pastor. You have been a blessing to Indianapolis, and your teachings and what you propose to do in the future commend itself to every true man."[71]

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[66] *Ibid.*, April 24, 1882.

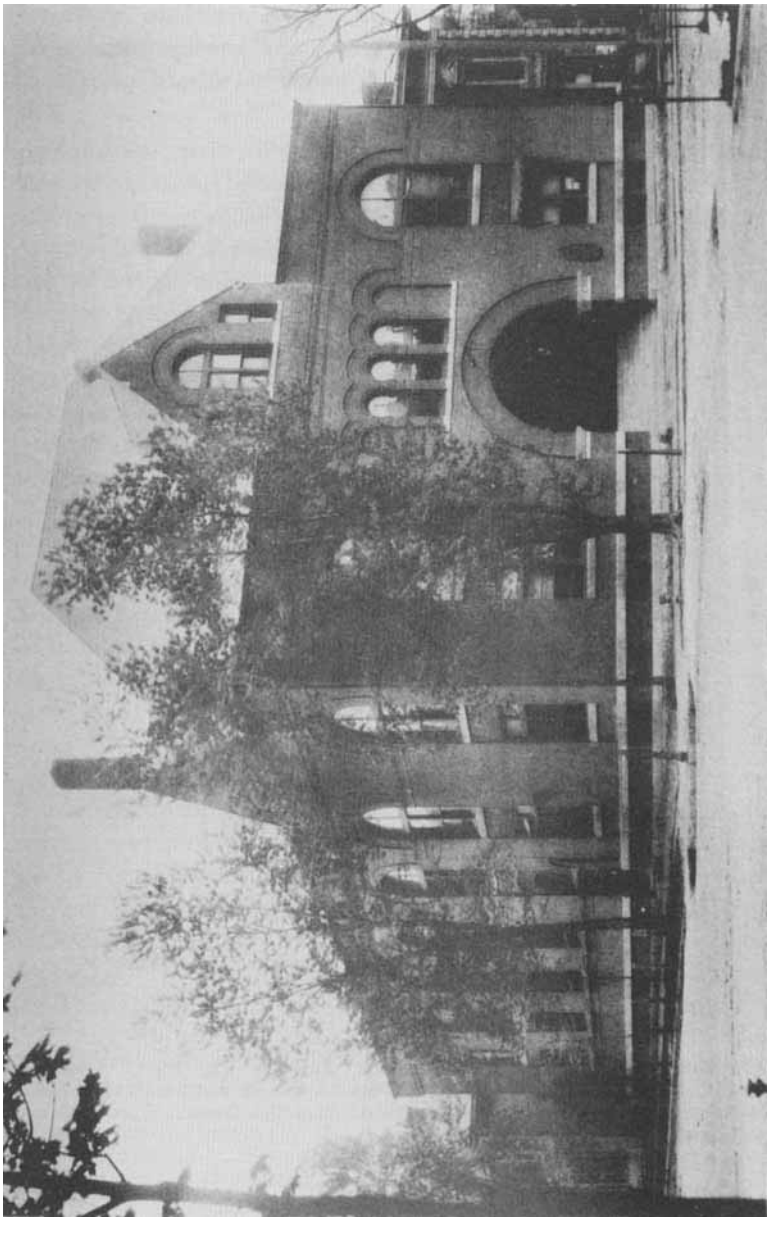
[67] *Ibid.*, April, 1882.

[68] Minutes of the meetings of the Board of Trustees, August 1, October 30, November 24, December 19, 1882, February 23, March 1, April 9, 1883.

[69] McCulloch Diary, "Cash Accounts," closing pages of 1883.

[70] McCulloch Diary, January 27, 1884.

[71] N. A. Eddy to Oscar C. McCulloch, February 7, 1884, in McCulloch Diary, January 26, 1884.



THE SECOND PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, MERIDIAN AND NEW YORK STREETS, 1884-1897.

Courtesy Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

Another correspondent, Hugo O. Pantzer, though not in agreement with McCulloch's religious views, wrote him nonetheless to express his personal satisfaction in the minister's efforts. He attributed McCulloch's success to a "sincere and earnest conviction carried by a courageous and untiring effort," and added: "By your ways you set an inspiring and worthy example for which I personally thank you. The manifold, good and liberal purpose of the edifice you planned and realized does you honor."[72]

Architecturally the new building was less attractive than the old one. It had more the appearance of a school than a place of worship; its style was functional rather than the traditional Gothic of its former home. But McCulloch's intent was that the building should be both a people's church and a people's college, and he had designed it with a wide variety of uses in mind.[73] The auditorium, which had over 1,200 seats, including approximately 350 in the gallery, was to be used for church services, concerts, public meetings, and "other gatherings for public good."[74] Smaller rooms were provided for classes, games, and a library, and other space was available for lease to civic organizations such as the Indianapolis Benevolent Society, the Charity Organization Society, the Indianapolis Literary Club, and the Woman's Club.[75]

McCulloch was the president of both the Indianapolis Benevolent Society and the Indianapolis Charity Organization Society. He had revitalized the first soon after coming to Indianapolis when it was about to be disbanded and had created the second in 1879 because of his conviction that the most economical and best way to help the poor was through an organization of charitable agencies.[76] When it became known that these societies were to have their headquarters in the new Plymouth Church building, criticism was sharp. It came primarily from ministers of other denominations who were jealous of the income Plymouth Church would receive in rent. The Methodist ministers even went so far as to form a committee to make an investigation of the two societies and their relationship to the Plymouth Church.[77] Articles and letters to the editor appeared in the newspapers; one Baptist minister took the position that the "charities of the city, like the public school system, ought to have no organic or official connection whatever with any sect."[78] McCulloch had sufficient support for his plan, however, from the Reverend Myron Reed

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[72] Hugo O. Pantzer to Oscar C. McCulloch, January 25, 1884. Loose in McCulloch Diary, January 27, 1884. Hugo Otto Pantzer was an outstanding physician who belonged to no church and probably was a member of the German Free Thinkers group in Indianapolis.

[73] Clipping in McCulloch Diary, January 14, 1884.

[74] Clippings in McCulloch Diary, January 4, 18, 1884.

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] McCulloch Diary, December 4, 5, 1879; McCulloch, *The Open Door,* xviii. McCulloch became nationally known for his leadership and genius in charity organization. See National Conference of Charities and Correction, *Proceedings,* 1880-1891.

[77] Indianapolis *Journal,* November 28, 1883.

[78] *Ibid.,* November 29, 1883.

of the First Presbyterian Church and from others so that both societies did move to the new building.[79]

Two events of special significance to McCulloch as well as to the development of Plymouth Church occurred during its first year in its new home: the amendment of the church constitution and the organization of the Plymouth Institute.[80] Both events must have given McCulloch great satisfaction. The amended constitution stated that all persons were eligible for membership who pledged themselves willing "to undertake such work as may be thought to lie within the scope of a Christian church." An applicant was not committed to any particular philosophy of faith; a Christian spirit and Christian character were the only requisites of membership.[81] This change was recognized as responsible for a very encouraging increase in the church membership.[82] As noted previously, a similar change, desired by McCulloch but rejected by his congregation in Sheboygan, had led to his resignation as minister there.

The organization of the Plymouth Institute in November, 1884, fulfilled McCulloch's early plan for the church program to provide educational and cultural opportunities for the young people of the community. Its specific purpose was stated as "increasing fellowship among young people . . . and bringing them under such influences as shall secure their moral, educational, industrial and social advancement by the best practical methods."[83] McCulloch hoped its development and value would be comparable to that of the Young Men's Christian Union and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, the Cooper Institute in New York, and the Athenaeum in Chicago.[84] Fifty young persons were present at the first meeting and 38 became members.[85] Within three months, there were 97 enrollees in classes in literature, French, German, current history, stenography, bookkeeping, drawing, and elocution. By the end of the first year 179 young people had joined.[86] Most of the classes met in the evening as they were intended primarily to serve people who were employed. The students, for the most part, were young men and women who worked in stores, offices, shops, and factories. The popularity of the program can be seen by the fact that many of the students entered two or more classes.[87] In its offering of classes the Plymouth Institute was like the Univeristy Extension Movement in England

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[79] *Ibid.*, November 28, 1883.

[80] McCulloch Diary, May 6, November 7, 1884.

[81] *Church Membership, Plymouth Congregational Church* (n.p., 1884), in McCulloch Diary, October 7, 1884. The name of the church was also changed from Plymouth Church to Plymouth Congregational Church on the same date that the constitution was amended, April 3, 1884.

[82] *Plymouth Congregational Church Register* (n.p., January 8, 1885).

[83] *The Plymouth Institute* (n.p., n.d.), in McCulloch Diary, November 7, 1884.

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] McCulloch Diary, November 18, 1884.

[86] *Ibid.*, February 14, 1885; *Year Book, Plymouth Church, for the Year Ending December 31, 1885* (n.p., n.d.).

[87] *Year Book, 1885*, 14, 15.

with which McCulloch was familiar.[88] His efforts contributed greatly to adult education classes in Indianapolis.

The number and variety of courses offered by the Plymouth Institute grew as interest increased. The program was frequently referred to as "a school for intellectual and moral culture," or "a school for busy people."[89] A fee of $1.00 per year entitled a member to the use of the reading room and to attendance at general meetings and special lectures. Fees for specific classes ranged from $1.00 to $2.50 per course.[90]

To extend his idea of a church program with practical aims, McCulloch created the Plymouth Savings & Loan Association in March, 1885, for the benefit of the congregation and members of Plymouth Institute.[91] Its objective was to provide a safe and profitable investment through small weekly installments toward the purchase of shares of $200 each. A second objective was to loan money on easy terms to enable persons to purchase or build homes, pay off mortgages, or provide business capital.[92] This association proved to be so popular that a second one was established in November, 1886.[93]

McCulloch instituted several other secular programs and facilities to extend the usefulness of the church. They included the Plymouth Book Club, through which individuals could purchase books at special prices; a library (in addition to the reading rooms which provided members of the Young Men's Club and of Plymouth Institute with many current newspapers and periodicals); and a boys' orchestra. A gymnasium was also opened and classes in physical culture were offered to both boys and girls.[94] Members of the congregation and of the community had the opportunity to hear nationally known persons who were invited to preach at the Sunday morning and evening services or to speak in the lecture series which was offered each year. Among the speakers were Mrs. Mary Livermore, Matthew Arnold,

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[88] *Plymouth Institute, Plymouth Church, Announcements for the Year 1890-91* (Indianapolis, n.d.), in McCulloch Diary, October 10, 1890.

[89] A printed flyer in McCulloch Diary, October 26, 1886, announcing the lecture course at Plymouth Institute and a printed leaflet in McCulloch Diary, October 10, 1890, giving the program for 1890-91, use the term "school for intellectual and moral culture." The program is referred to as a "school for busy people" in a printed card found in the McCulloch Diary, September 30, 1886. This card announces the annual meeting of the Plymouth Institute to be held on October 1, 1886.

[90] *Plymouth Institute, Plymouth Church, Announcements for the Year 1890-91.*

[91] McCulloch Diary, March 14, 1885.

[92] *Plymouth Savings & Loan Association, Constitution and By-Laws* (n.p., n.d.), in McCulloch Diary, March 14, 1885.

[93] *Plymouth Savings & Loan Association, No. 2, Constitution and By-Laws* (n.p., n.d.), in McCulloch Diary, December 7, 1886. These two associations were distinct from the Dime Savings & Loan Association, incorporated March 31, 1887, under the Building and Loan Association Laws of the state. The latter was formed with Oscar McCulloch as president under the aegis of the Charity Organization Society. Its purpose was similar to those of the Plymouth Associations and its principal objective was to extend the benefits of the building association idea to those not generally reached. See Indianapolis *News*, January 4, 1888, and various circulars in the McCulloch Diary, March 24, 1887.

[94] Plymouth Book Club, *Sunday Circle* and *Harvest Sunday* (n.p., n.d.). Printed materials in McCulloch Diary, 1888, 1889, 1890.

Henry George, Henry Ward Beecher, Lyman Abbott, Felix Adler, Amelia B. Edwards, and Henry M. Stanley.[95] Individuals from the community whose varying points of view McCulloch thought should be presented to Plymouth Church audiences or whose backgrounds qualified them to participate in the lecture series being offered were also drawn upon. For example, three representatives of labor—David F. Kennedy, Thomas M. Gruelle, and William M. Nichols—spoke on "What can the Workingmen do for the Churches?"[96] McCulloch himself carried a large share of the lectures, drawing upon his rich background and extensive knowledge of literature, history, and science.

McCulloch continuously experimented with ways of reaching laboring men and women and bringing them into the church. One of his most successful experiments, which was copied elsewhere, was the illustrated sermon. Stereoptican slides of well-known paintings were shown in connection with Sunday evening services. At the first illustrated sermon, the topic was "Christ in Art" which was illustrated by such pictures as Correggio's "Holy Night," Raphael's "Sistine Madonna," Hoffman's "Chirst in the Temple," and Del Sarto's "Baptism of Christ." Hymns were also projected on the screen and sung by the congregation. At a later service, he used "Laocoön" and "Apollo Belvidere" to illustrate Paul's thought of "Bondage and Freedom." Slides of paintings were also used with sermons such as "The Childhood of Jesus," "The Sermon on the Mount," and "Teaching by Parables." People soon filled the auditorium, with, at times, 100 to 200 people being turned away; the increase in the collection was sufficient to pay for the cost of the slides.[97] McCulloch also reported "a largely increased congregation" at the Sunday morning service, a fourfold attendance gain at weekly meetings, and young people "numbering 100 strong" in the Sunday School.[98]

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[95] Mrs. Mary Livermore, reformer, suffragist, and author, was a well-known platform speaker on social questions and topics of history, biography, politics, and education. Two areas in which her influence was highly felt were the education of women and temperance. Matthew Arnold was an English poet and critic who lectured in the United States in 1883-1884 and 1886. Henry George was an economist and reformer, founder of the single-tax movement and author of *Progress and Poverty*. Henry Ward Beecher was a Congregational clergyman who exerted wide influence throughout the country. Lyman Abbott was a Congregational minister whose first church was in Terre Haute, Indiana. He was also an editor and author and was associated with Henry Ward Beecher in the editorship of the *Christian Union*. Later he became the chief editor and changed the name to the *Outlook*. At Beecher's death, he succeeded him as minister of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York. Felix Adler was the founder of the Society for Ethical Culture in New York. Amelia B. Edwards was an English novelist and Egyptologist who published papers and lectured on Egyptology. Henry M. Stanley was an African explorer, author of *How I Found Livingston* and *Through the Dark Continent*. These speakers are listed in the McCulloch Diary, January 9 and February 4, 1884, April 7, 1885, February 16, 1887, February 9, 1889, and February 26, 1890.

[96] McCulloch Diary, January 25, 1891; Indianapolis *News*, January 26, 1891. Gruelle was president of the Central Labor Union and publisher of *The Labor Signal*. Kennedy was president of the Stonecutter's Union, and Nichols was a member of the Typographical Union.

[97] Clippings from *The Golden Rule* in McCulloch Diary, February 24, March 31, 1888; *Slide List of Pictures, Plymouth Church, Indianapolis* (n.p., n.d.). Printed folder in McCulloch Diary, January 17, 1889.

[98] McCulloch Diary, July 2, 1888.

In a message to the people of his church in 1889, he wrote: "The work we have undertaken to do is part of a new movement in church work, it may be called a new departure in Christianity. It is the attempt to put the church in touch with the masses of the people."[99] He went on to say that the problem of the modern city church was to find ways of utilizing the best results of scientific and critical thought, of reaching those who did not attend church, interesting the "restless young," teaching the ignorant the ways of a better life, and alleviating and preventing the troubles of the poor. He concluded his message by pointing out that it was the responsibility of members of Plymouth Church to help solve these problems by working through the four central ideas of the church program—worship, education, social life, and charity—and that it was as important for them to help the people of their own community as to support missionary work in the remote parts of the world.[100]

McCulloch's concept of the responsibility of church members and the church program to the community was an extension of his concept of how a minister should relate to the community. He held that a minister must identify himself with the community's life and concerns—the welfare and education of its children, the organization of its character, its moral condition, and its commercial and industrial interests.[101] McCulloch carried out this philosophy in Indianapolis and, in some respects, in the wider community of the state and the country. He either led or founded nearly all of the social agencies in existence during the fourteen years he lived in Indianapolis. Many of these agencies are still operating today although in some instances their names have changed. His interest and contribution to the Indianapolis Benevolent Society and the Indianapolis Charity Organization Society have already been mentioned. Other important agencies with which he was associated and whose programs he influenced included the Friendly Inn and Woodyard; the Children's Aid Society; the Free Kindergarten; the Flower Mission Training School for Nurses, which was established within the city hospital in 1883, and which two years later made possible the initiation of a visiting nurse service to the sick poor; and the Summer Mission for Sick Children, a fresh air camp constructed in Fairview Park, now the location of Butler University.[102]

Service to charitable agencies was not the only area in which McCulloch carried out what he believed were his civic responsibilities. He was a member of the board of directors of the Art School; he served as librarian of the city librarians in 1879 until a new librarian was secured; he lectured at Butler University, the State Normal School at Terre Haute, and Indiana University at Bloomington. When the Commercial Club, predecessor of the

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[99] *Work and Plans for 1890, Plymouth Church, December, 1889* (n.p., n.d.). Printed message to members of Plymouth Church from the minister; in McCulloch Diary, December 4, 1889.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] Oscar C. McCulloch, "Permanent Pastorates," *Christian Union* (June, 1883), in McCulloch Diary, June 29, 1883. Probably a letter to the editor.

[102] McCulloch, *The Open Door,* xix; McCulloch Diary, various years.

Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, was organized in 1890 he became a member and was influential in directing the club toward civic improvements.[103] McCulloch's most outstanding contribution at the state level was probably his formulation of bills which were enacted into law in 1889 creating the State Board of Charities and the Board of Children's Guardians.[104] At the national level, he was a leading member of the National Conference of Charities and Correction from 1879 until his death, serving as chairman or member of the Standing Committee on Charitable Organization in Cities for eight years, as secretary in 1886 and 1887, as vice president in 1890, and as president in 1891.[105] His contributions to these communities—city, state, and nation—outside of the Plymouth Church indicate that McCulloch's development of an "institutional church" program is but one part of the story of his life.[106]

McCulloch died of Hodgkin's disease on December 10, 1891, at the age of forty-eight. With his death, Plymouth Church lost its most illustrious minister, and the most extensive and active period of development and influence in the church's history came to an end. For approximately a decade, Plymouth Church had been the center of cultural and charitable activities of the city, but the program which McCulloch developed came at least ten years too soon to be sustained without his vision and leadership.[107] During the 1890's and immediately after the turn of the century, the kind of church which he had helped to build grew rapidly in other cities of the country. Contributing to the expansion of these churches was the formation in 1894 of the Open and Institutional Church League. The league was a national body which formalized a platform for institutional churches, conducted annual conventions, and published a monthly paper, *The Open Door,* to deal with varied aspects of the problems and programs of these city churches.[108]

McCulloch's successor, Frederick E. Dewhurst, established a neighborhood settlement house which took over much of the Plymouth Institute program.[109] In 1903 the institutional character of the church was further changed when

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[103] *Ibid.*

[104] *Laws of Indiana* (1889), ch. 37, 51; Indianapolis *News,* November 30, 1882; McCulloch Diary, March 8, 1889, February 25, 1891.

[105] National Conference of Charities and Correction, *Proceedings,* various years.

[106] A previous article presents McCulloch as a leader in organized charity. See Genevieve C. Weeks, "Oscar C. McCulloch: Leader in Organized Charity," *Social Service Review,* XXXIX (June, 1965), 209-21.

[107] Frederick Doyle Kershner, Jr., "A Social and Cultural History of Indianapolis, 1860-1914," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, January, 1950), 218-20.

[108] Charles L. Thompson, "An Agency in Accord with the Spirit and Method of the Gospel," 560-61; Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), 163.

[109] Ruth McCulloch, "Plymouth Church-II," *Indiana Magazine of History,* VII (September, 1911), 99. The institutional church program helped in accelerating the development of settlement houses which, in many instances, took over programs such as those started at Plymouth Church.

its property was purchased by the government for the Federal Building and the church moved from the center of the city to the southeast corner of Fourteenth Street and Central Avenue.[110]

There is ample evidence that McCulloch's personality, executive capacity, sincerity, ability to present the need for social reform, and his example as a compassionate "doer" strengthened and extended the Plymouth Church program and influenced the degree of participation by its members. The church was open every day in the year and was in use throughout the day and evening. Thus, the legend inscribed over the main entrance of the Plymouth Church on Meridian Street, "The gates of it shall not be shut by day," was fulfilled.[111]

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[110] Ruth McCulloch, "Plymouth Church-II," 99.
[111] McCulloch Diary, February 7, 1885.