



Immanuel Baptist Church, with its towering cross, in downtown Wichita, Kansas. Courtesy of Jay M. Price.

Assembling a Buckle of the Bible Belt: From Enclave to Powerhouse

by Jay M. Price

On Sunday, July 14, 1991, Bob Knight, mayor of Wichita, Kansas, had just delivered a talk at a local church when Chief of Police Rick Stone came up and warned him that “we’re going to have some very difficult circumstances tomorrow.” Operation Rescue, an antiabortion organization, intended to picket local abortion facilities. In particular, Operation Rescue leaders such as Randall Terry wanted to organize local and national antiabortion efforts to focus national attention on abortion providers such as George Tiller. Stone noted that “they’ll block, they’ll protest, first of all, but they’ve been known to block entrances.” Knight responded that these actions “shouldn’t be insurmountable to enforce our laws.” If there were arrests, he presumed that ordinary law enforcement channels would suffice.

The next morning, July 15, Knight received a call from Ryder Truck Rental concerned that protesters who had gathered outside Tiller’s office were being arrested and loaded into the company’s rented vehicles. In the days that followed, the arrests did not dissuade the protesters. In fact, the protests grew, and police efforts included helicopters flying overhead and blocking Kellogg Avenue. Initially, the protesters had envisioned a week-long series of events, including rallies and training in how to blockade the entrances to abortion clinics and intercept women going to the clinics. As events mounted, however, protests and pickets swelled at the Wichita Women’s Center on Market Street, the Wichita Family Planning Clinic on Central Avenue, and Tiller’s Women’s Health Care Services on Kellogg. Protests extended into a six-week-long period that became known as the Summer of Mercy.

In April that year, Wichita had been in the national headlines because of the devastation caused by the Andover tornado. Wichita was now again in the spotlight. By the middle of August, some 2,600 individuals had been arrested in the public spotlight with television cameras rolling. The protests sparked rallies on both sides, including a five-thousand-person rally of abortion rights supporters at A. Price Woodward Park on August 24, but the scale of that

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event paled in comparison to the twenty-five thousand people who crammed into Cessna Stadium at Wichita State University the following day, August 25, 1991. The rally brought together abortion opponents from across the city, the state, and the country. Its speakers included evangelist Pat Robertson, who traveled to Wichita for the event, and Eugene Gerber, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita. Organized by a coalition of groups called Hope in the Heartland, the rally was more than just an abortion event. It brought together social conservatives on a variety of issues, such as the writer Beverly LaHaye, who argued that abortion was just one part of a larger set of troubling sinful practices, including homosexuality and pornography.¹

Operation Rescue was especially concerned about Tiller's practice of late-term abortions, arguing that Kansas had become a place to go to end a pregnancy in the second or third trimester. Critics and pundits, however, wondered if there was something more to the selection of Wichita as the setting of the events. Among the most visible figures were local ministers Terry Fox of Immanuel Baptist Church and Joe Wright of Central Christian Church. Although Randall Terry was not from Wichita, significant numbers of the protesters were.

Beyond the specific events, that summer became a turning point for conservative groups in Wichita that were now mobilized and galvanized to take their views into political arena. It was a groundswell that ousted longtime Democrat Dan Glickman as congressional representative and replaced him with conservative Republican Todd Tiahrt. In January 1996, Wright gained accolades from conservative circles and criticism from liberal and moderate ones when he delivered a prayer at the Kansas House of Representatives that was a call to repentance, lamenting that "we have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it moral pluralism," "we have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle," and "we have killed our unborn and called it choice."²

1. For an overview of the Summer of Mercy, its origins, and its impacts, see Jennifer Donnally, "The Untold History behind the 1991 Summer of Mercy," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 39 (Winter 2016–2017): 244–61; Bud Norman and Bill Hirschman, "A Rallying Cry: Speakers Exhort More Than 25,000 to Continue Fight against Abortion," *Wichita Eagle*, August 26, 1991; Laviana Hurst and Bud Norman, "Abortion-Rights Rally Sends a Loud Message," *Wichita Eagle*, August 25, 1991; Tom Schaeffer and Cristine Crumbo, "Week of Discontent: Abortion Foes from Here and Elsewhere Plan Six Days of Protests," *Wichita Eagle*, July 14, 1991; Bob Knight, interview by author, April 27, 2016.

2. A copy of the prayer with some back story is found at http://www.eaac.org/desk/joe_wright_prayer.htm.

Kansas was gaining national attention on issues from abortion to homosexuality to evolution, confirming a reputation of Kansas a conservative state populated by religiously-motivated activists. To many, especially those outside of Kansas, the activities of Operation Rescue or prayers in the state house were just the latest examples of a narrative that included abolitionists coming out west in the 1850s to make Kansas a free state or temperance leaders who brought prohibition to the Sunflower States in 1881. As historian Craig Miner has observed "the freak fixes the type" and those who looked at Kansas from the outside often saw the actions of a John Brown or the "hatchetations" of Carry A. Nation as just the more extreme representatives of a society where evangelical religion and politics were intertwined. Those who studied the history of Kansas, however, were more apt to see these figures as aberrations from a state whose residents tended more toward a quiet conservatism than media grabbing activism. In the late 1800s, evangelical activism included support for temperance and prohibition, but it functioned more in the context of civic improvement and paralleled the work of the YMCA more than the smashing of saloons.

Scholars such as Robert Smith Bader in his book *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists* noted that this trend went back to at least the 1920s, when the national media had discussed Kansas, if at all, as a rural backwater out of touch with modern urban sensibilities that embraced prohibition and other religious-based policies. Meanwhile, Kansas-reared commentators such as writer Thomas Frank, historian Robert Wuthnow, and oceanographer-turned-filmmaker Randy Olson marveled at how a state that had once endorsed the pragmatic Republicanism of William Allen White, Alf Landon, and Dwight Eisenhower had become known for abortion protests, teaching "intelligent design" in science classrooms, and the antigay spectacles of Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church. Kansas had once been the embodiment of midwestern "white bread America" but now seemed more *700 Club* than *Prairie Home Companion*.³

3. Robert Wuthnow, *Red State Religion: Faith and Politics in America's Heartland* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robert Smith Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers and Methodists: The Twentieth Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988); Gary R. Entz, "Religion in Kansas: Review Essay," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Summer 2005): 120–45; Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005). See also the documentary based on Frank's book: *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, directed by Joe Winston (2009; Chicago, IL: Ow Myeye Productions, 2010), DVD; Mike DiCenzo,

Wichita seemed to be one of the centers of this shift. Aside from the activities of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, a significant number of the events and figures that seemed to define the Kansas Bible Belt image originated in Wichita. Wichita's mega-church presence was not on the scale seen in Dallas or Little Rock, but it had a larger share of Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and other southern-leaning denominations than other cities of the region. Even evangelicals noted the connection. The website of the West Evangelical Free Church used the city's religious orientation as a point of reference for its own activities: "Some wonder what the real need for the gospel is in Wichita. "Isn't Wichita in the 'Bible Belt?' 'Aren't there enough churches in Wichita already?' While Wichita is part of the Bible Belt and there are many churches, the number of Wichitans who don't know Jesus seems to be insurmountable without intervention from the God of the universe." The piece went on to argue that only 47 percent of the community had a religious affiliation, hence the need for the congregation's mission efforts. Apparently having only a minority of its citizens religiously affiliated did not disqualify a place from Bible Belt status. After all, this was the city where, a century earlier, Carrie (later Carry A.) Nation had catapulted herself into the temperance pantheon by smashing the bar at the Carey House Hotel.

However, Wichita's relationship with evangelical religion was more complicated than a blanket statement about the city being some sort of buckle of the Bible Belt. The very concept of the Bible Belt has long been challenging to define. Attempts by writers and commentators to pin



Operation Rescue, an antiabortion organization, participated in the Summer of Mercy, a six-week period of protests against Wichita's abortion clinics, notably that of George Tiller, who practiced late-term abortions. Here, an Operation Rescue banner proclaims victory over one such clinic. Courtesy of Jay M. Price.

down what makes a place a part of this proverbial belt have been difficult, in part because they involve larger discussions over issues such as religion and region that themselves have been fluid and difficult to untangle. Even though a definitive answer may be impossible to obtain, delving into the concept reveals a complicated network of religious and cultural trends that transformed a city with ties to the Great Plains, the Southwest, the South, and the Midwest.⁴

Wichita had been no stranger to activist religious voices that captured media attention but were often at odds with local leaders who may have shared the ideals if not the tactics of the activists. Carry A. Nation's attack on saloons such as that of Wichita's Carey House embarrassed many local temperance figures who felt that the evils of drink could be curbed through better enforcement of laws rather than smashing bars. A few decades later, Gerald Winrod earned a similar reputation. His Defenders of the Christian Faith had formed in the 1920s to promote

Dan Guterman, et al., eds., *The Onion, Our Dumb World: Atlas of the Planet Earth*, 73rd ed. (New York: Little, Brown, 2007); Flock of Dodos: *The Evolution-Intelligent Design Circus*, directed and produced by Randy Olson (2006; Hollywood, CA: Prairie Starfish Productions, 2006), DVD.

4. "Why Church Planting in Wichita?," website of West Evangelical Free Church, http://westefc.org/connect/church-planting/Laura_Addison, "In Search of the Bible Belt: The Bible Belt: Where Is It?," *Wichita Eagle*, October 4, 1997.

a fundamentalist challenge to evolution and bolshevism. By the 1930s, it voiced a more stridently anti-New Deal and anti-Semitic message. Winrod's run for the U.S. Senate even prompted a group of Wichita clergy to form the "Four Horsemen of Tolerance" to challenge him. By World War II, he had become the focus of a federal investigation regarding sedition charges that were tied to fascist sympathies. After the war, the Defenders continued to function out of their headquarters building on Douglas Avenue, targeting those whom they saw as enemies of their version of Christianity, including those who were soft on the Soviet Union and the Levand family, who ran the local *Wichita Beacon*. Although the Defenders may have echoed concerns and issues found among the business and social elites in conservative Wichita, they still represented an embarrassing extreme fringe. With Winrod's death in November 1957, the Defenders shifted their focus towards overseas missions as well as operating retirement centers. One such facility, called the Defenders Townhouse, operated for a time at 155 North Market Street in the structure that had once housed the Lassen Hotel. With Winrod's passing, it seemed that this sort of vocal religiosity might be a thing of the past, like that of Carry Nation.⁵

In the postwar Kansas of Dwight D. Eisenhower, conservatism in Wichita tended to be shaped by anticommunist attitudes and skepticism of government policies that intruded on the free market. It included figures such as Fred Koch, an early support of the John Birch Society whose vocal anticommunism included the publication of booklets such as *A Businessman Looks at Communism*. Walter Love, founder of the Love Box Company, was also a conservative force in the community, and his son, Robert, openly listed membership in the John Birch Society in the 1963 *Who's Who of Greater Wichita*. The Garvey family, especially as embodied in the figure of developer and investor Willard Garvey, were similarly passionate free-market advocates, as were Walter and Olive Ann Beech, whose Beechcraft company newspaper published regular features about the dangers

of communism and labor activism. It was Beechcraft executive John Gaty whose death in 1963 changed the face of modern conservatism nationally. Gaty's will stipulated that significant conservative leaders such as Strom Thurmond and William F. Buckley come to Wichita to distribute the funds from his trust.

These influential supporters of socially conservative, libertarian, and/or prohibitionist sentiments usually had ties to the Catholic, Jewish, or Orthodox communities or existing mainline Protestant congregations. They often functioned through groups such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and knew how to work within the existing power structure of the city. The mainline Protestant congregations still counted influential conservative figures in the community among their membership. The prominent Garvey family had come from a mixture of Quaker and Christian Science backgrounds, with some members part of Plymouth Congregational Church. Olive Ann Beech was a pillar of First Methodist Church. In a time when religious affiliation was a standard listing in biographies and obituaries, those of Fred Koch and John Gaty, for example, did not include religious references. They hailed from an era when religion was a more private matter, and their conservatism came more from economic than religious roots.⁶

For most of the twentieth century, the city's major congregations may have had conservative or liberal leanings but still had to address a broad membership that ranged from ardent John Birchers to antiwar and civil rights activists. In the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, however, that broad-tent approach proved harder to maintain. Major conservative figures began passing and aging. Meanwhile, national mainline Protestantism became more comfortable with moderate and even progressive stances on issues such as race, sexuality, the Great Society, and the Vietnam War, even if state and local bodies were more hesitant. Meanwhile, Richard Nixon's "Sunbelt

5. Seth Bate, "'Four Horsemen' Traveled Kansas in 1930s to Combat Anti-Jewish Rhetoric," *Journal* (Kansas Leadership Center), August 21, 2017; Leo P. Ribuffo, "Gerald B. Winrod: Prophet in Politics," in *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1983); Leo P. Ribuffo, "Gerald B. Winrod: From Fundamentalist Preacher to 'Jayhawk Hitler,'" in *John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers in Kansas History*, ed. Virgil W. Dean (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Barbara Jane Beale, "Gerald Burton Winrod: Defender of Christianity and Democracy in the United States" (master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1994).

Linda Saffier, a member of the Levand family, provided valuable insights into the context of Winrod and Wichita.

6. Wichita Historical Museum Association, 1963 *Who's Who in Greater Wichita* (Wichita, KS: Wichita Historical Museum Association, 1963); Gretchen Eick, *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954-72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001/2007); Maura McEnaney, *Willard Garvey: An Epic Life* (Oakland, CA.: Liberty Tree Press, 2013); Fred C. Koch, *A Business Man Looks at Communism* (self-pub., 1961); Jay P. Dolan "A Different Breed of Catholics," in *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest*, ed. Philip Barlow and Mark Silk (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 217-29.

Strategy” worked to blend white southerners, blue-collar voters disgruntled with Democratic politics, and northern anticommunists into an actively conservative Republican Party. Harnessing evangelists such as Billy Graham to serve as de facto Nixon campaigners, the Republicans began to see the value of courting evangelicals. By the 1970s, the last vestiges of the moderate and pragmatic wings of the party had unraveled in the wake of Watergate. Meanwhile, a new generation of activists fused social conservative attitudes on issues such as sexuality with antiestablishment hostility to government and other authorities to create a core of supporters for particular causes and politicians such as Ronald Reagan. Efforts on issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) began to galvanize a more vocal, more activist opposition movement. As historian Kristi Lowenthal noted, “ERA activists knew some conservative states would never ratify the ERA. They did not expect conservatives to wage a concerted campaign to make sure enough states would reject the ERA to prevent adoption.” The grassroots efforts against the ERA allowed conservative individuals and groups to hone their skills in pushing for change. Nationally, the voice against the ERA coalesced in the figure of Phyllis Schlafly. In Kansas, for example, the state government’s support of the ERA empowered a vocal opposition by conservatives, both men and women, for rescission. By the late 1970s, these voices were poised to push back against the changes on social issues that had emerged even in conservative Kansas.⁷

Wichita established itself as a center of this shift in September 1977, when the Wichita city commission voted to create Ordinance 35-242 to prohibit discrimination in public accommodation, housing, and employment based on sexual orientation. Immediately, a movement against the measure developed. Concerned Citizens for Community Standards of Wichita, Kansas, which had formed earlier to fight pornography, now worked to

overturn the ordinance. The group marshaled a network of conservative churches and religious groups and launched a petition drive to put the measure to a public referendum, collecting 26,000 signatures when only 9,615 were needed. The ordinance was placed on the ballot, and the public campaign became intense.

The most famous voice supporting repeal of the measure was that of Anita Bryant, an Oklahoma-raised beauty pageant winner and singer who was best known for being a spokesperson for Florida orange juice. Bryant was the face of a group called Save Our Children that worked against similar measures in Miami, Florida; Eugene, Oregon; and St. Paul, Minnesota. In Wichita, she lent her support to the Concerned Citizens campaign led by local pastors such as Ron Adrian and John Click. Adrian, the son of evangelist Dr. Jack Adrian, had undergone a conversion experience when his father was pastor of a congregation in Enid, Oklahoma. Ron Adrian then attended Bible Baptist College in Springfield, Missouri, while his father went on to found and lead Glenville Bible Baptist Church in Wichita. Click had come to Immanuel Baptist after pastoring the successful Southern Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. The publicity campaign against the ordinance raised \$50,000 and argued that those who wanted to make a stand against immoral behavior were themselves part of a civil rights movement to protect those who endorsed biblical morality. With the slogan “Let’s Go for Three in a Row,” a Concerned Citizens advertisement in the *Wichita Eagle* pushed for Wichita to join St. Paul and Miami to “remove special privileges for a few . . . special protection that would allow homosexuals to manifest their lifestyles openly before our children.”

By contrast, the Religious Caucus for Human Rights issued a full-page advertisement in the *Eagle* in favor of the nondiscrimination ordinance, arguing that “to deny human rights to people who are different or who don’t agree with us is an alarming threat to our Constitutional

7. Kristi Lowenthal, “The Equal Rights Amendment and the Persistence of Kansas Conservatism,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 37 (Spring 2014): 39; James Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms II: Stories of Kansas Mennonites in Politics* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2016); Joe P. Pisciotte, comp. and ed., *Selected Papers of Governor John Carlin: An Index of Social and Political Change* (Wichita, KS: Hugo Wall School of Urban and Public Affairs, Wichita State University, 1993); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), 167–396; Robert Wuthnow, *Rough Country: How Texas Became America’s Most Powerful Bible-Belt State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University

Press, 1997); Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969); Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 148–69. See also Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, “Religious and Political Behavior in the Sunbelt,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region*, ed. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 110–38. For context on the antiestablishment attitudes of the era, see, for example, Beth Baily and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); and David Sirota, *Back to Our Future: How the 1980s Explain the World We Live in Now—Our Culture, Our Politics, Our Everything* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011).



By August 1991, what started as a series of protests outside Wichita abortion clinics had become a movement that brought social conservatives together to work on a host of issues. The culminating event was a rally held at Cessna Stadium on the campus of Wichita State University, seen here in a photo that appeared in the *Sunflower*, the campus newspaper. More than just an abortion event, it marked the start of a period of activism in which social conservatives made their presence felt in local, state, and national politics. Courtesy of Connie Van Zandt and Wichita State University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.

rights.” Those in favor of the ordinance included United Methodist Urban Ministry; Concord United Church of Christ; and Metropolitan Community Church, an evangelical congregation that supported the spiritual needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. Rev. Paul Reece of Pine Valley Christian Church headed the caucus and argued that many major denominational bodies supported it and its efforts to retain the ordinance, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal House of Bishops, the United Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the United Church of Christ.

Individual congregations were more mixed in response, and those that were not openly on the side of Con-

cerned Citizens chose instead to let their congregants decide for themselves. “We are an open church,” noted First Baptist’s pastor Roger Frederickson. “We let people decide for themselves.” Even conservative congregations whose pastors were against the ordinance had to tread lightly. The city’s large and influential Catholic community was divided, with Bishop David Maloney officially opposed to the ordinance but others from the Catholic Workers Association to a number of local nuns arguing in favor of it. Preachers from smaller evangelical congregations, by contrast, did not have to worry about alienating major blocks of members and had the luxury of espousing a more vocal approach that they knew their congregations would support.

The results of the referendum were decisive. On May 9, 1978, the city’s voters decided by a five-to-one margin to scrap the gay rights ordinance. The results were striking: all nine of the city’s wards voted to repeal the measure by margins of 72 percent to 89 percent. Only the two precincts that were near Wichita State University voted to retain the ordinance. Jubilant over the result, members of Concerned Citizens publicly announced the next phase of the campaign: targeting the county

commissioners who had created the ordinance in the first place. A movement created to promote religious attitudes was turning political. The measure helped galvanize the LGBT movement in other parts of the country, including a rally in San Francisco where protesters chanted, “Wichita means fight back.”⁸

Back in Wichita, the campaign was experiencing a different sort of watershed with the presence of a powerful

8. Tyler Thornton, “Wichita’s Gay Rights Ordinance No 35-242: Opposition and Activism,” *Fairmount Folio* (2012): 140–64; Rick Plumlee and Tom McVey, “Referendum Winners Contemplate Recall,” John Achterkirchen and L. David Harris, “Most Losers in Referendum

conservative activist movement led by often southern-leaning evangelists who could organize religious networks to rally against certain issues, most notably homosexuality and abortion. Campaigns such as that of Concerned Citizens suggested that vocal religious conservatism was more than just the rural southern trait that journalist H. L. Mencken and his colleagues had lampooned in the 1920s. It illustrated that the Midwest, like the South, had its own conservative activism, leaving scholars such as Charles Heatwole, Stephen Tweedie, and James Shortridge struggling to define the Bible Belt and how a place such as Wichita connected to it. After all, Wichita in the 1970s had thoroughly embraced its Midwestern identity through its “Center City USA” promotional campaign. Yet the city’s evangelical presence was starting to make the community feel much more southern—more akin to Springfield, Missouri, than Springfield, Illinois.⁹

By the 1970s and 1980s, the great postwar evangelism boom was starting to yield some uncomfortable lessons for bodies that had planted many small congregations in the nation’s suburbs. These church plants had taken place under the assumption that they would inevitably grow, but that turned out not to be the case. For mainline Protestants, the 1960s represented the peak of growth and the start of a long period of decline rather than the foundation of even greater prominence. As congregations aged, the young children nurtured in the burgeoning Sunday schools resoundingly rejected their elders’ community-based faith in favor of more personalized religion that celebrated the individual making a stand against the establishment. In contrast to the mainline Protestant world, where, as the old joke went, evangelism occurred in the birthing room and at the marriage altar, southern-inspired evangelical,

Pentecostal, and Holiness groups were well equipped to reach out to a Sunbelt city such as Wichita. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, evangelicalism lost some of its twang and became more mainstream. A growing segment of the evangelical community embraced the “church growth” or “seeker friendly” individuals, who were often baby boomers. A new generation of pastors and congregations abandoned the “old-time religion” of *Southern Harmony* hymnbooks in favor of Christian rock, took to the airwaves with dynamic televangelists who tailored their message for the television camera, and planted “megachurches” that held services in vast stadium-like settings. Rallying around causes was another feature of this approach, providing a sense of mission for efforts in this life as well as concern about the afterlife. Nationwide, preachers, musicians, authors, political pundits, and evangelists played to the antiestablishment strain in evangelicalism, arguing that they were standing up to an elite of “official,” “respectable” churches that had compromised too much with secular culture. Those congregations that mastered this strategy grew in great numbers. It was especially popular among young families who had moved to the affluent neighborhoods on the edges of the nation’s cities. Congregations that chose the more clubby postwar approach and stayed in the 1950s-era suburbs lost out as their existing members aged and new members failed to join in large numbers. So too did those congregations that focused on the needs of the nation’s central urban cores, those that emphasized outreach to the poor, the immigrants, the refugees, and the marginalized.¹⁰

Being southern or evangelical was not inherently a guarantee of growth, as the story of Immanuel Baptist and First Southern Baptist illustrated. Immanuel’s pastor was John Click, a major figure in the 1978 Concerned Citizens

Battle Expect to Win War,” and Julie Charlip, “Voters Bury Gay Rights Ordinance,” *Wichita Eagle*, May 10, 1978; L. David Harris, “Catholics Disagree on Gay Ordinance,” Bob Latta, “Many Churches Leave Gay Issue Up to Individual Conscience,” and “Let’s Go for Three in a Row” advertisement, *Wichita Eagle*, May 8, 1978; “Religious Caucus for Human Rights advertisement,” *Wichita Eagle*, May 7, 1978; “Gay Rights—the Debate Goes On,” letters to the editor, *Wichita Eagle*, May 5, 1978; Julie Charlip, “Religious Caucus Backs Gay Rights” and letters to the editor, *Wichita Eagle*, May 6, 1978; “Voting against Gay Rights: A Backlash against Growing Tolerance,” *Time* magazine, May 22, 1978; “Wichita (SIC) Repeals Homosexual Law: Civil Rights Called Issue ‘Right Wing’ Assailed,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1978; Grace Lichtenstein, “Laws Aiding Homosexuals Face Rising Opposition around Nation,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1978; Jack Adrian obituary, *Wichita Eagle*, January 23, 2002; Dan Steinbeck, “Evangelist Adrian Has Heart for Sharing Gospel with Others,” *Pathway* (Jefferson City, MO), March 2, 2016.

9. Charles A. Heatwole, “The Bible Belt: A Problem in Regional Definition,” *Journal of Geography* 77 (February 1978): 50–55; Wilbur

Zelinsky, “An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51 (June 1961): 139–93; Stephen W. Tweedie, “Viewing the Bible Belt,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (Spring 1978): 865–76; James R. Shortridge, “Patterns of Religion in the United States,” *Geographical Review* 66 (October 1976): 427. See also, for example, James R. Shortridge, “The Heart of the Prairie: Culture Areas in the Central and Northern Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1988): 206–21.

10. Cathy Gunther Brown and Mark Silk, eds., *The Future of Evangelicalism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 267–311; H. B. Cavalcanti, *Gloryland: Christian Suburbia, Christian Nation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); William Benke and Le Etta Benke, *The Generation Driven Church: Evangelizing Boomers, Busters and Millennials* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002); Lynn and Bill Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 195–97; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002); Mike Regele,

movement and an outspoken voice in favor of the Southern Baptists' fundamentalist wing. Under his leadership, Immanuel Baptist, for example, had grown to become one of the dominant Southern Baptist congregations of the city. Even Southern Baptist congregations such as Metropolitan Baptist appeared staid by comparison, focusing more on outreach to new immigrant groups than on taking on citywide social and political causes. First Baptist, meanwhile, continued to serve its now aging body of congregants and maintained a more traditional model of church practice that focused mainly on supporting congregational activities. The distinction between the two approaches culminated in October 1989, when the two congregations merged and First Baptist became the junior partner to the much larger Immanuel. Immanuel soon became known for its branch campuses, which included First Baptist as well as the Christian Life Center on South Topeka Avenue. As it moved into the 1990s, Immanuel became the city's vocal and activist Southern Baptist congregation, hosting national social conservative figures such as Jerry Falwell. Click was a major figure in the Wichita Alliance of Evangelical Churches as well as state and national Baptist circles.¹¹

Not all mainline congregations were stagnating, especially if they embraced the evangelical church growth model. The most visible example was Central Christian Church. Founded in the 1880s, it had been one of the most respectable congregations in the city. In 1948, it expressed its prominence by dedicating an imposing Gothic Revival edifice at Second and Market Streets. By the 1970s, however, Wichita's population growth was occurring at the edges of the city while the downtown languished. The congregation decided to acquire a new parcel of land on the eastern edge, at Central Avenue and Rock Road, and moved to erect an imposing new megachurch. It also embraced a conservative evangelical identity focused

on growth, outreach, and outspoken social activism on social and cultural issues. The majority of the members embraced a conservative, evangelical faith and wanted to leave the more mainline Disciples of Christ. This time, it was the moderates, those who rejected the "absolutist" attitude of Central Christian, who broke away and returned to the former church downtown, renaming it First Christian Church. First Christian continued downtown but languished, as so many mainline-moderate congregations did in the late twentieth century, and the congregation eventually disbanded in 2005. Central Christian Church, meanwhile, flourished as one of the city's largest Protestant churches. Its towering gold cross gleamed over the city's prosperous east side. Services exceeded two thousand in attendance, filled with individuals who praised Wright for telling the truth and not bowing to political correctness. Its services pulsed with the music of Rich Mullins, a Christian-rock composer who had attended Friends University for a music degree, had headed the music program at First Evangelical Free Church, and wrote the evangelical standard "Our God Is an Awesome God."¹²

Other congregations, however, were new developments coming out of a nondenominational framework. For a time, the city's best-known evangelist was David Brace. The son of an Assemblies of God pastor, Brace was born in Lincoln, Illinois, but grew up in Coffeyville, Kansas where his mother had ties as well as to Gore, Oklahoma. David Brace's New Life Fellowship began in 1981 in a Wichita strip mall. By the end of the decade, his ministry had grown to establish Faith Metro Church, one of the city's most prominent nondenominational congregations with over four hundred members. In an indication of its standing, the congregation constructed a massive new church complex at Twenty-Ninth and Oliver. By the early 1990s, Brace's ministries included Faith Metro Media, which operated five Christian radio stations, and he had become one of the city's leading ministers. Then

Death of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992): 145–275; Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972).

11. Tom Schaefer, "Churches Combine Their Congregations," *Wichita Eagle*, October 21, 1989; Tom Schaefer, "Churches Fast Becoming Believers in Marketing," *Wichita Eagle*, December 30, 1989; Laura Addison, "From

Pulpit to Pew: The Rev. John Click, Leader in Church, State Battles, Retired Sunday," *Wichita Eagle*, February 22, 1997. For context, see Marjorie Stith, *Making a Difference: A Fifty-Year History of Kansas-Nebraska Southern Baptists* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1995).

12. Matt Riedl, "Abandoned Church to Get New Congregation, Homeless Ministry," *Wichita Eagle*, July 30, 2016; Erin Kennedy, "Singer's Death Leaves Hole in Heart of Church: Members of Central Christian Church in Wichita Remembered Rich Mullins and His Music on Sunday," *Wichita Eagle*, September 22, 1997; Leigh C. Early and Mary Elise Early, "Public Prayer Has a Two-Fold Purpose," special to the *Wichita Eagle*, February 9, 1996.



Founded in the 1880s, Central Christian Church abandoned its mainline Protestantism in the 1970s, embracing instead a conservative evangelical identity. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, it flourished as one of the city's largest Protestant megachurches, with services exceeding two thousand people. Courtesy of Jay M. Price.

it all came crashing down when a sting operation found that Brace had used his ministries to launder money. Agents posing as drug traffickers approached Brace about laundering drug money. The evangelist's agreement to the arrangement led to his downfall, starting with his resignation in 1995.¹³

The growth of evangelicalism in Wichita was changing the very nature of the city. In 1980, seven percent of Sedgwick County residents were members of the Southern Baptist Church. In 2010, that figure was 6 percent, but the overall numbers still pointed to growth. The number of Southern Baptists grew from just over

twenty-four thousand to over twenty-nine thousand, a 21 percent increase. American Baptists experienced a major decline in both numbers, from over 6,700 to just over 3,100 and from 2 percent to 0.6 percent. In 1980, Wichita had a significant evangelical population, but the mainline Protestants were still dominant, with the United Methodists as the largest single denomination. By 2010, the Southern Baptists and Methodists were equal in size, and those listed as "nondenominational" outnumbered the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and American Baptists combined. In part, this shift was seen across the American religious landscape. Recent statistics suggest that mainline Protestants now make up about 10 percent of the American population, down from half in 1960. However, the shift in Wichita was more than just demographic. Wichita's evangelicals were becoming more vocal, more visible, and more activist. No longer a community of transplanted southerners or a voice for those disaffected by the mainline Protestant establishment, conservative

13. Donald Williams and Mark Weaver, "Shaky Empire: Faith Metro: More Debt Than Cash," *Wichita Eagle*, July 2, 1995; Dave Ranney, "Faith Metro Minister Indicted Brace Resigns, Cites 'Personal Reasons,'" *Wichita Eagle*, June 27, 1995; Rhonda Holman, "Format Change Set for Station," *Wichita Eagle*, April 14, 1992.

evangelicals were positioning themselves as a significant presence in the community.¹⁴

A particularly visible part of the shift came from congregations and organizations that were developing on the city's suburban fringes, such as Central Christian. Another example, First Church of God, began as a modest congregation on South Market Avenue during the postwar years. Renamed Central Community Church, it had expanded by the 1990s to an impressive new facility on West Maple Avenue, one that came to host Trinity Academy, a Christian high school that was itself part of a movement to create alternative Christian schools and homeschooling networks in the city. A similar story can be told about South Emporia Bible church, which expanded into the neighboring city of Bel Aire and renamed itself Sunrise Bible Chapel, complete with a related Sunrise Christian Academy. More than just congregations, these facilities were increasingly tied to alternative education systems catering to parents who were uncomfortable with the trends in public schooling. The city's evangelical private schools, once the domain of Catholic parochial education, similar to those at Central Community and Sunrise. These, such as the Learning Academy, which was connected to the Love Box Company, offered a conservative Christian educational experience distinct from that of the Catholic schools Kapaun–Mt. Carmel and Bishop Carroll as well as the elite prep schools Collegiate and Garvey family-supported Independent School.¹⁵

Evangelicals were coming to reshape life outside their congregations as well. Well-organized networks of evangelicals and social conservatives emerged, including Kansans for Life, incorporated in 1983, and the Wichita Alliance of Evangelical Churches, incorporated in 1988. The incorporation documents for Kansans for Life, for example, included five petitioners who also served as the board of directors, of whom one was from Olathe, one

from Overland Park, one from Topeka, and two from Wichita. This mix highlights both the suburban rather than rural nature of late-twentieth-century religious conservatism and the significant role that Wichita was coming to play regarding religion in the Sunflower State. One of the Wichita signers, David Gittrich, also served as the group's executive director. A lifelong Wichitan, he was active in the city's Catholic community and illustrated how Wichita's Catholics and evangelicals could work together on social issues.

In the 1880s, religious leaders in Wichita formed the backbone of institutional and civic reform efforts such as temperance activities and the work of the YMCA. Similarly, the Wichita Alliance of Evangelical Churches represented an approach to evangelical civic activity very different from that of 1921, when civic leaders such as W. C. Coleman and temperance advocates such as A. A. Hyde had helped form the Wichita Federation of Churches, the body that became the Wichita Council of Churches. Later the council renamed itself Inter-Faith Ministries, reflecting a body that brought together a variety of religious groups, including both Christians and non-Christians, to address issues such as poverty, social justice, and hunger.

During the early twentieth century, evangelicals resisted ecumenical efforts, concerned that such cooperation with mainline denominations came at the expense of a diluted theology. American Baptists' willingness to work with the Federal Council of Churches, for example, was a symbolic issue that prompted some Baptist congregations in Kansas to affiliate with the Southern Baptist fold. Certain fundamentalist leaders were openly alarmed by Roman Catholicism, especially when Catholics such as Al Smith and John F. Kennedy ran for the presidency. By the 1980s, however, that attitude had changed, and evangelicals joined with Catholics on social issues such as abortion. In addition, a new generation of evangelical leaders, starting with the "Jesus movement," had grown to embrace a countercultural position. By the end of the twentieth century, being antiestablishment had become a powerful rallying point for any movement that wanted to harness the activism and passion of the baby boom generation, and a wide range of groups, including evangelicals, embraced protests and activist techniques that had emerged during the civil rights and antiwar movements as a way to bring media attention to an issue. These techniques both motivated activists and challenged religious and political authorities to take sides and take stands.¹⁶

16. See also Articles of Incorporation, Kansans for Life, Wichita Alliances of Evangelical Churches and Interfaith Ministries, accessed

14. Brown and Silk, *The Future of Evangelicalism in America*, especially "Introduction"; Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 215–66; Dale E. Jones, Sherry Doty, Clifford Grammich, James E. Horsch, Richard Houseal, Mac Lynn, John P. Marcum, Kenneth M. Sanchagrin and Richard H. Taylor, *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 149 Religious Bodies* (Nashville, TN: Glenmary Research Center, 2002), *The Association of Religious Data Archives for 2010*, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/20/rcms2010_20173_county_name_2010.asp, and 1980, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/20/rcms2010_20173_county_name_1980_ON.asp, cited at <http://www.city-data.com>, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wichita-Kansas.html#ixzz35Owiuy8Y>.

15. See, for example, Ben Wear, "Parents Put Faith in Private School: Christian Academy to Give Public Schools Yet Another Competitor," *Wichita Eagle*, October 19, 1993.



Tara Traylor, Pamela Schuffert, and Glen Riedel of Wichita kneel in prayer in front of the U.S. Courthouse in Wichita. They sought the release of fellow protestors arrested on federal charges of blocking access to George Tiller’s Women’s Health Care Services during the Summer of Mercy. The event transformed Wichita, and Kansas generally, into a hotbed of conservative activism and the leading pro-life state. Courtesy of the Wichita Eagle.

For example, by the late 1980s, Kansans for Life, the state’s affiliate of the National Right to Life Committee, was emerging as a key leading voice for antiabortion legislation in the state legislature. Its efforts included lobbying, rallies at the state house, and grassroots organizing. A segment of Catholic and evangelical activists, however, had grown frustrated with the lack of change they saw in Topeka. Efforts to pass laws restricting abortion had run into challenges, and some felt that the times called for more radical activities. They took inspiration from figures such as Randall Terry, leader of the antiabortion protest group Operation Rescue, which had started making headlines by protesting abortion clinics in places such as Atlanta

during the Democratic National Convention, Milwaukee, and Dallas.¹⁷

In early 1990, protests began outside George Tiller’s clinic. At first, the protests were simply those of Kansans for Life, not Operation Rescue. Local activists reached out to national figures such as Operation Rescue’s Keith Tucci to lend their support, and by spring 1991, Operation Rescue had announced plans to support protests in Wichita. This was the first Operation Rescue protest in the

17. Donnally, “The Untold History behind the Summer of Mercy”; “David Gittrich, Prominent Kansas Anti-abortion Activist, Dies,” *Wichita Eagle*, October 18, 2017; Cristine Crumbo, “Abortion Foes to Hold Vigil for Jailed Fellow Activists,” *Wichita Eagle*, June 21, 1991; “Second National Protest Set for Abortion Clinics,” *Wichita Eagle*, June 4, 1991; David Bauder, “Rescuers’ Put Abortion Back in Spotlight,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 8, 1989; “Kansans for Life, Inc., Born Mar. 24, in Topeka,” *Catholic Advance*, April 7, 1983.

via Kansas Secretary of State Business Entity Search Station website at <https://www.kansas.gov/bess/flow/main>.

Midwest, and it was planned to coincide with a meeting of the Pro-Life Action Network that was to take place in Wichita in June of that year. The plans were initially for a week of protests beginning on Monday, July 15, 1991, at a morning rally at the Wichita Plaza Hotel. The participants then went on to protest local abortion clinics. That initial rally of about seven hundred people swelled into a media event as more came to join the protests. Randall Terry, who had been arrested and was in jail in Harvey County, urged his supporters to resist officials. U.S. District Court Judge Patrick Kelly issued a temporary restraining order to block the protests, and abortion foes saw themselves more and more as participants in a righteous struggle. A rally of abortion opponents at Edgemoor Park on Sunday July 28 was twice the size of one that had taken place a week earlier. By early August, over 1,900 protesters had been arrested for trespassing. An August 6 tally listed some fifty-two people still under arrest. Of this group, twenty were Wichitans and a few others were from surrounding communities. That meant the majority had come from out of the area specifically for the protests. An issue that had once been the topic of awkward conversation was no longer discussed only in hushed tones.

More than just a Catholic event, the protests crossed religious boundaries. The Summer of Mercy coincided with a meeting in Wichita of five hundred individuals of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, which advocated that members "avoid civil disobedience except on issues where laws serve to prevent us from worshipping or where laws or authorities demand us to personally disobey the principles and precepts of God in his word." Although that body was divided on whether to support the civil disobedience of Operation Rescue, Pastor John Macy of First Evangelical Free Church, along with Central Christian's Joe Wright and Gene Carleson of Westlink Christian, worked alongside Catholics and other prolife advocates, either on the front protest lines or in the organizational efforts of the campaign, although not always to the point of being arrested.

Not all were convinced. John Click of Immanuel Baptist, for example, was openly prolife but skeptical of the activist, confrontational tone of the protesters in front of George Tiller's clinic. A veteran of the 1978 referendum, he favored working through established channels, albeit as an outspoken voice within them. Catholic leaders such as Bishop Eugene Gerber and Governor Joan Finney appreciated the attention the protests drew to the prolife cause but also worried that it might end up damaging the movement's reputation. It could have done for the prolife movement what Carry Nation had done for temperance,

Phelps for the antigay movement, and Winrod for fundamentalism: forcing leaders to carefully distance themselves from outspoken radicals while not appearing too willing to compromise. Then again, the purpose of such activities was a classic lesson in prophetic witness: in many cases, the goal of the prophet is not to convince the outside world to change but to motivate those within the given faith community to act. The *Catholic Advance* reported that Kansans for Life members were supportive of women who rethought their plans for abortions because of the protests, but as Gittrich explained, "we create social unrest because things don't get done until there is social unrest." The protests were intended to be peaceful, however, and Gittrich insisted that those who were arrested were only the ones who intentionally sought to be. Nor was this just a Catholic event; Gittrich observed that it was "an interdenominational ecumenical event."¹⁸ It was not obvious what the long-term consequences of the Summer of Mercy would be. By early August, several of Operation Rescue's national leaders, such as Rev. Keith Tucci, had left, leaving it to local clergy to meet at the Wichita Plaza Hotel to decide what to do next.¹⁹

The protests of 1991 were visible and media-grabbing events, but they were always part of a larger effort that included lobbying and voter drives. Once the activities of Operation Rescue had concluded, a group of about fifty clergy met to discuss ways to continue the work of the prolife cause. As "spiritual and moral leaders of the Pro-Life movement in our city," they vowed to continue the work of Operation Rescue. Among them were Central Christian's Joe Wright, Gene Williams of First Church of the Nazarene; Cecil Adams of First Assembly of God Church in Haysville,

18. Christopher M. Riggs, "Legislature Fails to Pass Any Prolife Legislation," *Catholic Advance*, April 26, 1990; Christopher M. Riggs, "Abortion Clinic Rescue Effort Growing," *Catholic Advance*, February 22, 1990.

19. Donnally, "The Untold History behind the Summer of Mercy," 258-60; Christopher M. Riggs, "Leaders: OR forced people off 'fence,'" *Catholic Advance*, September 5, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, Tom Schaffer, and Bud Norman, "Abortion Heat Is Redirected: Clergy Regroup as Leaders Depart," *Wichita Eagle*, August 8, 1991; Bill Hirschman, "52 Protesters Held on Trespassing Charges: Wichita Police Arrest 1,919 since July 15," *Wichita Eagle*, August 6, 1991; Suzanne Perez, "Hot and Bothered: Wichitans Boil in a Summer of Discontent," *Wichita Eagle*, August 4, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "A Battle of Wills: Police Line Crossed," *Wichita Eagle*, July 31, 1991; Stan Finger, "Anti-Abortion Call Rings Out from Jail House: Terry Exhorts Wichita Rally," *Wichita Eagle*, July 29, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Abortion Foes Dig In for a Renewed Fight: Courthouse Rally Protests Leaders' Arrests," *Wichita Eagle*, July 26, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas and Bud Norman, "Abortion Protests Bring 200 Arrests: Federal Judge Orders

Gene Carlson of Westlink Christian Church, and others. It was in the wake of the protests themselves that the Hope for the Heartland Coalition organized the rally at Cessna Stadium. The rally was only the start of the work. Early in the discussions of how to move forward, the decision was made to move beyond protest activities to political action and away from blockades at clinics to electing prolife candidates to office. In the years after the Summer of Mercy, local religious leaders focused less on protests and being willingly arrested for a cause and more on ensuring that sympathetic individuals were elected to local, state, and national office.

The Summer of Mercy also coincided with a shift in Kansas and national politics. A number of individuals who were on the picket lines or who at least supported prolife efforts became, in the 1990s, active at the precinct level, on school board efforts, or worked on the campaigns of conservative candidates for the state legislature. Some became active in political organizations such as the Wichita Pachyderm Club, a local affiliate of a national association of Pachyderm Clubs that served as a place for Republicans to discuss social and political issues with each other and their elected leaders. The Pachyderm Club, Kansans for Life, and other groups became important resources for conservative voters to vet candidates and elected officials. They made their voice felt in numerous local campaigns as one by one, districts that had once elected Democrats started electing Republicans and those that were Republican elected conservatives over moderates. The tripartite division in Kansas politics of Democrats, establishment Republicans, and more activist conservative Republicans was starting to shift. For decades, Democrats and establishment Republicans had governed by being able to balance various constituencies. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, however, that balance proved increasingly harder to maintain. Willingness to stand for a cause rather than compromise was the new value, and political strength went to groups and

causes that could clearly articulate a vision and mobilize voters to support it. The issues of school funding and taxes, for example, resulted in a 1992 effort by portions of southwestern Kansas to secede from the rest of the state. On the national scene, opposition to a range of issues from the North American Free Trade Agreement to President Bill Clinton's "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding LGBT members of the military to the Clinton administration's unsuccessful attempt to overhaul the nation's health care system galvanized conservatives.²⁰

Religious and social issues were an important part of this new political landscape. Religious conservatives backed Joan Finney, a prolife Democrat, as governor in 1990. As the Summer of Mercy unfolded, Finney weighed in, speaking to an Operation Rescue rally outside the Century II Performing Arts and Convention Center on August 2 and affirming that she was prolife but imploring protesters to "please, work within the law." Finney initially agreed to speak at the planned August 25 rally but then backed out. This move outraged the more activist segment of the prolife movement, and by the end of August, elements of a movement that had brought her into office were calling for her impeachment. Finney also found herself increasingly at odds with her own party, which tended to favor a very different approach to social issues. The 1990s saw the last gasp of conservative Democrats, ranging from traditional Catholic voters across the state to more outspoken prolife figures such as Finney to openly anti-LGBT figures such as Representative Jan Pauls and Fred Phelps, who ran for governor on a Democratic ticket. It fell to the "rebel" Republicans to bring the social conservative message to Topeka.²¹

The results of conservative political activism were striking in the 1994 election, when in Kansas, longtime Representative Dan Glickman lost his seat to the conservative Todd Tiaht, a manager at Boeing whose campaign success depended on the political actions of the city's evangelical community. Born in South Dakota, Tiaht

Demonstrators to Stop Blocking Clinics," *Wichita Eagle*, July 24, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Saint or Buffoon? No One Is Neutral about Abortion Foe Randall Terry," *Wichita Eagle*, July 21, 1991; Suzanne Perez and Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Abortion Foes Will Extend Protest," *Wichita Eagle*, July 18, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Protests Close Abortion Clinics," *Wichita Eagle*, July 17, 1991; Bud Norman, "Impassioned Rally Launches Protest," *Wichita Eagle*, July 16, 1991; Tom Schaeffer and Cristine Crumbo, "Week of Discontent: Abortion Foes from Here and Elsewhere Plan Six Days of Protests," *Wichita Eagle*, July 14, 1991; Tom Schaeffer, "Abortion Battleground Moves to Wichita: Operation Rescue to Lead Protests," *Wichita Eagle*, July 14, 1991; Tom Schaeffer, "Independent Fundamental Meeting Harmonious," *Wichita Eagle*, June 29, 1991; Angela Herrin, "Anti-abortion Group Plans Wichita

Protest: Hundreds to Gather outside Tiller's Clinic," *Wichita Eagle*, May 30, 1991; Susan Faludi, "Operation Rescue a Crusading Passion for Terry," *Wichita Eagle*, August 19, 1989; Bauder, "Rescuers' Put Abortion Back in Spotlight."

20. Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas*; James C. Juhnke, "Moderates, Mennonites, and the Religious Right: A Hot Contest in the Seventy-Fourth House District, 1994," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Autumn 2004): 180-93; Peter J. McCormick, "The 1992 Secession Movement in Southwest Kansas," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Fall 1995): 247-58; Burdett Loomis, *Time, Politics, and Policies: A Legislative Year* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 1994), 149-62.

21. Donnally, "The Untold History behind the Summer of Mercy"; Hurst Norman, "Abortion-Rights Rally Sends a Loud Message"; Bill



By the early 2000s, Wichita had become a major center of conservative politics in Kansas, and social conservative candidates started taking notice. Here, Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum speaks to a gathering at Jabara Airport during the 2012 election season. Courtesy of Jay M. Price.

was a member of the Assemblies of God, a prominent example of how far Pentecostalism and evangelicalism had moved beyond their twentieth-century southern image. Meanwhile, elections from 1992 on brought wave after wave of conservative legislators into the state house in Topeka, giving conservative Christians a political as well as a media presence in the state.²²

Hirschman, Judy Lundstrom Thomas, and Bud Norman, "Finney Says She Was Misled, Backs Out of Aug. 25 Rally," *Wichita Eagle*, August 6, 1991; Bud Norman, "Abortion Foes Crafting New Political Strategy: Protest Leader Finney to Speak at Aug. 25 Rally," *Wichita Eagle*, August 5, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Finney Backs Abortion Foes: Remain within the Law, She Urges," *Wichita Eagle*, August 3, 1991.

22. Tom Schaefer, "A Delicate Balance: Abortion Issue Splits Local Clergy, Congregations," *Wichita Eagle*, August 10, 1991; Tom Schaefer,

As the 1990s unfolded, social issues shaped by evangelical voices in places such as Wichita came to realign the state's political structure, and Wichita's evangelical preachers continued to grab headlines. Some of the notoriety was due to scandals such as that of David Brace. Others gained visibility by rattling the proverbial cages in the state's political establishment, as in January 23, 1996, when Rev. Joe Wright, who loudly proclaimed a conservative message in a prayer before the state legislature. Republican Representative Anthony Powell, a member of Central Christian, invited Wright to give the opening prayer and what Wright delivered was a list of concerns that conservative Christians had been voicing. He lamented that society has

worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism. We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

For many in the state, especially those of mainline spirituality, it was a provocative, inflammatory, and offensive speech. Wight's supporters countered that he was willing to speak the truth, no matter how unpopular.²³

Meanwhile, John Click's retirement from Immanuel Baptist in 1997 brought in a figure who was even more vocal and outspoken than his predecessor: Terry Fox. Fox had been a pastor in Corpus Christi, Texas, and from the pulpit of Immanuel, he became one of the most publicized voices in local and state social and political discussions. No sooner had Fox been installed as pastor than he came out in favor of the Southern Baptist Church's boycott of Disney over Disney's tolerance of LGBT individuals. Fox's popularity launched a new phase of growth. When he

"Clergymen Say Kelly Trying to Silence Them," *Wichita Eagle*, August 7, 1991; Judy Lundstrom Thomas, Tom Schaefer, and Bud Norman, "Abortion Heat Is Redirected: Clergy Regroups as Leaders Depart," *Wichita Eagle*, August 8, 1991; Bud Norman and Bill Hirschman, "A Rallying Cry: Speakers Exhort More Than 25,000 to Continue Fight against Abortion," *Wichita Eagle*, August 26, 1991. See also Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 281–303.

23. Jenny Upchurch, "Ministers Give Prayers but Not Approval to Brace," *Wichita Eagle*, June 29, 1995; Grace Hobson, "Prayer Provokes Passions: Wichitans' Message Upsets Kansas House," *Wichita Eagle*, January 24, 1996; Leigh C. Early and Mary Elise Early, "Public Prayer Has a Two-Fold Purpose," and Grace Hobson, "Prayer Keeps on Giving—and Insulting: Rev. Joe Wright Is Not Apologizing for His Controversial

became pastor in 1997, worship attendance was about five hundred. A few years later, it was 1,500, and Immanuel was the largest Southern Baptist congregation in Kansas and Nebraska. The congregation launched a new building campaign, including an auditorium that could seat three thousand and a free-standing 110-foot metal cross that, Fox noted, would be “tall enough to make a statement.” Meant to be seen by passing motorists, it was similar to other roadside metal crosses such as that of Edmond, Oklahoma, and the massive cross on I-40 in Groom, Texas. It was a companion to Central Christian’s gilded cross that gleamed over East Wichita. Fox and Wright had become more than just local icons. They headed congregations that were themselves physical landmarks on the landscape.²⁴

By 2004, Wichita’s evangelical leaders had joined their colleagues in the state legislature to become a decisive force in state and local politics. With them were individuals such as Phil Kline of Johnson County, who had been in the legislature in the 1990s as one of the growing conservative voices and in 2003 became state attorney general. Abortion was one of the critical issues, with Kline positioning himself to go after abortion providers such as Tiller. Meanwhile, elections brought conservatives onto the state’s board of education, prompting that body to consider how to integrate “intelligent design” into the state’s teaching standards. Fox and Wright worked with the board and Attorney General Kline in efforts that included, for example, placing stickers on textbooks warning readers that evolution was only “a theory, not fact.” It was a topic that inspired nationwide comment, from newspaper editorials to documentaries such as Randy Olson’s *Flock of Dodos: The Evolution–Intelligent Design Circus*.²⁵

By now, however, it was homosexuality that had become the main symbolic issue for social conservatives. While the members of Fred Phelps’s Westboro Baptist Church gained headlines for picketing funerals and other events, they were, even for religious conservatives, embarrassing extremists who brought unwanted attention

Prayer, and Neither Are His Many Fans,” *Wichita Eagle*, May 9, 1996; Grace Hobson, “Lawmaker Gains Clout in Capitol,” *Wichita Eagle*, December 13, 1996 and -----, “Prayer Provokes Passions: Wichitan’s Message Upsets Kansas House,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 24, 1996.

24. Joe Rodriguez, “‘Things Are Moving’ on South Broadway; Church and School Improvements Are Just a Part of the Neighborhood’s Growth,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 7, 2002; Brian Lewis, “Church Ready for Growth: Immanuel Baptist Church in South Wichita Breaks Ground Today on a New 3,000-Seat Auditorium,” *Wichita Eagle*, August 26, 2001; Deborah Kovach Caldwell, “Baptist Boycott of Disney Moving Ahead,” *Wichita Eagle*, November 22, 1997; Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 319.

25. Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 303–11, 338–47.

to the state and the social conservative movement. By contrast, Terry Fox and Joe Wright had become the face of social conservatism in the state and turned their efforts to pushing through a “defense of marriage” amendment to the state constitution after the Senate defeated a similar measure in the state house. Marshaling a campaign to define marriage in Kansas as between one man and one woman, Wright, Fox, and Rev. Mark Hoover of Messiah Baptist Church organized an effective campaign that included “Christian Life Committees” that worked to organize political activists and support sympathetic politicians. Evangelicals and social conservatives worked to get sympathetic voices elected and appointed in a wide range of political offices and were active in the 2004 elections. Fox and Wright were more than just organizers getting evangelicals, conservative Catholics, and others on board for the cause. They had become media celebrities in their own right and were quoted regularly in television reports and in the paper. Their best-known media activity, however, involved cohosting a weekly radio show called *Answering the Call*, which aired on KNSS, 1330 AM.

Wichita’s evangelicals had become a statewide face of social conservatism. In the 2005 legislative session, the state house put the measure banning same-sex marriage and same-sex unions on the ballot. In April 2005, the voters passed the amendment against same-sex marriage by a two-to-one margin. Wright, Fox, and other leaders celebrated the victory but almost immediately met to plan ways to focus their efforts on other conservative causes, such as abortion and creationism. Within the span of one generation, Wichita’s evangelicals had gone from a southern-leaning enclave to one of the guiding forces in state politics.²⁶

This shift reflected a city that had found itself in the headlines as a center of conservative, activist, and

26. Rebecca Barrett-Fox, *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016); Donnally, “The Untold History behind the Summer of Mercy”; Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, especially 228–36. Joe Rodriguez, “Christian Leaders Ponder Next Moves: After Successfully Promoting the Marriage Amendment, Conservatives Consider Abortion, Gambling and Evolution as Targets for Action,” *Wichita Eagle*, April 6, 2005; Abe Levy, “Kansans Will Vote on Marriage: The Constitutional Amendment to Define Marriage and Ban Civil Unions Wins a Spot on the April 5 Ballot,” *Wichita Eagle*, February 3, 2005; Roy Wenzl, “Preachers Take ‘War’ to Topeka,” *Wichita Eagle*, November 7, 2004; Steve Painter and Abe Levy, “Effort to Ban Gay Marriage Falls Short,” *Wichita Eagle*, May 5, 2004; Abe Levy, “Gay-Union Fight Not Over: Religious Leaders Say They Will Push to Revisit the Senate-Defeated Issue of Adding Same-Sex Marriage Ban to the State Constitution,” *Wichita Eagle*, March 28, 2004; Abe Levy, “Pastors Push for Marriage Amendment,” *Wichita Eagle*, March 22, 2004; Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 330–38.

evangelical religion. Commentators both in Wichita and across the country had started to affiliate the city with the Bible Belt ever since city voters had repealed the gay rights ordinance in 1978. This reputation gained even greater visibility with the 1991 Summer of Mercy antiabortion protests and unfolded as local evangelical leaders played influential roles in local and state politics on a host of issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and the teaching of evolution.²⁷

By the early 2000s, Wichita was looking, or at least feeling, less like Wuthnow's Methodist/Catholic consensus and more like a city in Oklahoma or Texas. It was more than just the efforts of a handful of ministers who grabbed the headlines. The soaring crosses of Immanuel Baptist, Metropolitan Baptist, Central Christian, Central Church of Christ, and Central Community Church towered over massive facilities that handled hundreds if not thousands of worshippers on Sundays. These were just the most visible examples of a religious landscape that included scores of evangelical and Pentecostal congregations ranging from respected community institutions to makeshift storefront churches. By 2010, about a third of the area's residents identified as evangelical Protestant, the largest single religious group and twice the size of the mainline Protestant community.

When the American Bible Society conducted a poll in 2016, seeking to locate the "most Bible-minded" cities of the United States, it looked at how many residents had read the Bible in the past seven days and who believed strongly in the Bible as an accurate reflection of reality. The top cities for this measure were, predictably, southern, with Chattanooga, Tennessee, in first place. With 39 percent of the population falling into the category of "Bible-minded," the Wichita/Hutchinson metropolitan area, was ranked at number 18. It was the highest ranking of any nonsouthern city and placed the Wichita area ahead of Waco, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas; and Memphis, Tennessee, cities that were home to many evangelical and Pentecostal denominational headquarters and colleges.²⁸

Such statistics can be revealing but also must be handled with care to determine what is actually taking place.

27. See, for example, "Shrewd: Evolution Debate Is Political," *Wichita Eagle*, March 21, 2005; Josh Funk, "Plans Take Shape: Evolution in the Classroom: State Board's Conservatives Create New Ways to Decide Science Standards," *Wichita Eagle*, February 10, 2005.

28. "America's Most Bible-Minded Cities," American Bible Society, <http://www.americanbible.org/features/americas-most-bible-minded-cities>.

Large metropolitan areas often attract large numbers of immigrants from abroad and migrants from other parts of the country, making it less likely that any one religious tradition will dominate. Cities such as Atlanta for the evangelical South or Salt Lake City for the Latter-Day Saints heartland of the Great Basin have long functioned as exceptionally diverse hubs that are markedly at odds with the sentiments just a few miles away.

Changes in Wichita paralleled a larger shift in the religious and political makeup of Kansas. Although still a midwestern state, Kansas was starting to look more like its southern neighbors in terms of religious demographics. The Pew Forum's 2015 religious landscape study found that evangelical Protestants comprised the state's single largest religious group, at 31 percent. The state's social and political attitudes also mirrored the southern Bible Belt rather than the Great Lakes. For example, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled sodomy laws unconstitutional in 2003, Kansas was one of only four states whose laws specifically targeted same-sex activity, the others being Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. Kansas became visible in the national media for conservative religious activity because of the 1978 vote against the Wichita antidiscrimination ordinance, the Summer of Mercy, the constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, critiques of the theory of evolution by the state school board, and the activism of Westboro Baptist Church. Westboro's founder, Fred Phelps, was himself a transplant from Arkansas whose congregation embraced the media spotlight by picketing funerals with warnings that supporting homosexuality was causing God's wrath to fall on the United States; even conservative evangelicals faced the wrath of Westboro's picketers for not opposing homosexuality with the same fervor or for other theological issues. Conservative evangelicals in Kansas struggled to distance themselves from this group that reveled in the media spotlight and whose strict Calvinist views were extreme even by Bible Belt standards. Yet there were also Kansas ties: one of the group's supporters was the son of Gerald Winrod, the anti-Semitic fundamentalist figure who had run the Defenders of the Christian Faith from a building on Wichita's Douglas Avenue. In an odd ironic twist, by the time of the Phelps protests, that structure had long since ceased being Winrod's headquarters and instead housed the Wichita Indochinese Center, a facility dedicated to assisting immigrants from Southeast Asia.²⁹

29. Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 312–60.

In 2009, Kansas again gained national media attention as a center of conservative evangelical religion when, on the morning of May 31, 2009, George Tiller was attending worship at Wichita's Reformation Lutheran Church when Scott Roeder shot him at close range. Tiller died almost instantly. The city's pro-life groups and pastors distanced themselves from the shooting while also hinting that Tiller had reaped what he had sown. The events of the Summer of Mercy seemed to have come full circle. Kansas in general and Wichita in particular had become such a hotbed of conservative activism that it seemed that those who believed otherwise might not be safe even in church.³⁰

Pundits saw these events as further proof of the Kansas/Wichita legacy as at least a buckle of the Bible Belt. However, many of the most colorful figures associated with Kansas's activist evangelical legacy, from John Brown to Carry A. Nation to Fred Phelps to Terry Fox, were not native Kansans. Rather, they were outsiders who saw in Kansas a base of individuals and groups to organize for their respective causes. For figures such as Wright and Fox, media attention was an important tool of evangelism, as significant as dynamic preaching and worship. Kansas's spotlight as a center for religious-based conservatism provided ample fodder for their campaigns. However, the shift from a prophetic voice challenging the halls of power from the outside to becoming part of those power blocs brought its own risks, not least of which was greater scrutiny. In 2006, just a year after championing the state's marriage amendment, Terry Fox suddenly announced his resignation as senior pastor of Immanuel. Official sources were quiet regarding the reason, although there were rumors in the community and even Baptist circles that the cause lay in the mismanagement of funds involving his radio show with Joe Wright—a show that Wright and



In this December 2017 photograph, now former Kansas governor Sam Brownback awaits a question from the friendly crowd gathered at the Wichita Pachyderm Club's lunch meeting. Leaving office to become President Donald Trump's special international ambassador for religious freedom, Brownback stated his intention to proclaim a day of prayer and fasting for Kansas while also urging his successor, Lieutenant Governor Jeff Colyer, to pray upon assuming the office—an openly religious message that resonated well with his evangelical conservative audience. Courtesy of the Wichita Pachyderm Club.

Fox ended the same year. For a time, Fox played a role in a developing congregation called Summit Church that was connected to the Western-themed attraction known as Wild West World. A few months later, Wright retired from Central Christian and eventually joined Fox and Summit Church. In 2007, Summit's efforts had to change when Wild West World's founder, Thomas Etheredge, suddenly folded operations in July 2007 under the shadow of financial impropriety, and the congregation moved to a repurposed movie theater on Kellogg Avenue. The changes were not limited to Fox and Wright. The early 2000s saw other evangelists retire such as Gene Carlson of Westlink Christian. An era was drawing to a close. In recent years, these figures have continued to be active locally, but in less public form. Joe Wright, for example, has drawn a new set of headlines, not for his work in local politics but for acquiring the vacant downtown church building that once housed Central Christian and later First Christian to become a center for an inner-city ministry for the homeless. One of the city's most controversial evangelists helped a congregational story come full circle.³¹

30. Ibid., 347–48; "George Tiller Killed: Abortion Doctor Shot at Church," *Huffington Post*, July 1, 2009; Ron Silvester, "Witnesses Detail Day of Tiller's Fatal Shooting: Roeder to Stand Trial, Ushers Saw Suspect Was Shooter," *Wichita Eagle*, July 29, 2009; Roxana Hegeman, "Roeder Mailings Say Killings Justified," *Wichita Eagle*, July 4, 2009; Jennifer Torline, "News Crews from across U.S. Descend on City: Slaying Pushes Wichita into National Spotlight," *Wichita Eagle*, June 2, 2009; Conor Shine, "Tiller Is the Fourth Abortion Doctor Killed in the United States," *Wichita Eagle*, June 1, 2009; "Evangelicals Are Outraged by Death," *Wichita Eagle*, June 1, 2009.

31. Gregory Tomlin and Art Toalston, "Wichita Church Issues Statement Regarding Fox Resignation," *Baptist Press* (Nashville, TN),

Religious demographics in the United States are inseparable from generational and class issues. Research such as the Pew Research Center's 2008 religious landscape study, updated in 2015, has shown that evangelical Christianity in its current megachurch/televangelist/Christian rock/politically active version has been particularly tied to baby boom and generation X cohorts, in contrast, for example, to the mainline Protestant denominations that are tied to the World War II generation and the silent generation. It could be argued that in Wichita, the rise of evangelicalism was, at least in part, connected to the aging and eventual passing of older generations that attended the prominent United Methodist or Presbyterian Churches downtown and the growth in numbers and influence of the baby boomers who flocked to megachurches on the suburban edges. Bob Knight, the mayor who struggled with Operation Rescue's activities in 1991, and abortion provider George Tiller were members of the silent generation who attended First Methodist and Reformation Lutheran, respectively. Pastors such as Terry Fox and Joe Wright were local expressions of the baby boomer spiritual movement that was taking place nationwide, while their congregations were filled with young adults whose parents and grandparents had been part of the southern diaspora that came to Wichita to work in the aircraft industry. That era saw a period of prosperity in Wichita as the aviation industry provided decent-paying jobs for blue-collar workers, while corporate headquarters for Pizza Hut, Coleman, and Koch provided opportunities for professionals. Meanwhile, the city became a center for regional medicine and, with McConnell Air Force Base, had a significant military population. Evangelical megachurches grew and prospered along with these populations. Although Wichita is located in a midwestern state, its technology-based economy, sprawling suburban landscape, and orientation towards Texas and Oklahoma made it function as part of the Sunbelt rather than the heavy industry of the Great Lakes. The Sunbelt tie extended to culture and religion as well. As with places from Atlanta to Los Angeles, Wichita was discovering, in the words of

Darren Dochuk, that "Southern evangelicalism was no longer the poor person's religion."³²

Whether those demographics and influences will continue remains to be seen. The religiously nonaffiliated is the largest single religious group in the country and has been especially present among younger adults of the millennial generation. Whether younger Wichitans retain the evangelical heritage or interest in political activism of their elders is uncertain. Immigration continues to reshape the local demography. The contraction of the aviation industry resulted in major layoffs in the 2010s. Boeing, the anchor of the aviation industry, left the city entirely. White flight has pushed the descendants of southern-born migrants out to places such as Derby and Haysville, where evangelical religion has continued to flourish. South Wichita neighborhoods that were filled with aircraft workers have atrophied, their sprawling ranches now housing families whose elders came from Saigon and Guadalajara, not the Ozarks. In Wichita, the white, non-Latino population shrank from 71.7 percent to 64.5 percent between 2000 and 2010. Latinos became the largest minority group, growing from 9.6 percent of the population in 2000 to over 15 percent in 2015. The "white bread" midwestern city of seventy-five years ago has faded as meat-and-potatoes church potlucks have given way to *quinceañeras* that feature *conchas* and *empanadas* from local Mexican bakeries. The moderate conservative core that Wuthnow saw as a tempering force of radical religion in Kansas may reappear with Latino inflections. Perhaps a new consensus will emerge rooted in Latino Catholicism and a growing segment of the population that is nonaffiliated and secular.³³

One of evangelicalism's greatest strengths has been its adaptability, with the story of South City Southern Baptist being a case of how that religious tradition might again shift in a place like Wichita. Formed in 1968, South City was founded when Southern Baptist evangelism was flourishing. Located at 1513 Galena, in close proximity to the plants of Boeing, it was planted on the city's southern

September 19, 2006; Joe Rodriguez, "Following Leaders," *Wichita Eagle*, April 28, 2007; Joe Rodriguez, "Service, Reception to Honor Central Christian's Joe Wright," *Wichita Eagle*, November 18, 2006; Joe Rodriguez, "Pastors Ax Their Radio Program," *Wichita Eagle*, September 28, 2006; "Fox Left Immanuel but Not Culture War," *Wichita Eagle*, August 10, 2006; Christina Woods, "Rev. Fox Resigns, Startling His Flock—Immanuel Baptist Church," *Wichita Eagle*, August 7, 2006; "Summit Staff," Summit Church Kansas, <http://www.summitchurchkansas.com/summit-staff/>; Wuthnow, *Red State Religion*, 336–38.

32. Brown and Silk, *The Future of Evangelicalism in America*; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008); Pew Research Center: America's Changing Religious Landscape 2015; Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 169.

33. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Quick Facts: Wichita, Kansas," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wichitacitykansas/PST045216>; David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

edge, hence the name. In time, however, South City aged and atrophied, functioning more like a graying mainline Protestant church than a seeker-oriented, politically active megachurch such as Immanuel Baptist or Central Christian. By the 2000s, the membership had declined, putting a strain on finances. A survey of the area revealed that the surrounding neighborhoods had skewed more towards the Latino population. In response, the congregation founded Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida to serve a Spanish-speaking congregation. Starting with twenty to twenty-five members, the Spanish-language congregation grew to over eighty members in just a few years, sharing the building with South City. For a number of years, it joined the ranks of a small but growing number of Latino evangelical congregations in the city. Nueva Vida's pastor, Abraham Arealos, even served as president of the local Alliance of Hispanic Churches. Nueva Vida later moved to new quarters on Woodland and declared bankruptcy in 2008. Meanwhile, the neighborhood around South City continued to become more diverse as South City Southern Baptist dwindled to a congregation of less than twenty, most of whom were in their seventies and eighties. In 2016, the congregation decided to merge with a recently created congregation called the Mending Place to serve a younger multiracial, multiethnic, and multigenerational congregation. The future of South City/Mending Place is still unfolding. However, its story, points to a number of trends that continue to reshape Wichita, including the aging of white congregations, even evangelical ones, and growing racial and ethnic diversity. It may be in a place such as South City, rather than Summit Church, that the next expression of Wichita's religious and regional story is being assembled, waiting in the proverbial wings until the right time to take flight.³⁴

It was unusually warm and sunny weather for the first day of December 2017 when Governor Sam Brownback spoke among friends at the Wichita Pachyderm Club's lunch meeting. They had come to hear the governor as he prepared to leave office to become President

Donald Trump's special international ambassador for religious freedom. The U.S. Senate had not yet confirmed Brownback for this post, but there was a sense that the governor's term was coming to a close. With an openly religious message, Brownback noted that one of his final goals in Topeka would be to proclaim a day of prayer and fasting for Kansas and advised his successor, Lieutenant Governor Jeff Colyer, to pray once he assumed the governorship. Turning to the group itself, Brownback praised those assembled for their work to make Kansas "the leading pro-life state" in the country. This status was the result of prolife efforts that had begun during the Summer of Mercy and continued as the state's churches became places of activism. The governor saw in this work a parallel with the antislavery abolitionist work of the 1850s, when evangelical churches applied their moral convictions to an issue in efforts that ranged from formal legislation to outright civil disobedience. It was a message that resonated well with this body. In the audience were a number of veterans of the events of 1991 who had, in the decades that followed, joined with fiscal conservatives to play an important role in promoting the conservative wing of the GOP in Kansas. The individuals who were on, or at least endorsed, the picket lines outside George Tiller's clinic had helped reshape local, state, and even national politics. "You changed the nation by changing thoughts in people," Brownback asserted. Yet, like the proverbial dog that caught the car, the question now was where to go from here. Evangelical activism had emerged in part because of its antiestablishment perspective. Now it *was* the establishment, and maintaining that drive and energy was perhaps an equally formidable challenge, especially when the leaders were no longer those scrappy young activists of the 1990s. Looking to what was proving to be a more challenging 2018 election season, Brownback warned, "I'll be really disappointed if you don't elect a pro-life governor." The fight continued and Wichita was one of the key outposts in that struggle.³⁵ [KH]

34. Matt Riedl, "Abandoned Church to Get New Congregation, Homeless Ministry," and Beccy Tanner, "Two Become One as Churches Merge," *Wichita Eagle*, February 1, 2016; Joe Rodriguez and Icess Fernandez, "Hispanic Reformation," *Wichita Eagle*, June 30, 2007; Joe Rodriguez, "Two Churches . . . One Building: Like Thousands of Congregations Nationwide, Several Churches in Wichita Share a

Building with Another Church," *Wichita Eagle*, April 30, 2005; Abe Levy, "Weathering the Financial Storm: Several Wichita Congregations Are Tightening Their Belts as Fall Stewardship Campaigns Begin," *Wichita Eagle*, October 3, 2003.

35. "Outgoing Kansas Governor Advises His Successor to 'Pray,'" *Wichita Eagle*, December 1, 2017.