Social Issues

From the 1920s to the 1950s the archdiocese of Cincinnati worked more closely with secular social agencies and expanded its charitable programs, defended the poor and the rights of workers, condemned totalitarianism, and expanded its ministry among African Americans. During McNicholas's first years as archbishop it began reorganizing its charity and social service agencies. In November 1926 the Cincinnati ordinary appointed Father R. Marcellus Wagner as his vicar in the direction of charities in the archdiocese. The Bureau of Catholic Charities, established in 1916 and of which Wagner had been director, was replaced with the Catholic Charities. In Cincinnati, as in other dioceses, the various Catholic charitable institutions and organizations had developed without much centralized direction and full-time personnel. Each organization had been designed by its founders to attend to some specific area of need. In 1926 there were nine institutions that cared for dependent, neglected, and delinquent children away from their own homes. This care occupied the premier place among the charitable organizations of the archdiocese. Besides forty-two conferences of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul with two thousand active members who ministered to the poor in their own homes, there were five Catholic hospitals, three homes for the needy, three community houses, three day nurseries, and two large clubs for men and boys.1

The Cincinnati Bureau of Catholic Charities, one of the pioneer organizations of its kind in the country, had accomplished much in its ten-year history, especially in its work with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. But due to the bureau's lack of authority, full-time personnel, and funds necessary to render effective service to the poor and to other Catholic organizations of the
archdiocese, a change was needed to bring the central organization up to the highest standards. It had been difficult to secure trained personnel for Catholic charities. Social and charitable work on a full-time basis was a new field for the Catholic laity. Until the establishment of the bureau, archdiocesan officials had depended entirely on the religious and volunteers to carry on the works of charity. The bureau had shown that full-time workers were essential for adequate service to families in their own homes. Furthermore, Catholics had not been accustomed to spending large sums of money for the types of work in which the bureau had been interested. Most of the money had been devoted to the care of children away from their own homes. It had been assumed that the parishes through the aid of volunteer groups of men and women could be depended upon to care for the needs of the poor. Over time, however, Catholics realized that the funds of the parish conferences of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were not entirely adequate. Studies of poor families in the community revealed that relief represented only one element in their needs. There was also a need for adequate and sustained service. “If we allow our charities to go on . . . without direction, without conferences and without analysis,” McNicholas said in support of the establishment of the Catholic Charities, “we can readily see, in this day of organization, [that] we cannot make the progress we should.” The new structure, moreover, gave the individual organizations and institutions sufficient freedom to sustain a progressive diocesan program. Its work fell into four main divisions: Family, Children’s, Protective Care, and Recreational and Community Work.7

During the economic depression of the 1930s, when the archdiocese expanded its relief activity, Catholic Charities had four priests and about fifty trained lay workers. Each year Catholic Charities provided financial and other services to approximately four thousand families. By the middle of the decade the archdiocese had three institutions for dependent children. These were St. Aloysius Orphanage in Bond Hill, operated by the Sisters of Notre Dame, St. Joseph Orphanage in Cummins ville, run by the Sisters of Charity, and St. Joseph Orphan Home in Dayton, conducted by the Sisters of the Precious Blood. It also had two institutions for the care of young girls, Mount St. Mary’s Training School for black girls in Price Hill and Our Lady of the Woods Training School in Carthage, both under the supervision of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. In Cincinnati St. Joseph Infant Asylum and Maternity Home on Tennessee Avenue, under the auspices of the Sisters of Charity, cared for children under the age of four years and for unmarried mothers. Mount Alverno School for Boys in Price Hill was under the supervision of the Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis. The Catholic Big Brothers took care of an average monthly total of 151 boys and the Catholic Big Sisters gave service to about eighty-seven girls per month. In the 1960s St.
Joseph Orphanage moved to a forty-acre site on North Bend Road in Montfort Heights and the St. Joseph Maternity Home moved from its ninety-year-old institution to a twenty-acre site in Sharonville.1

During McNicholas’s tenure women’s religious orders expanded their social outreach in the community. By 1926 the Sisters of Charity had developed the Mount St. Joseph motherhouse and college, conducted Good Samaritan Hospital, St. Vincent Academy, St. Joseph Orphanage, St. Joseph Infant Asylum and Maternity Home, and taught in thirty-five schools of the archdiocese. In 1932 the sisters opened Good Samaritan Hospital in Dayton, made possible by a gift of four acres of land by a local physician. At the time there were nearly one thousand sisters in the religious community working in several dioceses. In the 1920s the Sisters of Charity, with McNicholas’s eventual backing, had decided to affiliate with Rome, transforming the diocesan community into a papal community. Final approval of their Constitution came in 1928. This “gives us,” Mother Superior Irenaeas wrote, “greater prestige in the Church and strengthens our Organization.”1

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur maintained their convent home on Sycamore Street, their academy on Grandin Road in Walnut Hills, Notre Dame Academy at Reading, Notre Dame Academy in Dayton, and the convent on Mound Street in Cincinnati. The sisters taught in twenty-five parish schools of the archdiocese. Another branch of the Sisters of Notre Dame, the Cleveland community, had come to the archdiocese on May 1, 1877, and had taken charge of St. Aloysius Orphanage. In 1926 they taught in five parish schools of the archdiocese. The Sisters of the Precious Blood, whose motherhouse was in Dayton, had convents at Maria Stein, Cassella, and Minster. In addition to teaching in twenty parochial schools and operating St. Joseph Orphan Home in Dayton, they provided domestic service at the Fenwick Club, St. Teresa Home, and Mount St. Mary’s of the West Seminary in Cincinnati. At the time there were about six hundred sisters in the community. In 1930 the sisters established Maria Joseph Home for the Aged on Salem Avenue in Dayton. A group of lay women had started the building fund with profits from street fairs and other public benefits. From 1891 to 1967 the Sisters of the Precious Blood conducted the St. Joseph Home for Children, formerly called St. Joseph Orphan Home. In 1967 the School Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis from Pittsburgh assumed this responsibility.1

The community of Ursulines, which still had its motherhouse at Brown County in Ohio, was in charge of two academies, the boarding school at St. Martin and the day school for students from kindergarten through high school at Oak and Reading Road. Some of the sisters also taught in St. Vivian’s grade school at Finneytown and conducted Sunday school classes at
St. Martin, Blanchester, Wilmington, and Hillsboro. The Ursulines, with headquarters in St. Ursula’s convent on McMillan Street in Cincinnati, taught in four parochial schools. At the McMillan convent the sisters conducted a private day school that numbered, at midcentury, about 840 pupils of grade and high school levels.6

The Sisters of Mercy, who had their motherhouse and academy on Freeman Avenue in Cincinnati, conducted the Mother of Mercy Academy at Westwood, the Mount Carmel Home, and Mercy Hospital in Hamilton. During the second quarter of the twentieth century the sisters taught in twelve parochial schools. In June 1929 the pope expressed the desire for the union of all the Sisters of Mercy in the United States. A majority of the sisters consented to the amalgamation into one larger institute, constituting the largest congregation of religious women in the United States. Two months later the apostolic delegate convened the first general chapter of the united congregation in Cincinnati. The Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis conducted a total of twenty institutions in the archdiocese, including a central retreat house, homes for the incurable, tuberculosis, and hospitals, among which were St. Francis Hospital for Incurables in Cincinnati, St. Elizabeth Hospital in Dayton, and a central retreat house. Since the establishment of the first house in the United States in 1858 in Cincinnati, the congregation enjoyed a rapid growth, spreading first to the East and then to the West. In the early 1930s the congregation numbered approximately three thousand members in ninety establishments.7

The Little Sisters of the Poor had their convent home on Florence Avenue and the St. Peter Home on Riddle Road in Cincinnati. On average, the sisters in the two institutions took care of four hundred elderly people annually. For more than half a century two Little Sisters of the Poor usually rode a black horse-drawn wagon to make their rounds of the city on their daily mission of begging alms and food for the elderly poor in their institutions. By mid-twentieth century they made similar calls in a station wagon. The Sisters of St. Joseph maintained their convent home and a novitiate at St. Joseph Academy in Mount Washington in Cincinnati. Besides teaching in a parochial school, the sisters operated a home for young businesswomen in the community. In 1926 they built the Fontbonne on East Fifth Street, the outgrowth of the Sacred Heart Home on Broadway. The name of the home was changed to the Fontbonne in memory of Mother St. John Fontbonne, founder of the congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France. The Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, whose motherhouse was at Oldenburg, Indiana, taught in about thirty parochial schools of the archdiocese. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who taught black children, were in charge of Cincinnati’s St. Ann school. The Sisters of Christian Charity con-
ducted St. Boniface school in Piqua, and the Polish Sisters of St. Francis of St. Louis had charge of St. Adalbert school in Dayton.⁹

In the fall of 1927 a new order of women religious, the Dominican Sisters of Memphis, Tennessee, arrived in Cincinnati to take charge of the school in the new St. Thomas Aquinas parish in Avondale. Seven years later they also began teaching at St. Gertrude’s in Madeira. In 1927 McNicholas also put fellow Dominican Fathers from the Province of St. Joseph in charge of the Avondale and Madeira parishes. This was clearly an effort on the part of the archbishop to give the Dominican Order some permanence in his diocese. In 1929, at the request of McNicholas, the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan, also came to Cincinnati and made themselves available for parochial visitations and parish census-taking. Though some pastors resented the idea of sisters making parochial visitations, arguing that the priests should do this work, McNicholas disagreed. He was convinced that his clergy, preoccupied with many other duties, could not or would “not do it as thoroughly as the Sisters.” Other members of the order took charge of St. Teresa’s home for the aged in Silverton in 1936. During the depression eight Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross, whose motherhouse was in Switzerland, took charge of St. John’s school in Deer Park. In 1942 the Benedictine Sisters of Duluth, Minnesota, came to the archdiocese and took charge of the new school of Our Mother of Sorrows parish in Roselawn.⁹

In addition to the great contribution of the women religious in the educational enterprises and Catholic charities of the archdiocese, the laity gave generously of their time and means. Among the active organizations of Catholic women engaged in charitable work, the largest and most prominent was the Catholic Women’s Association. In the fall of 1928 lay women representatives from all parts of the archdiocese organized the Cincinnati Archdiocesan Federation of Catholic Women with Mrs. R. K. LeBlond as president. The federation was the medium of uniting Catholic women and coordinating their social and charitable work. It was the organization to which all women’s societies turned for guidance in Catholic Action. It involved more than 10,000 women. In McNicholas’s judgment, it was the most important group of women in the archdiocese. Speaking at the National Council of Catholic Women in Cleveland in October 1928, McNicholas praised the “awakening” of Catholic women to their social responsibilities. They “have unquestionably a public duty to their respective communities,” he argued, “in the moulding[sp] of public opinion.” In their charitable work, American Catholic women were able to expand their role in society and exercise more influence.¹⁰

In March 1928 St. Joseph Mission in Dayton was opened as a residence for homeless men and women. Ten years later the building was converted into a
community center for the youths and adults of the neighborhood. In April 1930 the Dominican Sisters opened the Loretto, a nondenominational home for girls, on West Fifth Street in Dayton. In 1912 Josephine Schwind, a Dayton resident who was instrumental in bringing the sisters to the area, had presented to the order two fully equipped properties on Franklin Street. Within a year of its founding, the Loretto accommodated 120 residents who were generally self-supporting and of modest means.\(^\text{11}\)

During the early years of the depression the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis opened a house on East Ninth Street. Besides providing care for the sick poor in their homes, they helped show mothers how to take care of many domestic affairs. A decade later the sisters also opened St. Raphael Convent at Hamilton, Ohio, for social service. Under the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy, the Mercy Braille Club was founded in 1937. It would operate until 1993. The sisters’ work began by transcribing books into Braille and then opening a free Braille library, providing textbooks, and preparing blind children to receive the sacraments.\(^\text{12}\)

Perhaps the most active Catholic charitable organization during the depression years was the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. In 1934 it had approximately 450 active members in the fifty parish conferences. The conferences met weekly and attended to the immediate needs of the poor. At midcentury U.S. church officials thought, as did Archbishop Alter, that Catholic parishes could manifest the spirit of charity in no better way than through the activities of St. Vincent de Paul Conferences. By the 1960s some parish conferences, like St. Bartholomew’s in Springfield Township in Cincinnati, regularly sought donations of used clothing and furniture and conducted blood drives.\(^\text{13}\)

At the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Fenwick Club in 1935, Archbishop McNicholas announced that the groundwork had been laid for a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) for the archdiocese. Charles F. Williams, Knight Commander of St. Gregory, was its first president. The CYO council was composed of four priests and three laymen. Inspired by the accomplishments of the Catholic Youth Organization in Chicago, the new archdiocesan organization provided spiritual, intellectual, and recreational activities for Catholic youths. Also in 1935 a Boy Scout group launched the Dayton CYO. Two years later Monsignor Charles A. Ertel, first director of the Dayton CYO, established the organization on a broader basis. In 1939 the archdiocese hosted the first National Conference of the Catholic Youth Organization in the United States. Ten years later the CYO in the archdiocese served approximately 9,500 young Catholics, ranging in age from seven to twenty-six years. For several generations the CYO proved to be one of the major elements of the local church’s ministry to Catholic
youth. With the expansion of the work of the Catholic Charities, the archdiocese opened central branch offices in Hamilton in 1953 and in Springfield in 1957.14

As the local Community Chest expanded its services in the late 1920s and 1930s, greater sums of money were asked for the various charities of the Catholic Church. In 1928 the Catholic Charities received approximately $300,000 from the Community Chest; by 1940 the amount was more than $350,000. In Dayton the Community Chest provided more than $80,000 in assistance to six Catholic agencies. But as more and more Catholics became associated with the fund drives, not all the Catholic charitable institutions were beneficiaries of the Community Chest. The rules of the Little Sisters of the Poor, who conducted two homes for the destitute and aged in the archdiocese, required them to be mendicants and to independently seek support for their aged wards by daily soliciting money and merchandise. Increasing relationships with the Community Chest and other secular agencies, furthermore, helped break down “prejudice,” McNicholas wrote. They helped generate “good feeling in the community” toward Catholics as well as establish financial contacts for them. By midcentury there were a few occasions when parishes gave a pulpit announcement in favor of the Community Chest and the Red Cross. Though not specifically under church auspices, these organizations worked closely with the Catholic charitable institutions.15

By the second quarter of the twentieth century, the archdiocese made available to Catholics all the new kinds of social agencies developed by non-Catholic civic organizations. Since the arrival of the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1862, when homes for the aged began in the archdiocese, church officials had gradually provided more resident care for the elderly. In 1943 the archdiocese purchased Orchard Springs sanitarium and its twenty-two acres on North Main Street at Shiloh Springs as the site of another home for the aged in Montgomery County. When McNicholas appealed for a group of religious sisters to take charge of the new home, the Sisters of Mercy offered to staff what became known as the Siena Home. The following year the religious community bought property from the Knights of Pythias in Springfield and established Mercycrest as a home for the aged. For more than fifty years the buildings had been used as an orphanage by the Pythians. In addition to Siena and Mercycrest, the archdiocese by midcentury had five other institutions dedicated to caring for the aged. These homes were St. Joseph’s on Florence Avenue, St. Peter’s on Riddle Road, St. Teresa’s in Silverton, Mount Carmel’s on Freeman Avenue, all in Cincinnati, and Jarla-Joseph’s in Dayton. In 1962 the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm of St. Teresa Avila Convent in Germantown, New York, opened St. Margaret Hall on Madison Road in Cincinnati for retired persons.16
At midcentury the Catholic hospitals in the archdiocese provided care for a total of 64,476 patients. This record number of patients was an indication of the growth and expansion that had marked the work of the various sisterhoods in the care of the sick since the founding of the first hospital in Cincinnati in 1852. In September 1942 the Sisters of Mercy opened Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in Mariemont in a building erected by Mrs. Mary Emery. Eight years later the sisters and residents of Springfield and Clark Counties provided three million and two million dollars, respectively, and built Mercy Hospital. With the opening of Mercy Hospital in Springfield in January 1950, the religious sisterhoods conducted nine hospitals in the archdiocese. There were the Good Samaritan, St. Mary's, St. Francis, and St. George hospitals in Cincinnati, Mercy Hospital in Hamilton, Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in Mariemont, Mercy Hospital in Springfield, and St. Elizabeth and Good Samaritan Hospitals in Dayton. The following year the Sisters of Mercy also operated hospitals in Coldwater and Urbana. In 1956 there was a local financial campaign to raise $17,500,000 for the eleven hospitals in Hamilton County. A substantial part of the total was designated for the five Catholic hospitals. As the Catholic hospitals became increasingly drawn into relationships with state and federal agencies and with programs of hospital care and insurance, the archdiocese in 1958 established the Office of Archdiocesan Superintendent of Hospitals to help coordinate the hospitals’ operations. In 1965, for the first time in Hamilton County, it became possible for privately operated hospitals to receive building money from public funds. That year Alter urged passage of a bond issue in order to build Providence Hospital, a new St. George Hospital, and additions to Our Lady of Mercy Hospital and Bethesda Hospital. Hamilton County voters passed the $19.8 million bond issue; of that amount, Providence Hospital received $8.6 million.17

LABOR AND INDUSTRY

During the economic depression of the 1930s many Americans became pre-occupied with national social reform programs. The participation of Catholic Church leaders, the clergy, and the laity in the burgeoning reform movement made the church less parochial, drew it closer to the American liberal tradition, and helped make Catholicism more of an American religion. Catholics’ involvement in the era’s progressive social programs and their full-fledged participation in World War II were signs that they were becoming more a part of the American mainstream. During this period McNicholas became a staunch defender of the poor and the rights of workers as well as an outspoken critic of the excesses of capitalism. By no means a radical, as he was a greater critic of communism and socialism than capitalism,
he believed the church was justified morally and religiously in speaking out on capitalism and industrialism. Much of his criticism of the excesses of capitalism was derived from the church’s teachings on justice, as found especially in papal social encyclicals.18

In his fall 1931 pastoral, read in every church throughout the archdiocese and given wide circulation by the press, McNicholas urged his pastors and the faithful to allow none to hunger. The economic depression was deepening and was widely regarded as a serious depression. To McNicholas it was unthinkable in the light of Christian principles that “in this land of plenty,” where there were “superabundant harvests” and excess food held in storage, the bread lines were lengthening in the cities. He argued it was the duty of local, state, and federal authorities to attend to the needs of the poor. “Just as in time of war the Government is justified in resorting to emergency measures to meet a crisis,” he said, “so in our present circumstances civil authority has not only the right but the duty to adopt relief measures.” But he was not hopeful in 1931 that President Herbert Hoover and the national government would soon come to the aid of the poor. “Government officials have lost,” he wrote to Bishop Hugh Boyle of Pittsburgh, “... all sense of democracy and a representative form of government, and are selfishly concerning themselves about their own political fortunes and personal interests rather than the general welfare of the people.” Issuing an appeal in 1932 for the Community Chest, McNicholas warned that unless there was “a speedy reconstruction of the social order” the nation would “face great social disorder.”19

Shortly after President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s inauguration and announcement of his New Deal policy in 1933, Americans became more hopeful and supportive of the promising new legislation. A number of Catholic Church leaders and lay people became involved in reform programs. Calling for economic justice, McNicholas praised the new administration for having courageously begun a program to address the needs of the masses. He spoke out forcefully on the needs of workers and urged Catholics in the archdiocese to do whatever they could to help the poor, especially those who wanted to work but could not find it and were deprived of their means of livelihood. Because of his concern over the plight of the poor, McNicholas took a strong stand against proposals for various state sales taxes on essentials. Preferring to see the burden fall on the wealthy, he supported a tax on luxuries and an income tax on those individuals best able to pay. A sales tax, he argued, would place “an intolerable burden upon our poor Negro population, who not only in our locality but throughout the whole country during the depression have suffered most and have complained least.”20

McNicholas often criticized the affluent for not doing enough during the economic crisis. “In this aristocracy of wealth, too many seem to feel
themselves set above the average of humanity. There is something in the mere possession of great wealth,” he wrote, “which tends to give men an entirely false outlook on life. It warps their judgment and too often renders them incapable of realizing the value and the essential dignity of every human being, regardless of race and color.” Although he acknowledged the natural inequality of men and the right to private property, he condemned “the monstrous injustice of the distribution of wealth” due to the injustice of the economic system.21

McNicholas consistently urged capitalists and workers to abide by moral principles. He warned of impending ruin if Christian principles and morality were not adopted by industry. There was, he argued, a “potential for revolution in the hungry masses.” Believing that capitalism was “on trial before the world,” he thought it could reform itself only according to Christian justice. “It if does not so reform itself,” he wrote, “the end must be revolution and confiscation.” His views on labor were consistent with his position on capitalism. He argued that the unions “must also realize that social justice obliges them to work for the common interests of the community and country.” For McNicholas the common good was more important than the profit motive. He always maintained that both capitalists and workers were “in conscience bound to consider what is for the best interests of the majority of our citizens rather than seek advantages for their own particular group.” In practical terms, he thought that industry should provide a wage that would “enable the employee to live in a manner befitting the dignity of a human being.” Just as industrialists had a right to a fair return for their investments, he insisted the workers should be allowed their fair shares as well.22

As the depression worsened, the archdiocese focused its energies on the victims of the depression. The archbishop insisted that no appeals for money should be made at the time “except for the hungry, the homeless and the sick poor.” The Catholic Charities and the St. Vincent de Paul Society alone cared for about one thousand families in the archdiocese. Though some parishioners helped take care of needy families, their resources were limited. Income in parishes by 1932 had fallen off from 30 to 60 percent and there was increasing difficulty on the part of the parishes to pay interest on loans. Because some of the parishioners in St. Louis parish at North Star were unable to pay their pew rent, the chancery lent $2,200 to help meet parish expenses. Based on a study done of high school finances, McNicholas in the fall of 1932 felt compelled to reduce the salaries of priests and lay persons at Elder and Purcell high schools. Hoping to make it possible for as many Catholics as possible to subscribe to the Catholic Telegraph, the diocesan paper reduced the subscription rate from $3 to $1 per year.23
As he assessed the social malaise of the 1930s, McNicholas became a forceful speaker on moral matters. Acknowledging that he could not discourse on specific economic issues, such as the fluctuation of the dollar, with much authority, he thought he could on moral matters. "[I]f I say anything about moral questions," he said in his first newspaper interview as archbishop, "I expect it to be understood that I am talking on a subject about which I presume to know something." He believed there was a need for a fixed moral code. Consistent with Thomas Aquinas's teachings on the moral principles by which the wealthy were obliged to share their abundance with the poor, McNicholas argued that the destitute were entitled to what they needed and that their right to live was greater than any right to possess.33

Holding high standards for himself as a leader, McNicholas was also a fighter. "I wish to live on amiable terms with everyone," he wrote, "but when a principle is at stake and I am convinced I am on the right side, I enjoy nothing better than a good fight." The five foot five prelate was quite pugnacious and his strong voice carried all around the archdiocese and beyond. A 1934 interviewer for the Cincinnati Post pointed out that "the priests and laity are well acquainted with the Archbishop's candor. His public utterances give no evidence of hedging." Local Catholics "frequently writhed," another writer wrote, "under the pungent, hard-hitting pastoral letters that flowed from his busy pen."34

Early in his term McNicholas vowed that the Catholic Church had a special duty to help the poor and the working classes. It was clear where his sympathies lay. He maintained that the strength of the country was not to be measured by the wealth of its corporations, "but by the number of its happy homes." Advising workers to hold fast to their unions, he assured them "that their Church will always be their spokesman; that she will never remain silent in the presence of injustice." During the depression the editor of The Labor Advocate, a national labor publication, referred to Cincinnati's activist archbishop as "the one voice" that was "looked up equally" by both the working people and the business community. In 1940 McNicholas made the front page of Social Justice, a national publication. Though in general he supported labor causes, he was concerned over the use of sit-down strikes and the influence of radicals and communists in the unions. During a sit-down strike in Cincinnati in the 1930s, McNicholas warned that strikers could undo the progress of labor unions over the years and retard efforts to get the country out of the depression.35

At the same time that McNicholas advocated more federal government assistance for the poor, he did not believe that the government should do everything. Throughout his administration he expressed concern over too
much federal control. He lamented the multiplicity of laws and “the mania that lawmakers have for enacting them.” Though he realized social legisla
tion could be of great benefit to the working class, he warned labor “against
the loss of that liberty” that belonged to individuals. “The tendency of gov-
ernments today,” he said in his address at the American Federation of Labor
in 1939, “is towards totalitarianism. We cannot expect our country to be an
exception. The democracies of the world are facing a great crisis.”

Building upon the work of such labor-priests as John Mackey and Peter
Dietz in the archdiocese, in 1937 McNicholas appointed nineteen priests to
assist and defend workers and the poor. They offered their services to all
groups regardless of creed, color, or race. Eight years later he again called
upon his clergy to know the conditions of the poor and to help workers see
the advantages of unions. He thought that unions were the best way to help
workers. In another effort to reach the urban working class, a group of
diocesan priests in the summer of 1940 began the practice known as street
preaching on the south side of Court Street in downtown Cincinnati. Every
Friday night two priests preached on popular subjects and answered ques-
tions from the audience. Throughout the 1940s street-preaching during the
summer months proved to be an effective means of reaching the urban poor,
especially non-Catholics. The involvement of priests in the social and labor
causes of the 1930s and 1940s was substantial and exerted considerable influence on the future of the local church in social activism.

In the early years of the depression the Detroit radio priest, Charles
Coughlin, was the idol of thousands of people. He convinced much of Amer-
ica that the Catholic Church was not the particular friend of the privileged
classes. Though Coughlin’s popular polemics were for some time reported
favorably in the Catholic Telegraph, in March 1933, “The Observer,” a week-
ly unsigned column in the diocesan paper, expressed concern over some of
his anti–New Deal views. It warned its readers that he was not an official
spokesman of the Catholic Church. For the next several weeks people tele-
phoned and wrote letters chastising the diocesan paper for rebuking Cough-
lin. Believing the criticism was not justified, the diocesan paper reminded its
readers that it had carried many news items condemning “the sins of the
profiteers.” When Coughlin spoke in Cincinnati in 1936, McNicholas, who
had argued for some time that Coughlin was “not grounded in the funda-
mentals” of Catholic theology, thought he had to respond to some of his
remarks. Though he espoused the right of free speech, the Cincinnati ordi-
nary protested on “moral grounds” Coughlin’s reference to the possibility of
using “bullets” and suggestion that the ballot was useless.

During the next several years, the American Catholic hierarchy expressed
concern over Coughlin’s statements. By this time the Detroit priest had
turned against the New Deal, criticized President Roosevelt at every available opportunity, and had become openly anti-Semitic. As a member of the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the hapless McNicholas disapproved of Coughlin’s “unguarded, . . . unmeasured and inaccurate statements.” Though it was suggested to McNicholas that he bring the matter up before the church authorities in Rome, he preferred not to. He was of the opinion that if Coughlin were to be censured, “a formula must be found by which an American Bishop, or Bishops, can do it.” He thought it inadvisable for Vatican officials to tell Coughlin to stop speaking. He was convinced that “a great cry” would go up against the pope meddling in American affairs. Preferring that the matter be dealt with exclusively within Coughlin’s diocese, he urged Bishop Michael Gallagher of Detroit to “insist on moderation” in the radio priest’s statements.80

During and after World War II, McNicholas continued speaking on behalf of labor. Shortly after the war he announced that arrangements had been entered into between a local radio station and the archdiocese to give a series of dialogue addresses on various public issues under the guiding caption of “Catholic Position.” In the fall of 1945 the chancery selected fourteen priests to give these addresses. Following McNicholas’s opening talk on November 4 on the importance of taking a Catholic position on various issues, the station broadcast talks on the next three Sundays. But the station rejected talks on the “Rights of Labor,” scheduled for December, as too controversial. The archdiocese protested. “If there is not true freedom of speech over the radio,” Chancellor Clarence Issenmann wrote, “then we should realize the dangers that are in store for us.” The United Automobile Workers and the Congress of Industrial Organizations also protested against the station’s policy. Unable to resolve the conflict, they cancelled the radio broadcasts. The following spring the archdiocese inaugurated a new radio series of religious programs over another local station.81

Archbishop Alter was also very concerned with economic and social justice issues. Even though, unlike McNicholas, he pulled away from being in front of the issues, he was not shy in addressing political questions of social welfare. This was especially evident, as will be discussed later, in his involvement in civil rights issues in the 1960s. In an interview aboard a train en route to Cincinnati for his installation in 1950, he urged that the church’s interest in labor-management affairs be continued. Before long he recommended “profit participation” plans as a sound approach toward resolving many employee-management differences. He also thought such plans would give workers more incentive. In 1958 the Ohio Catholic Welfare Conference, headed by Alter, opposed proposals by the business community to ban the union shop in Ohio. Heads of industries and businesses protested against the
bishops' statement, forcing Alter to meet personally with a committee of seven prominent Catholic businessmen. Alter and the other Ohio ordinaries stood firm. Near the end of his term Alter, acting on behalf of the local church, also endorsed the efforts of California grape workers to win collective bargaining rights. He argued that the farm workers in the table grape growing industry were "among the forgotten Americans suffering the privation and human indignity of poverty and social injustice." The Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women, like many of its counterparts across the country, took the lead in supporting the boycott in the archdiocese.12

TOTALITARIANISM AND WORLD WAR II

Between the world wars American Catholics became increasingly concerned with the rise of Russian communism and the governmental persecution of Catholics in various countries. This Catholic protest was another sign that Catholics were emerging from their earlier conclaves of ethnic separatism. By the mid-1930s McNicholas, who had great interest in international as well as national affairs, was one of the foremost members of the militant hierarchy in the United States. As Adolf Hitler gained power in Germany, Benito Mussolini consolidated his hold on Italy, and Joseph Stalin maintained his iron grip on the Soviet Union, McNicholas found it necessary to address the growth of totalitarianism and its possible effects on the United States. In the process, McNicholas, as archbishop and member of the NCWC Administrative Board, engaged the church with the larger American culture.13

At a talk in May 1938 before the Medievalists, primarily a group of prominent Catholic businessmen and professionals in Greater Cincinnati who met monthly, donned medieval garb, and staged a medieval-style banquet, McNicholas alluded to some of his responsibilities as head of the local church. In response to the growing voices of irreligion, atheism, and immorality in the world, he believed it was his duty to bring to his peoples' attention the truths of religion and morality. "I would be unfaithful to my trust," he said, "if I did not have the courage to give voice to these views when they are challenged." Similarly, he urged his listeners to stand for the things they believed in and to use their influence "in furthering true morality. . . . I do not ask you to be obnoxious in this," he continued, "but on the other hand, you should not sit by supinely and let the forces of evil prevail." McNicholas was indefatigable and unswerving once he had set his course. Never tiring in his defense of morality, he developed his theology around the idea of the Catholic Church's role as the central bulwark of morality.14

The rise of anti-Semitism on a national and international scale during the 1930s generated a response from the archdiocese. McNicholas prohibited his
flock from joining or supporting any organization expressing hostility to Jews. Throughout his years of leadership he proved to be a tireless campaigner against anti-Semitism. "God forbid," he said early in his term, that "I should remain silent if the religion of any man not of my faith were attacked." As the Second World War approached and the persecution of Jews became more apparent and frequent, McNicholas declared that the persecutions "should be condemned by sane men everywhere." Besides criticizing anti-Semitism on humanitarian grounds, there was also the practical realization that if persecution were allowed to take place against the Jews, Catholics may very well be next. Many Catholics were very much aware of their own history and remembered only too well the anti-Catholic outbursts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.15

At the same time that articles and editorials appeared in the Catholic Telegraph condemning anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews, there were Cincinnati Catholics ambivalent about Jews. This attitude was reflected in the diocesan paper, especially in the early 1930s. In the spring of 1933 the Catholic Telegraph cautioned its readers against overreacting regarding the "alleged persecution of the Jews in Germany." Urging the faithful to be certain of the facts, the diocesan paper suggested that recent cablegrams on the persecution of the Jews by the Hitler government were "greatly exaggerated." Suggesting that Hitler was "a practical Catholic" and that his vice chancellor was an "exemplary Catholic," it concluded with the unbridled assertion "that an era of persecution of the Jews in Germany is out of the question." A few months later "The Observer" column in the diocesan paper also noted that even though there was some persecution of Jews in Germany, the Jews had "brought [it] upon themselves . . . by their exploitation of labor in sweatshops." Later that decade "The Observer" further blamed the Jews for offensive movies through their ownership of the major film studios. By the time of the Second World War, the inconsistency in the Catholic Telegraph stopped. From that point on it consistently condemned anti-Semitism and Hitler's persecution of Jews. It remains somewhat of a mystery as to why McNicholas, who vehemently opposed anti-Semitism, did not put a stop to this ambivalence in the diocesan paper earlier.16

Although McNicholas was concerned over the rise of Nazism in Germany, his preoccupation with totalitarianism had largely to do with communism. Because of its officially expressed atheism, he regarded communism as a special threat to Catholics and Catholicism. It gave him "much anxiety," he wrote to Bishop John Cantwell of Los Angeles and San Diego. He believed the communists could not be trusted. "I think our country," he wrote as early as 1932, "is much more seriously menaced by Communism than we realize." In the summer of 1936 McNicholas helped launch the Marian Brigade, a
national crusade of prayer among Catholic students against the growing menace of communism. Duties incumbent upon members of the new crusade were the daily recitation of the Memorare—a late medieval prayer that asked the intercession of Mary—the weekly recitation of the rosary, and the reception of Holy Communion on the feast of the Most Holy Rosary on October 7. Catholics prayed for the conversion of Russia, which had begun under Pope Leo XIII, after every Mass, and Marian devotion became an integral part of their faith lives. Anticommunism also became a means for Catholicism to begin shedding its separatism, to express its loyalty to the American way of life, and to help draw Catholics together with Protestants and Jews in a common cause. Like the fight against immoral movies, local Catholics in their assault against communism defended traditional American values. In response to the request of Bishop Joseph Pinten of Grand Rapids that McNicholas write a text on the evil of communism, the Cincinnati ordinary wrote a pastoral that was published in 1937 in leaflet form. The NCWC had copies of it distributed nationally.17

As McNicholas rose to prominence in the 1930s over moral, social, and international issues, there were rumors of a possible cardinalate. The first rumor to reach the papers came in 1934, and the rumors continued right on through the reign of Pius XII. Not until 1939, however, did the rumors become widespread, making the front page of Cincinnati newspapers. That year McNicholas was considered the leading candidate among three ordinaries mentioned as a possible successor to Cardinal Patrick Hayes of New York. McNicholas knew personally Pope Benedict XV, who died in 1922, and was also a personal friend of Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, Papal Secretary of State. It was rumored that Pacelli had recommended McNicholas’s elevation shortly after the Cardinal’s visit to Cincinnati in 1936. Pacelli, who had gotten to know McNicholas during the latter’s residence in Rome, wrote glowing reports on McNicholas’s leadership in the Legion of Decency, in his expansion of the Holy Name Society into a worldwide institution, and in his administration of the Cincinnati see. By late November 1938 it was rumored, as Bishop Francis Spellman of New York noted, that the Cincinnati ordinary was “cleaning his desk preparing to go to N.Y. as Archbishop.” With the election of Pacelli as pope in 1939 the speculation as to McNicholas being bestowed a red hat grew stronger. Later that year, however, McNicholas was passed over and Bishop Francis Spellman of Boston was appointed to the New York see. It is difficult to assess how McNicholas’s outspokenness on national and world issues affected his chances to becoming a prince of the church. At the same time that it may have hurt him, it may also have been the cause for consideration. Moreover, sources maintain that McNicholas was actually named archbishop of New York, but Pius XI died before officially appointing him ordinary.18
In addition to being an inveterate foe of communism, McNicholas was a strong advocate for peace before, during, and after World War II. Until Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he was openly critical of those who encouraged U.S. entry into the war. The December 1938 issue of *The Catholic World* made reference to McNicholas's appeal “for a mighty League of conscientious noncombatants of all informed Christians who have the best interests of America at heart.” Though critical of the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, like various Catholics in Congress and other church leaders he remained adamant that the United States should remain aloof from the war. While addressing Catholic high school graduates at a ceremony at Music Hall in the summer of 1940, he urged them to form “peace brigades” to stand for peace, justice, and morality. As late as December 1940 McNicholas argued that America was being pushed into war against her will. Claiming that ninety percent of the American people were for peace, he urged Americans to stand up to the ten percent who wanted war.³⁹

But the moment the United States entered World War II the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, McNicholas informed the apostolic delegate that the American bishops should go on record supporting their country. At the Christmas Midnight Mass at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Norwood, McNicholas pointed out in his sermon that while the United States was “involved in a titanic war,” Americans were to serve it loyally. They should do so with “only one end in view,” he argued, “that through our war efforts the blessing of peace may come to us and to the whole world.” Throughout the war McNicholas urged the faithful to participate in war bond drives.⁴⁰

During and after the war McNicholas presented peace plans and proposals. He envisioned the United States playing a leadership role in concluding and maintaining a just peace. In an address on a CBS national radio broadcast in 1942 McNicholas emphasized the importance for leaders to build a strong front against the danger of world chaos after the war. His 1942 plan called for the churches to help establish a new world order, arguing that peace without morality and a moral structure was pointless. Some of his episcopal colleagues applauded his work. On the eve of the annual meeting of bishops in the fall of 1942, Archbishop Edward Mooney of Detroit, then chairman of the Administrative Board of the NCWC, complimented McNicholas on his fertile mind. “You know that you are our starter,” he wrote to him. “Some of the rest of us have more talent in criticism than in creation! . . . Please do jot down what thoughts come to you as you look out on the world at war and we shall have something to work on.” McNicholas had great respect for Mooney. He, Archbishop Stritch of Chicago, and McNicholas constituted an intimate and influential trio in the American
hierarchy and exercised considerable influence in the domestic affairs of the American church.\textsuperscript{41}

On the subject of world peace, McNicholas was practical as well as spiritual. He realized that it could not be accomplished if physical needs were not met. McNicholas maintained that the end of hostilities would not assure peace unless the whole world were organized for the task of helping the overwhelming masses that would be in a condition of hunger and disease. “The profit element in the world of industry and commerce,” he wrote to Archbishop Mooney, “must be made subservient to the common good if we are to have a lasting peace with justice and with a sense of true brotherhood.”

In a national radio address in the fall of 1943, he listed several conditions for world peace, among which were arms limitations, an international regulating body, a more equitable distribution of basic necessities, and freedom of religion. Above everything else, McNicholas was convinced that there could be no world peace so long as atheistic communism existed. A year later, speaking on “The Crisis of the Ages” at the annual religious service conducted by the Holy Name Society in New York City, McNicholas, in his usual candid and forceful manner, identified an ideological struggle in the making. He foresaw “a long struggle . . . for generations after the war, over the God-given freedom, dignity, and security of man on the one side, and the man-denied freedom, dignity, and security of his fellow man on the other side.” That year he and nine other U.S. bishops, including Bishop Karl Alter of Toledo, warned of a postwar era without God and issued statements in opposition to the policies and attitudes of the Soviet Union. By 1945 American bishops were already concerned over the specter of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Catholics in the preconciliar era were as much convinced that the world needed saving against Godless communism and secularism as did Catholics in post–Vatican II who campaigned against the evils of poverty, race, and war.\textsuperscript{42}

When President Truman issued his famous foreign policy doctrine in the spring of 1947, advocating the containment of communism in Greece, McNicholas praised his efforts. “I feel,” he wrote to the president in May of that year, that the Truman Doctrine “will resound through succeeding ages.” The following January McNicholas again wrote to Truman. He hoped that his containment policy would not be restricted to southeastern Europe but would be “expressed in terms that will be world-embracing.” Acknowledging that “the material cost of preventing world war may be very serious,” it would be, he argued, “infinitely less costly than our engagement in a global conflict.”\textsuperscript{43}

As McNicholas grew older and the world situation looked increasingly bleak to him, his tone became a bit more strident. His views of the Soviet government hardened, and he repeatedly warned his flock of the spread of
communism. It was "a world octopus," he argued, "with tentacles reaching out to every nation of the earth." McNicholas's views on communism doubtless mirrored that part of the American public that had a strong conspiratorial cast. As he spoke out against communists, materialists, agnostics, and secularists, he freely criticized—without naming names—legislators, teachers, and members of the press as their allies. Before McCarthyism became a national phenomenon, McNicholas argued that America was "standing by and allowing Communism to sweep the country, . . . to place their agents in every pivotal position." He maintained that the most effective means to counteract communism was to provide moral training and instruction in America's schools.4

In the fall of 1946 McNicholas was aghast at the arrests of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac and fifteen others in Yugoslavia on the charge of having collaborated with the Germans. Denouncing Marshall Tito's "Red Fascist" rule, the archbishop asked his pastors and people to request the American government to voice its protest against the arrests. As head of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, McNicholas sent a telegram to President Truman, disapproving of the condemnation of Stepinac to sixteen years of imprisonment. Two years later the archdiocese also came to the defense of Cardinal Józef Mindszenty of Hungary. The Cincinnati Archdiocesan Union of the Holy Name Society, representing 50,000 Catholics, sent a telegram to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in opposition to the despotic imprisonment of Mindszenty. Five weeks earlier McNicholas had urged President Truman to protest the arrest. "The utterly false and stupid charges against the Cardinal by a Communist government," he wrote, "do not hide the real purpose of attacking, persecuting, and liquidating religion." In the spring of 1949, when Mindszenty was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment, McNicholas led local Catholic groups in adding their voices to the thousands who protested throughout the country.5

Before and during World War II, a number of American Catholics became less parochial and increasingly interested in issues beyond their parishes and dioceses. By the end of the war more and more Catholics and church leaders became preoccupied with world peace, the spread of communism, and relief of war-torn Europe and the Far East. Among the 33,691 Catholic men and women of the archdiocese who served in the armed services during World War II, 886 were killed, 938 were wounded, and seventy-four were missing in action. One hundred and two religious and diocesan priests of the archdiocese served as chaplains. After the war the Catholic War Veterans Association offered every Catholic veteran man and woman fraternal and social activities. Catholics in all the parishes, moreover, gathered food and clothing to be shipped to the war-stricken areas in Europe, in the Philip-
pines, and in the islands of the Far East. Volunteers, like The Clement Helpers at St. Clement parish at St. Bernard in Cincinnati, met once a week in the basement of their church to sort clothing and pack boxes. The trucks of St. Vincent de Paul collected items directly from the parishes and took care of the shipping to the warehouse. Through the archdiocesan resettlement council, under the directorship of Monsignor August Kramer, Catholics offered home and job opportunities to approximately two hundred refugees. McNicholas, as chairman of the administrative board of the NCWC, spearheaded the campaign in 1946 for the Bishop’s Fund for Victims of War. The fund, used to finance work in Europe, was collected in Catholic churches and in more than 10,000 Catholic elementary and high schools nationally. Within a year’s time more than $500,000 were raised. Since 1943 War Relief Services had maintained a vast program of relief and rehabilitation in the war-torn countries of Europe and the Far East. At the end of the war the program concentrated on the problems of displaced persons, the sick, the aged, and children. 

When the sixty-five-year-old Karl Alter succeeded McNicholas in 1950 he affirmed the local church’s anticommunist stance. The day after his installation he backed the national Crusade for Freedom and urged local Catholics
to sign the Freedom scroll. At the annual Marian Day celebration at Xavier University on October 1 of that year, he described the conflict between U.S. democracy and Soviet communism as a “struggle between freedom and slavery.” The following month the bishops gathered in Washington, D.C., and elected Alter treasurer and vice chairman of the National Catholic Welfare Conference Administrative Board. Three years later Alter left Cincinnati for Europe where, as the new chairman of the NCWC Administrative Board, a position he held from 1952 to 1956 and 1958 to 1961, he visited NCWC relief centers.47

As head of the NCWC, Alter urged Catholics to contribute generously to the annual Catholic Bishops’ Thanksgiving clothing campaign for war victims throughout the world. The campaign continued through the 1950s. Throughout his tenure Alter also urged the faithful to continue the good work of supporting the worldwide program of Catholic Relief Services. Lactare Sunday became associated in the minds of Catholics with the annual appeal of the Catholic Relief Services. By 1962 the agency had brought aid and religious instruction to some thirty million hungry and homeless people in more than seventy countries.48

THE BLACK APOSTOLATE AND RACIAL ISSUES

During their administrations McNicholas and Alter also made the apostolate to African Americans one of their special causes. The local church moved from convert making in the 1920s to community organization and direct action on behalf of African Americans by midcentury. Within two months after his installation, McNicholas, who believed that the most fertile field for conversions in the United States was among blacks, established Holy Trinity parish in the lower west end near the Ohio River in Cincinnati as a church dedicated to work among black people. Ninety-one years earlier almost to the day, October 5, 1834, Holy Trinity Church had been established as the first Catholic church for German-speaking people in Ohio. During its many years Holy Trinity parish grew in importance, always retaining a large preponderance of German Catholic families. By the turn of the nineteenth century the parish’s mostly white population was declining rapidly due to the removal of many middle- and upper-middle class German Catholics to the suburbs. The parishioners felt keenly the passing of the glory that was once theirs. Whereas in the fall of 1922 Holy Trinity school had an enrollment of 137 pupils, three years later it had less than thirty-five. The provincial of the Sisters of Notre Dame withdrew the teachers, arguing that it was impractical “to supply teachers for so small a number of children.” In 1925 the school closed.49
Moreover, the neighborhood surrounding Holy Trinity Church had badly deteriorated, as well as largely populated by blacks. The black population of approximately seventeen thousand in the lower west end had almost doubled since the migration of blacks from the South during and after World War I. Holy Trinity parish consisted of forty-eight white and two blacks. Though advised to sell the church and school, the newly arrived McNicholas asked Father Leo M. Walsh, then at St. Gregory Seminary, to spend a few days a week in the neighborhood, study the situation, and help decide what to do. When Walsh told the archbishop that he “knew nothing about Negro work,” McNicholas reminded him “that souls are neither black nor white and that the same general principles apply to all phases of conversion work.”

In late September Walsh distributed about nine thousand handbills throughout the city’s west end, inviting the residents to attend Mass at Holy Trinity Church on October 4. More than eight hundred persons responded, among whom were about four hundred blacks. A number of local church leaders attended the services, including Henry J. Richter who, as pastor of St. Ann Church in the west end, had been working among the city’s blacks for several years. During the ceremony Walsh read a letter written by McNicholas. Pointing out that the mission of the Catholic Church was the sanctification of all souls regardless of race, McNicholas protested “against the race prejudice which has done so much injustice to the colored people.” He extended an invitation to local blacks to investigate and consider the teachings of the Catholic Church. Forty-eight blacks applied for instruction. In the meantime all but one of the Catholic white families in the parish moved out of the neighborhood.

In November 1925 Holy Trinity Church, with Walsh as pastor, was reopened for blacks. At first the work was difficult and slow. Walsh helped build up a parish composed almost entirely of converts. Most of the first new members were children and the elderly. The following year five additional Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament came to Cincinnati to work at Holy Trinity. The newly arrived sisters went from house to house in the west end, asking the parents—white and black—to send their children to the Catholic school. Their efforts paid off. On registration day, long lines of children waited to be enrolled. Because the school could accommodate only two hundred, the sisters had to refuse admission to about a third of the applicants. At a large gathering of people, mostly black, at an outdoor meeting on the church grounds in August 1926, McNicholas again encouraged blacks to join the Catholic Church. “Can we find in any other Church,” he said, “the inspiring democracy that we witness at the Communion-rail every Sunday . . . , where the master and the servant, the powerful and the lowly, the millionaire and the paupers, the colored man and the white man, kneel side by side.
to adore God and to receive His sacred Body and Blood [?]." Though there were a few instances of blacks and white kneeling at the same communion rail, the archdiocese at this time largely discriminated against blacks. Most blacks were segregated into their own parishes and schools and were almost never allowed into white Catholic institutions. During the next four years there were more than two hundred children baptized in Holy Trinity parish each Easter. By the year 1935 more than 1,300 blacks had been baptized.52

In September 1927 the archdiocese acquired the property of the Sisters of Notre Dame at the corner of Court and Mound Streets in Cincinnati's west end. Formerly used as an academy, it now served as a home for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and for Madonna high school, a coeducational high school for the children of Holy Trinity and St. Ann grade schools. Madonna High, which opened that fall with twenty-three students, was the first high school for African American Catholic students in Ohio and one of the few black high schools in the country. For the next eighteen years the sisters were in charge of the school with an average enrollment of approximately seventy students.53

During those early years of McNicholas's administration, Catholic African Americans participated in several parish activities. In the spring of 1927 the parishes of St. Ann and Holy Trinity organized the McNicholas Convert Club and provided club and recreation rooms at the Holy Trinity school. Blacks in the west end also organized a forty-piece band, composed of boys from St. Ann, Holy Trinity, and Madonna schools. The band was known as the Father Cleary Band, in honor of the pioneer priest in his work with the black people in the archdiocese. In the fall of 1928 the local church hosted the fourth annual convention of the Federated Colored Catholics of the United States. At the time there were approximately twelve million African Americans, among whom—a 1928 survey showed—were 203,896 black Catholics. The object of the federation was to bring about a closer union among black Catholics and to stimulate them to a larger participation in the racial and civic affairs of the country.54

In the spring of 1930 four Franciscan Sisters from Providence, Rhode Island, arrived in Cincinnati to establish another religious foundation to aid in the black apostolate. They located their convent at St. Anthony parish on Budd Street in the west end and reopened the school that had been vacant for three years. The limit of expansion had been reached in St. Ann and Holy Trinity parishes due to the fact that the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who had been in charge of all the Catholic schools for blacks in Cincinnati, could not spare any more sisters from their religious community. The arrival of the Franciscan Sisters promised to enhance the Catholic work among the blacks. St. Anthony school, with an enrollment of 109 students, most of whom were
Protestants, admitted only the younger black children. In “taking older children,” McNicholas thought, there was “naturally the great danger that they may have acquired bad habits.”

By 1933 the archdiocese had opened Madonna high school, schools in Holy Trinity, St. Anthony, and St. Ann parishes, and the Catholic Mission at Lockland for blacks. In 1935 St. Ann parish school cared for 250 pupils in the six elementary grades. Holy Trinity Junior High had 350 students, and Madonna High numbered seventy-five. The number of black children in Catholic schools had increased from fewer than two hundred to approximately seven hundred in about four years. Moreover, approximately one thousand blacks attended Sunday Mass at Holy Trinity Church and four hundred went to St. Ann. When offers were made in the 1930s to buy the St. Anthony Church property, McNicholas and his advisors declined because of the successful work that was also being conducted there among the blacks. In 1945 archdiocesan officials decided to transform Madonna High School into a school for only black boys and changed the name to De Porres High, named after the Dominican lay brother, Martin de Porres, who had cared for slaves brought to Peru from Africa in the early seventeenth century. The increasing number of converts to the Catholic faith had made the high school inadequate as a coeducational institution. Diocesan priests replaced the sisters on the faculty. The first class at De Porres High School numbered thirty-five students. The girls, who had initially attended Madonna High School, attended other interparochial high schools for girls in the city.

During the depression of the 1930s the archbishop also worked for the welfare of poor blacks in the archdiocese in other ways. Besides recommending low cost and better housing for blacks, he backed slum clearance projects. At the 1933 National Catholic Interracial Federation Convention in Cleveland, McNicholas, as the spiritual director of the organization, criticized ill-conceived slum clearance and redevelopment programs. He strongly urged the delegates to be leaders in Catholic Action. Concerned over the proposed removal of blacks by the all-white Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority for the renovation of the west end of Cincinnati, he was outraged that no provision had been made for the “helpless” blacks who had been dispossessed. Convinced that the condition should “be brought to the attention of the public by a militant group,” he urged Catholic lay leaders and priests to “assume the responsibility of bringing this condition to the attention of the city and the State of Ohio.”

Throughout his administration McNicholas expressed concern over the deplorable housing conditions of whites and blacks in the city. In a letter to his clergy on April 14, 1945, he referred to the slum areas in the west end as “a disgraceful blot in the metropolitan area of our city.” Believing that the
“poor people themselves could not solve the problem,” he repeatedly argued it was the responsibility of city, state, and national officials to deal with it. It was not enough to hope that the black poor would have the same sense of responsibility that working whites did. McNicholas pointed out that the “degrading state of affairs” in the city, he wrote, “is crime-promoting, disease-propagating, and destructive of all the values, to which we attach importance in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual order.” If the west end had only “poor White dwellers in it, and if they were condemned to live as our Colored people are now living,” he insisted that “conditions would be many times worse.”

McNicholas joined African American Catholics in calling for racial justice both in the local church and in the community. In spite of efforts by some Catholics to lessen racial prejudice, there were recurring examples of it. The chancery received allegations of St. Xavier’s Commercial School and Cincinnati’s Good Samaritan Hospital denying admission to blacks and St. Joseph cemetery refusing to sell lots to them. In response to McNicholas’s plea for more assistance to blacks in the inner city, a number of schools began contributing a fixed part of their yearly mission contributions for the maintenance of segregated black missions and parishes. Students from Catholic high schools engaged themselves in catechetical work for the benefit of black children in the community. Pleased with the work of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis in taking care of blacks in hospitals, McNicholas hoped to see African American doctors and nurses also given an opportunity to care for them. He also wanted to see more priests and sisters, as well as more black parishes, schools, and missions, working with the black population in the archdiocese. Though gratified to see women religious communities doing missionary work in “far-off China,” he hoped to see more of them “undertake some work among the Negroes of this Diocese.” At the same time that church officials wanted to see more done for blacks in the archdiocese, they did not favor integrating the parishes. There were those who believed, as did Walsh of Holy Trinity Church, that there would be “no social problem in our churches if we will but give the Negro his own buildings and his own priests. The average Negro,” Walsh argued, “does not want to mix with the White Folks any more than the Whites want to associate with the Colored.” He also insisted that the work of the church “would be twice as effective if it were conducted by a Negro priest.”

In 1939 four Dominican priests of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, came to Cincinnati at the request of McNicholas to work among blacks in a black neighborhood in the newly founded Mother of God Church in Walnut Hills. The following year McNicholas welcomed to the archdiocese the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Verona, Italy, whose special apostolate was African Missions.
After taking up residence at Holy Trinity, the Camboni missionaries took charge of St. Henry, St. Anthony, St. Michael, and St. Pius black churches. McNicholas was pleased with the “extraordinary success” they had, he wrote, “in bringing the Colored people into the Church.” The Congregation of the Holy Ghost, stationed at St. John’s parish in Dayton since 1928, was also active in African American missions. Their work at St. John’s was devoted almost exclusively to the blacks that formed the bulk of the parish. By the end of the decade there were nine diocesan priests who labored among blacks.60

In 1941 there were 2,821 blacks registered in the parishes in the archdiocese. All but one of the parishes had their own grade schools. In Cincinnati, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Sisters of Charity, and Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary conducted the schools. The Blessed Sacrament Sisters taught at Holy Trinity and at the school attached to St. Edward’s, which was known as St. Ann’s mission, and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary taught at St. Anthony’s School. Though Mother of God Church had no school, it had a catechetical center. The Dominican Sisters from Sinsinawa taught religion both in the evening and in the day. Sisters of Mercy undertook similar work at the catechetical center at Hamilton. At Lockland, on the northern outskirts of Cincinnati, St. Christina Church and a school for blacks were built. In addition, St. Joseph and St. Henry Churches in Cincinnati were made parishes for blacks. St. John’s school in Dayton, conducted by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, was also turned into a parochial school for black children. In 1942 the Queen of Angels parish in Hamilton was reorganized for blacks in the community. Four years later the new Church of St. Richard of Chichester was opened in North College Hill. It was the seventh black church in Greater Cincinnati. Jerome Wolf of the Congregation of the Precious Blood was named pastor. The Precious Blood Fathers were in charge of two other missions for the blacks in the archdiocese, Queen of Angels mission in Hamilton and St. Martin in Springfield. In 1941 the De Porres Welfare Center in Cincinnati was established to serve the needs of blacks in Hamilton County. Three years later the archdiocese incorporated the DePorres Welfare Center into Catholic Charities.61

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s most Catholic colleges, secondary schools, monasteries, convents, and seminaries in the country were segregated. American bishops as a national body did not speak out against segregation until during World War II. In 1943 McNicholas urged the priests of the archdiocese to integrate Catholic high schools and colleges, though there was no mention of the parishes. This concern for integration and equal rights for blacks represented a new direction in American Catholic action. McNicholas suggested to President Celestin J. Steiner at
Xavier University that if there were objections from the student body, he should “get a number of students to organize in favor of the admission of the Negroes.” Steiner replied that he saw “no reason why Xavier [University] . . . should not admit some deserving Negroes.” Efforts to integrate some of the elementary and high schools, however, met considerable resistance. There was loud protest by some of the white parents at St. Francis de Sales School in Cincinnati. In “retaliation” of the archbishop “ruining our homes overnight, putting Negroes in our schools, where it is unnecessary,” ‘Disgusted Catholics’ from de Sales parish wrote in November 1946, “we are going . . . to cram your beloved Bingo Game full of Southern Negroes.” They demanded that the black children be immediately taken out of the school. McNicholas rejected their demand and the children stayed. When white parents in 1947 threatened to take their children out of some high schools, McNicholas and his staff “quietly urged” the student body to accept black students “whenever there was an expression of indignation.”

In the spring of 1946 a group to aid blacks in the archdiocese established the Apostolate of the Negro, with John M. Cronin, a Cincinnati insurance agent, as its president. The new organization launched a membership campaign designed to reach every parish in the archdiocese as well as make appeals to the clergy and laity to help underwrite the activities of the African American missions. It was estimated that among the 128,000 blacks in the archdiocesan area, 4,500 were Catholics, approximately one out of every twenty-eight blacks. The organization helped the black missions not only financially but also in the social, educational, and athletic phases of their work. It also attempted some work in race relations through the promotion of discussion groups and the staging of black choral groups. Within five years the Apostolate of the Negro, with a membership of approximately 14,000, raised more than $70,000 for support of black parishes.

As head of the archdiocese, McNicholas urged support of the Apostolate. “The condition of the Colored people,” he wrote in 1947, “is very pitiable in the archdiocese. We ask our priests and their parishioners to pay even a casual visit in the Negro sections of Cincinnati, Dayton, Hamilton, and Springfield so that they may see for themselves the inhuman conditions under which the Negroes’ abject poverty forces many of them to live.” Shortly after his installation in 1950 Alter directed Monsignor August Kramer, spiritual director of the Apostolate for the Negro, to phase out the organization. Two years later the Apostolate was completely dissolved. Alter thought that the men would accomplish more by working through the parishes instead.

By midcentury the archdiocese had come a long way on the race issue in a quarter century. The black cause was no longer the preserve of one parish, but the work of many priests and parishes. Notwithstanding the progress,
however, racism still remained a serious problem in the archdiocese. The majority of the white lay people, religious, and clergy lived in outer city neighborhoods and in the suburbs, far removed from the problems in the city and largely inattentive to racial problems. At times, by today’s standards, McNicholas also appeared somewhat patronizing to blacks, subscribing to the stereotypical beliefs that most whites had about blacks. Openly challenging the view that blacks were inferior to whites, he nevertheless thought that their “simplicity and childlike nature” would make the apostolate attractive to priests. He attributed their resistance to communism to “their superstition, . . . their innate cheerfulness and also their improvidence. . . .” But McNicholas nonetheless had a genuine concern for the spiritual and material well-being and a sense of justice for blacks that was ahead of his time. From the time he arrived in Cincinnati, a black layman observed, McNicholas had become “a loyal, faithful and devoted friend of my group.”

One of the foremost social issues during Alter’s administration was racial segregation in churches, schools, and recreational facilities in the archdiocese. In the early 1950s seventeen priests and thirty-seven religious sisters served African Americans in these institutions. Though the local church addressed some of the needs of blacks, it was reluctant to publicly challenge discrimination. By its silence it probably helped fan racism. Most African American Catholics in the 1950s were still segregated into their own parishes and schools and were seldom allowed into white parishes, schools, and hospitals. When in 1953 some Protestant clergymen protested against discrimination at Coney Island in Cincinnati, the editor of the Cincinnati Leader, a business newsletter, asked the Chancery Office to state its position on the matter. Responding on behalf of the local church, Chancellor Paul F. Leibold insisted that no one should be discriminated against because of color. Nobody in the community did more “for the real advancement of [African Americans] . . . than the Archdiocese of Cincinnati,” he argued. Then he maintained that it was not in the church’s province “to publicly condemn any individual or group for not promoting a private venture or business in the same way [the Church] . . . might conduct it.”

By the end of the decade, however, and especially during the urban riots of the 1960s, the archdiocese took a more aggressive stance on the race issue. Alter became deeply committed to social justice and took strong stands against racism and any form of bigotry. Throughout the sixties he issued statements and pastoral letters promoting interracial justice. On October 1, 1961, at a Mass connected with the “Rally for Interracial Understanding” sponsored by the Third Order Franciscans, Auxiliary Bishop Leibold labelled race discrimination a “spiritual disease,” and urged the faithful to help eliminate it by prudent and courageous action. When the Catholic
Interracial Council of Dayton informed Alter in 1963 that a black child was refused admission at Fort Scott Camps, run by the archdiocese, the archbishop ordered the director to begin admitting blacks. In the wake of the Birmingham, Alabama, summer race riots of 1963, Alter issued a pastoral urging Catholics to support legislation that would grant all citizens, regardless of race and color, equal rights. He called for an end to discriminatory practices in voting rights, employment, housing, and education. At the same time that he urged real estate agents to promote open occupancy, Alter recommended that neighborhoods be integrated in ratio to the population of white and black citizens in Cincinnati. In 1963 archdiocesan officials also began awarding two four-year college scholarships annually to black students graduating from Catholic high schools. The students received a sum covering the cost of books and tuition at any of the Catholic colleges or universities in the archdiocese. Through the work of the De Porres Center the archdiocese also helped provide more educational and employment opportunities for black youths.67

To help eliminate legal and social barriers for blacks, the archdiocese looked to the laity, and they responded. Shortly after Alter’s 1963 pastoral on interracial justice, the Archdiocesan Councils of Catholic Men and Women pledged concrete action. Within a year there was a substantial increase of Catholic participation in neighborhood and citywide interfaith efforts for racial justice. Members of both lay organizations wrote to their political representatives in support of the Civil Rights bill. Through their speakers’ bureaus, the Catholic Interracial Councils of Cincinnati and Dayton distributed thousands of copies of Alter’s pastoral in parish societies and other organizations. Catholics also joined Protestants and Jews in the 1963 Cincinnati March for Jobs. In the fall of that year some parishes conducted pilot home visit exchange programs, called Living Room Dialogues, for white and black families. By the following spring a full-scale program in Cincinnati drew 1,800 participants, including several priests and women religious. In the first year after the issuance of the pastoral, there was a substantial increase of Catholic participation in neighborhood and citywide efforts for racial justice. Throughout the archdiocese lay men and women echoed the spirit of the time as they became more involved in social action work, housing, education, job discrimination, health, public welfare, voter registration, migrant workers, and peace. In January 1965 Front Line, a lay movement that prepared volunteers for foreign and domestic mission work, established a service in Dayton’s predominantly African American west side. The movement, which concentrated its effort within the black apostolate, had been initiated in 1962 by the Society of Mary at the University of Dayton under the name Chaminade’s Auxiliaries of North America.68
By 1965 there was no doubt where the archdiocese stood on the issue of race. That year the Cincinnati Catholic Interracial Council, joined by Protestant and Jewish groups, called on City Council to support the passage of "an effective and comprehensive state law" that would prohibit discrimination in the sale or rental of housing because of race, religion, or national origin. In the summer needy students in Catholic high schools of Hamilton County benefited from a federal government grant of $138,954 for the neighborhood summer youth program of the De Porres Center, conducted in Cincinnati's west end. This was the first instance of direct federal aid to students attending Catholic schools in the archdiocese. On Labor Day the chancery placed nondiscrimination clauses in all building contracts for churches, schools, and other institutions in the archdiocese. Auxiliary Bishops Leibold and Edward A. McCarthy, assisted by a committee of priests and lay people, were put in charge of the program. 69

As interracial tensions mounted throughout the United States in the mid to late 1960s, there was increased rioting in many American cities, including Cincinnati. Blaming part of the unrest on the high rate of unemployment among young blacks, Alter in 1967 called for more job and educational opportunities, open housing, and relief of the poor. Consistent with the liberal agenda of the times, he urged individuals to get involved by bringing social and political pressure that would lead to government action. "Only government through taxes," Alter argued, "can supply the many millions of dollars needed for relief." Campaigning for more government initiative, he insisted that individual efforts were also needed because the national government could not do it all. In early February 1968 Alter launched Project Commitment, a grassroots program in human relations designed to communicate the teachings of the church on racial justice to local parishes. The project helped bring together white and black citizens to engage in serious dialogue. Modeled after a similar program in the Detroit archdiocese, Project Commitment started officially as a pilot effort in St. Francis de Sales deanery. It consisted of an eight-week series of discussions of community problems by civic and social welfare leaders. In addition, the Knights of Columbus, which made generous grants to the Catholic Youth Organization and the Newman Clubs at area secular colleges and universities, became more active in assisting the local church in the fields of interracial justice, antipoverty programs, and general social welfare. Catholic high school and college students, moreover, volunteered their time in community action programs in predominantly black neighborhoods. 70

In response to Alter's pastoral on the civil disturbances in Cincinnati, the local church's Commission on Human Relations organized "top-level dialogue" with Catholic real estate agents, building and loan directors, and
other professionals. The Commission also called for support for integrating neighborhoods in Cincinnati and in nearby communities, for placement of at least one black faculty member in each Catholic high school, for use of schools and gymnasiums in after-school hours, and for greater efforts to eliminate segregation in schools. In 1967 black students were enrolled in fifty-nine of the 148 elementary schools in the archdiocese and in twenty of its twenty-six high schools. Among the 65,862 students in the elementary schools, 2,123 were black; among the 21,768 high school students, 492 were black. There were nineteen black teachers in the elementary schools and eight in the high schools.21

In May 1968 the De Facto Segregation Committee in Dayton, headed by Thaddeus Regulinski of Corpus Christi parish, presented a report to Monsignor Edward A. Connaughton, superintendent of Dayton area Catholic schools. For nearly a year the committee had studied the problem of racial imbalance in parish schools. In the summer the archdiocese responded to the increasing needs of the black community by establishing an “open enrollment” policy for Dayton that allowed black Catholic children to attend the Catholic school of their choice. The church’s plan also initiated a voluntary student exchange program to bring white children into two predominantly black schools: St. James and Resurrection. To facilitate matters, no tuition assessment was made against pupils going outside of their parish boundaries to attend either black school.22

During the decade a number of priests from urban parishes began meeting to exchange ideas on what actions should be taken by the parishes to enhance interracial relations. At the end of Alter’s term the Urban Apostolate, building upon the success of the Negro Apostolate of the late 1940s, was formed. It focused on the inner city of metropolitan areas in the archdiocese. As early as September 1959, Franklin Shands and Father August Kramer had asked that the Negro Apostolate be revived in order to promote “good racial relations.” By the fall of 1968, fifty-four priests, mostly pastors, belonged to the Urban Apostolate. Alter put Clement Busemeyer, pastor of St. Joseph parish in Cincinnati’s west end, in charge. Busemeyer stressed that the religious and lay people in urban parishes with black parishioners had “a special mission in the Church.” A core of committed priests, sisters, and lay persons came together into serious collaboration and helped promote programs with mixed success on race and poverty in the parishes. The group represented parishes in Cincinnati, Dayton, Middletown, Hamilton, Lebanon, Batavia, Piqua, and Xenia.23

Acknowledging that race and class issues often intersected, the archdiocese also focused on poverty. In 1964 a growing concern for the poor led a group of Mount St. Mary’s of the West seminarians to open Bible Centers in
the inner city of Cincinnati, a project that afforded a new witness in the local church, especially in the Appalachian white community. In the summer the 120-year-old St. John the Baptist Church at Green and Republic Streets became the center of a mission to the Southern Appalachian migrants. The center helped serve Appalachians who had for the most part displaced the old German Catholic families of the area. Concerned over the level of poverty in Cincinnati, where one-fourth of the total number of families had incomes of less than $3,000 a year and lived below the poverty line, the archdiocese in 1966 established a Poverty Commission, headed by Bishop McCarthy. The seventeen-member commission, composed of clergy, religious, and laity, leveled charges that the state was “guilty of breeding poverty.” It urged the implementation of programs to help improve welfare assistance. In October the local church took another concrete step toward improving interracial relations by establishing the Catholic Commission on Human Relations. The commission, also headed by McCarthy, expanded the work of the Cincinnati Catholic Interracial Council.74

The archdiocese in 1968 took another important step and established and staffed a Central Planning and Budget Commission for the funding of Catholic and ecumenical programs and projects in the areas of race and poverty. The local church pledged $1.25 million over a five-year period. The new Commission also helped coordinate the work of the Poverty Commission, Project Commitment, and community centers. This new and innovative archdiocesan response to urban unrest influenced the larger national Catholic Campaign for Human Development in establishing a similar fund in 1970 for human development. By the end of Alter’s term the archdiocese also joined Project Equality of Ohio. Based in Columbus, Project Equality was part of a nationwide, interreligious effort to promote fair employment practices through the hiring and buying policies of religious institutions. The local church along with nine other churches in the state committed their multimillion-dollar purchasing power to equal opportunity in all aspects of employment, especially for the African American workers.75

The McNicholas-Alter years saw significant improvement in the expansion of the ministry among African Americans. At the same time that it addressed some of the needs of the poor, the rights of workers, and inequities against African Americans, the local church increased and reorganized its charity and social organizations. The increase in the number of social agencies was due, in part, to the leadership of the two ordinaries and to the contribution and sacrifices made by devout lay people, parishioners, and the charity of the various religious orders.