PART

FOUR

†

LOCAL CHURCH
TRANSFORMED

Of, by, and for the People

1960s–1996
Introduction

During Karl Alter's tenure in the 1960s the nation and the Catholic Church were shaken by the social and political tumults raging across America. Americans lived in a society full of paradoxes, in a culture that involved confrontation and interchange between differing ideas and values. Women's rights, concern for the environment, racial justice, and a desire for peace were part of the American mainstream. The local church was affected by the ferment in society. The dominant issues of race, poverty, and war had an immense effect on it. When Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, no one could foresee its impact on the church and its influence on society. There were profound changes in the structure and practices of the church, reinvigorating the role of the laity and transforming the people's experiences of worship. Moreover, at the same time that the church was influenced by the cultural crisis of the 1960s, it also influenced it. Issues within the church reflected the revolution in culture in the larger society. Catholics were practically everywhere on the political landscape, as they explored new ways of being both Catholic and American. The clergy and women religious became familiar figures in racial justice marches and peace protests.¹

During the succeeding administrations of Paul F. Leibold (1969–1972), Joseph L. Bernardin (1972–1982), and Daniel E. Pilarczyk (1982–present), the post-Vatican II archdiocese of Cincinnati underwent a period of consolidation as well as stabilization and adjustment to the changes that had swept the church. In the face of a substantial decline in the number of clergy and religious, Catholics in the archdiocese witnessed an unprecedented number of church closings and mergers. Simultaneously, however, there was greater involvement of the laity and parishes in the life of the church, expansion of social programs, as well as increasing Mass attendance and enrollment in Catholic schools. A new model of church and authority emerged that replaced the more authoritarian and clerical concept that prevailed throughout the second half of the nineteenth and first six decades of the twentieth centuries. There was more shared responsibility in the governance and administration of the local church and the various parishes by the clergy, religious, and laity. As it celebrated in 1996 the 175th anniversary of its founding, the archdiocese braced itself for the challenges of the new millennium.