



## FAITH-BASED YOUTH OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Bringing their youth into the community and tradition of the faith is a primary concern for most congregations. Sabbath school, recreation and social groups, and rites-of-passage classes prepare young people for adulthood and for participation in the congregation. Generally, these programs are aimed at the youth of the congregation itself. Of the approximately 1,200 congregations in the Indianapolis area, the vast majority conduct such programs.

Fewer congregations—between 7 and 10 percent, or approximately 100 offer “outreach” programs for youth from outside the congregation. In 1997-98, The Polis Center, in conjunction with Indianapolis-based PSL and Associates, Inc., studied the extent and efficacy of these programs. The study’s findings, summarized here, were drawn from [1] a telephone survey of 300 randomly selected congregations (156 responded); [2] a mailed survey to 150 churches, 70 of which were registered with the state as child care providers (43 responded) and 80 that were randomly selected (37 responded, 3 of which offered child care programs); [3] observations of 35 programs; and [4] case studies of 13 selected programs.

The study found that youth benefit from these programs in significant ways. The adults who supervise and guide them serve as models, allowing children to form trusting relationships with adults. The programs offer enriching activities in which youth are recognized and supported as individuals. In integrated programs, young people come to know each other across barriers of race and culture. Religious programs allow youth to express their faith with peers who share similar values. In all cases, the programs provide youth with a safe place to socialize.

The vast majority of youth programs sponsored by congregations fall into the category of “member development,” and clearly it is in serving their own that congregations reach the largest number of youth. Further, the line between internally focused and externally focused programs is not sharply drawn. Many youth programs, though primarily designed to serve the congregation, are open to everyone, and guests do attend.

In Indianapolis, a few prominent congregations sponsor large, well-funded, and well-known programs for the larger community. Sports programs offered by First Baptist and Tabernacle Presbyterian churches serve thousands of youth from outside their congregations. In their scope and impact, however, these programs are not typical.

The Polis Center study found that most congregation-based youth outreach programs:

- *are small.* Only 14 percent serve more than 100 children or youth in a given week.
- *operate with small staffs.* Few have staff dedicated full-time to youth programs. More than a third rely entirely on volunteers.
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*are internally funded.* A relatively small number receive some funding from their denominations, charitable foundations, or other outside sources.

- *operate independently.* Few of the programs are part of a network or partnership with other congregations or community groups.

- *are racially homogenous.* Most programs serve a population that reflects the congregation's membership. Only 12 percent serve a significantly mixed population.

- *operate without formal guidelines.* Few programs adhere to formal regulatory standards, or use any measures to evaluate their effectiveness.

The range and variety among congregational programs themselves is not so great as many believe. Art Farnsley, senior research associate at The Polis Center, wrote the report's analysis. Even though many congregational programs describe themselves as "unique," says Farnsley, "when we looked at programs closely, we were struck more by their similarities than by their differences."

Youth outreach programs have four basic emphases, with most possessing elements of each type. *Evangelism* programs emphasize Bible study and religious instruction, usually mixed with recreation or some other element. No programs studied were solely evangelical, and only 10 percent were found to have evangelism as their primary focus. Evangelism programs tend to focus on young children.

Most *compensatory* programs are aimed at adolescents. Thirty-nine percent of the programs observed offer some sort of social compensation, such as tutoring, job training, crisis counseling, and leadership development. These programs generally have the widest networks of support and partnerships and reach furthest into the community.

*Safe space* programs (31 percent) offer a place without drugs, alcohol, or violence where children or youth can gather to socialize and play. These may or may not have an evangelical component. The recreation program at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church mixes members (generally white, middle class and suburban) with nonmembers (generally black, urban, and often poor). For these two groups—who might otherwise never interact—the program provides a safe space to meet.

*Service-oriented* programs (20 percent), many of them Catholic, enable the youth of a congregation to serve others. Usually, these programs are not part of a network, but represent the effort of an individual congregation. A notable exception is Beggars for the Poor, a program operated by the St. Vincent de Paul Society that involves a number of congregations. As part of their congregation's involvement, youth from St. Luke Roman Catholic Church collect food and clothing and distribute them to homeless people.

The report identifies variables that account for some of the differences among youth programs, including *religious tradition, race, size of congregation, leadership, , and relationship to local community.*

"The most obvious difference among religious traditions," Farnsley points out, "is that Catholics, unlike Protestants, tend to divide their service areas geographically." Catholic congregations see themselves as responsible for the spiritual care of all Catholics within their parish. Further, they extend their services to others in the neighborhood, particularly the needy. Many Catholic parishes operate schools that are open to all who live within the parish.

The study suggests that black and white congregations often establish youth programs for different reasons. Programs of white congregations are more likely to be for membership development. Black congregations, especially Baptists and Pentecostals, often include the young in adult worship and social activities, rather than place them in separate programs. Black congregations, when they are in poor neighborhoods, are more likely to have an outward focus on the pressing social problems around them.

Large congregations 500 or more members constitute about one-quarter of the congregations surveyed, but they sponsor two-thirds of the outreach programs that serve 100 or more youth per week. Not surprisingly, large congregations are more likely to have full-time staffs devoted to their youth programs.

In more than half the programs, directors have no formal credentials for the position. Of those with credentials of some sort, only 10 percent have training rising to the level of a college degree. Karen Thome Feitl, now a project administrator with the Indiana Youth Institute, was a research assistant on the study. She observes that youth work is seldom a career destination among people seeking pastoral ministry positions. “Some clergy go into staff positions in youth ministry right out of seminary, but then often move on within a few years to other kinds of ministries,” she says.

Most congregation-based programs rely on volunteers, which is both a strength and a weakness. Volunteers are dedicated and bring a caring attitude to youth, and often serve as parental role models to those who otherwise lack such models. But volunteers are often untrained and ill equipped to deal with many of the problems faced by the young people in their care.

Congregations with youth outreach programs tend to be more connected to their local communities than congregations without such programs. When trying to reach and serve a youth population other than their own members, congregations usually find that group right outside their doors, even though the members of the congregation are likely to live throughout the metropolitan area.

While the study did not focus on religious schools, it found that many congregations operate schools, and often these serve a large number—even a majority—of youth drawn from outside the congregation. This is especially true of day care and preschool programs that serve younger children. Congregations typically view these programs as ministries.

Throughout the course of the study, researchers discovered that, among the majority of congregations that do not sponsor outreach programs for young people, many expressed the desire to do something positive for youth in the broader community. In most cases, the reason cited for not doing so was lack of resources, either staff or funds.

Paula Schmidt-Lewis, president of PLS and Associates, Inc., and a local expert on youth services, says that, when delivering social services to youth, congregations have the flexibility to react quickly to needs, but she agrees that resources limit the role they can play in this arena. “Even the wealthier congregations will tell you that they are stretched,” she says. “It’s not a given that they can reach deeper into their pockets.”

David Licht, research associate at The Polis Center, conducted field research for the study. He points out that even programs with limited resources, however, manage to “serve and engage young people.” While the study differentiated among the programs according to primary focus, he notes that most of them cover multiple bases. “All the programs create safe spaces. All the programs are intended to improve the lives of the youth, though they have different underlying motives, whether evangelism or social service. All are compensatory in the broadest sense—they are trying to meet unmet needs.”

He adds that the needs far exceed the capacity of congregations to address. “These programs do good work,” Licht says. “There are just not enough of them.”

*For more information on faith-based youth outreach programs, contact The Polis Center.*

## A SAMPLING OF YOUTH OUTREACH PROGRAMS IN INDIANAPOLIS

St. Luke Roman Catholic Church/ Beggars for the Poor

Beggars for the Poor is a “special work” of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Participating congregations distribute food and clothing to homeless people in downtown Indianapolis. Youth from St. Luke Roman Catholic Church participate as part of the community service component of their confirmation class. For further information contact: Beggars for the Poor (317) 262-4999.

Victory Memorial United Methodist Church/ Fountain Square Youth Corps

The Fountain Square Youth Corp is a leadership training program geared toward junior high students. The six-week summer program focuses on community service and group building. Teams of youth clean lots, assist senior citizens, and run a program for younger children in a local park. For further information contact: Victory Memorial (317) 637-2684.

#### Calvary Temple Assemblies of God/ Caring Place Saturday Sunday School

Calvary Temple conducts a Saturday ministry to elementary age children from east side neighborhoods, employing a large paid staff and volunteers. The primary focus is evangelical. For further information contact: Calvary Temple (317) 897-7100.

#### Faith Teaching Church of Deliverance/ Youth Program

Faith Teaching Church hosts a weekend program in which youth are invited to stay overnight in the pastor's home. Participants play sports and receive basic tutoring in reading, writing, and job preparedness. For further information contact: Faith Teaching Youth Program (317) 974-0494.

#### Tabernacle Presbyterian Church/ Recreation Program

Tabernacle Presbyterian's program, in existence for 75 years, serves more than 2,000 young people annually with a variety of organized sports. Children age 6-14 come from all over the city to participate in its recreation leagues. The church provides a full-time director and support staff, while much of the coaching and supervision is provided by volunteers. For further information contact: Tabernacle Recreation (317) 926-9426.

## PRAGMATIC IDEALISM: Religion's Response to Juvenile Delinquency in the 20th Century

At the turn of the 20th century, reformers across the country waged a crusade to save children from the city's negative influences that too often led them into the criminal court system. The most vocal and well-known of these child-savers were clergy and lay leaders. In 1901, Marion County Circuit Court Judge George W. Stubbs, an active Methodist, established one of the nation's first juvenile courts in Indianapolis, based on principles of Christian idealism and civic practicality. These elements have governed responses to juvenile justice for the past century.

Stubbs felt that if the religious community would only reach out to them, troubled youth could be rescued by their encounter with juvenile court. Who better to serve as foster parents and probation officers than religious people of good character? He believed that involvement by churches and synagogues would create an atmosphere of sobriety, decency, uprightness in social and business relations, and a spirit of general public concern.

Originally, Stubbs recruited eight pastors, both Catholic and Protestant, and three pastor's assistants to serve as volunteer probation officers for delinquent youths. Young offenders called before the court would be assigned probation instead of jail time, if they brought a neighborhood minister with them. Probation officers saw their charges weekly and helped them find work and stay in school.

Reformers in the early part of the 20th century saw all their work as religious, and devised ways to combat juvenile delinquency through means other than the court system. They founded public schools, kindergartens, playgrounds, health programs, libraries, boys and girls clubs, and Sunday schools. They worked to improve children's lives and instill them with the morals and character they would need as adults. In 1925, a local survey reported that churches were doing more for youth than ever before, even as professional social workers moved to the fore in dealing with troubled youth.

By the 1930s, juvenile court case loads had risen to the point that individual attention began to give way to the impersonal "processing" of cases. The religious community responded by establishing agencies to work with juvenile delinquents. The Catholic Charities Bureau provided trained caseworkers to work with youths brought before the court. The Church Federation worked with the Indianapolis Police Department to have Protestant youths referred to local churches for supervision.

In the 1960s, the public grew dissatisfied with the handling of juvenile delinquents. Efforts to counsel and reform gave way to punishment, as increasingly the youths in the juvenile court system were repeat offenders accused of serious crimes--cases untrained workers could not handle.

Today, juvenile court is again focusing its efforts on prevention and first-time offenders. As it did a hundred years ago, the court is calling on the religious community to help address the problems of young people.

## RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Two fundamental American tenants, freedom of religion and separation of church and state, sometimes come into conflict. Public schools in particular must balance individual rights against community sensibilities and the strictures imposed by law.

A national project to study religion in the public schools was undertaken by Elliot Wright of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, with sponsorship by the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment Inc. Wright contracted with The Polis Center to conduct a local case study of an Indianapolis public school: Washington Township's North Central High School, selected because the district it serves reflects the demographic and religious diversity of mid-sized American cities.

The study examined the role of religion in academic, cultural, and moral instruction; the individual expression of religion; observance of religious holidays and customs; and the ability of students to join in religious clubs on school property. Some general findings of the study:

Religion is not a source of much conflict within the school. School officials have emphasized pluralism for the past 20 years, and today pluralistic values and practices are taken for granted by students and their families.

Teachers receive little specific training in how to deal with the expression and presentation of religion.

Different standards apply in classrooms and extra-curricular activities. Sports teams may pray before games, though prayer is not allowed in classrooms. On the other hand, a game will not be cancelled for a religious holiday, though classes may be cancelled on the same date.

Religion is seldom broached by school officials as a topic for public discussion. Changes in school practice regarding religion are low-key and gradual, and are generally accepted by students and parents.

School officials sense that the consensus of community opinion on this topic is fragile, with some justification. A survey of residents indicated that many in the community want more religion in the schools. As well, the survey indicated a trend among younger residents toward more conservative religious values, and significant differences between black and white respondents.

Compared with those in neighboring communities, residents of Washington Township are not strident in their dealings with local educators concerning matters of religion in the schools. North Central maintains a balance of practicality, common sense, and respect for religious diversity.

## Fresh Currents

### Filling the Void: Juvenile Court and Faith-Based Organizations

In the 14 years that Marion Superior Court Juvenile Judge James Payne has been on the bench, he has worked with many traditional programs designed to help troubled youths and their families.

But he always felt that something was missing.

“We have had a readily available asset in the community that was under-utilized, and that was the faith-based organizations and churches,” Payne says.

Faith-Based Home-Based Guidance Services, a joint project of the Juvenile Court and the Marion County Office of Family and Children, is Payne’s attempt to fill this void.

In the Faith-Based Home-Based program, the Office of Family and Children and the Juvenile Court contract with churches, religious organizations, and other faith-based groups to work one-on-one with troubled youths and their families.

Participation is voluntary. Clergy, counselors, family advocates, and volunteers meet in homes, schools or a parent’s workplace an average of four hours per week for about six months. The time may be shorter or longer depending on the need and degree of success.

The program differs from traditional home-based or other intervention programs in that it requires youth, parents, and counselors to incorporate discussions about values, morals, and religion into counseling sessions.

The judge believes the Marion County program is the only one of its kind in the country.

Faith-Based Home-Based Guidance is in its early stages, yet organizers see promise in its ability to help where other programs have failed. At the same time, they point out that there are no quick fixes or easy answers. What works for one young person may not work for another. Troubled youths often have long-standing family problems that cannot be solved in the six months that providers are expected to spend counseling a family.

Payne and others are willing to give the program a try as a viable alternative to traditional home-based programs.

The idea came about in the early 1990s when Payne learned about Advanced Training Institute (ATI), a non-denominational, Christian-based residential project housed at the old Stouffer Hotel on Meridian Street. ATI matches young people one-on-one with mentors. Students live in the residence and are put through a stringent course of organized programs, including scheduled meals and chores, exercise, prayer, schoolwork, and counseling.

Juvenile court sent several youth through the program. What impressed the judge the most was that the kids who went through the ATI seldom showed up in his courtroom again.

“There were more children and families needing these kinds of services, and the traditional programs did not have the capacity to meet this need as quickly as we felt would be necessary,” Payne says.

The Office of Family and Children and the juvenile court sent a request for proposals in December 1997 to more than 100 congregations and groups. A review committee<sup>3/4</sup>made up of representatives from the Mayor’s office, juvenile court, religious organizations, Office of Family and Children, and the academic community<sup>3/4</sup>received 12 proposals. Eleven agencies met the criteria; currently, eight agencies are participating.

Of the eight, six are black: Westside Community Ministers, Courage Family Life of First Baptist Church North, Faith Teaching Church of Deliverance, Jesus Christ Gospel Church/Jus Harmony Counseling Services, Martin University Institute of Urban Ministries, and St. Paul AME Church (The Leah Project). Open Hand, Inc., and St. Matthew Lutheran Church are majority white. All are Christian-based and accept clients regardless of race or denomination.

Payne’s office has spoken with representatives from the Jewish and Muslim communities, and they have expressed interest in working with families. But so far, none of the families have requested counseling from those groups.

The majority of the faith-based providers are African-American and male. The majority of social workers who ordinarily handle these cases are white females. The hope is that these men might have better success with youth, who can readily identify with their older counterparts.

“With positive role models, young people are more likely to stay out of trouble,” Payne says. “If we can hook youth up within a community that has a support base for the young person and the family, then we have linked that family to a network that can be there long after the child is disconnected from the courts.”

The Rev. Ralph Spears, senior pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, on the near east side, has worked about a dozen cases, with mixed results. Some have ended with a recommendation to the court for an end to the young person’s probation. In other instances, the young person was assigned to a program that offered more intensive assistance, such as placement in Boys’ or Girls’ School.

“There are a lot of circumstances to consider when you look at a case,” Spears explains as a reason for the differing outcomes. “It might be family. It might be the setting. The problems that these kids have didn’t happen yesterday. Some are easily answered and others aren’t as easily reversed, at least in the time that we have them.”

Judge Payne agrees. “It’s impossible to predict who will be successful and who won’t. There’s a myriad of issues in the home to consider,” he says.

“Some kids have enough support to hook up with someone in a counseling setting and succeed while others do not. You will find that with any program. It’s like trying to figure out why a kid with everything stacked against him makes all A’s while another kid who seems to have everything has all kinds of problems.”

For most Faith-Based Home-Based providers, the program is an extension of the services they already offer their congregations, clients, or community, says Spears, who has counseled inner city youth in ministries in Cincinnati and New Jersey.

The pastor finds that youth are curious about religion. They ask questions, which he eagerly answers, but he emphasizes that providers understand that it is not their role to convert families.

“We can offer, ‘Have you prayed about your situation?’ as an option to solving the problem. We can also give them instructions on how to do this,” Spears says.

As with any new program, Home-Based Faith-Based Guidance has its challenges¾record keeping in particular, Payne said. Expectations and administrative styles of faith-based groups differ from those of government agencies.

The Rev. Rod Smith is a family therapist with Open Hand, Inc., a not-for-profit home-based juvenile counseling center on the north side. Smith has counseled 16 families.

“I asked an attorney recently why the program is working. He said it is because finally someone cares about the young people,” Smith said. “The child protection services workers and probation officers care about the young people, but there are so many cases that it’s overwhelming and kids get lost in the system.”

Smith, a former high school counselor, said his role is to help young people and their families understand probation. He talks with them about keeping curfew and making court dates. He helps them establish relationships with teachers.

Smith said he tells the families, “I’m *from* the courts, but I’m not *of* the court. I’m not a policeman. I’m the agent they need to walk through this process with them.”

Payne stresses that faith-based programs are not for every family. “Giving them a choice is important, though. The concept of ‘each one teach one’ and one person helping another in need is what the faith-based community is all about.”

While organizers say it is too early to determine whether the program is working, Payne believes Faith-Based Home-Based Guidance will make a difference.

“If there was something that could turn lives around quickly and solve all the problems, everyone would be doing it. There is no quick fix. This is needed, but it won’t happen overnight,” he says.

“Lots of people are doing good work, so it will make a difference. Faith-Based Guidance is another resource to help some in the community with their problems.”

## Youth Resources

The Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) promotes the healthy development of children and youth by serving the institutions and people of Indiana who work on their behalf. IYI offers advocacy programs, training and development, and an extensive resource center. IYI publishes the annual *Kids Count in Indiana Data Book: County Profiles of Child Well-Being*. The updated 1999 edition is now available. To receive a copy, call (317) 924-3657, extension 18.

Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc., (MCCOY) is an independent, non-profit organization that convenes youth and youth-serving agencies to foster communication and discussion on a broad range of issues facing young people. MCCOY encourages collaboration between the various systems that work with and for youth. For more information, contact MCCOY at 3901 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind., 46208, (317) 921-1266 or 1-888-4-YOUTH-8.

United Way of Central Indiana mobilizes people in the community to care for one another. The agency serves youth by supporting a number of community programs. Youth As Resources challenges young people to identify and solve community problems. Youth-led, not-for-profit groups can apply for small grants (under \$5,000) to implement ideas. For more information, call (317) 921-1224.

Indianapolis Center for Congregations helps area congregations find solutions to the challenges and opportunities they face by connecting them with local and national resources and by providing printed and electronic materials, consulting services, educational programs and workshops, community agencies, and more. For more information, call (317) 237-7799 or visit the office in the Gateway Plaza building, 950 N. Meridian St., Suite 950.

Indiana Youth Services Association (IYSA) is composed of county and community organizations that serve youth and families in their neighborhoods. Its focus is on juvenile delinquency prevention, information and referral services, community education, and youth advocacy. To learn more, contact IYSA at (317) 238-6955 or visit the office at 309 W. Washington St., Suite 245.

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