

YOU CARRY "PLACE" WITH YOU

There is nothing settled in the life of a religious community. Many a congregation started its life in the center of town, moved to a residential neighborhood as its members become more prosperous, pulled up stakes again, and now sits in the middle of a parking lot in the suburbs.

In spite of this movement, the fact that "place matters" was a consistent theme in the interviews with congregation members conducted by The Polis Center this past summer.

A congregation now settled in Carmel cannot forget its urban past. You can tell by the pictures and artifacts in display cases in the narthex. But you can also tell by the leadership the congregation takes in the Interfaith Hospitality Network, a coalition that hosts homeless people a week at a time. In symbolic ways the old neighborhood still lives in the memories of the people.

Often a congregation does not choose, or cannot afford to relocate. As its members move away, some commute back to the old place. Why do they come back? The reasons are complex, but these weekly pilgrimages can reinforce the sense of identity scattered members have for the old neighborhood.

Often they want to support congregational outreach. A small percentage of the church's members may live in that neighborhood, but the church remains active in community affairs.

In other congregations, the commuting members are only concerned with keeping traditions and friendships alive. The old neighborhood now belongs to people they don't know. Except for the place of worship, it is an alien place. The neighborhood that lives in memory is the one to which they keep returning.

STARTING A FOOD PANTRY? SOME WORDS TO THE WISE

There are indications that the demand for food pantries will increase as welfare reform is phased in. If your organization is thinking about starting a food pantry, here are some tips from people who are already in the business:

Be aware of other food pantries in your area. Talk to the people in charge. Get their advice on what kind of help is needed. Find out where other food pantries get their food. Gleaners is an important resource. Talk to Sarah there at 925-0191. There is some red tape involved. Gleaners will want to inspect your premises, and you will need a non-profit 501(c)3 number. (Ask Sarah.)

Train volunteers to show respect to people who ask for help. Try to enter into a relationship with the people who come. Listening is important.

Have someone who knows the welfare and food stamp systems.

There is no such thing as a fool-proof system. You will be conned once in a while. But make that a learning experience.

Don't make your requirements so high you force hungry people to lie. These are the beginning items. Others will pop up as you proceed.

2nd Annual Civic Festival Comes to Indianapolis, November 8-10

The three-day civic festival, Spirit & Place: A Gathering of Voices, will feature the writers Thomas Keneally (Schindler's List), Clifton L. Taulbert (When We Were Colored), and Joy Harjo (The Woman Who Fell from the Sky). They will come together Sunday, November 9, 6:30-8:00 p.m., at Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University, for a conversation on the themes of spirituality, place, and creativity. They will discuss the tension between staying, leaving and returning to the place one considers "home." Rabbi Sandy Sasso of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck will moderate.

The first Spirit & Place festival was held last year, at the initiative of the Polis Center, in cooperation with other educational and cultural institutions in the city. The festival, which aims to promote spirituality and community through the creative arts, will include performances, exhibits and lectures. All events are free and open to the public.

Tickets are required only for the November 9 keynote discussion. Free tickets are available at the Clowes Memorial Hall box office. Limit 4 per person. Box office hours are Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

For a schedule of events, please contact The Polis Center at (317) 274-2455.