

MEETING AT THE CROSSROADS: RELIGION AND URBAN LIFE

The better I get to know the faithful people of the congregation I serve, the more I'm convinced they have deep yearnings and aspirations to make a contribution to the common good. They wonder what knowledge and energy they have to offer the people around them, and seek wisdom and spiritual grounding to help them enrich the lives of their families and communities.

Our vocation is to encourage and equip people to develop their gifts and share them in meaningful service. I'm well aware, however, they are being sent out into a complex, changing, and dangerous world. They will be disappointed, even devastated, if the ancient teachings of faith are not wedded to an awareness of present realities.

Through its Project on Religion and Urban Culture, The Polis Center continues to provide thoughtful direction at these intersections of faith and public life. Its research, books, videos, newsletters, and other products remind us that the "expert" advice we often seek from out-of-town guests and national periodicals can be found here at home, among the lives and stories of neighbors and friends.

A new element of the project, the Public Teaching initiative, aims to foster public conversation and create civic space for teaching and learning. The Polis Center seeks the active participation of people like you and me, both lay and clergy, who gather at the crossroads of religion and urban life. The Center is creating educational materials and curricula for use by those engaged in public teaching, and through its partnerships with congregations and community groups is training teachers to implement the materials. These include curriculum materials to orient new clergy to Indianapolis, and guides to local resources available for clergy and lay use.

I hope you'll be willing to share your knowledge as we seek the insights needed to engage our faith convictions with the contemporary culture. We hope to develop a community of learners where the line between teacher and student is creatively blurred and where graduation means being sent out to teach other teachers.

If you have suggestions, comments, or questions regarding Clergy Notes, let us know. Let's keep the conversation going between issues.

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SOME TOPICS PLANNED FOR FUTURE CLERGY NOTES:

October: "What's Your Place in the City?" For some congregations, the world is their parish. For others, the parish is their world. Certain congregations say they exist to serve the metropolitan area while others focus on their immediate neighborhood. This issue, and a subsequent workshop, will explore how congregations are defining their place in the city.

November: "Stump the Pastor" At a congregation I served, the grade-school children would broaden their knowledge (and challenge mine) by asking questions about the people and places of the Bible. They called this exercise "Stump the Pastor." What do Indianapolis pastors know about the people and places of this city? Where do they get that information?

December: "What Are Your Neighbors Saying About You?" How do inner city residents think of religion, if at all? How do local residents perceive congregations? We'll look at the results of a comprehensive survey of Indianapolis neighborhoods.

January: "Worshipping in Cyberspace?" What's at stake for congregations if a quarter of Generation Xers believe they will have their worship needs met on the Internet? How do local congregations currently use computer technology? What are the implications for community building? Is this another sign of a generation gap in the religious community?

February: "Sunday Segregation Revisited" During Black History Month, we'll look at how segregated and/or integrated Indianapolis congregations really are. Are congregations committed to integration, and if so, how is that communicated?

1998 CIVIC FESTIVAL "SPIRIT AND PLACE: A GATHERING OF VOICES."

Keynote event: a public conversation on the themes of spirituality, creativity, and place

With: Peter Matthiessen, Reynolds Price, and Maxine Hong Kingston

Where: Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University

When: Sunday, Nov. 15, 1998 from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

These nationally acclaimed authors will discuss how their spiritual beliefs and the places they have known have shaped both their personal and creative lives.

Now in its third year, the Spirit & Place Festival seeks to create opportunities through the arts and humanities for the public to explore spirituality and community in Indianapolis.

Clergy Notes is published 12 times a year by The Polis Center, 425 University Boulevard, CA 301, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5140. You are encouraged to reproduce and distribute Clergy Notes to neighbors, friends, or congregations. We welcome your comments and suggestions. You may write to Kevin at the above address, call him at (317) 630-1667, or contact him by e-mail at ClergyNote@aol.com.