

CONNECTING THE CONGREGATION AND THE ACADEMY

Following are excerpts from a recent interview with David Bodenhamer, Director of The Polis Center. The conversation centered on research being conducted by the Center for its Project on Religion and Urban Culture.

Clergy Notes: Do people in the religious community participate in what Polis is doing aside from giving information to its researchers?

David Bodenhamer: Yes. Polis works with people who are concerned with the state of community life in our city. Clergy are involved in issues of community all the time. So we have a lot to learn from their perspective and from the questions that are of concern to them. We build our projects around questions that are important to a variety of people, and we involve them regularly in our work.

Are the questions raised by people in Indianapolis of interest to people in other places?

Absolutely. But the Indianapolis expression of an issue will be different from the way it is expressed in Detroit or St. Louis. There are different players. They speak out of different cultures, politics and histories.

Then how will people in different places benefit from what is being discovered in Indianapolis?

We are conducting one of the most in-depth studies anywhere on the ways religion functions in an urban environment. This gives other communities a benchmark they can look to. Secondly, we are learning a lot about how environment is vitally important. Finally, we are disseminating our findings nationally.

Can you cite an example showing how Polis research has helped the community deal with a problem?

Some governmental officials want to involve congregations in welfare delivery. We have helped to show that religious organizations differ greatly; most have neither the intention nor the capacity to work effectively as deliverers of social services. They were not constituted for that purpose, and most have fewer resources than you would imagine.

In addition, the ways in which religious organizations relate to their communities and to each other differs from neighborhood to neighborhood. For example, the Mid-North Council in Mapleton-Fall Creek is an effective example of church cooperation and community involvement. But that's not the typical pattern. So we have encouraged policy-makers to recognize these differences.

SOME ITEMS WORTH CHECKING OUT

On March 31, The Polis Center will host a workshop to premiere Religion as a Window on Culture, a six-part video documentary that explores faith in Indianapolis. The workshop will feature a viewing of one of the episodes, followed by group discussion of how the videos may be used by congregational study groups.

The workshop will be held at the Fatima Retreat House, at 5353 East 56th Street in Indianapolis. It will be offered in two identical sessions: 9:00 a.m. to noon, and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. There is no charge for participants. Refreshments will be served. To attend, make arrangements by March 23 by calling The Polis Center at (317) 274-2455.

Voices of Faith, a book profiling Indianapolis residents whose service to their communities grows from religious faith, will be in bookstores in late March. The 120-page illustrated volume documents the difference faith makes in five Indianapolis neighborhoods: Mapleton-Fall Creek, Martindale-Brightwood, Fountain Square, Haughville-Near Westside and the Near Eastside. To get a pre-publication discount, send a check for \$14.75 (which includes \$2.75 postage and handling) to The Polis Center, 425 University Blvd CA 301, Indianapolis, IN 46202. After March 15, the cost will be \$19.95 plus shipping and handling. The Polis Center also accepts Visa and MasterCard.

A conference on "Worship, Music and Culture" will be held April 17-19 in Indianapolis. Presenters will include Carmelo Alvarez of Christian Theological Seminary, Melva Costen of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, and Graham Maule from the Iona Community in Scotland. There will be group discussions and demonstrations of musical and liturgical styles. Cost: \$100, with discounts for groups and students. Get information from Ted Gibboney, First Baptist Church, at (317) 846-5821; fax (317) 573-6457.

A seminar series on "Religion and Social Change in Africa," sponsored by Butler University, will have its next event March 2, on the topic "Islam in Contemporary Africa." Islamic scholars from Howard, Georgetown, and Indiana Universities will be presenters. The seminar will be in Clowes Hall, 7-9 p.m. Admission is free. Call (317) 940-9974 for information.