CLERGY NOTES

COMING DOWN FROM THE VOLUNTEER SUMMIT

At the end of April, General Colin Powell convened a national summit meeting in Philadelphia to launch an end-of-the-century campaign to enlist volunteers to work with the poor and children.

The most visible figures at the meeting were politicians, celebrities, and business leaders. Planning began there for community and state processes to find and use volunteers. In the next few weeks there should be more information on local and state goals and projects.

Congregations of all sorts have been in the volunteer business a long time. Polis researchers have found that the volunteers congregations recruit are mainly for the educational, administrative and liturgical programs of the congregation. Community service is important to many congregations, but in most cases it is not the highest priority.

It is not now clear how and where congregations will be affected by this national push. However if a powerful mentoring, tutoring and caring program is gaining momentum, it behooves religious organizations to know how this program is flowing into their communities. It may then be possible to give support and learn from the local efforts.

Perhaps discussions on how congregations relate to the volunteer world might be a lively topic for ministerial associations, religious classes and area religious meetings. That could be one way to bring the conversation down from the summit.

TIP-TOEING SLOWLY INTO CYBERSPACE

In the interviews Polis researchers have with clergy and congregational leaders, we have come across some congregations who use the internet to get and receive mail. Others use the world wide web to get their messages out and to hear from web surfers who stop by.

Our data on how congregations use the web and the internet is still sketchy. However, we have enough information to know that a only a small minority use computers to communicate with the world out there.

But some do. First Baptist of Carmel uses the internet to write to missionaries in the Philippines. St. Luke's Methodist has a web site (www.Stlukesumc.com). Second Presbyterian Church has been on the Web for two months now and is pleased with the response (www.secondchurch.org). The Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation has a site at www.trader.com/users/5013/6272. First Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church has been on the Web more than a year at www.ai.com/alivetime.

In the future we will follow up with more information on how some congregations put together a web site. We would also like to publish a list of congregations who use the web and/or e-mail. If you do, let us know via e-mail at polis@iupui.edu. Or write or call (274-2455).

REACHING FOR THE SURFERS

Maybe the lack of interest in using the internet and the web is another symptom of a generation gap in the religious community. At least Kenneth Bedell thinks so. He's the editor of the National Council of Churches' Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches. He says, "All denominations are experiencing difficulty in reaching and holding the people who form their community and values in a media context."

By media Bedell means television, video and computer-based communication. For the most part, people who tap into those media are under 40. He opines: "The only way for the church to reach people growing up in the media age is by making maximum use of the kinds of sophisticated media techniques familiar to those people." Is it possible that the people who make decisions about whether to use these media are in a generation that grew up before they were available? This may be a place where children and young people can teach the leaders.

The Polis Center is experimenting with a wide variety of new media in its Project on Religion and Urban Culture. A web site (www.polis.iupui.edu/ruc) and several video products are already well underway. For more information, contact Lamont Hulse at 274-2455.