

Clergy Notes

A Component of the Project
on Religion & Urban Culture

THE POLIS CENTER • 425 University Boulevard, CA 301 • Indianapolis, IN 46202-5140 • 317.274.2455



THE POLIS
CENTER

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You are present at the creation of a monthly newsletter from THE POLIS CENTER at IUPUI. The audience for the publication will be clergy in the metropolitan Indianapolis. On its pages you will find several things:

- What POLIS is discovering in its research into Religion and Urban Culture (more about that later).
- What your colleagues are working on in your neighborhood or across the city.
- Tips on conferences, books and articles that may interest you.
- New angles on problems that keep you awake at night.

Above all, we want this to be a means of encouraging a community of dialogue. We hope you will read about some work a colleague is doing and then give him or her a call, or that you will find here grist for conversation in your study group or at the dinner table.

Community Lost?

Are we becoming a nation of loners? Yes, claims sociologist Robert Putnam in his essay "Bowling Alone." He goes against the grain of much pious talk about community. He came to his conclusions by looking at the places where we meet, play, and work together. He found we do not do things in groups like we once did. For example, membership in bowling leagues is down. More people would rather bowl alone. We stay away from neighborhood political meetings, the PTA, and Kiwanis. Fewer citizens vote. It's another expression of a growing individualism, Putnam claims.

Putnam's thesis is persuasive. However, there is opposing evidence. Some people are joining groups. Some urban congregations like Trinity Episcopal on North Meridian have a growing membership. St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Fountain Square reports the same core membership as ten years ago, but now also schedules two Spanish masses each week and a monthly Latin mass. On the westside, churches conduct a summertime week-long tent revival. People come. These random examples indicate that while older groups are abating, some new forms of community are forming. Do the new groups replace the disappearing groups? We don't know, but we believe the POLIS study will shed some light on the question.

Stay with the loner theory a minute longer. If that theory describes a real trend in our society, that is an important finding for clergy. It's one thing to look at low turnout for groups in your congregation and blame the people in charge. It's another thing to see people staying away as a shift in the society that affects most traditional communities.

This is the point where the work of POLIS and your concerns intersect. We want to find out where community is being created in congregations and neighborhoods. As we find out where communities are being born and nurtured, you will have help in seeing possibilities in the world where you live.

THE POLIS CENTER invites you to see us as your research partner. POLIS staff works to understand the relation between religion and the culture of metropolitan Indianapolis. We ask, "Where are communities created and nurtured by religious groups?" and "What is the connection between a church, synagogue, or mosque and the neighborhood?" Our hunch is that religious groups create community in both obvious and subtle ways. We want to understand how and where these communities are formed. We believe this is a concern of yours, too. We will be in touch through neighborhood conversations, interviews, workshops and by your picking up the phone and calling. To us, this is a joint enterprise. We hope it is for you, too.

Spirit and Place: A Gathering of Voices

Nationally known authors John Updike, Dan Wakefield and Kurt Vonnegut will visit Indianapolis November 17-18 for a civic festival entitled "Spirit and Place: A Gathering of Voices." As friends, these authors regularly converse privately on the subjects of spirituality, creativity and place. They will bring their conversation to Clowes Hall in Indianapolis on Nov. 17 at 5:00 p.m.

On Monday November 18, Updike and Wakefield will meet again for with an open conversation of special interest to clergy on "Spirituality and Creativity" from 3 to 4:30 p.m. in the DeHaan Arts Center at the University of Indianapolis.

"Spirit and Place" represents an impressive partnership among cultural institutions and all of the universities in the city. On November 17 and 18, a number of venues throughout the city will host conversations on these themes. Some other dates to note:

Dan Wakefield will discuss spiritual autobiographies at Marian College Sunday, November 17 from 2-3:30 p.m. At the same time, Barbara Shoup and Rabbi Sandy Sasso will converse about spirituality across generations, with particular emphasis on women and children, in the Cropsey Auditorium at the Central Library on St. Clair Street.

Monday morning, November 18, Sandy Sasso will lead a discussion at the Christian Theological Seminary about how to talk with children about spirituality. From 1:00 to 2:00 p.m., Michael Martone and Scott Russell Sanders will discuss the search for spirituality in the context of a particular place-- Indiana.

Monday evening at 5:00 p.m. "A Gathering of Indiana Writers" will address these themes at the Indiana State Library Auditorium. Finally, at 7:30 p.m., John Updike will return to Clowes Hall.

To see the complete program, call THE POLIS CENTER at (317) 274-2455. All events are free and open to the public.

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425 University Boulevard, CA 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5140

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