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Urban-Suburban Partnerships are Growing

In 1983, the large Indianapolis Second Presbyterian Church and Westminster Presbyterian, an inner-city congregation, started a urban-suburban partnership that is still a part of both churches' lives. Within a few months the congregations agreed upon a covenant. The document provided for regular communication between the churches but preserved the independence of the smaller Westminster. Second Presbyterian offered financial support and volunteers for the near Eastside community ministries managed by Westminster.

Second Church is not a silent partner. Its staff and committees make recommendations to Westminster, and some Second Church members sit on the governing boards of various Westminster ministries. But the initiative for the ministries stayed with the smaller inner-city church.

Around the metropolitan region, similar inter-church partnerships are being created and considered. Researchers from The Polis Center are observing several urban-suburban partnerships. Because our research agenda has only recently brought us to Carmel, we are learning about many cooperative arrangements between Carmel churches and their partners in the urban areas we have been studying all along. But we expect to find new linkages as our research extends this summer into other suburban areas, including Greenwood.

Here are some urban-suburban partnerships involving Carmel congregations: St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic church is linked with Holy Cross on the Near Eastside; Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is a partner with St. Phillip Neri on the Near Eastside; Orchard Park Presbyterian works with Washington St. Presbyterian on the Westside; St. Mark's United Methodist works with Vida Nueva United Methodist Church on the Eastside; Pilgrim Lutheran is a partner with Redeemer Lutheran in the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood; and Carmel Lutheran is related to Our Savior Lutheran.

Not every partnership involves suburban congregations supporting urban ones. Christ Church Episcopal, at the heart of downtown, has formed partnerships with other congregations too. We would appreciate it if you would let us know of other alliances or cooperative ministry ventures. Please give us a call at (317) 278-2014.



Religion in the Public Square

When Polis researchers interview pastors and rabbis, they ask if they hear their people talking about religion outside the congregation. The usual response is that they don't hear much religious talk in public.

This silence does not mean there is no interest in public discussions of religion. American Cabaret Theater's production of "Give Me That New Time Religion" played to full houses, as did the "Spirit and Place" literary programs last fall. In both instances, people stayed past the program's end to talk, formally and informally, about religion and spirituality in the life of our city.

The broad interest in these public conversations suggests that many thirst for some serious probing of religious issues. However, we often talk willingly about our beliefs and our motivations only in restricted, safe places such as church, synagogue, or mosque. One pastor said he hears people talking about what they believe after funerals. A rabbi says people will talk anywhere about synagogue programs but not about what they believe. We are trying to learn what environment is best suited to beginning, and continuing, this public discussion. Again, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Some Neighborhood Histories Available

Looking at a place's past helps one understand that place's present. Residents of the neighborhoods we are studying often refuse to make a fine distinction between past and present. They prefer instead to explain their community in terms of what its traditions are and how those traditions will shape its future.

Historians David Vanderstel and Etan Diamond are compiling histories of the neighborhoods being engaged by The Polis Center. Some of these histories are now available. If you would like to read about Fountain Square, Mapleton-Fall Creek, Martindale-Brightwood, or the Near Westside, call The Polis Center at (317) 274-2455.

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