

TWO MAPS OF THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD

A map doesn't tell the whole story about the territory. When you talk with residents about their neighborhoods, you are soon struck by the different ways citizens describe their environment. Some see their neighborhood as host to a plague of problems: graffiti, truancy, broken families, child abuse, unemployment, housing problems, drugs, gangs. Others see their community's assets: churches, parks, hospitals, businesses, schools, block clubs, artists, the people's income. One view looks on the neighborhood as a needy area; the other view sees assets available to solve problems.

John Kretzmann and John McKnight's book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, is a guide for people who want to look for the assets in their community. They advocate looking at the community as a reservoir of assets because that is where possibilities lie. Seeing the residents as "needy" increases dependency and lets us overlook the abilities and dreams of the people. Those hopes are the resources needed to create new initiatives that will help people solve their own problems. Another practical reason for looking at local assets is that outside aid is drying up.

A simple test of the Kretzmann-McKnight idea is to list what you think are the major assets of the neighborhood. Then give yourself a reality check: is your congregation connected to these resources? Or, look at the other side. Ask yourself, "what are the greatest needs of my neighborhood?" Then try to recall whether these needs fit the concerns of your congregation.

Building Communities from the Inside Out is full of suggestions to prime your imagination. It also has lists of successful neighborhood enterprises with addresses and phone numbers. The book will help whether your turf is inner city or suburbia. Order the book from ACTA Publications, 4848 N. Clark St. Chicago 60640 or 1-800-397-2282 (\$15.00).

HOW DO CLERGY ASSOCIATE?

Clergy associations aren't what they used to be. As we interview pastors in various areas of Indianapolis, it becomes apparent that there are very few neighborhood clergy groups. Some clergy remember when such groups met but the general feeling is that, for whatever reason, they are out of style now. In their place, some clergy are in what might be called "affinity" groups. These groups may meet for Bible study, prayer, or to discuss the lectionary for upcoming services. In addition, some clergy meet regularly with colleagues in their denomination.

However, there are many clergy who are not in face-to-face touch with other practitioners. We suspect that a majority of clergy are not engaged in regular dialogue with their colleagues. Further study will show whether and how this assumption is justified.

It's possible that there are different ways clergy hob-nob. Maybe a growing number talk on the internet. Maybe clergy talk before and after neighborhood association meetings. In any case, communication within the clergy community is hard to define right now. The Polis Center's Faith and Community project is talking with different clergy gatherings to see how clergy get and share their information. Do you have ideas? Let us know by calling (317) 274-2455.

NEWS ABOUT RELIGION AND THE CREATIVE ARTS

It was standing room only when The Polis Center and other city institutions brought John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, and Dan Wakefield to Indianapolis last November for a discussion on the theme of "Spirit and Place." Over 3,100 people--the largest crowd ever--packed Clowes Hall to hear these three major literary figures. The Clowes discussion was only one of a series of events featuring these and other creative writers held on November 17 and 18, 1996 at the University of Indianapolis, the Central Library, Marian College, Christian Theological Seminary, and in twenty local churches.

A videotape of the keynote event featuring Vonnegut, Updike, and Wakefield may soon be available for purchase. Call The Polis Center at (317) 274-2455 for more information.

A cabaret production, "Give Me that New Time Religion," sponsored by The Polis Center will be on stage March 7 to 22, 1997 at the American Cabaret Theatre, in the Athenaeum, 401 E. Michigan in downtown Indianapolis. Performances will be on Fridays at 5:00 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Sunday Matinees are scheduled at 2:30 p.m. For ticket information, call (317) 631-0334.

CONGREGATIONS IN THE AMERICAN CITY

Mark your calendars for April 9, 1997 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. On that Wednesday afternoon, Dr. Jan Shipps will share her research on the role of congregations in urban life, the topic of an upcoming book. Dr. Shipps' presentation will be held at the Madame Walker Theatre Center Ball Room and is cosponsored by the IUPUI Senior Academy, the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, and The Polis Center's Project on Religion and Urban Culture. For more information call The Polis Center at (317) 274-2455.