

# RESEARCH NOTES

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the Project on Religion and Urban Culture

## INDIANAPOLIS CLERGY: PRIVATE MINISTRIES, PUBLIC FIGURES

by William A. Mirola

Debate over the appropriate role of religious leaders in public life has raged for centuries. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-70), butted heads with England's Henry II over which institution, church or state,

had the right to try clergy accused of civil crimes. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century sought to temper the power of religious leaders over economic and political affairs.

In America, religious leaders have entered the fray of public debate in response to slavery, the condition of immigrants and industrial workers, Prohibition, civil rights, and the anti-war movement. More recently, clergy have joined the political battles over abortion, homosexuality, a living wage, and education.

In the spring of 2000, The Polis Center sponsored a telephone survey to explore the role clergy play in shaping community life in Indianapolis, and the extent of their involvement in neighborhood and city affairs. The survey sample was limited to Christian clergy, all of whom were the senior pastor of their respective congregations.

Interview staff at the Indiana University Center for Survey Research attempted to invite participation from all Roman Catholic priests and mainline Protestant ministers, and a random sampling of the remaining Christian clergy currently heading congregations in the city. The data that follow are based on interviews with 24 Catholic, 125 mainline Protestant, and 111 independent Christian clergy. The response rate for Catholics was 69 percent; for mainline Protestants, 78 percent; for independent Christians, 77 percent.

### Roman Catholic Clergy

Roman Catholic priests in Indianapolis have an average age of 57 years and a median age of 58, compared with an average age of 52 and a mean age of 51 for Indianapolis clergy in general. Of the 24 priests surveyed, 21 were white, two were African-American, and one was Hispanic. As one might expect, all reported being male and single. All held at least a college degree, and 20 reported having formal training to be a priest. They reported on average being ordained for 26 years (compared to 23 years for Indianapolis clergy as a whole), and serving at an average of five churches during their ordained ministry. Most priests (92 percent) lived in the same neighborhood as their churches. The average household income reported for this group was between \$20,000 and \$29,999 a year.

### Mainline Protestant Clergy

Mainline Protestant ministers in Indianapolis have an average age of 52 years and a median age of 51. Of the 125

surveyed, 92 percent reported being white, 5 percent were African-American, and 3 percent were of Asian descent. Eighty-seven percent were men; 13 percent were women. Eighty-nine percent were married; 2 percent lived with a partner; 6 percent were divorced, separated, or widowed; and 3 percent had never been married. All reported having at least a four-year college degree, and all reported having formal training to be a minister. On average, they had been ministers for 23 years, had served five different churches, and had been in their current position for almost seven years. Forty percent live in the neighborhood of their churches—the lowest percentage for any category of clergy. Mainline Protestant ministers reported earning an annual income of between \$60,000 and \$79,000 a year.

### Independent Christian Clergy

Of the 111 independent Christian ministers in our sample, the average age was 51 years; the median age was 50. This was the only category with any clergy under the age of 30. Seventy-three percent of this group reported being white, 25 percent were African American, 1 percent were Native American and 1 percent were Hispanic. Ninety-seven percent were men; 3 percent were women. Approximately 90 percent were married; 6 percent were divorced, separated or widowed; 4 percent had never been married. Sixty-nine percent of this group had at least a four-year college degree. Another 22 percent reported having some college education; 8 percent had a high school diploma; and 1 percent did not finish high school. Sixty-five percent had formal training to be a minister. On average, they had been ministers for 23 years, had served four different churches, and had been in their current position for just over a decade. Approximately 48 percent of these ministers lived in the neighborhood of their churches. They reported earning an annual household income of between \$40,000 and \$59,000 a year.

- **On average, administrative tasks occupy the most time for Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy, while independent Christian clergy spend the largest block of their time in Bible study.**

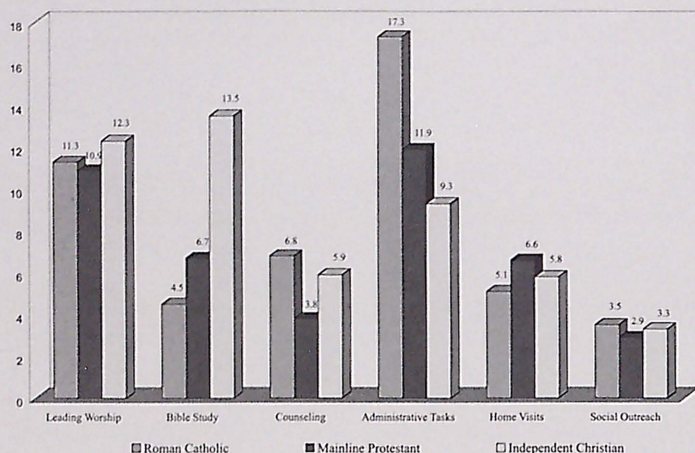


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Graph 1. Mean Hours Spent on Clergy Tasks



Clergy of different traditions carry out similar types of tasks, though they differ in the amount of time they allocate to these tasks. Leading worship takes up the second biggest block of time for all three groups, while the time spent in social outreach represents the smallest block for all. Independent Christian ministers work an average of 50 hours in a typical week; Roman Catholic priests, 49 hours; mainline Protestants, 43 hours.

- **Indianapolis clergy serve congregations with an average of 644 members, with an average of 296 people attending church in a typical week. However, the median congregational size is 279, and median attendance is 140.**

Congregational size and attendance figures are important indicators of how much time clergy allocate to administration, pastoral care, or community involvement. Roman Catholic clergy reported the highest figure for both total membership and weekly attendance. The median membership reported by priests was 1,500, with a median attendance of 500. Mainline Protestant clergy reported a median membership of 290, with a median weekly attendance of 135. Independent Christian clergy reported a median of 184 members, with a median of 125 attending worship. The more people on the rolls or in the pews, the more time clergy spend on administration and counseling. There was no relationship between size of congregations and the likelihood they engaged in Bible study or spent time in other activities.

- **A majority of Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy have observed little change in the economic and racial/ethnic diversity of their congregations during the last 10 years.**

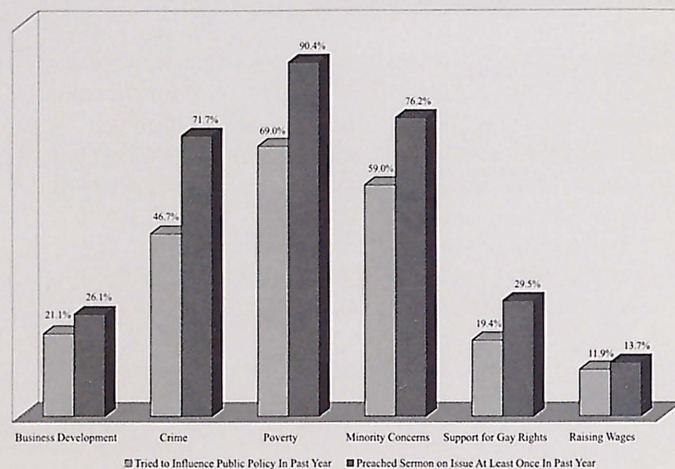
Clergy were asked to characterize the economic and racial makeup of their congregations. The graph below shows the percentage of clergy who characterized their congregations in class terms. The patterns illustrate what have been historic trends in the economic character of particular religious traditions. Mainline Protestantism still tends to be home to more middle-class, upper-middle-class, and upper-class people. Catholicism is still the bastion of the middle and working classes and the poor. Independent Christian congregations reflect the full spectrum of

classes but with fewer upper-class and upper-middle-class members and more working class and poor members than either of the other groups.

Most clergy serve congregations that are made up largely of people from a single racial group. Half of all mainline Protestant ministers reported that their congregations were 98 percent white; nine congregations were more than 90 percent non-white. Among Catholics, there was greater variation in racial or ethnic makeup in their congregations. While most had a majority of white members, there was less racial concentration compared to mainline Protestant congregations. Five Catholic congregations surveyed had a majority of members who were African-American or of another ethnic group. Of the 111 independent Christian ministers surveyed, 25 had congregations more than 90 percent non-white. Only six had congregations in which more than 10 percent of their members were from a racial or ethnic group different from the majority. Independent Christian ministers were more likely than the others to say their congregations were becoming more diverse.

- **Significantly more Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy reported their congregations engaging in social service, community development, and neighborhood projects compared with independent Christian clergy. Twenty percent of all clergy reported that their congregations supported political action projects.**

Graph 4. Clergy Activities to Address Social Issues in Indianapolis (N=261)



More than half of all Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy headed congregations that were involved in service, community, and neighborhood projects. Most (82 percent) of these projects were funded and staffed in collaboration with other groups and organizations.

Table 1. Percentage of Congregations Involved in Four Types of Urban Projects

	Social Service Projects	Community Development Projects	Neighborhood Projects	Political Action Projects
Roman Catholic	100.0 %	60.0 %	56.0 %	32.0%
Mainline Protestant	95.2	56.0	51.2	17.2
Independent Christian	60.0	40.9	35.1	19.8



- **The vast majority of Indianapolis clergy belong to at least one ministerial association.**

Ninety-seven percent of Indianapolis clergy in our survey reported belonging to at least one ministerial association, and most reported being *very* or *somewhat* active in the organization. Seventy-seven percent belonged to two associations; 41 percent reported belonging to three. Most reported being satisfied with their contact with other clergy, from both within and without their denomination.

**Table 2. Percentage of Clergy Belonging to and Active in Ministerial Associations**

	Belongs to Association	Very Active in Association	Somewhat Active in Association
Roman Catholic	75.0 %	33.3 %	66.7 %
Mainline Protestant	87.1 %	56.5 %	31.5 %
Independent Christian	73.3 %	56.6 %	28.9 %

**Table 3. Satisfaction with Amount of Contact with Other Ministers**

	From Same Denomination	From Different Denomination
Roman Catholic	100.0 %	87.5 %
Mainline Protestant	89.6 %	78.3 %
Independent Christian	89.3 %	82.9 %

- **Local clergy see themselves as having more influence in civic affairs than Indianapolis residents see them as having.**

We asked clergy how much influence they had in Indianapolis civic affairs, and to say how much influence they felt they should have. We compared their responses to a random sampling of Marion County residents. Clergy on the whole tended to see themselves as having more influence in Indianapolis affairs than did Marion County residents. There were no significant differences in their responses among the three clergy categories.

We also asked whether clergy influence was greater or lesser than it was 10 or 20 years ago. A majority of clergy saw their influence as largely remaining the same or increasing, with no significant differences among the three clergy groups.

**Table 4. Perceptions of Clergy Influence in Civic Affairs**

	Current Influence (a lot/moderate amount)	Influence ought to be (a lot/moderate amount)
Clergy	62.8 %	94.6 %
City Sample	48.8 %	76.4 %

- **Less than half of all Indianapolis clergy live in the neighborhoods in which their churches are located. The majority of clergy feel that it is important to be involved in their church's neighborhood, and believe that they are knowledgeable about the issues facing residents.**

Of the Roman Catholic priests in our sample, 92 percent live in the same neighborhood as their church, often in

parish owned houses or rectories. Less than half of mainline Protestant (40.0 percent) and independent Christian clergy (47.7 percent) live close to their churches. Most thought being involved in the local neighborhood was important, with little difference between the three subgroups of clergy. Ninety-five percent described themselves as being knowledgeable about their neighborhood.

The Indianapolis residents surveyed expressed a somewhat different view, with 64 percent of residents agreeing that clergy were knowledgeable about their neighborhoods.

**Table 5. Clergy as Neighborhood Figures**

	Lives in Neighborhood	Important to be Involved in Neighborhood	Knowledgeable about Neighborhood Issues- Clergy Sample	Knowledgeable about Neighborhood Issues- County Sample
Clergy Total	43.3 %	86.2 %	94.6 %	63.7 %
Roman Catholic	92.0	92.0	100.0	74.4
Mainline Protestant	40.0	85.6	92.8	62.7
Independent Christian	47.7	85.6	95.5	63.5

- **Most Indianapolis clergy have preached sermons about reducing crime and about the needs of the city's poor and minorities at least once in the last year. Similarly, most Indianapolis clergy who reported being active in trying to influence public policies were active in these issues.**

When it comes to preaching about social issues facing Indianapolis, clergy most frequently preached on the Christian mission to help the needy. Almost all had preached about the needs of the poor and disadvantaged at least once in the preceding year. Concern for the city's minority populations, and reducing crime, were sermon topics for a majority of clergy, as well. Roman Catholics were more likely than their Protestant counterparts to preach about the needs of the poor and of minorities. Protestants were much more likely than Catholics to preach about business development in Indianapolis. Mainline Protestants and Catholics were more likely to preach in support of gay rights. But Catholics and independent Christian ministers were more likely than mainline Protestants to preach in support of raising the minimum wage.

**Table 6. Percentage of Clergy Who Preached Sermon on Topic at Least Once in Past Year**

	Business Development	Reducing Crime	Needs of Poor and Disadvantaged	Concerns of Minorities	Raising Wages	Supporting Gay Rights
Roman Catholic	8.0 %	68.0 %	96.0 %	88.0 %	20.0 %	24.0 %
Mainline Protestant	21.6	75.2	94.4	82.4	8.0	46.4
Independent Christian	36.9	70.3	86.5	68.5	18.9	12.6



**Table 7. Percentage of Clergy Who Reported They Actively Tried to Influence Policies in Past Year**

	Business Development	Reducing Crime	Needs of Poor and Disadvantaged	Concerns of Minorities	Raising Wages	Supporting Gay Rights
Roman Catholic	24.0 %	56.0 %	88.0 %	80.0 %	24.0 %	25.0 %
Mainline Protestant	22.6	45.6	68.0	59.2	8.0	29.6
Independent Christian	18.9	45.9	65.8	54.1	13.9	6.4
Important for churches to be involved—County sample	52.8	87.8	92.9	81.2	62.3	43.8

Clergy who actively tried to influence public policy are most often drawn to issues concerning the needs of the poor and minority populations, and reducing crime. Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant clergy reported activism in support of gay and lesbian rights. A quarter of Roman Catholic priests reported trying to shape the two economic policy areas. Protestant clergy were more likely to be active in trying to influence business development than in trying to raise wages.

Indianapolis residents generally expected religious groups and leaders to be more involved in influencing public policy than they actually are.

### Conclusion

The Indianapolis clergy who took part in this survey illustrate the complex roles that they live out in their professional lives. Clergy expect and are trained to deal with the spiritual needs of their congregations. Their ministries are typically built around the common mission to assist individuals in their faith journey and to help those in need. The vast majority of believers and non-believers understand these twin objectives to be the most important priorities of religious leaders and their congregations. Nevertheless, there is a cultural expectation, rooted in the history of American religion, that religious leaders have an obligation to engage the world outside their church walls. Since the late 19th century, clergy of many faiths have brought a prophetic voice to public battles over labor reform; suffrage; old age pensions; civil rights for minorities, women and immigrants; factory-closings; welfare reform; and, increasingly, extending protection and equal rights to gays and lesbians. Indianapolis residents hold this same expectation and expect religious leaders along with their congregations to live out their faith by making their neighborhoods and the city a better place to live. Most city residents expect clergy to engage in the policy battles over business development, crime reduction, a living wage, and meeting the needs of disenfranchised groups. Yet, training in being a public minister is not available in the curriculum of most seminaries. For some, such as Roman Catholic priests, there is an institutional culture that supports their being visible figures in neighborhood and municipal politics. The findings from this survey suggest that Indianapolis clergy continue to negotiate the competing demands of carrying out the ministry in their churches while continuing to exert some influence in the civic affairs of this city. Whether it is possible for them to do both well remains to be demonstrated.

**ROUNDTABLE** On October 25, Research Notes hosted a roundtable discussion at Christian Theological Seminary. Participants had been provided beforehand with the text of this issue of RN, and were invited to respond to the issues raised in the paper. Darren Cushman-Wood is pastor of East Tenth United Methodist Church. Ann M. DeLaney is executive director of the Julian Center. Jackie Nytes is a member of the Indianapolis/Marion County City-County Council. Edward Wheeler is president of Christian Theological Seminary. William A. Mirola, assistant professor of sociology at Marian College and research associate at The Polis Center, wrote the paper under discussion. Kevin Armstrong is senior public teacher at The Polis Center. The following is an edited version of their discussion, which was moderated by Armstrong.

**ARMSTRONG:** Americans talk of restoring religious values in public life, but our affection for religious leaders is ambiguous. With the survey of Indianapolis clergy providing the background, let's explore the role religious leaders play in the world outside their congregation walls. We also have the results of a community survey, where more than half the respondents thought religious leaders had little or no influence on civic affairs. Almost two-thirds of the clergy surveyed, however, thought that they had a lot or a moderate amount of influence in civic affairs. How do you account for that difference of perception?

**WHEELER:** Many clergy believe that we are still in a Protestant paradigm in America, where what they say really does count and has an impact on the way things happen. Also, it's part of our identity to think that the work we do makes a difference. I think that everybody would like to think that—especially clergy, who have a sense of "call."

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** In Bill's report, the vast majority of ministers claim that they talk about social issues in the pulpit. Yet, what's really telling is that the hours spent by clergy in social outreach ranks the lowest. We are talkers of the Word but not doers of the Word. There is a credibility gap.

**NYTES:** We begin the Council meetings with a prayer by an invited pastor. It's a symbolic gesture, suggesting that clergy are an integral part of our civic lives. In fact, once they leave the room there is no evidence during the course of the evening that they have been particularly influential. Clergy are there for the critical events in people's lives—the births, deaths, and marriages—and maybe that makes them feel important. But this doesn't translate into our listening to them on social issues.

**DELANEY:** Clergy don't talk about social issues as directly as they think they do. Seldom in my experience do they recommend specific courses of action for people to follow. They mention it in a generic way, and fulfill what they think is their responsibility without getting too confrontational, so that people stop coming or stop contributing.





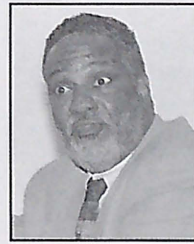
Darren Cushman-Wood

Jackie Nytes



Ann M. Delaney

Edward Wheeler



William A. Mirola

Kevin Armstrong



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**ARMSTRONG:** Was there a time when clergy influence in this city was greater?

**NYTES:** I think that for my parents the influence would have been greater. If they were told to do something, they would have been more prone to follow it than I am.

**DELANEY:** I would have to say the same from my experience.

**MIROLA:** Can you think of an example where a pastor in your parents' generation would have said, "Go out to vote" on a particular issue, or, "We need to respond to this issue in a very particular way"?

**NYTES:** There was more of that in the civil rights movement. But other than that example, no. It was more a case of clergy making pronouncements on personal conduct, rather than on larger social issues.

**MIROLA:** We are in a period where there is no one defining social issue. Thirty years ago clergy felt compelled to address the civil rights movement.

**WHEELER:** In the African-American community that is still something a pastor might be expected to do. A pastor would specifically refer to the police brutality that happened in New York recently, and call it by name. The pastor may not tell the congregation who to vote for, but the pastor is very likely to say who he is going to vote for.

**DELANEY:** In my church—I am Roman Catholic—you may have an appeal to vote, but certainly there would never be any indication of for whom to vote.

**MIROLA:** Now that is interesting, because Roman Catholic tradition is filled with a very strong sense of social teaching, and in other dioceses you see very active bishops and archbishops.

**DELANEY:** Yes, usually on the issue of abortion, and speaking against women candidates. In New York, I heard Cardinal O'Connor at St. Patrick's basically say that I would go to hell if I voted for Geraldine Ferraro.

**ARMSTRONG:** On the whole, I don't see strong leadership from middle judicatory leaders on social issues in Indianapolis. And that raises the question: if clergy influence is slipping, is that a problem or is it simply a fact? Why should it matter?

**NYTES:** In a community that is putting so much of its hope on faith-based institutions to solve problems, I think it does matter. Now, are we fooling ourselves about the potential of that avenue? Do we have some myths that we can return to a simpler time when a word from the pulpit could get us all to do the right thing?

**ARMSTRONG:** Dr. Wheeler, you were the first to snicker.

**WHEELER:** Part of my snickering is because I see mainline Protestantism ending up where the African-American community has always been: at the margins. And for people who have never been there before it is a new and uncomfortable place. But at the margins is where issues can be rethought. I do think we can make a difference. My fear is that the mainlines will think, if we just do this and just do that, we can go back to the early 1900s. Ain't going to happen. We are not going to be at the center of the show. But we don't have to be there to make a difference.

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** The logic of the marketplace has saturated the way we see and the way we do church. Everything is a commodity and everybody is a consumer. The local churches focus all their time on servicing members or gaining new members. You can substitute the word 'customer' for member when you have that kind of paradigm. As a pastor, there is no room for doing social justice ministry.

**ARMSTRONG:** I saw assent all around the table when Jackie raised the question of how well faith-based organizations can solve social problems. Should clergy speak to this issue of the growing involvement of faith-based partnerships in public life? Not to put too fine a point on it, the only people whom I hear speaking about faith-based partnerships are not religious leaders.

**DELANEY:** I sometimes think it is people who want to avoid taking responsibility for solving things themselves. They have this dream that we can get someone else to solve these problems. Who did people at one time turn to when they were in need? They turned to the faith-based organizations. Who was it that used to have rules that people listened to and followed and therefore avoided a lot of the problems that we have right now? Faith-based institutions. So perhaps we can go back to that kinder, gentler time. Just give them some token amounts of



money and they will solve a lot of these problems. We are fooling ourselves.

**NYTES:** I first heard the idea of faith-based organizations serving a public policy role when Goldsmith was between elections. I saw it as a cynical attempt to manipulate the African-American community by, for example, funneling high school summer job programs and the like through the ministers, so that they would have a vested interest in his reelection.

**ARMSTRONG:** Do clergy have a political role to play? Or is their authority like that of poets—moral and transcendent, rather than temporal?

**NYTES:** It is obviously a perilous path to walk. They have a moral responsibility to speak out on issues of public policy. But when they advocate a particular program they affect their credibility. That they have a vested interest in the outcome is part of what bothers me about faith-based provision of social services.

**ARMSTRONG:** What about speaking out on a particular social issue?

**NYTES:** I don't see a problem with that. One of the things the Catholic Church has done very well in recent years is speak out on the death penalty. That has been a large part of bringing the issue to public consciousness, evolving the public consciousness.

**WHEELER:** The Catholic Church has done a marvelous job with their statements on justice and the economy. I would agree that there is a danger for any religious institution to take a stand on candidates. I have always been reluctant to endorse anybody who is running for office—but I have been clear on where I stand on issues, and anyone with an ounce of sense can determine who I think is the best candidate. But I have to live with whoever is in office, and I want to have access to that person for the good of the community I represent. One thing that concerns me about faith-based organizations' being given the responsibility of handling some of the problems in society is that the paradigm in the church has changed. Women are no longer at home taking care of children and baking cookies. They are out working 8 and 10 hours a day, too. The volunteer base that churches once enjoyed is not available anymore.

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** At East Tenth Church, we receive government money, and we have created partnerships with government. However, Charitable Choice poses a great theological question, and that is: "What is the church?" Is the church nothing more than a social service provider? Also, Charitable Choice can give the church a false sense of importance; it can lead the church into the arrogance that we have all the answers. The result is that the church loses its prophetic witness. There is something biblical about the church being a gadfly in society. In Indianapolis, it seems that churches have lost the ability to be a critical voice against local government. And some of the problems we have go beyond just providing more effective social services.

**NYTES:** If the church puts a great deal of energy into social solutions, it is sometimes at the expense of providing all of us with spiritual strengthening and spiritual poetry. You are not doing your job if you are doing someone else's job. And I worry sometimes that we ask the church to solve a whole set of problems with limited resources, and it stops ministering to our spiritual needs.

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** The congregation is likely saying to the pastor: "Your role here is the spiritual nurturing of your congregation." There is a larger public audience that seems to be saying, in this survey: "Your role is to have more influence on public life." Given those tensions, what would you say to clergy leaders in this city? And what would you say to civic and not-for-profit leaders that they ought to know about clergy leadership?

**NYTES:** Clergy have a critical role in helping their congregation members develop values and judgment and perhaps motivation. Some of those things come from spiritual growth. They need to give us values, partly to enable us to go out and do things in society. I don't expect the clergy to take on early childhood education. Yet that is what we see happening in a lot of our churches. And I get a little concerned because I think they are not equipped to do that. Should they be talking to us about the value and the importance of family? Should they be talking to us about the importance of supporting organizations in our community? Yes. But I don't see clergy being the solution to all of society's problems.

**ARMSTRONG:** I hear in this conversation some uncertainty about just how strong a presence clergy should have within their congregation, as well as in the public square.

**DELANEY:** That comes from me, largely, because I am a woman Catholic and I start from the premise that the most contribution they can make is to do no harm.

**ARMSTRONG:** You would make a good Methodist.

**DELANEY:** I might. What I find in the Catholic clergy in particular is that they are so obsessed with sex and gender that the greater part of their social witness deals with issues that they have no business even commenting on. They have been blind and deaf to what they hear in the gospel regarding women. Regarding Third World debt or any other issue they have made part of their mission, I agree with them—and if they spent a proportional amount of time on those issues, I might feel better.

**NYTES:** The major public social protest activity that this diocese organizes every year is the "Right to Life" march on Meridian Street. You don't see them organizing against the conditions in the lockup. You don't see them organizing against the conditions in some of our classrooms—

**DELANEY:** Or readily available health care for the poor—

**WHEELER:** Even within denominations there are going to be different points of view. I do think there is value in



interpreting issues through a theological lens for the broader community. It is part of the function of a minister to be a public witness, but the primary role is to be shepherd of a particular flock. Sometimes you have to be satisfied with a surrogate role, where you help your congregation think about things in a theological way. And there are people in your church, leaders in a wide range of things, who can be a voice in the public square.

**MIROLA:** When I looked at the survey results, my biggest surprise was how few hours are spent by clergy on social outreach issues. There isn't the intellectual time to develop a prophetic voice. If you are spending 20 hours a week in administration, another 10 in leading worship, and then having to deal with people's problems, where is the time for reflection?

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** That goes back to my point about the consumer mentality that is controlling the way pastors see the church. You know, that is what is expected of you. There is very little of value given.

**WHEELER:** If a sermon is going to be worth preaching, it has got to be grounded not only in scripture but in life. I am not going to preach a sermon so esoteric that they come out saying, "Umm, what was he talking about today?" If I am dealing with Moses leading the children out of slavery, I want that passage to relate to their lives. So those times of study and reflection are not isolated from thinking about social issues.

**DELANEY:** It is just a question of priorities. If social witnessing were as important as it ought to be, there are other ways to handle administrative tasks. Most of the pastors I have seen can't run their own bank account, much less a parish. And they have no business doing that, or fund raising. You can hire somebody or get good volunteers and delegate it if you think it is important to do the other.

**ARMSTRONG:** Every year that it comes to a committee, five clergy will get up and speak about the death penalty, and their remarks will go without challenge from the committee. Then the public policy folks, the lawyers, the economists speak, and they get dressed down. Isn't that a reflection that the public is not willing to even engage folks who would come to the table using a theological perspective? Is it because there is not a shared language?

**DELANEY:** It is because the legislature has already made up its mind, and doesn't want to irritate the pastors in the process of going where they are going anyway.

**ARMSTRONG:** Why don't they want to irritate the pastors?

**DELANEY:** Because they see that as perhaps costing them votes. It is disrespectful, and it is unnecessary. So they are certainly polite to them, but their minds are shut before the first testimony is made on the issue.

**ARMSTRONG:** Why aren't they polite to the lawyers?

**DELANEY:** Because they are professional lobbyists and the clergy are amateurs. When you are a registered lobbyist it is a whole different dynamic. Clergy are seen as Joe Citizen.

**NYTES:** Maybe this is a language thing. When clergy come to speak on the death penalty—let's face it—the legislators don't know how to ask questions. They are out of their league. When it comes to questioning a lawyer or someone who is speaking about economics, they can find a language to understand the arguments.

**ARMSTRONG:** So despite the rhetoric these days about the role of religion in public life, what you are suggesting is that the shared language is very shallow if not absent.

**DELANEY:** I think Jews have done a very good job of bringing social issues to the forefront in their synagogues and having forums for discussion, with the rabbis leading the way. You just don't see that in a lot of churches.

**CUSHMAN-WOOD:** Religious organizations become social service agencies as opposed to social justice agencies, if you follow that distinction, because it is easier for clergy to become involved in educational issues or soup kitchens or engage in social outreach programs—because that is what the congregations seem to be interested in. We are not going to talk about raising wages and fighting for better jobs for the people who live in that neighborhood—although many clergy said in the survey, "We want to know about the economic conditions of this city, we want to know what jobs are like, we want to know about all these structural conditions." I wonder: if we gave them that information, would it help?

**WHEELER:** Most of us are not trained in social analysis or economic analysis, and we like our answers real simple. It is much easier to get a committee together once a week and go down to Wheeler Mission and ladle out soup. That is needed—don't misunderstand me. But that is not going to change the systemic problems that we are dealing with.

**DELANEY:** That is why faith-based provision of services is so worrisome to me. Because that allows us a mechanism for thinking, all right, we have hunger; we are dealing with that. But then, we are taking money from the one entity that could take corrective action—and that makes it much more precarious for us to criticize or rock that boat.

**NYTES:** I worry that we are so busy administering the food kitchen that we are not talking to people about core values and human relations, talk that might result in the next generation's not needing a food kitchen.

**ARMSTRONG:** If clergy are to play some substantive role in public life, how are they going to have to be educated or trained differently than they are now?

**WHEELER:** The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is going to look a lot different from the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. You will have to be trained with a lot more flexibility. People will have to learn how to think theologically about a wide range of issues.

**ARMSTRONG:** Jackie, what do you want this future clergy to learn that you sense they are not learning?



**NYTES:** I am concerned that they know the neighborhoods that they serve. In the survey, I thought it was an interesting contradiction that clergy thought of themselves as being more knowledgeable about their neighborhoods than the community perceived them as being. Do clergy know the number of unwed mothers, or the extent of poverty among young families in their neighborhoods? Do they understand what we are up against so that they can give us some inspiration or fortification?

**WHEELER:** Or do they know who the corporate executives are in their churches? Do they know the folks who are shakers and movers?

**DELANEY:** What struck me is how homogenous the clergy is. You can try to educate them, but unless there is a nagging voice in their ear on issues that they are not familiar with, whether it is race or gender, they are never going to speak with the voice that I want to hear. That there is such a small percentage of churches that are actually integrated is particular worrisome.

**NYTES:** There is an article in last week's *Recorder* about a black woman minister. She was talking about the difficulty she is encountering just getting members of her own faith organization to be comfortable with and respect

her leadership. I was pleased to see that Trinity has just added a woman deacon from Uganda, to get a little bit more diversity here in the pulpit. But I think it is going to be real slow coming.

**DELANEY:** The question is, how many of us will still be there when it does come?

**MIROLA:** That is a good question. As a progressive, I can tell you this is an immensely frustrating city. It doesn't take much to be a liberal in Indianapolis. All you have to do is watch PBS and have a subscription to the *New Yorker*. One of the key things for forming clergy in a different mode is for them to have some hands-on experience. They need to be in internships in places such as the Julian Center, or with the Union Summer, where they are working with community organizers, labor organizers. Those are formative experiences that they will take with them forever.

**ARMSTRONG:** On that note, I am going to allow us to be constrained by time rather than by exhaustion of the conversation. We could go on for a long time. Thank you for your participation, and thank you for considering the role clergy play in public leadership in this city.

## RESEARCH NOTES

from  
the Project on Religion and Urban Culture



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