

TO AVOID DEATH PLANNING

Seven Characteristics of Healthy Inner-City Parishes

1. They are entrepreneurial.

They operate under the principle of subsidiarity. Like pastors of the past, they must have latitude to be enterprising. Parishes were run like local franchises. Today of course we would need to eliminate the clericalism and authoritarianism that often occurred in the past. This should be part of the pastor's job description. The best pastors are risk-takers and self-starters - convinced that "headquarters" does not always know best. Their motto is Shaw's: "You see things and say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and say 'Why not?'"

2. They encourage in various ways the "Protestantization" of weekend church attendance.

This means that parish boundaries are less significant and so Catholics like Protestants shop around for a parish. So term "parish" is used less frequently in inner city because too neighborhood-bound. Community or congregation or church are preferred. Many churches have people register via the bulletin by checking off whether they are a) a member, b) associate, c) activities participant, d) Weekday member.

3. They reach out to newcomers.

By, for example, enhancing and enlivening the weekend liturgies; especially the preaching and the music. The Church bulletin is trilingual - WITAMY, WELCOME, BIENVENIDOS. Many inner-city parishes have in their boundaries hospitals, universities, govt. buildings etc. and so outreach here is important in terms of weekday services. "Any enterprise begins to die when it's run for the benefit of the insiders rather than for the benefit of outsiders" (Miller, Christianity Today Oct 3, 1994, p.72 "Church Growth").

4. They seek to network with other Catholic entities as well as other churches and agencies in their area.

5. They regard their parish school as an asset, not a burden.

Most successful inner-city church schools offer before and after school care and pre-school programs. Some recruit young adults to tutor children in the school. Also, work related scripture and prayer groups are started. Pastors resist current trends by offering a grammar school education that is a real alternative to an often dysfunctional public school. These pastors are convinced that their school greatly helps the parish retain its mission to the poor while reaching out to new residents. Subsidized tuition, scholarships and a host of volunteers enable parents with low incomes to send their children to a Catholic elementary school.

6. They strive, not always successfully, to minister to the parish's high-rise dwellers.

Conspicuously absent is an overall, diocesan-wide strategy on the more or less successful experience of local churches in evangelizing a vertical parish. Some promising initiatives include: sending a Sunday morning bus to a high-rise for the elderly; celebrating Mass in the high-rise itself; enlisting the cooperation of building owners to post events; and drawing upon the experience of precinct captains, political workers and others.

7. Finally, they give high priority to weekday and daytime ministries.

Many inner-city parishes reflect a heavy institutional presence and so do not fit the typical urban model parish that is visibly residential. What are the institutional presences and their needs?

Marciniak, Edward and Droel, William. 1995. "The Future of Catholic Churches in the Inner City." Chicago Studies, Vol. 34, No. 2.