

Mayor does not let job as minister influence politics

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW HAVEN, Ind. — Terry McDonald is a man with two congregations. One is a church; the other is a city.

To effectively manage both, he keeps church and state as separate as possible in location and with his time.

McDonald is the mayor of New Haven and also the minister at Monson Chapel United Methodist Church. But there is no fire and brimstone in his voice, nor does he constantly intertwine biblical verses or religious terms with his speech.

"People don't like to be preached to. You have to be more of a teacher than a preacher," he said.

McDonald, 46, said there are several bad examples of politicians using faith publicly, including Pat Robertson calling for an assassination or President Clinton quoting Scripture while having an affair. He also said religious leaders involved in politics often "become more partisan than the partisans."

While the mayor contends he never hides his faith, he also said it is not necessary to be overbearing with it.

"It's not like when you're talking to him, you're talking to a pastor," said Laura Mason, a New Haven deputy clerk.

For most people, taking on one new job would

be enough to fill their time, but in 1999 McDonald decided to pursue two.

He became pastor of Monson Chapel in June 1999. In July of that year, he announced he was running for mayor after working as a police officer for 14 years.

"The Holy Spirit gave me lots and lots of strength," he said.

People from his congregation helped run his church and people from his community helped run his campaign. McDonald won the election over a three-term incumbent by less than 150 votes.

What has made the relationship work between his city and his chapel is their separation. Monson Chapel is at 11431 Lower Huntington Road near the General Motors plant, about 20 miles from New Haven. He said that distance is "wonderful" and acknowledges it would be difficult to be a minister in his home community. He is already stopped almost every time at the grocery store with questions for him as mayor. It would likely be worse if he were also a minister in the community.

"I try to keep it as separate as I possibly can," he said.

He occasionally gets calls at his office from parishioners, but he tries to keep them short. He also has city employees asking to discuss personal issues with him, and he said it would be "cold hearted" to turn them away.

FIRST MUSLIM SORORITY

Sisters embrace Greek life carefully

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"I'm obviously Muslim, you know. I cover."

Imani Abdul-Haqq keeps her bright headscarf closely around her. But when she was out shopping not long ago, a clerk focused on her keychain instead, its three Greek letters stamped in classic green.

"Oh, you're in a sorority!" the clerk said.

But not just that. America's first Muslim sorority is Abdul-Haqq's own.

The senior at North Carolina's Guilford College founded Gamma Gamma Chi this summer. She'd been looking for the full, fun college experience, but she found it hard to be a good Muslim in the standard Greek world.

"To not be part of something because you're Muslim just shouldn't be," she says.

So her new group, based in Alexandria, Va., mixes Greek accessories with its Islamic values. It has a secret ceremony and a special hand-shake, even tank tops, tote bags and printed coffee mugs, all of Abdul-Haqq's design.

Now it just needs the girls.

Gamma Gamma Chi inducted its first four members this month. It also arrived on campus, making a formal presentation at the University of Kentucky for about a dozen girls. The sorority says it has interest from schools in 16 states, plus a couple of unlikely Greek supporters.

"I dearly hope the sorority will have a chapter of its own in Pakistan someday," e-mails Hina Aman, a freshman at National University in Karachi. She heard about Gamma Gamma Chi online. "Too bad I can't be a part of it," she writes. "Sororities can, I believe, bring a big change in our society."

Here in the U.S., the goals are more simple.

"Maybe this will kill the stereotype of sororities," says Kentucky freshman Naema Shalash. "Partying, drinking, you know. It sounds pretty interesting."

But Gamma Gamma Chi does plan to party, in its own way. No men and no alcohol allowed.

The approach does get some criticism. Muslim men have written, "Why do you have to be like non-Muslims?" And some students say existing Muslim groups do just fine.

"My only question is, why?" says Jameelah Shukri, a business manager at the Al-Thalib student magazine at the University of California at Los Angeles. "We have our girl parties, we hang out, we live together. I personally don't see the need to put Greek letters to it. But I guess if it's increasing unity, more power to them."

Althia Collins says she

wants Gamma Gamma Chi to be on equal footing with other sororities. Collins is the sorority's president, Abdul-Haqq's mother and the former president of Bennett College in Greensboro. Like her daughter, she converted to Islam several years ago.

Collins says Gamma Gamma Chi eventually will take part in campus Rush

Weeks and perhaps even join the National Panhellenic Conference, an umbrella group of 26 women's fraternities and sororities.

The Indiana-based NPC says it doesn't keep membership statistics based on religion. "Part of our purpose is visibility," Collins says. "We want to show Muslim women as they really are."

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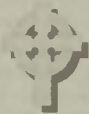


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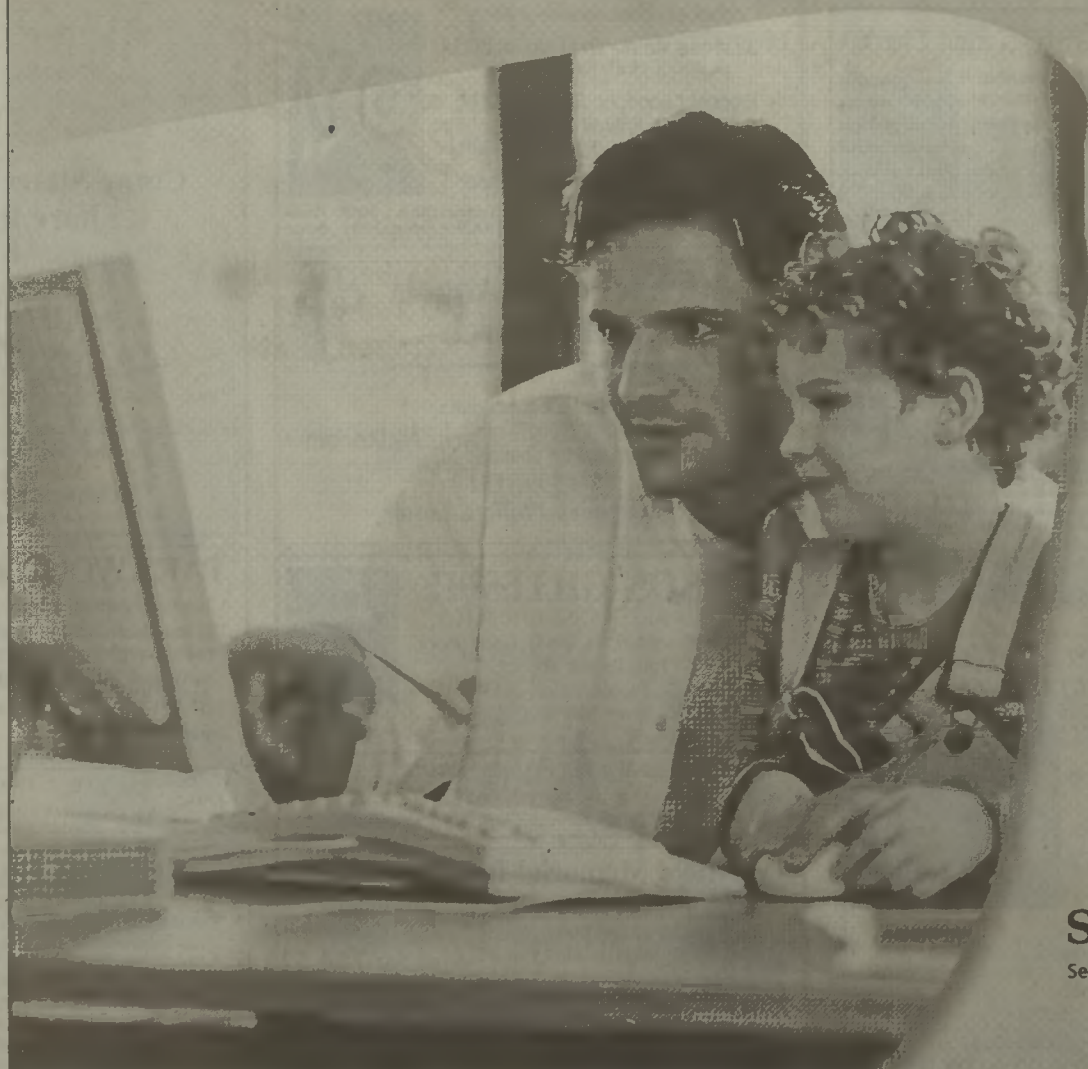
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