

# **CITY'S WOES NOT THE CHURCH'S CROSS TO BEAR**

## **COMMITTING TO JOBS AND EDUCATION SHOULD BE ARTICLE OF FAITH**

**Daily News Editorial**  
**April 3, 2007**

IT'S NOT that we don't think this city needs prayers. It does -lots of them.

But after reading a new report from Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board on the region's labor supply, we think the 5,400 people who packed Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church this weekend to pray for the end to violence in the city may have been in the wrong building, and asking the wrong guy for help.

Imagine what might have happened if those thousands of concerned citizens showed up instead at City Hall, and at the five campaign headquarters of the candidates running for mayor, demanding that the city make serious investments in jobs and education.

If they had read the report called "A Tale of Two Cities," they might have. The report presents a devastating but accurate view of Philadelphia as a city divided between educated workers and uneducated citizens living in poverty.

The research done by the Center for Labor Market Studies is the first clear picture of what any sharp observer has suspected over the past few years: We're "the next great city" - with new development, a growing downtown, revitalized neighborhoods - and yet, we are fast declining, with the highest percentage of people living in poverty among the country's 10 biggest cities. (And as we all know, we're now No. 1 in murders.)

We have an educated population of white-collar workers, and yet 45 percent of adults are not working or looking for work, which puts us almost dead-last among 100 largest cities. Twenty percent of our 16-24 year-olds are not in school or working.

And here's the most devastating fact: Our region has 83 colleges and universities that award more than 65,000 degrees. But only 20 percent of our own residents have degrees, again, putting us near rock-bottom among the country's 100 biggest cities. A quarter of our residents are high-school dropouts. It's no great leap to go from a city of uneducated, unskilled, unemployed people to a city with a huge homicide problem.

And while the Street administration has recognized that truancy and curfew must be part of our crime-fighting strategy, the city needs to do far better in making a serious commitment to jobs and education, with real action like:

- \* Start investing, not cutting. Not only was \$1 million cut from Community College's budget, but the city fails to pay its fair share of the cost of Community College, which is supposed to be borne by the state, students and the municipality. We fall short of this share by \$15 million.

- \* Commit city money to meaningful adult education. Barely a dime is currently committed.

- \* Consider innovations like completion grants: Instead of keeping our sole focus on school enrollment, we also need to focus on getting people to finish. This is especially important for those in college, and could mean incentives to complete, with tutoring, counseling and other supports.

- \* Demand ambitious goals: By 2010, if we want to double the number of people enrolled in college, let's figure out what that would take. And suppose we committed to having a job available for anyone 17 or 18 who wanted one? These are ambitious, but absolutely achievable. It means shifting our investment in the criminal-justice system to the investment in our education system. (According to the workforce investment report, every person who drops out of high school will cost taxpayers \$83,000 in criminal-justice costs.)

Poverty and lack of education are at the core of this city's problems. If our leaders won't take this on, even God can't help us. \*