

No world-class city should have blood on its streets

MY VIEW

T. Garrett Benjamin Jr.

Thank you for your editorial Dec. 28 concerning Indianapolis' record-setting homicide rate of 153 murders in 2006 and the apathetic response of the Peterson administration.

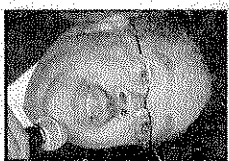
When the 50-plus pastors and ministers met in August and October with Mayor Bart Peterson, we did not ask him for money in spite of what was reported and distorted.

We asked him for leadership. We came to propose a partnership to help solve some of the problems plaguing our city, including the rising rates of homicide and violence. The ministers offered the mayor a partnership with the faith community. As of this date we have never had a formal response.

Peterson was asked to lead a public-private sector initiative to raise \$25 million to provide a social safety net for disadvantaged and disaffected young people by providing educational and recreational opportunities.

We said the city is enamored with bricks and mortar while things and drugs are allowed to flourish. What good is it to have a billion-dollar stadium if the fans come and go in fear? Personally, I am not against it being built, but I am against misquipped priorities.

Go ahead and build the stadium for \$1 billion, build the library for \$200 million, build new hotels for mega-millions, get new police uniforms for \$1 million, give police officers a well-deserved raise, give the City-County Council a raise, spend millions on a Downtown



Benjamin is bishop of Light of the World Christian Church in Indianapolis.

sidewalk. But remember, a city is only as great as its people.

If we can find the money for all these projects, why can't we find the money to curb crime by investing in our youth and young adults, the poor and disenfranchised? Twenty-five million dollars does not sound like much when you compare it to the spending frenzy taking place in our city.

We need to invest more in mentoring, tutoring, job placement and preparation, offender re-entry, anti-drug and drug treatment, parenting empowerment, and recreation programs both after school and on the weekends. What

about state-of-the-art recreation centers in the four sectors of our city that would serve youth and young adults in the evenings and weekends? This would be money well spent. It costs far less to educate and recreate than to incarcerate.

There are many good faith-based programs in existence. They just need expanded resources, and we firmly believe the mayor must take the lead in helping to raise these resources just as he has eagerly helped to raise the resources required for brick and mortar.

In August, we asked him to lead our city and the faith-based community in tangibly addressing the rising tide of violence and murder. He asked us for a plan. In October, we

gave him a plan in writing. We also demanded action because the blood of our children continued to run red in our streets. He gave us a Blue Ribbon Commission, which was supposed to report to the public on Dec. 15. We are still waiting.

He is able and an affable mayor, but it does not look like he is willing to lead this comprehensive initiative in an assertive and enthusiastic way.

Surely the Lucas Oil representatives, Jim Irsay, the Simons, the Lilly Endowment, the City-County Council, the legislature, the Colts, the Pacers and many others in the public and private sectors can see that to invest in our city's youth in a more significant way is in their best interest, as well as the best interest of the community.

All of these already help youth, but there is much more we all can do. If the mayor's response is not definitive and serious, we will do our best to present this need to all who will listen.

I admit the church can do more in changing hearts as we expect public and private sectors to do more in sharing resources.

As we approach Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, let us all double our determination to keep his dream of the "beloved community" alive. Every death diminishes us collectively and individually. Yet we are determined to have a city where God's love and peace are experienced by all. Let your voice be heard. Silence is consent. Dr. King used to quote one of the sages: Our greatest sin is not in the demonic deeds of the bad people, but our greatest sin is the appalling silence of the good people.