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For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/scenes-from-a-parish

**JAMES RUTENBECK'S SCENES FROM A PARISH
PREMIERES NATIONALLY ON THE PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2009 AT 10 PM**

A Portrait of an Urban Congregation in Turmoil

(San Francisco, CA)—In 2001, Paul O'Brien, an irreverent, young, Harvard-educated Catholic priest arrived in Lawrence, Massachusetts to take over the reins of Saint Patrick's Parish. A hundred years ago, Lawrence was a thriving mill town and Saint Patrick's was home to a large community of immigrant Irish mill workers. Today, the mills are closed, the Irish-American families are a dwindling minority and a new generation of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Vietnam and Cambodia are looking to Saint Patrick's as their spiritual home. Father Paul quickly discovers that trying to foster an inclusive community in this hard hit, multicultural parish is no mean feat. **SCENES FROM A PARISH**, directed by James Rutenbeck, will premiere nationally on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday, December 29, 2009 at 10 PM (check local listings.)

Filmed over four years, **SCENES FROM A PARISH** tells a story that is being played out in churches across the country, as neighborhood parishes struggle to serve the needs of communities transformed by rampant economic and cultural change. We watch as Father O'Brien embarks on an ambitious plan to build a church-based meal center that will feed the hungry of Lawrence. He enlists high-profile allies for help, including his Harvard classmate Conan O'Brien, while dealing with angry old timers who are dismayed by the rapid changes transforming their once traditional parish; a place that offers Spanish services and aid to members with new and frightening problems like addiction and gang activity. The story comes to life through the personal stories of several parishioners who come to the church seeking fellowship, but face obstacles that threaten to drive them apart.



Scenes from SCENES FROM PARISH, coming to Independent Lens December 2009.

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Long-time parishioner Frank Martin, along with other, older parishioners, questions Father Paul's hunger initiative. He's been helping the poor in his city for 40 years, but now finds the personal lives of those in need more and more perplexing, and his compassion is waning. Edna McGregor is also suspicious. Father O'Brien, she thinks, is neglecting his older parishioners and spending too much time playing basketball with the tough-looking neighborhood teens in the parish center. And when Saint Patrick outreach volunteer Peggy Oliveto visits a group of homeless families, she befriends a single mother named Theresa Santell. Over the years, their unlikely friendship grows more complicated, as Theresa's life circumstances and choices test the limits of Peggy's Christian love.

Elvys Guzman has arrived from the Dominican Republic, sporting tattoos, piercings and a menacing look. But in reality, Elvys is a sensitive soul trapped in a gangster's body and involvement in Saint Patrick's has transformed his life. Rosaura Vasquez, also from the Dominican Republic, must overcome her fears about singing in the all-Anglo choir.

SCENES FROM A PARISH attempts to define that elusive and fragile entity known as community. The film closely observes the faithful, who aspire to a communal "body of Christ," wrestle with their differences and with the everyday tensions threatening to undermine their Catholic ideals. Although set in Massachusetts, **SCENES FROM A PARISH** tells a universal story—one that is unfolding in communities across America, as new neighbors forge paths towards acceptance and a positive, inclusive future for their community.

To learn more about the film and the issues involved with it, visit the companion website **SCENES FROM A PARISH** interactive companion website www.pbs.org/scenes-from-a-parish. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

About the Filmmaker

James Rutenbeck's films have explored the lives of unemployed coal miners, small farmers and itinerant evangelists. *Raise The Dead* portrays the lives of holiness; preachers practicing a grassroots tradition in the shadow of televangelism. In 2000, the hour-long documentary was the only U.S. film selected for competition at Cinema du Reel and was awarded Best Independent Film at the New England Film Festival. His 1989 film *Losing Ground*, also a Cinema du Reel selection, is a psychological portrait of an Iowa family facing the loss of their family farm. His first film, *Company Town* (1984), was a meditation on the past and present in an Appalachian coal town.

Rutenbeck's body of work was featured at the 2003 Robert Flaherty International Film Seminar. His films have also been presented at the Museum of Fine Arts and Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, as well as at MoMA, the National Gallery, Double Take Documentary Film Festival, Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival, Lussas International Film Festival, Black Maria and others.

In January 2009, Rutenbeck was recipient of the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award for his work as producer and director of *Not Just a Paycheck*, a half-hour episode of the PBS series *Unnatural Causes*, about health disparities in the United States. *Not Just a Paycheck* examined the health consequences of the loss of 3000 jobs in a rural Michigan county.

Rutenbeck's editing credits include over 50 films for PBS, BBC, Channel Four (UK), Discovery Channel and Showtime. They include the 2008 ALMA award-winning *Roberto Clemente for American Experience*, the Emmy® award-winning *Siamese Twins for NOVA* and the groundbreaking *People of the Shining Path* for Britain's Channel Four. These films have also won Peabody, duPont-Columbia and other honors and awards. He was a consulting editor on the recent independent feature *American Wake*.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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