

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity  
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[www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)

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## Attention Readers

Many of you kindly included a note of support with your recent donation.

“Your work gives me hope in very dark times,” says Lois in New York.

“Thank you for your Vatican II voice of courage and perseverance. God bless,” says Maria in Michigan.

“It is a pleasure to support NCL,” says Bruce in Colorado. However, NCL needs younger types to succeed “those who created and sustained NCL over the years.”

If perchance you missed NCL’s recent donation request, there is an opportunity on page eight of this newsletter. More importantly: Send along contact information on any young adult with whom NCL should connect.

## Taking the Initiative *In the Parish*

“Most parishes are not Vatican II parishes,” claims Jack Jezreel in *A New Way to Be Church* (Orbis Books [2018], PO Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545; \$20). They have experienced renewal on the *inside*. They have 20+ ministries. “But such busyness can be an expression of distraction instead of spiritual potency,” he writes. Jezreel wants renewal that flows “from the outside in.” Full parish renewal is response to the world’s needs, especially its poor. It puts “the work of compassion and justice at the center of the parish... All the world is the geography of God and the place where faith should take us.”

Jezreel is long associated with Just Faith Ministries (PO Box 221348, Louisville, KY 40252; [www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org)), a program about parish outreach. Parish life cannot be “limited just to the good and necessary work of ecclesial ministry that occurs primarily on the parish block,” he writes. Jezreel is passionate about fostering “imagination and some experimentation” about a church for the poor.

Jezreel’s message is timely. Nonetheless, his frame of reference is a tad *churchy*. His examples are taken from dedicated

movements like Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Worker and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. He also refers to religious orders, their auxiliaries and their volunteer programs. Plus he names several inspiring Catholic personalities, like Dorothy Day (1897-1980), St. Oscar Romero (1917-1980) and St. Teresa of Kolkata (1910-1997).

But couldn’t parish renewal be from the *inside out* to affirm and perhaps mobilize its primary assets: the people of God at work in the ordinary world? Mainstream justice and peace occurs when like-minded *insiders* get together in the hospital, school, neighborhood, business setting or professional association to improve policies or institutions. The *scattered parish* is the sheriff who tirelessly seeks mental health resources for the incarcerated; the administrator who daily battles bureaucracies on behalf of the intellectually disabled; the sociologist who thoroughly studies public housing and furnishes reports to municipal leaders; the officer of the electrician’s local who insists that apprentices learn green technology and that contractors go green. A Vatican II parish has to support *middle-class holiness* through its liturgy, in the sacrament of reconciliation, throughout its fundraising, with support groups and more.

The 1977 charter for our National Center for the Laity says: “The impression is often created that one can work for justice and peace only by stepping outside of ordinary roles... The almost exclusive preoccupation with the role of the outsider as the model for social action can only distract the laity from the apostolic potential that lies at the core of their professional and occupational lives.” (Found in *Church Chicago Style*, NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$4)

## Taking the Initiative *Within the Parish*

ITEST (20 Archbishop May Dr., St. Louis, MO 63119; [www.faithscience.org](http://www.faithscience.org)) offers a 26-page booklet, *Scientists Speak of their Faith: A Model for Parish Discussion*. There is also a supplementary video showing participation at a pilot parish.

The strategy is to surface scientists of all types from within the parish; to affirm them in their work; and to show fellow parishioners that faith and science/reason are complementary paths to the one Truth.

This model, INITIATIVES assumes, can be adapted for other occupations.

### **Taking the Initiative** *For Immigrants*

Catholicism's principle of subsidiarity says that non-profit local entities are often better conduits for delivering public services than government bureaucracy. Subsidiarity tempers impersonal arbitrariness while enhancing freedom and responsibility.

BUILD (2439 Maryland Ave., Baltimore, MD 21218; [www.buildiaf.org](http://www.buildiaf.org)), a community organization of about 20 churches, a temple and several schools, has designed identification cards for its congregations. Each card has the holder's picture plus the church's logo and address. The church will distribute the cards.

BUILD got the city--the police and all other departments—to approve this card program. These cards will eliminate any apprehension immigrants and others might have in reporting crimes. City agencies, in turn, know that a card holder is part of a local community. (*Baltimore Sun*, 10/10/18)

### **Taking the Initiative** *On Wages*

Catholic social thought, the product of over 2,000 years of reflection as guided by revelation and reason, is 20+ principles that contribute to healthy societal arrangements. Those principles have to be adapted for specific situations and then applied as concrete improvements within an institution. That is, Catholicism does not know from heaven if a basic wage at a specific company should be \$25 or \$19 or \$15—though the federal minimum (\$7.25) probably does not meet Catholic criteria.

The Catholic principle of *family wage* is not invoked anymore because some people consider it sexist. Yet the principle does not say that a woman cannot be the primary wage earner; it does not say that a household cannot have two wage earners. The principle says that a just wage structure is one in which a household can if it chooses participate in a local economy on the

basis of one full-time job without constant stress. Normal participation, says Catholicism, includes the basics plus adequate resources for health care, money for the children's education, a modest amount for leisure and sufficient retirement savings. Unite Here (275 Seventh Ave. #1600, New York, NY 10001; [www.unite-here.com](http://www.unite-here.com)) has a slogan: "One job should be enough." That is Catholicism's concept of *family wage*.

Wages last year increased by the greatest percentage in ten years, says the U.S. Labor Department. The average hourly wage was up too. Unemployment was at a 49-year low. These are good trends, though they do not imply that a worker has only one job nor do these numbers include benefits or lack thereof. (*Chicago Tribune*, 11/1/18 & *Wall St. Journal*, 11/4/18)

Baggage handlers, cleaning crew members and others at the two big NYC airports and at Newark Liberty Airport will get \$19. This pay increase, coming in increments over five years, is the result of a long campaign by SEIU 32BJ (25 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10011) and others. (*N.Y. Times*, 11/30/16 & 9/28/18)

Is \$19 too high or too low? Keep NYC's cost of living in mind. Is \$15 closer to a family wage?

With much fanfare Amazon recently announced a \$15 minimum in its warehouses, offices and its physical stores, like Whole Foods. Any worker currently under \$15 gets a raise, including seasonal workers and part-time workers. The raise will take effect in stages.

Amazon is responding to the tight job market. Plus Amazon is under pressure from campaigns like Fight for \$15. It is also criticized by the White House on taxes and use of the post office. The company is vulnerable on wages because Jeff Bezos, its chairman, is worth \$165 billion while many of Bezos' employees receive means-tested benefits. Plus Amazon's libertarian philosophy comes with some bizarre and unhealthy working conditions. (*N.Y. Times*, 8/16/15 and *Hired* by James Bloodworth, Atlantic Books [2018], 26 Boswell St., London, WC1N 3JZ England)

Many Amazon workers are ambivalent about the raise because the company will now eliminate stock grants and a monthly productivity bonus. Local managers, some workers presume, will also cut individual hours. (*N.Y. Times*, 8/16/15 & 10/3/18 & 10/10/18 and *Chicago Sun Times*, 10/7/18 and *Labor Notes*

[11/18], 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210)

A higher minimum wage (either government mandated or privately instituted) assists struggling workers. Illinois Economic Policy Institute (PO Box 2378, LaGrange, IL 60525; [www.illinoisepi.org](http://www.illinoisepi.org)), looking at wage increase in ten cities, finds no negatives. Same results from University of California Berkeley (2227 Piedmont Ave., Berkeley, CA 94720; <https://escholarship.org>). In six cities studied employment actually grew. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 9/12/18 & *N.Y. Times*, 10/22/18)

A federal minimum obviously covers the most workers. New Zealand passed its first minimum wage law in 1894. President Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) included the first U.S. minimum in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. The federal minimum has been increased 22 times since then with good results. The last increase was in 2009.

The *family wage principle*, Catholicism realizes, does not address inequality. A wage increase at Amazon hardly puts a worker's wealth increase on pace with Bezos' steady wealth increase, which by one estimate more than doubled over the past 18 months.

### **Taking the Initiative** *Among Farm Workers*

Farm Labor Organizing Committee (1221 Broadway St., Toledo, OH 43609; [www.floc.com](http://www.floc.com)) negotiated contracts for about 5,000 North Carolina workers. Clayton Sinyai of Catholic Labor Network ([www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)) says this is "remarkable" because the Carolinas are *right to work* states (a misnomer); because many of the farm workers have an H2A visa at the pleasure of their employers; and because farm workers are not protected by the National Labor Relations Act--a compromise made during President Franklin Roosevelt's administration.

North Carolina General Assembly is disturbed by the farm workers' achievement. They amended a law to eliminate *dues check-off*, Sinyai reports. Normally union members authorize the payroll department to send along a portion of each paycheck to their union, just like some workers authorize a deduction for their retirement fund. Keep in mind, Sinyai concludes, that FLOC members are employed at hundreds of farms and that the modest-sized FLOC staff cannot make the rounds every other Friday to

collect dues. The check-off prohibition is now in court.

To stay current on farm workers, get *News & Views*, the newsletter of National Farm Worker Ministry (PO Box 10645, Raleigh, NC 27605; [www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org)). The current issue alerts readers to a January 28, 2019 conference in NYC. The principal sponsor is Coalition of Immokalee Workers (PO Box 603, Immokalee, FL 34143; [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)). That group and its many institutional friends want Wendy's (1 Dave Thomas Blvd., Dublin, OH 43017) to adhere to the Fair Food Program and monitor its suppliers on their treatment of farm workers.

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## **The Great Workbench**

Work in itself is capable of contributing to a spiritual life, says our National Center for the Laity. Work is not a punishment from God. The original human worked ("dressing paradise") even before the fall. Work is for the fulfillment of workers. (See *Genesis* 2:15 and *John Paul II's Gospel of Work*, NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$7)

Those who believe that work ennobles workers are wrong, writes Jonathan Malesic in *Hedgehog Review* (PO Box 400816, Charlottesville, VA 22904; Fall/18). "Work doesn't reliably deliver [on the belief] that work is indispensable to human flourishing," he claims. Work doesn't really build character and it is a cruel promise to say work is "a spiritual enterprise."

Malesic says companies that throw around "the language of self-fulfillment" are deceiving employees. The website of Wegman's Food Market, says Malesic, recruits workers to "careers" with the misleading phrase *Do what you love*. In fact the jobs involve "stocking shelves and ringing up groceries."

Malesic refers to *Bullshit Jobs* by David Graeber (Simon & Schuster [2018], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$27). It argues that plenty of workers "aren't really doing anything."

No matter what others might assume, writes Graeber, many workers are "convinced the job is pointless." These Dilbert-like workers include those in financial services, telemarketing, human resources, public relations and anyone who gives Powerpoint presentations.

Can Malesic and Graeber be correct? Is it fantasy to believe that work is participation in God's on-going creation and redemption?

## North American Spirituality

*Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003)*

The new film runs 102 minutes. Joseph Dorman and Toby Perl Freilich are its directors. Riverside Films (250 Riverside Dr. #65, New York, NY 10025) distributes it. The title is simply *Moynihan*. He was a four-term U.S. Senator from New York, our ambassador to India and to the UN, a teacher, an author (18 books and many journal articles) and a social policy expert.

Moynihan, in accord with his Catholicism, believed in objective truth. He first did research, and then devised policy positions. Sam Roberts recalls this Moynihan proverb: Yes, people are entitled to their own opinion, but not to their own facts. (*N.Y. Times*, 10/14/18)

Moynihan, in keeping with the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, favored thick local cultures, starting with the family and extending to the neighborhood, ethnic group and other communities. Such settings are incubators of moral character, particularly of responsible freedom. He did not though romanticize family life or ethnic enclaves. He was raised in a single-parent household and took jobs from a young age. Poverty is always undesirable; it is not, however, indelible.

Moynihan did not think a preference for local institutions makes government unnecessary. Federal government deals with foreign affairs, inter-city transportation, the environment, auto safety, the mail and more. Federal government also has a necessary though often supportive role in urban affairs. He was well-informed on all these topics.

Unlike anti-government Republicans and unlike so-called *new* Democrats, Moynihan's type of conservatives want more Federal allocation for effective anti-poverty programs; that is, efforts that do not employ heavy cause-and-effect analysis to isolate the poor, as if all problems are *over there*. Keep in mind that in 1996 when Congress passed President Bill Clinton's termination of AFDC, Moynihan was among the few who voted *no*. (*N.Y. Times*, 10/2/18 & *Wall St. Journal*, 10/28/18)

For more background, get *American Burke: the Uncommon Liberalism of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* by Greg Weiner (University Press of Kansas [2015], 2502 Westbrooke Cr., Lawrence, KS 66045: \$22.95). The biography is *The Gentleman from New York* by Godfrey

Hodgson (Houghton Mifflin [2000], 3 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$38).

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## 125+ Years

### *Of Catholic Social Thought*

“Theologically understood racism is more than a sin,” writes Joseph Flipper of Bellarmine University. Racism “constitutes a heresy that undermines the very identity of the church... [It] threatens to co-opt Christianity because it offers a powerful anti-Christian narrative about who we are as human beings.” (*Commonweal* [10/5/18], 475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115; [www.commonwealmagazine.org](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org))

Flipper equates racism with heresy at the conclusion of an article about Fr. Henri de Lubac, SJ (1896-1991). De Lubac was with the French resistance in World War II, though he and his friends did not use guns. He was regularly in hiding, yet found ways to assert that Christian belief cannot be squared with Nazi ideology and practice.

Flipper refers to de Lubac's 1947 book, *Catholicism* (Ignatius Press, 1348 Tenth Ave., San Francisco, CA 94122; \$21.21). It touches on many topics, including the unity of humankind. In the 1980s de Lubac wrote down his memories of incidents during the resistance, published as *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism* (Ignatius Press [1990]). There is no such thing as Aryan Christianity, he says. The church is one. Despite what anyone might think, there is no *tolerable* racism. A Christian is obliged to block all racist contagion.

In the 1950s the Vatican placed restrictions against de Lubac and many other pioneering theologians. Yet in 1960 St. John XXIII (1881-1963) asked him to assist in preparing for Vatican II (1962-1965). And in 1983 St. John Paul II (1920-2005) named him a non-bishop cardinal (a rare designation).

Arthur Falls (1901-2000) of Chicago also put racism in the heresy category, says Lincoln Rice in *Healing the Racial Divide* (Wipf & Stock [2014], 199 W. Eighth Ave. #300, Eugene, OR 97401; \$20.80). Falls, a medical doctor and surgeon, founded the first Catholic Worker house in Chicago in 1936 and is responsible for the integrated masthead of *Catholic Worker* newspaper. Over the years he founded or served on the boards of dozens of pro-integration groups here and nationally. Falls was militant on race, but opposed black-only

approaches in favor of moral suasion, tedious insider efforts and persistent direct action.

Racism is a heretical violation of the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ, Falls believed. When it comes to the body of Christ, he often said, “the doctrine is mythical not mystical” to too many Catholics.

Catholicism preaches against the sin of racism, though some Catholics have been hypocritical about race relations. A focus on prejudice as an individual sin does not impress all Catholics. In fact, such moralizing can be counterproductive. Would this evil be better combated with education on heresy?

Rice draws upon *Hearing Past the Pain* by Jon Nilson (Paulist Press, 2008) to explain the difference between sin and heresy. To commit a sin requires knowledge and volition. But a heretic can think she or he is defending something essential to the faith. A sinful act hurts the sinner and hurts the one from whom money or dignity is robbed. Plus to a degree, each sin hurts the trust necessary for a society.

A heresy, by contrast, “is not dependent on whether one is aware of his or her heretical beliefs,” explains Rice. Racism is a heresy that distorts a revealed mystery and strikes a blow against the integrity of faith itself. Racism is not only an ethical problem, it undermines Christian unity—even when racists think they are moral Christians. (See, *Gospel According to the Klan* by Kelly Baker, University Press of Kansas [2017], 2502 Westbrooke Cr., Lawrence, KS 66045: \$24.95. For more on Falls, get *One in Christ* by Karen Johnson, Oxford University Press [2018], 2001 Evans Rd., Cary, NC 27513; \$34.95)

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## Rest in Peace

### *Deacon Kenneth Bell (1925-2018)*

Bell was a Methodist as a youngster. His questions about life were not, however, adequately addressed until he met a handful of Catholics working with him at an industrial products company during World War II. He soon became a Catholic. A classmate from night school subsequently suggested he attend a Saturday morning gathering of CISCA (Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action).

CISCA was founded in 1927 by Fr. Joseph Reiner, SJ (1881-1934). It was a citywide

organization for young adults. In Bell’s era, Fr. Martin Carrabine, SJ (1894-1965) was CISCA’s leader. (See *One in Christ* by Karen Johnson, previously cited.)

In the days after World War II about 400 young people were attending the weekly CISCA gatherings. Its leaders often hung out in the afternoon. Bell was invited to join them. In 1946 he was heavily involved with CISCA, serving on its staff for a time. He assisted in the production of its *Today* magazine and wrote some reviews. Plenty of socializing occurred; enough that many years later Bell could name scores of young adults, including *who married whom*.

One August day in 1946, Bell was in the CISCA office. Jeanne Skepnek, active in Young Christian Students, floated in. The two married in June 1948.

It wasn’t just socializing and love life in those days, Bell once told INITIATIVES. In various ways it amounted to “finding God in the glorious company of one another.” There was strong foundation in Christian life. The young people read and discussed social encyclicals, writings of the saints and Catholic novelists. They also brought a Catholic sensibility to their interest in music and the arts. It was a time for building faith, enriching intellect and lifting spirits. Vatican II (1962-1965) did not appear spontaneously, Bell understood. In those days after World War II “there was life and love and thought in the church that somehow found its way into the Council.”

For many years Bell served as an auditor and accountant for numerous insurance companies, during which time he and Jeanne raised nine children. They were involved with Christian Family Movement for 18 years. Bell, in addition to other committees, was for a time a board member of Catholic Council on Working Life, the predecessor of our National Center for the Laity. In 1978, already involved in parish activities, he was ordained a deacon. Upon “retirement” Bell was a business manager for two churches in INITIATIVES’ southwest side neighborhood. He “cut back” in 2012—mostly out of concern for safe driving.

Bell was what NCL calls a *full-time Christian*. “The faith I know and love and have practiced ever since arose largely in that time of CISCA formation,” he said.

## Happenings

Our U.S. bishops' department of Justice, Peace & Human Development (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) sponsors its annual Social Ministry Gathering on February 2-5, 2019 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in DC.

Our National Center for the Laity is co-sponsoring a conference titled "Option for the Poor: Engaging Our Social Tradition." The date is March 21-23, 2019. The place is University of Notre Dame (1212 Geddes Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556; <https://socialconcerns.nd.edu>). There is a discount for registrations before February 1, 2019. As with previous collaborations between NCL and Notre Dame, NCL will have an information table in McKenna Hall and will host a caucus, probably at Rohr's.

St. Elizabeth Seton (1774-1821) is the subject of a March 30, 2019 seminar at Cushwa Center (U. of Notre Dame, 407 Geddes Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556; [www.cushwa.nd.edu](http://www.cushwa.nd.edu)). The main presenter is Catherine O'Donnell of Arizona State University and the author of *Elizabeth Seton: American Saint* (Cornell University Press [2018], 512 E. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850; \$36.95).

Seton founded the first congregation of women religious based in the U.S., of which there are now nine clusters plus some in Canada. In her thorough book O'Donnell quotes from the Rule those Sisters of Charity adopted in 1812: We have "no cloister but public streets or hospital rooms, no enclosure but obedience, no grate but the fear of God."

Two other notable U.S. Catholics are subjects of recent videos. *A Glorious Life* (<https://gloria.tv> or found on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) is a biography of Cardinal Francis George, OMI (1937-2015), who was born in Chicago and who served as archbishop here. *Frances Cabrini: The People's Saint* (In My Brothers Shoes, 435 W. Diversey Pkwy. #200, Chicago, IL 60614; [www.mothercabrinfilm.com](http://www.mothercabrinfilm.com)) is a biography of St. Frances Cabrini, MSC (1850-1917), the founder of schools, orphanages and hospitals--totaling 67 institutions in New York, Chicago and several other cities. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 11/18/18)

Catholic Theological Union (5401 S. Cornell Ave. Chicago, IL 60615; [www.ctu.edu](http://www.ctu.edu)) celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Mass at nearby St. Thomas the Apostle on May 5, 2019. CTU, a gem within Chicago Catholicism, offers graduate courses and degrees to seminarians, to those already ordained, to religious and to many lay people. Its faculty and students come from all corners. It also offers many enrichment events, including a May 24, 2019 trip to the Holy Land.

From CTU's inception, National Center for the Laity leaders were part of the mix. A former CTU president signed NCL's charter and for some time NCL maintained an office at CTU.

"Business and Catholic Social Thought" is a June 2-5, 2019 seminar. The host is Mendoza School of Business (University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556; [www.mendoza.nd.edu](http://www.mendoza.nd.edu)). The seminar will explore Catholic principles and affirm business practices that enhance the common good. John A. Ryan Institute (2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105; [www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies](http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies)) is the seminar's promoter. The Institute will accept 15 people who want to participate in the June gathering.

In October 1986 St. John Paul II (1920-2005) spoke in Assisi. He made this distinction: We need *prophets of peace* who fill "our eyes with visions of peace. They release energies for a new language of peace, for new gestures of peace... [And] peace awaits its *builders*. Let us stretch our hands toward our brothers and sisters, to encourage them to build peace upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom."

Environmental Peacebuilding Association ([www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org](http://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org)) is prophetic, but is also for insiders: How to respond quickly to conflict, to manage disputed natural resources, to continue mediation, to dispose of weapons, to maintain security operations and more. Its first international conference will be held October 23-25, 2019 at the University of California Irvine. Participants will include teachers, researchers, engineers, government officials, students and others interested. More information from EPA's website.

Yeshua Catholic Leadership Institute (208 E. North St., Durand, IL 61024; [www.yeshualeader.com](http://www.yeshualeader.com)) is a training and support resource for laity. It regularly facilitates "encounter" sessions—either one day or over two days. Some participants receive additional leadership training. The Institute goes further with

individual mentoring plus several cyber-resources, including on-line video talks about various Catholic topics.

“An epidemic of loneliness” is spreading across our society, says Arthur Brooks of American Enterprise Institute (1789 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)). He draws upon *Them: Why We Hate Each Other & How to Heal* by Ben Sasse (St. Martin’s Press [2018], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010; \$28.99) to name symptoms of this epidemic. They include suicide rates, drug addiction and prolonged escape into cyberspace. (*N.Y. Times*, 11/24/18)

A national Inner Peace Corps might be one line of response to such an epidemic, writes Maria Shriver in her blog, *The Sunday Paper* ([www.mariashriver.com](http://www.mariashriver.com); 11/18/18). People don’t leave their current jobs to join the corp. Rather, social workers, first responders, clergy, student leaders, nurses and others agree to network; maybe through a website or an 800 number. Those feeling vulnerable contact the network and are guaranteed a practical response. Shriver wants suggestions from INITIATIVES’ readers.

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## INITIATIVES

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Editor: Bill Droel ([wdroel@cs.com](mailto:wdroel@cs.com)).

NCL was founded to continue the discussion prompted by the Advent 1977 *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. NCL’s board includes Charles DiSalvo, Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, John Hazard, Frosty Pipal and Lauren Sukal.

NCL’s archives are in Alter Library (Mt. St. Joseph University, 5701 Delhi Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45233).

Fr. Sinclair Oubre (1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642) is a diocesan director of Apostleship of the Sea ([www.aos-usa.org](http://www.aos-usa.org)) and he is moderator of Catholic Labor Network (7145 Roosevelt Ave., Falls Church, VA 22042)—the group that hosts the cyber-edition of NCL’s newsletters (<http://catholiclabor.org/library/national-center-for-the-laity>). *The Working Catholic* blog also appears on the CLN site under the “Blogs” heading.

CLN is like NCL. Both have the same three letters in their acronym. Smile. But CLN and NCL have a difference or two. CLN concentrates on workers who belong to unions or who seek union representation. NCL, by contrast, tracks many work-related topics and is directed to any and all workers: homemakers, executives, journalists, health care professionals, students, union members and more.

“The heresy of radical individualism [distorts] many areas of our faith,” Oubre recently told *Catholic News Service* (9/3/18). “Like, a lack of knowledge about why unions were formed, and a general ignorance of what options workers have.” Too many Catholics do “not realize that the church has favored workers’ associations, or that the church even has a teaching that has to do with the workplace.”

Oubre continues: “From the 1930s to the 1950s, there was a real effort by communists to take over the U.S. unions, and in some cases, they were successful.” Instead of reacting against unions all together, Catholics “instead set up labor schools by the hundreds in parish basements.” (NCL’s predecessor organization, Catholic Labor Alliance, was among those labor schools. CLA was founded in 1943 and renamed Catholic Council on Working Life in the early 1960s.) These labor schools “taught workers their rights under the law and Robert’s Rules of Order. They encouraged Catholic workers to run for union office, and bring their Catholic social teachings to bear,” Oubre told *CNS*.

Oubre is concerned that unions have embraced too many facets of the cultural wars that are tangential to the primary purpose of a union, positions that “are not in line with Catholic teaching... However, the church and labor have been here before.” We cannot write off a whole group because part of their agenda is misguided. “Rather, we are called to engage these groups, be active in the organizations, and like in the past, direct these organizations in ways that respect God’s truth.”

By the way, Apostleship of the Sea (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [jokereke@uscpcb.org](mailto:jokereke@uscpcb.org)) can use dedicated volunteers. When a ship docks in a U.S. port, its sailors usually have restricted shore leave. AOS assists them with practical details and attends to their spiritual concerns. (*Our Sunday Visitor* [11/10/18], 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750)