

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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Covid 19

- What is the proper relationship between individual liberty and responsibility to community; between *freedom from* and *freedom for*?
- What is the relationship between federal government and state government, in good times and in bad?
- Is each life equally inviolable and inherently dignified or in crisis circumstances are some lives more important than others?
- Are there any positives to a building-less church?
- What are the positives and negatives of a health care system with thousands of interdependent entities—governmental, non-profit and for-profit? Is it really a system?
- Do public health and the economy really differ from each other?
- Why are the rates of chronic disease and infection higher in certain neighborhoods?
- Isn't decent housing a form of health care?
- If the distinction between *essential workers* and *non-essential workers* is useful in an emergency, why are those essential workers (hospitalists, nurses, lab technicians, janitors, house parents for intellectually disabled, bus drivers, grocery clerks, delivery drivers, homemakers, pizza makers, meat processors, nursing home aides, garbage collectors, public safety officers, farm workers and more) inadequately paid? Why is it, as Christopher Borrelli notes in *Chicago Tribune* (4/26/20), that "many of the workers who keep this country humming are the same people we regard as social wallpaper and take for granted"? In other words, why is the essential the least visible?
- Are there any effective local efforts (on the part of unions, churches, business associations, veterans' groups or community organizations) to alleviate wage and wealth inequality and concretely address the good of public health we hold in common? Please tell INITIATIVES.

Attention Readers

Tax Note: If you are 72 and taking a required IRA minimum distribution, all or some of it can go directly to a charity and you receive a tax benefit.

For example, if your required distribution is \$2,500 you can donate \$1,000 directly to National Center for the Laity. You only pay taxes on \$1,500; not on the \$1,000 donation. Put it this way: You give \$1,000 of the \$2,500 to NCL but it only costs you \$800 because you saved approximately \$200 in taxes. Check with your investment advisor.

Taking the Initiative

For the Family

Social policies must support family life as it really is, says David Brooks in *The Atlantic* (600 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20037; 3/20). Currently the dominant type of family is "the stressed family." These are perhaps blended or single-parent. Today's breadwinner(s) might hold two jobs and/or work in excess of 50 hours. The family may move frequently. Grandparents live some distance away.

Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (3460 Lexington Ave. N, Suite 300 Shoreview, MN 55126; www.mape.org) faced a common challenge: How to get younger members involved in the organization. Instead of the usual *ex nihilo* approach, MAPE leaders listened to those younger members. Several expressed a need to care for a newborn, an ill parent and the like. A meeting attracted 75. The younger members then committed to research and one-to-one conversations with colleagues. A booklet of stories was produced and distributed to government officials and the public. After two years of this campaign, MAPE won six weeks of paid leave for both parents. By May 2019 all state employees were covered. The effort grew into a coalition and in March 2020 the Minnesota House approved an insurance pool for paid family and medical leave for all workers; up to 12 weeks off when caring for an ill parent or a

child issue. For more on the coalition and the legislation, contact AARP Minnesota (1919 University Ave. #500, St. Paul, MN 55104; www.paidleavemn.org). (*Labor Notes* [1/3/17], 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210; www.labornotes.org & *Star Tribune*, 3/6/20)

In the real world, Brooks says, a stressed family can function with sufficient support. Yet in reacting to family issues, “conservatives insist that we can bring the nuclear family back.” Their ideal family, however, is imaginary. This nuclear family model was an exception, Brooks continues. It was dominant only from about 1950 to 1965. Further, it was never as autonomous as advertised because it was dependent on social ties among similar families.

In preaching to others about the ideal of a stable family, these conservatives “ignore [that] they can afford to purchase the support that an extended family [of years gone by] used to provide,” says Brooks. Meanwhile progressives don’t comment on the stressed model “because they don’t want to seem judgmental.”

Any improvement in family life absolutely depends on cultural support and pro-family social policy including a family wage, subsidized early education, guaranteed parental leave and perhaps family allowance.

Taking the Initiative *For the Environment*

The collected essays of Wendell Berry from 1969-2017 are in a two-volume box set titled *What I Stand On* (The Library of America [2020]; \$75). Editor Jack Shoemaker describes Berry as “our essential voice on the cultural and ecological crisis brought on by industrialization, technology, and market economy, urging us to live differently, better, more sustainably.” Berry is a Kentucky farmer, a poet, novelist, short story writer. His former teacher, Wallace Stegner (1909-1993), says Berry “is one of the most provocative and thoughtful essayists alive.”

Though the collection addresses a wide range of concerns, Berry’s starting point is always one’s particular place: “What I stand for is what I stand on.” The essays expose the devastating consequences of the global economy, the myth of unlimited growth at any cost, and unquestioned technological progress as seen, for example, in the harmful practices of agribusiness, strip mining and clear-cut logging. Conversely, the essays also speak to the healing

possibilities of locally based economies, good work, neighborliness, and caring for one’s home place and community.

In his 2012 Jefferson Lecture to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Berry contrasts those who exploit the land and its people solely for profit with those motivated by affection, by “such love for a place and its life that they want to preserve it and remain in it.”

On good work, he writes: “Good human work honors God’s work...To work without pleasure or affection, to make a product that is not both useful and beautiful is to dishonor God, nature, the thing that is made, and whomever it is made for.”

Regarding Christians’ culpability with the desecration of so many places, Berry observes: “The Bible leaves no doubt at all about the sanctity of the act of world-making, or of the world that was made...How can modern Christianity have so solemnly folded its hands while so much of the work of God has and is being destroyed?”

Five years ago Pope Francis, also invoked God’s intention in writing that true economic progress depends entirely on preserving our environment and a “rich and beautiful” environment depends on responsible production, distribution and consumption. Obtain his 2015 encyclical *Care for Our Common Home* from National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$12.50).

To keep current on environmental topics from around the globe, try www.350.org.

Franciscan Action Network (PO Box 29106, Washington, DC 20017; www.franciscanaction.org) tracks news and provides resources. Agreeing with Francis’ “that everything in the world is connected,” FAN also covers peace and human rights.

Green Faith (104 Mt. Tabor Rd., Buchanan, MI 49107; www.swmichinterfaith.org) is a religious coalition in the southwest corner of Michigan, north of South Bend, IN. It lobbies for the environment and for peace and human rights.

Finally, Catholic Climate Covenant (415 Michigan Ave. NE #260, Washington, DC 20017; www.catholicclimatecovenant.org) invites groups to sign its *Catholic Climate Declaration*.

Taking the Initiative

Green Janitors

About 75% of the two million members of Service Employees International Union have, along with many others, been on the job fighting Covid 19. They work as janitors in airports, hospitals, nursing homes, facilities for the intellectually disabled and the like. Some are nurses and pharmacists. The 25% not on the front line include those in SEIU who are college faculty and some office personnel. (*N.Y. Times*, 5/24/20)

Members of SEIU Local 26 (1620 Central Ave. NE #177, Minneapolis, MN 55413; www.seiu26.org) have taken on additional duty. For four months prior to the virus outbreak, its leaders discussed environment issues with student groups and with community groups like Environment Minnesota (211 N. First St. #480, Minneapolis, MN 55401; www.environmentminnesota.org), an alliance of labor, business and engineering groups. Local 26 made a list of achievable green improvements. In late February 2020 the union staged a short strike to bring attention to environmental health and to a family wage. In its new contract, employers agree to reduce energy use in buildings and to move away from toxic cleaning supplies. The local's tactic is now considered the first climate strike in the U.S. Local 26's effort will continue as part of a national network, (www.bargainingforthecommongood.org).

Local 26 is noteworthy because common opinion holds that unions exist only to raise wages; that they do not care about the longer term viability of an employer or about the health and safety of the public they serve. Also because some assume that any pro-environment measure comes at the expense of union jobs and family wages. (*Catholic Labor Network* [5/15/20]; www.catholiclabor.org and *Labor Notes* [4/30/20], 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210; www.labornotes.org)

Taking the Initiative

For Labor Relations

NCL's friends at Catholic Labor Network (Georgetown, 3700 O St. NW #209 Maguire, Washington, DC 20057; www.catholiclabor.org) hosted a virtual happy hour on May 1, 2020, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. During the party, Fr. Sinclair Oubre recounted the history of CLN. It began in March

1996, though of course CLN has institutional and personal antecedents.

Several members of Oubre's family were members of the Carpenters' Union, including his father who later was in the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union. So too upon graduation were many of Oubre's classmates who worked in the oil industry. As a seminarian in Houston, Oubre saw a booklet in the student government office: Pope Leo XIII's (1810-1903) encyclical of 1891, *On the Condition of Labor*. "I was astounded that at the end of the 19th century, a pope wrote a strong critique of Marxist socialism and of free market capitalism, while offering a third way that promoted private property, subsidiarity, the common good, and the dignity of the human person," Oubre told us. This was different from the religion presented in his Catholic high school. This encyclical motivated him to take as many courses as possible "focused on Catholic social teaching and work."

Eventually Oubre got acquainted with priests and other Catholics interested in labor topics, including Chicago native Msgr. George Higgins (1916-2002), Fr. Ed Boyle, SJ (1931-2007) at the Boston Labor Guild and Bishop John McCarthy (1930-2018) of Texas. In 1995 Oubre's interest focused on lockouts and strikes in Decatur, IL. He thus called Fr. Martin Mangan (1929-2001), who was assigned to St. James in Decatur. "When we sat down at a local restaurant," Oubre said, "I was ready to ask Mangan how to be a labor priest, but before the words got out of my mouth, he was asking me how to be a labor priest." Some meetings followed, leading to CLN.

CLN recently took a major step by raising some money and making Clayton Sinyai its executive director. Visit the CLN website for informative blogs and its list of Catholic institutions that abide by our Catholic doctrine on labor relations.

Oubre, in addition to other duties, is involved with Apostleship of the Sea and is a member of the Seafarers International Union. He reports that in June 2020 the U.S. Coast Guard implemented legislation guaranteeing that U.S. and foreign seafarers have shore leave, effective after COVID-19 is defeated.

There was never a worker-priest experiment in the U.S., as in France, Belgium and elsewhere. Some Protestants in Europe also tried the experiment. The Europeans are still connected through Christians in Secular Ministry

(www.chrism.org.uk) and its monthly journal, *Ministers-At-Work*.

NCL does not suggest that the U.S. try worker-priests. NCL, taking cues from Vatican II (1962-1965), believes that the whole church—clergy, professional lay ministers and lay faithful—must be in dialogue with the world of work. Indeed there are hundreds of priests and lay ministers, often in immigrant parishes, who already deal with work issues. Plus, NCL happily notes, there are thousands of ordinary Catholics who with colleagues take the initiative to advance justice and peace in their offices, police departments, unions, hospitals, businesses, schools and other settings.

For U.S. Catholicism, the challenge is for every homemaker, student, nurse, administrator, lawyer, executive and civil servant to be what Kimball Baker calls a labor apostle. His book, *Go To the Worker* (NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$18) devotes a chapter to each of ten such U.S. apostles. Several are priests; others are lay people, including NCL founder Ed Marciniak (1917-2004). Baker's title is taken from the aforementioned *On the Condition of Labor* encyclical of 1891: "Go to the worker, especially where workers are poor; and in general go to the poor."

Work Prayers

Best Life Ever

"This life is after all a miracle and we ought to pay fierce attention every moment, as much as possible," writes Brian Doyle (1956-2017) in his posthumously published *One Long River of Song* (Little, Brown [2019]; \$17.99). Its

readers have the pleasure of spending hours with a gifted writer of expansive spirit.

Before his death from a brain tumor, Doyle was the longtime editor of the now defunct *Portland Magazine*. He also wrote many books of essays, as well as poems, a novella and several novels. He was included seven times in *Best American Essays*.

Doyle was a person in love with "this blistering perfect terrible world." His writings on the natural world earned numerous awards. He wrote about raptors, sturgeons, hummingbirds, frogs, moles, mountains and rivers. He had fascinating takes on the joy of basketball, the craft of writing, the awkward exhilaration of first kisses, the unfathomable gift of friendship. *One Long River* includes a brilliant piece on William Blake (1757-1827), surely a kindred spirit. Many of his most touching essays are about the grace-filled, ordinary experiences of being a husband, father, brother, son.

Doyle was an Irish-American, a faithful U.S. citizen and a Catholic. All three descriptors came into play in his worldview. It is evident in his wit, his unbounded curiosity and his deeply sacramental apprehension of things. He saw seemingly pedestrian objects and events as emblematic of Mystery, often exposing the hidden humor and the heartbreaking poignancy of everyday human experiences.

In his essay, "Last Prayer" he writes, "Dear Coherent Mercy: Thanks. Best life ever...no man was ever more grateful for Your profligate generosity, and here at the end, here in my last lines, I close my eyes and weep with joy that I was alive, and blessed beyond measure, and might well be headed home to the incomprehensible Love from which I came, mewling, many years ago."

Work and Art

The Man Who Said No

What would I have done? Do I have the moral courage to oppose what I know to be evil? What price am I willing to pay for my convictions? What difference can one person's resistance make?

These unsettling questions come to a viewer of Terrance Malick's *A Hidden Life* (Searchlight Studio, 2019), a film based on the story of an Austrian farmer, Franz Jägerstätter (1907-1943), whose lonely refusal to pledge loyalty to Hitler led to his incarceration and eventual execution. He takes his stand while

everyone else in his village is willing--either from personal assent or fear of the consequences--to sign a fealty oath to the führer. Jägerstätter's neighbors, his pastor and even the bishop advise him to get on board, arguing that his stubborn resistance makes no difference. How can he throw his life away and allow his family to suffer? He is given numerous opportunities to rescind his decision while suffering the deprivations and harshness of imprisonment, and the agony of separation from his wife and children. He makes no long explanations for his steadfastness refusal, simply stating, "I cannot do what I know to be wrong."

A Hidden Life is as beautiful and ennobling as it is troubling. Malick's style is meditative and exploratory. It is philosophically grounded, but not in an overly intellectual manner. Malick's approach, here and in his other films, is searching and questioning, rather than polemical. As he tells the story of one man, he implicitly draws his viewers into a reflection on what response they would make in Jägerstätter's shoes. That Jägerstätter is an Everyman rather than as an outsized hero brings his sacrifice closer to home. Malick renders Jägerstätter not as a person who is out to change the world; he does not judge others; he simply feels he needs to do the right thing. Which he does.

Franz Jägerstätter was beatified by the Catholic Church in 2007.

By the way, Jägerstätter was lost to history until Gordon Zahn (1918-2007), while researching World War II, uncovered the story. Zahn's biography is *In Solitary Witness* (Templegate Publs., 1964).

125+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Saint Paul VI (1897-1978) is credited with launching a *new evangelization* with his December 1975 encyclical *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. He did not use that exact term, but says: We expect "a fresh forward impulse capable of creating within a church still more firmly rooted in the undying power and strength of Pentecost a new period of evangelization."

It was Saint John Paul II (1920-2005) who coined the term. Speaking in Haiti in May 1983 he said, "Evangelization will gain its full energy if it is a commitment not to re-evangelize but to a New Evangelization, new in its ardor, methods and expression." He repeatedly used the

phrase, particularly in his December 1990 encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer*.

A new evangelization is urgently needed. However, the term itself neutralizes the good outcome it intends—at least in our U.S. context. The word *evangelization* in this country is utterly associated with evangelical Christianity and thus conveys nearly the opposite of its Catholic meaning.

Yes, Catholicism's new evangelization means sharing one's faith. But even on the personal level it is not about proselytizing. A modern person "listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [a person] does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses," Paul VI told lay people in October 1974. He repeats the *talk-is-chatter* admonition in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. "The gospel must be related to people's actual lives, personal and social," the encyclical insists. Paul VI also says that "the world is the only subject that interests God."

Catholicism's prior evangelization lasted from, let's say, 1517 (the Protestant Reformation) until 1962-1965 (Vatican II). It focused on winning back *wayward souls*; on recruiting individuals to church membership. There were of course creative modifications among some missionaries. For example, Fr. Isaac Hecker, CSP (1819-1888), who founded the Paulists, pioneered a U.S. strategy that begins with the aspirations of the world, not with the internal concerns of Church leaders.

During the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens (1904-1996) of Belgium and Cardinal Giovanni Montini, who became Paul VI, said that most of the world does not care about the internal needs of the Church. Out of their determination came the outward-looking Vatican II documents *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Ever since Vatican II, it is improper for Catholic evangelization to concentrate only on the internal life of the church.

It is clear that new evangelization is not a specialized activity of clergy, vowed religious and other ministry professionals. It is a mission for lay people "in the affairs of the world," says Paul VI in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. The laity's mission field "is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media." Catholic evangelization has to be situated where the evangelizers are. The laity are

not bringing Christ to the marketplace in a proselytizing sense, but they illuminate the gospel that is “latent but already present and active” in the community, around the home and in the workplace.

In INITIATIVES’ opinion lay people will not readily embrace this challenge if it is called by a term associated with door-knocking or buttonholing. The term *evangelization of culture* is perhaps better because it points the process outward. But even that term won’t catch on. Catholicism has a social principle called *inculturation*. It is the strategy that Pope Francis suggests for Catholicism in the Amazon region. Although the term inculturation avoids the proselytizing notion of evangelization, it too is hard to grasp in a busy clinic hallway, a neighborhood haunt, a union hall or in civic settings.

To be continued...

Rest in Peace

Jane Clark (1924-2020)

Clark was among those pioneering Chicago Catholics who anticipated Vatican II (1962-1965). Through many efforts, she pushed the church to include lay people, to practice ecumenism, to consistently apply the *observe-judge-act* method and to live the gospel in their

families, community and work. Clark, with husband John whom she first met at age six, participated in our NCL’s founding convention at Notre Dame University in March 1979. She was involved in numerous other groups, including NCL’s predecessor, Catholic Council on Working Life.

Clark’s fervor began in her own family and was reinforced by Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters during her grammar school and high school years and again at St. Mary’s College in South Bend, IN. Back in Chicago, Msgr. Jack Egan (1916-2001) and Patrick (1911-1974) and Patty (1913-2005) Crowley recruited the Clarks for the lay-led family life groups, CANA and Christian Family Movement.

Clark was active in her River Forest, IL parish, leading it through the Vatican II reforms. Her home was a hub for family and community gatherings.

Did Clark’s involvements come at the expense of family life? Hardly. She and John raised nine children. She prepared daily meals, was dedicated to setting a welcoming table while using what her children call “inventive recipes.”

Clark was nearly the last of her generation of active lay Catholics. Who is replacing her? Are there any viable organizations for young adult Christians who are serious about their worldly vocation?

Happenings

The Ethics and Trust in Finance Prize (Observatoire de la Finance, 16 Chemin des Clochettes, Geneva 1206, Switzerland; www.ethicsinfinance.org) is for those under 35 who work or study finance with an imagination for how “financial institutions, together with their stakeholders, can balance the desire for growth, security and stability with aspirations to provide a meaningful response to the changing needs of the communities in which they operate.” Its eighth annual ceremony, featuring a panel on finance institutions serving the post-pandemic world and a second panel on finance education for a post-pandemic world, was held virtually. The deadline for the next round is May 31, 2021.

Fr. Charles Hoffacker of Maryland writes INITIATIVES about Frances Perkins (1880-1965). She was the first woman to serve as a U.S. Cabinet member, as labor secretary through the long presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945). Perkins is the person to thank for formulating and then implementing all of the New Deal reforms that deal with worker health and safety: the illegality of child labor, unemployment insurance, Social Security and more. Her faith was a constant guidepost and support. In difficult times she visited church before heading to the office. She made monthly weekend retreats at a Catonsville, MD convent with the All Saints Sisters, an order of Anglican Catholics. Perkins became a lay associate of the order and in 2014 was declared a saint. Her feast day is May 13th. There is a Frances Perkins Center (www.francesperkinscenter.org) in Newcastle, ME. The biography is *The Woman Behind the New Deal* by Kristin Downey (Doubleday [2009]; \$18).

Stefan Gigacz (sgigacz2007@gmail.com) sends INITIATIVES a note from Australia inviting readers to sign-up for his cyber-newsletter on specialized Catholic Action (capital A). Gigacz, who has international

contacts, leads the Australian Cardijn Institute (www.josephcardijn.com). It maintains a thorough history of Catholic Action.

Cardinal Joseph Leo Cardijn (1882-1967) of Belgium pioneered a method of young adult Christian formation known as the Inquiry Method of *observe, judge and act*. It was the basis of several groups in Western Europe and then spread to North America, onto Bavaria, Poland, New Zealand and Australia and more recently to Philippines, Republic of Guinea, El Salvador, Chile and elsewhere. The groups were collectively known as Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne or by the acronym Jocists.

Lots of pastoral programs aimed at young adults want to eventually get them into church and involved in the parish. The Cardijn groups were different. They said that young adults are the church and so the formation occurs within small groups of those in one or another occupation or status. The groups are led by a young adult, though a priest or lay minister serves as a resource. Further, these groups said that talks in a parish hall don't do the trick. Adult formation has to include action in one's milieu, however modest. A person's growth occurs when, subsequent to an action, the group reflects on it.

In the U.S. the main Cardijn groups were Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students and then Christian Family Movement. For an inside look at how specialized Catholic Action developed in the U.S. get *Patty Crowley: Lay Pioneer* (\$5) and *The YCWI Remember* (\$8) from NCL (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629).

Journal of Catholic Social Thought (800 E. Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085; www1.villanova.edu/jcst) is looking for contributors to its next two issues that will reflect on *Justice in the World*, a 1971 document by an international synod of Catholic bishops. The journal editors want to know "how does this document help us to assess the world we live in."

The 1971 Synod, convened by Saint Paul VI (1897-1978), dealt with two topics; one being justice. On that topic, the bishops issued this short document (18 pages in one edition). Here are two of its main points.

Some Christians think about justice as an optional virtue; something for those who have spare time or for specialists. Many Christians think that a parish justice committee is one more among many; that its agenda is for those who are "into that kind of thing." *Justice in the World* reminds us that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world [is] a constitutive dimension" of a Christian's life. That is, like praying the Bible or participating in the sacraments, organizing for justice is essential.

The bishops distinguish between the big C Church (its institutions and its personnel) and the small c church (all the faithful at home, in the community and on the job). The big C Church including the bishops has "a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with [the church's] mission of giving witness before the world." That is, bishops and other Church employees must continually proclaim Christian principles in the public realm. The Church does not, however, have the competence to "offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world." That's the job of the lay faithful church who "should act as a leaven in the world, in their family, professional, social cultural and political life."

Justice in the World is a free download from Catholic Charities in St. Paul (www.cctwincities.org) and from other sites.

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NCL is an independent 501-C-3 Catholic organization with an Illinois charter. NCL's board includes Charles DiSalvo, Ambrose Donnelly, Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, Adam Fitzpatrick, John Hazard and Lauren Sukal.

"The poor are hidden because poverty is bashful." – Pope Francis in *The Tablet* (1 King St. Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY England; 4/8/20)

"The millions who are poor in the U.S. tend to be increasingly invisible [and our] society is creating a new kind of blindness about poverty." – Michael Harrington (1928-1989) in *The Other America* (Macmillan Co., 1962)