

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
PO Box 291102
Chicago, IL 60629

April
2024
Number
276

Turn Toward the World

The post-World War II worker-priest experiment contains lessons for today's church, though it is not replicable.

Prior to Vatican II (1962-1965) the street was one-way. The church preached to the world. Today the street goes both ways. In our post-Vatican II era "the church needs to come to the world in order to better understand the meaning of revelation," Russ Barta (1918-1997), NCL's first president, told us. In fact, with honest dialogue the church-world distinction becomes less significant.

The seeds for Vatican II include the short-lived worker-priest movement. It was an outgrowth of specialized Catholic Action, as pioneered by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967) of Belgium. Using Cardijn's observe-judge-act method of Christian formation, a small group of occupational-specific young workers discussed their milieu in light of the gospel and Catholic doctrine. Then they acted to improve a specific situation.

Catholic Action chaplains Fr. Henri Godin (1906-1944) with Fr. Yves Daniel (1906-1986) of France went a step further. They saw that the majority of young adults in the 1940s knew almost nothing about Catholicism. The young people were dealing with challenges from World War II, from an industrial economy, from an individualistic culture and with communist ideas. Parish life in France was insular—Mass on Sunday, a Catholic school perhaps and parish clubs. Though some Catholic leaders presume otherwise, young adult workers are foreigners to that style of parish life, say Godin and Daniel.

The two priests penned *France, A Missionary Land?* (Kessinger Publs. [1943]; \$28.95). It argues for "a Christianity of a catechumen." The goal can no longer be entirely centered on the parish, they wrote. Duplicating the standard forms of Catholicism is ineffective. It is necessary to try fresh communities through which young workers can live the gospel.

Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard (1874-1949) read their manuscript and endorsed what became known as the worker-priest movement.

Soon, over 100 young priests in France and Belgium took jobs in factories. By truly listening, the priests gradually gained the confidence of young workers.

Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) ended the experiment in 1954, out of concern that communism was overly influencing some priests. Despite its formal conclusion, some Catholics and Protestants kept true to the worker-priest movement. In fact, the annual International Worker-Priest conference will be held October 25-27, 2024 in Herzogenrath, Germany. Get more information from Margaret Trivasse of Christians in Secular Ministry (margtriv@yahoo.co.uk).

The worker priest approach is impractical for today's U.S. Catholicism simply because priests are scarce enough. Additionally, its theology is outdated. Catholicism now understands that Christ is not waiting for a priest or other Church employee to suddenly show up in a home, a neighborhood or a workplace. Christ is already there where two or more are gathered.

Let's presume that many young adults and even their parents are less attached to their faith than some Church leaders like to admit. Though it is challenging, let's discontinue putting programs and issues ahead of relationships. Let's actively listen to young adults—one to one and in small groups. Let's act in solidarity alongside those improving their own milieu. Let's develop a 21st century North American theology and pastoral practice of work that is *of* and *by* young adult workers. Let's heed the advice of Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903): "Go to the workers."

Can INITIATIVES' readers share any *go to the worker* examples?

Attention Readers

Thanks to all for donations toward NCL's 2024 budget. The notes you enclose with your donation are especially reassuring.

We can still use a little more money. (Who can't?). See page eight.

Taking the Initiative *For Green*

Regular reports in INITIATIVES about green innovations raise a question: Is better technology the way to save our planet?

“The technocratic paradigm,” writes Pope Francis, “consists in thinking as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power.” That mindset leads us to wrongly assume that growth is infinite or unlimited. (*Praise God, Our Sunday Visitor* [2023]; \$8.95)

The pope is correct. Detached from objective ethics and the common good, science and technology quickly cause harm. Proper progress must aim not toward a calculated greater good but toward the common good.

INITIATIVES remains positive about the green efforts of engineers, scientists, legislators, the diplomatic corps, regulatory agencies, citizen groups, negotiators at the Conference of the Parties and more. However, INITIATIVES worries that a *green spirituality* lags far behind advances in technology.

The Book of Nature by Barbara Mahany (Broadleaf Books [2023]; \$27.99) is one source for green spirituality.

Over the years nature’s wisdom was pushed away with “the thinking that harnessing the wild equaled progress,” Mahany says. Yet God has “infused the natural world with symbol and meaning... Nature itself [is] a source for divine revelation... [God] never hits pause when it comes to creation.”

Mahany is careful to say that God doesn’t equal nature. But the divine is embedded in all creation. Humankind is part of nature and people flourish as they respect the pace and limits of nature.

Mahany’s bibliography has many spiritual resources—saints, poets, and novelists plus others from the Celtic and Eastern traditions.

Our green spirituality cannot be romantic, Francis writes. It is nice to tend a backyard garden or recycle newspapers and pop bottles. “Every little bit helps,” he admits. But a full cultural change necessarily includes new dispositions and actions regarding production, consumption, investment and distribution.

Taking the Initiative *For Criminal Justice*

Catholic Criminal Justice Reform Network was formed in August of 2020 by Lumen Christi Institute (1220 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637; www.lumenchristi.org). So far its 18 institutional partners include Catholic law schools, a lawyers’ guild and two ministries among prisoners. Its scope has expanded to include formerly incarcerated, survivors of violent crime, judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, police officers, correctional staff and others. The U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development endorses CCJRN. Judge Thomas More Donnelly (thomas.donnelly@cookcountyil.gov), president of CCJRN, is a consultant to the Committee. CCJRN is consecrated to our Blessed Virgin Mary.

Of behalf of CCJRN, Cecelia Klingele (cecilia.klingele@wisc.edu) of University of Wisconsin leads a group of legal scholars in a dialogue series about the impact of the justice system and about those responsible for it. A volume of papers from three national conferences await publication. CCJRN also sponsors regional dialogues. The next one is in Memphis on May 7, 2024.

The Memphis event, like its predecessors, will recognize and give voice to the experience and suffering of both the formerly incarcerated and the survivors of violent crime, and will allow those in the legal system to listen to those experiences.

The CCJRN dialogues underscore, as Pope Francis says, that law must put itself “at the service of the persons involved, whether they be the perpetrators of the crimes or those who have been offended.”

Taking the Initiative *In Health Care Delivery*

What, doctors on strike? Don’t doctors have country club memberships, a 25-pound horse power outboard at their Michigan cottage and season tickets to the White Sox? In fact, the stereotype of a relatively independent doctor with a comfortable income is dated.

Over Christmas 2023, younger physicians in clinical training staged a six-day strike at some London hospitals affiliated with the National Health Service (www.nhs.uk). The

backlog in emergency rooms and for elective procedures is persistently excessive. Represented by a union, these doctors want a pay increase and some relief from long hours. (*NY Times*, 1/4/24)

The issues for U.S. doctors are similar—stress, a relative shortage of new recruits (particularly in primary care), plus for many a quantity-over-quality reimbursement system. Some doctors respond to the current situation by opting for employee status in an emergency room or other hospital setting, thereby gaining some control over hours on the job. Others are getting out of patient care in favor of another medical field or in a different career. And some are forming unions. (*NY Times*, 4/2/11)

Allina Health (www.allinahealth.org), based in Minneapolis, has 50 facilities in Western Wisconsin and Minnesota. Doctors and nurse practitioners in Allina are organizing under the banner of Doctors Council (50 Broadway #1101, New York, NY 10004; www.doctorscouncil.org). Understaffing and its consequences is the main issue. (*NY Times*, 10/14/23)

Committee of Interns and Residents (10-27 46th Ave. #300, Long Island City, NY 11101; www.cirseiu.org) is a similar union. It has locals in New York, California, Florida, Illinois and other locales.

Your INITIATIVES editor is aging and thus goes to the drug store almost weekly. Anytime after 8 A.M., the line is quite long. There simply are not enough pharmacists and clerks to handle the need. Stress and concern for the ill caused many CVS and Walgreen's pharmacists to stage a rolling walkout in late October into November 2023. (*NY Times*, 8/20/22 & 12/3/23 and *CNN Business*, 10/30/23)

This job action was applauded by American Pharmacist Association (2215 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20037; www.pharmacist.com), by United Food & Commercial Workers (1775 K St. NW, Washington, DC 20006; www.ufcw.org) and others.

Executives at the drug store chains are not oblivious to the problem. They have allocated funds for recruiting young professionals. However, the short term strategy of putting current pharmacists under performance expectations seems counterproductive.

Nurses too are experiencing a vocation crisis. They too have increasingly tried job actions, including recently by Minnesota Nurses

Association (345 Randolph Ave, #200, St. Paul, MN 55102; www.mnnurses.org), N.Y. State Nurses Association (131 W. 33rd St. #400, New York, NY 10001; www.nysna.org), Illinois Nurses Association (910 W. Van Buren St. #502, Chicago, IL 60607; www.illinoisnurses.com), National Nurses United (8455 Colesville Rd. #1100, Silver Spring, MD 20910; www.nationalnursesunited.org) and others.

Taking the Initiative

For Marriage

The U.S. marriage rate is at a record low. In particular it is “parents with less than a four-year college degree who have moved away from marriage,” writes Nicholas Kristof. Further, the children of unmarried parents are significantly less likely to complete college and to achieve upward mobility. This trend is not talked about, especially by liberals, because people want “to be inclusive of a diversity of family arrangements,” Kristof concludes. (*NY Times*, 9/14/23)

Addressing the topic of family structure can result in charges of racism or blaming the victim, as in the case nearly 60-years ago when Daniel P. Moynihan presented research, now called *The Moynihan Report* (U.S. Dept. of Labor [1965], www.dol.gov; \$17.99).

Melissa Kearney is the latest to daringly publish the statistics in her widely-reviewed *The Two-Parent Privilege* (University of Chicago Press [2023]; \$25).

Kearney objects to those who put a moral spin on her economic and social analysis. The correlation among marriage, education and wealth is not a matter of entitlement. The trends are not related to the goodness of a person, she writes. “It is not helpful to blame or shame women who are faced with the difficult choice between parenting alone or living with a partner who is an economic or emotional drain.”

What can be done? To repeat: Simply telling people to get married is counterproductive. However, public policy improvements on tax codes, criminal justice and public safety, child care, housing and the like could foster a better pro-marriage environment.

Some parishes yearly host a *Sacramental Saturday* for civilly-married couples and, upon proper preparation, for cohabitating couples.

Each May and October, let's say, councils of the Knights of Columbus could offer

their hall for a free reception to any couple married in the previous months. As funds allow, the K of C could even pay for the banquet food.

INITIATIVES' readers might sign the "no coffee pledge" sponsored by Starbucks Workers (2495 Main St. #556, Buffalo, NY 14214; www.sbworkersunited.org). Employees in about 380 stores have legally formed a union. However, managers are slow to conduct meaningful negotiations.

What does Starbucks have to do with the issue of two-parent families? "Union membership is positively and significantly associated with marriage," conclude researchers Daniel Schneider and Adam Reich. A person's current economic standing and future economic security affects their potential for a first marriage, particularly for men. A union card increases all three. (*Social Problems*, University of Tennessee, 901 McClung Tower, Knoxville, TN 37996; <https://academic.oup.com>)

Other suggestions from readers are welcome.

Taking the Initiative *On Human Rights*

Statements alone are not social change—even full-page ads in the *NY Times*. However, well-conceived statements can guide necessary collective action within institutions to foster improvement.

An effort to reinvigorate the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (405 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017; www.ohchr.org) is worthwhile, says Mary Ann Glendon, former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. In the past the *Declaration* has inspired "the great grassroots movements that hastened the demise of colonialism, brought down apartheid in South Africa and helped topple the seemingly indestructible totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe."

Glendon describes current human rights movements that have the same principles as the *Declaration*. Nahdlatul Ulama (<https://nu.or.id>) and its Indonesia-based companion Center for Shared Civilizational Values (www.civilizationalvalues.org), "the world's largest Muslim political organization," promotes an "inclusive, tolerant form of Islam."

In addition, Centrist Democrat International (<https://idc-cdi.com>), based in Belgium, is the largest network of smaller political parties, primarily in Europe and Latin

America. CDI is likewise dedicated to the *Declaration's* list of human rights. (*Wall St. Journal*, 12/10/23)

Glendon notes that both of these movements draw upon religious traditions. INITIATIVES reminds readers that 61 years ago this month Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) called the U.N.'s *Declaration* an "act of the highest importance" in his encyclical, *Peace on Earth*. And Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) frequently referred to the *Declaration*, saying it "must be observed integrally in both its spirit and letter."

Groups monitoring human rights include Amnesty International (311 W. 43rd St. #700, New York, NY 10036; www.amnestyusa.org), Freedom House (1850 M St. NW #1100, Washington, DC 20036; www.freedomhouse.org) and Human Rights Watch (350 Fifth Ave. #3400, New York, NY 10118; www.hrw.org).

Work and Art

In his essay, "The Catholic Writer Today," Dana Gioia writes that Catholic imaginative literature need not be explicitly religious, even less so does it need to be devotional. He suggests that what makes writing Catholic is a particular worldview that permeates its treatment of subjects such as love, war, family, violence, sex, mortality, money, and power. He laments the decline in recent years of Catholic presence in U.S. letters (with some notable exceptions), seeing that absence as "an impoverishment" because the Catholic perspective, which has played a formative and inspirational role in the arts for two millennia, continues to speak profoundly to the human condition. He comments elsewhere, "American literature will be enlarged, refined and enriched by having the Catholic voice heard more robustly than it has in the last half century." (*First Things* [12/13], 9 E. 40th St., New York, NY 10016)

More recently, Trevor Cribben Merrill takes up that thought in his booklet, *The Situation of the Catholic Novelist* (Wiseblood Books [2021]; \$5.00). While seeing some signs of Catholic literary renewal, Merrill views the gap between the secular literary establishment and the Catholic sphere as wider than ever. He asserts that an overtly Catholic novel has difficulty finding publishers, audience and critical attention. He harkens back, nostalgically, to the era of U.S. writers like Flannery O'Connor

(1925-1964), Walker Percy (1916-1990), and British authors Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) and Graham Greene (1904-1991), sadly noting that an audience with a Christian outlook, such as they wrote for, no longer exists.

However, Merrill acknowledges a few acclaimed Catholic novelists on the scene today--Alice McDermott, Ron Hansen and Phil Klay, among others. There are many significant writers of Catholic sensibilities that could be added: Mary Gordon, Tobias Wolfe, Don DeLillo, Richard Rodriguez, Mary Karr, Jon Fosse and Marie Howe, to name a few. Readers of *Initiatives*, no doubt, could add to the list.

Echoing Gioia, Merrill is justified in asserting that U.S. society could use an even stronger presence of writers imbued with sacramental Christianity because, as he claims, "solid faith has the ability to act as a conduit toward an ever deeper and more truthful perception of reality."

Labor Apostles

INITIATIVES here concludes its retrospective series on *Go to the Worker: America's Labor Apostles* by Kimball Baker (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$19). The book's organizing principle is profiles of ten major figures in the Catholic social action movement. It thereby tells a major but mostly forgotten part of our country's story, including that part's origin, evolution, and results.

One of the surest strokes of this principle is the profile of Msgr. George Higgins (1916-2002) because he was, in a sense, there from beginning to end.

Higgins was a Chicago native who left the city in 1940 to pursue a doctorate in economics at The Catholic University of America. He ended up living and working in D.C. until his death. Higgins was open but tough; you could be fooled by his bookish ways. He wore his immense learning like a comfortable old cloak, but you wouldn't want to mistake comfort for weakness.

His apartment was filled with books—stacked shoulder-high. But when Higgins needed to quote verbatim from a favorite source, he would immediately find the desired volume and turn to the exact page. When it came to worker justice, Higgins knew the topic from A to Z, and he knew what it was to fight ferociously for workers.

Higgins' doctoral advisor was Msgr. John A. Ryan (1869-1945). He soon became Ryan's assistant in the national Catholic Social Action Department (SAD). Ryan goes all the way back to Pope Leo XIII's union-sanctioning 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor* and to the U.S. Bishops' *Program of Social Reconstruction* of 1919. This document put Catholic social teaching about worker justice into the U.S. mainstream and later into New Deal measures designed to reverse the Great Depression. Together with the magnificent 1931 encyclical *Reconstructing the Social Order* by Pope Pius XI (1857-1939), these documents and the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ inspired the Catholic social action movement, with its central teaching that helping workers to organize and to bargain collectively is part of a Catholic's (or other spiritual person's) calling.

SAD was extremely active in the 1930s, including coordination of a network of schools encouraging Catholics to join unions; it showed them how Catholic social teaching meshed with this action and with their workplace activities. Msgr. John Hayes (1906-2002) from Chicago resourced the labor schools, but tuberculosis forced him out in 1940. Higgins filled in for him.

The mystical body concept, as outlined in *The Mystical Body and Social Justice* by liturgical reformer Fr. Virgil Michel, OSB (1890-1938), revolves around the simple belief that all human beings are children of God and are therefore sisters and brothers of one another. Jesus is the joining of human and divine life into a universal and mystical body, so that when people minister to others--whether to their hunger, nakedness, homelessness, sickness, or worker injustice, they are actually ministering to both a physical and a spiritual need. It was, by the way, this belief that attracted Baker to the story of Catholic leaders of the 1930s and 1940s.

Higgins became assistant director of SAD in 1944, director from 1954-67, and director or staffer of related units from 1967-80. For 56 years, from 1945-2001, he wrote *The Yardstick*, a series of columns keeping Catholics posted on world affairs. He was known throughout D.C. and the nation as Catholicism's liaison with national labor unions. According to Thomas Donahue (1928-2023), former president of the AFL-CIO, "He [Higgins] served as the premier translator of the Catholic Church to the American trade-union movement and of the movement to the Church."

Higgins came from a union family and from an upbringing in an archdiocese led by

Cardinal George Mundelein (1872-1939), who lived and worked under the guiding principle that the place of the Catholic Church is “behind the worker.” It is thus no surprise that Higgins’ own career was guided by the same principle. His major accomplishment was that despite arriving on the national scene in 1940--about halfway into the heyday of the Catholic social action movement--he was largely responsible for making the movement an effective and positive force; one that could be so again in our days.

The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, however, has greatly hampered labor organizing and collective bargaining. It unfairly restricts workers’ freedom, particularly in so-called *right to work* states. Higgins was prompt and fierce in his opposition to this anti-labor legislation. In a *Yardstick* column he declared, “The Taft-Hartley bill does little or nothing to encourage labor-management cooperation. On the contrary, it approaches the complicated problem of industrial relations from a narrow and excessively legalistic point of view. It runs the risk of disorganizing and disrupting industrial relations by hastily and completely recasting the whole range of federal labor legislation just at the time when collective bargaining shows definite signs of moving towards collective cooperation for the common good.”

The rugged individualists of U.S. capitalism did not take kindly to Higgins’ call for labor and management to come together over major economic decisions regarding wages, prices, profits, production schedules, and related matters. The National Association of Manufacturers and its allies in the media and even in Catholic hierarchy attacked Higgins, calling on his superiors to rein him in. But Bishop Karl Alter (1885-1977) of Toledo, then chair of the bishops’ conference, refused. Higgins persisted. He notably played a key role in organizing farm workers, one of the occupations not covered by the National Labor Relations Act of 1937.

Sadly, our society still awaits the kind of cooperation Higgins called for. Some momentum was gained after Vatican II (1962-1965) by a resurgent laity, including Ed Marciniak (1917-2004) and other leaders of our NCL. However, Vatican II has too often been interpreted as something within the Church rather than between Catholics and other efforts. Also, in the pews and throughout U.S. society, power and money too often replace or shoulder aside justice and peace in the pantheon of values.

Higgins was appalled by such trends. In *Organized Labor and the Church: Reflections of a Labor Priest* (Paulist Press, 1993), Higgins, as-told-to William Bole, feared to say for sure that the church will “reclaim its heritage of support for the organization of average working people.” Indeed, he adds, the church “stands in danger of losing forever its tradition of cooperation with organized labor.” He did note with approval some renewed ties. Surely were he around today that approval would extend to the Higgins Center at the University of Notre Dame (www.socialconcerns.nd.edu/higgins), to the Kalmanovitz Institute for Labor (www.lwp.georgetown.edu), to the Catholic Labor Network (www.catholiclabor.org), to all the worker centers assisting underpaid laborers and to our own NCL. You can be sure that he would resoundingly applaud President Joseph Biden's marching in the recent successful strike by the United Auto Workers (www.uaw.org)--the first time a president has marched in a U.S. strike.

Rest in Peace

Fr. George Lane, SJ (1934-2023)

Buildings are secondary, Vatican II teaches. The church is essentially the people of God in the world. Yet for centuries the people of God built and maintained thousands upon thousands of buildings for worship, conviviality, social service, education, private prayer and more. In our time those buildings are closing for lack of faithful users, staff, money and relevant mission. Each closing causes sadness and means a loss of social capital in its area.

Holy Family Church (www.holyfamilychicago.org), founded in 1857, was slated for demolition in the late 1980s. Lane, director of Loyola University Press (www.loyolapress.com) at that time, lived near Holy Family. He decided to restore this sacred space “to its original glory.” With others, including the Catholic Order of Foresters (www.catholicforester.org), Lane raised over \$1million. On the morning of Jan. 1, 1991, he with parishioners and supporters gathered on the steps of the church to celebrate success.

Lane, an NCL friend, was eventually honored as “one of the most dedicated advocates for church architecture and preservation in Chicago.”

NCL's Objectives

- Prompt discussion of church-laity-world as provoked by Vatican II (1962-1965).
- Facilitate people and institutions in the search for a spirituality that grows out of daily occupations and professions.
- Agitate and assist parishes, schools and agencies as they support the connection between work and Christian life.

- Maintain a center of information on the Christian in the world; specifically by publishing INITIATIVES and by assisting writing and research on the church and world.

NCL, an independent 501-C-3 organization, was founded in 1978, in response to the mail and publicity about the Advent 1977 *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* (reprinted in *Social Holiness*, National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$1).

INITIATIVES

Published for 46 years by National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629

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NCL's board includes Sergio Barrera, Charles DiSalvo, Ambrose Donnelly, Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, Adam Fitzpatrick and Lauren Sukal.

NCL's papers are in Alter Library (Mt. St. Joseph University, 5701 Delhi Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45233). Back issues of INITIATIVES are carried by *Catholic Labor Network* (www.catholiclabor.org). Go into menu, then library, then—near the bottom—into National Center.

NCL's *Working Catholic* blog is carried by *Faith and Labor Movement* (www.faithandlabor.blogspot.com). The Pastoral Center in Alameda, CA (www.pastoralcenter.com/work.html) distributes several NCL publications plus other resources on faith and work, including *On the Way to Work* by NCL national advisor Vinal van Benthem.

INITIATIVES' readers get a free subscription to the cyber-publication *Today's American Catholic* by sending an email to editor@todaysamericancatholic.org.

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places--and there are so many--where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory." --Howard Zinn (1922-2010)

"Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." --Vaclav Havel (1936-2011)