

<h1 style="color: green;">Initiatives</h1> <p style="color: green;">In Support of Christians in the World</p>	National Center for the Laity PO Box 291102 Chicago, IL 60629	November 2024 Number 280
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Turn Toward the World

A war against the modern world cannot be won. Our world is not swamp, not a hell hole, not an unredeemed cesspool of evil. It is heretical for a Catholic to be dystopian. Nor has Catholicism ever been sectarian. Catholicism is not a cordon around a safety zone. Catholics cannot get stuck in nostalgia—pining for a long ago better time that in fact never existed. Catholics are not culture despisers.

Yes, several modern trends must be challenged. The method is dialogue, using the tools of science/reason while bringing to bear the unvarnished truth of dogma.

Teilhard: Visionary Project is a two-hour film broadcast by and distributed through PBS TV (www.pbs.org; 5/18/24). Produced by Mary and Frank Frost (www.frankfrostproductions.com), the film details the life and thought of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (1881-1955), an influential theologian and scientist.

Chardin accepts the premise of evolution. However, he broadens the theory. In addition to physical evolution, the world and humankind evolve spiritually toward complete unity in Christ. God's creation, he says, is only complete when everything is united. *Becoming* is a key word for Chardin. A major task is to use the tools of science/reason to tell us a little more about the Ultimate.

This is not to say that evolution moves straightaway toward perfection. Nowadays, Chardin says, the isolation and individualism that accompany modern advancements inhibit evolution. We are often stuck in place or seemingly going backward. Yet the arc of the universe bends toward God.

In addition to philosophy and theology Chardin studied botany, zoology, archeology and paleontology. He was a decorated medic during World War I. He then embarked for China and other parts of Asia, spending several years on scientific explorations. He published many scientific papers.

The Vatican and Jesuit leaders lodged objections to Chardin's effort to promote dialogue between Christian thought and

science/reason, beginning in 1923 and continuing until seven years after his death.

The tune changed around the time of Vatican II (1962-1965). St. John Paul II (1920-2005), for example, wrote that "evolution is more than a hypothesis" and he quoted Chardin favorably in *Gift and Mystery* (Random House [1999]; \$16). Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022) also referred favorably to Chardin and Pope Francis likewise mentions him.

Two of Chardin's theological books were published only after his death: *Phenomenon of Man* (Harper Perennial [1955]; \$14.39) and *The Divine Milieu* (Harper Perennial [1960]; \$12.79).

"God most vitally active and incarnate is nor remote from us...on the contrary, at every moment [God] awaits us in the activity, the work to be done... It is by [completing what] I am working on that I shall lay hold on the ultimate end." –Chardin in *Hymn of the Universe* (Harper Collins, 1961).

"A large number of Catholics lead a double life [as if] they have to step out of their [work] clothes so as to have faith... Whatever our role may be [as] workers, we can speed toward the object of our work, as though toward an opening to the Supreme fulfillment. –Chardin in *Divine Milieu*.

Taking the Initiative

For Green

As INITIATIVES' readers know, plastic products never disappear. And it seems everything is a plastic product. At the moment responsibility for curbing plastic pollution is usually and unfairly put on consumers and local businesses.

Unfortunately, when people try alternatives to plastic their total production and distribution is often more pollution than the original. Plus, sustainable packaging can be too expensive for vendors. It too often leaks in the car, on the kitchen counter or under the sink. Get more information these difficulties from Columbia Climate School (www.climate.columbia.edu) and from Beyond

Plastic at Bennington College (www.beyondplastic.org). (*NY Times*, 7/9/24)

Recycled plastic products are possible, though currently less than 10% of plastic ever gets reused—much less than 10% in several areas. In the absence of *no plastic production*, recycling requires a like-minded network of suppliers, customers, investors, entrepreneurs and usually green-friendly public entities.

Le Pave (www.le-pave.com), a company near Paris, had its wares on display for the millions who tuned into the Summer 2024 Olympics—chairs, podiums and stadium seating. Le Pave also makes sinks, counter and table tops, wall board and more from previously used plastic.

It's an unusual company. Though successful, Le Pave is attuned to the common good. It readily partners with other firms, like Lemon Tri (<https://lemontri.fr>) that collects waste and processes it for recycling. For the Olympics' project, Lemon Tri challenged students to collect bottle caps. They sent one million along and in return got ecology education. Shampoo bottles and food containers were also part of the Olympic effort.

Le Pave hires locally, including from among the unemployed. Le Pave drew upon the efforts of others as it persistently experimented with special ovens and techniques necessary for durable green plastic. (*NY Times*, 7/6/24)

Much depends on creating a green culture. Yet, as again INITIATIVES' readers know, many consumers, business leaders and elected officials place low priority on ecology. Far too many people are hostile, even denying there is a climate crisis.

The Morris Model (<https://morrismodel.org>) is suggestive. Forget about pitching ecology, it says. Talk and act on economics.

Morris, MN (west of St. Cloud; about 55 miles east of South Dakota) is a conservative rural town that like many others is struggling these days. However, it has an anchor institution: a campus of University of Minnesota (600 E. Fourth St. #Welcome 200, Morris, MN 56267; <https://morris.umn.edu>). Troy Goodnough, the school's sustainability director, can be found there.

About 13 years ago some students launched a for-profit compost service. It became popular with farmers and other residents. Next, LED lighting at the school was a money-saver. Then, cost-effective solar panels were installed at a store. Well, why not wind turbines to cut

municipal costs? And then power a factory for cheaper green fertilizer. The language around town, reports Edward Humes, isn't about global warming. It is "rural self-sufficiency, [lower] energy and fuel costs, saving tax dollars and eliminating costly inefficiency and waste." Other towns in Minnesota are now getting data, blueprints and other assistance from the Morris Model, which has become a consortium of other schools, the city, the county, state agencies and non-profits. (*Wall St. Journal*, 7/7/24)

Taking the Initiative For Veterans

Major John Armstrong Jr. (1758-1843) served in our Revolutionary War. Near its conclusion, he publically criticized our fledgling government for neglecting veterans. As matters stand, Armstrong said, the only "remaining mark of military distinction left [is] your wants." We are left "to grow old in poverty." General George Washington (1732-1799) was sympathetic to the complaint but needed to head off any disruptive action. He appealed to the soldiers, asking them to temporarily put "patriotism and patient virtue" ahead of their frustration.

Nathanael Greene (1742-1786) of Rhode Island, one of Washington's top people, had to personally stake a supplier in order to get uniforms and other equipment for his troops. The supplier went bankrupt, leaving Greene holding the debt. He never recovered, nor did his family after his death.

There is still at times a neglect of veterans. Not deliberately, but from apathy.

There's good news though. The percentage of veterans among the homeless has decreased in part because of a Veterans Administration (www.va.gov/housing-assistance) program that gives vets vouchers. The vet must put up the equivalent of 30% of her or his adjusted income toward rent. The VA voucher picks up the rest. One wrinkle: About 25% of the vouchers are never used and veterans in the program do not always stay housed. Thus there is a supplemental program, HUD-VASH (www.hud.gov/program). It assigns social workers to the situation. "What we are [now] doing is effective," says VA medical director John Kuhn (www.va.gov/greater-los-angeles). (*NY Times*, 8/7/24)

One good government program, much less a ballpark tribute to a veteran, does not fulfill responsibility to honor our troops. INITIATIVES' readers might check out National

Alliance to End Homelessness (<https://endhomelessless.org>), a citizen group addressing homelessness, including among vets. Another group is Help USA (www.helpusa.org).

American Veteran Productions (www.americanveteransmedia.org) uses film and other material to raise consciousness about our veterans. Two of AVP's films are about service during the Vietnam War.

More former students of Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia (<https://edison.philasd.org>) died in Vietnam than from any other high school. AVP's *Edison 64* tells their stories and explores the long term damage to families and communities resulting from those deaths. AVP also has a film about Fr. Judge High School (www.fatherjudge.com), which suffered the highest number of Vietnam casualties of any Catholic school.

Schedule a showing of these films for a church or school group through Character Driven Productions (5726 Pentridge St., Philadelphia, PA 19143; www.characterdrivenfilms.com).

Taking the Initiative *On Affordable Housing*

A big protest march is not in itself social change. A full-page ad or an on-line petition does not in itself improve our society. Change requires getting inside institutions, persisting for months and years and then settling for an imperfect reform.

DuPage United (41 N. Park Blvd., Glen Ellyn, IL 60137; www.dupageunited.org) is a community organization whose members include two synagogues, five Islamic centers, two union locals, ten churches and a couple agencies. For some time, DuPage United has lobbied for affordable housing. High prices in its area (a Chicago exurb) are prohibitive to many who work in the town and on average earn \$60,000. There is also a need for affordable housing among the disabled and some seniors.

With research in hand, DuPage United participated in several town meetings until the Village of Elgin approved a 48 unit development proposal from Full Circle Communities (310 S. Peoria St. #500, Chicago, IL 60607; www.fccommunities.org).

Dupage United then turned its attention to Glen Ellyn Village, where this past April the town council cleared the way for 42 units in a vacant hotel. Circle Communities is again the developer.

Median rent for a two bedroom apartment in Brooklyn's Bed-Stuy neighborhood is \$3,593. Many working families are priced-out. Like Dupage United, East Brooklyn Churches (516 Schroeders Ave. #G, Brooklyn, NY 11239; www.ebc-iaf.org) has a history of identifying potential property and then lobbying for housing rehab or construction. And, like Dupage United, EBC is affiliated with Metro IAF (89-60 164th St., Jamaica, NY 11432; www.metro-iaf.org).

This past June leaders from Our Lady of Victory (583 Throop Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11216) met with EBC leaders to craft an affordable housing strategy. The group is buoyed by a bill introduced in the U.S. Senate (S 3910), titled "Yes in God's Backyard." Sen. Sherrod Brown (www.brown.senate.gov) is the sponsor. If passed, it allows the government to provide technical assistance and grants to church groups involved with affordable housing. (*The Catholic Spirit* of St. Paul, 8/8/24 & *The Tablet* of Brooklyn, 8/10/24)

Michael Stanley details the perseverance required for housing improvements like those mentioned above. His booklet, *Relentless* (NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$7.50), opens with the perception among policy makers that idealistic groups come-and-go. Not so with Metro IAF. It has campaigned for 40 years to reform the NYC Housing Authority (www.nyc.gov). Despite many accomplishments, Stanley admits that even after all this time he cannot "tell a heart-warming story of complete or nearly complete victory."

NYCHA is "a massive and inert bureaucracy" with about 530,000 tenants. It is a place of secure employment, even though some workers are lackadaisical. "The supposed public servants were often unhappy to be forced to comply" with agreements made between NYCHA and tenant groups, Stanley writes. Yet progress depends in part upon good relationships with NYCHA employees.

The Metro IAF tenant group soon realized that a total overhaul of NYCHA was unlikely, just as it was impossible to rectify each individual complaint, like a broken elevator, poor security, rats and more. Problems resolved in one building would fester in several others, Stanley says. The focus then became "one persistent and systemic problem: mold." The group documented how mold, caused by leaks and inadequate ventilation, caused respiratory problems among tenants. NYCHA routinely paid contractors to eradicate mold. But repairs were

shoddy, if indeed the contractor even came around.

Metro IAF advises groups not to use the law as a tactic because it is slow-moving. Additionally, once a law suit enters a campaign ordinary people disengage, leaving it to the experts. In this campaign, however, an exception was made. The “IAF leaders decided to initiate a parallel legal strategy,” Stanley continues. Invoking the Americans with Disabilities Act, lawyers at Natural Resources Defense Council (40 W. 20th St., New York, NY 10011; www.nrdc.org) submitted a suit charging that mold in NYCHA buildings caused or worsened the health of compromised tenants. The action prong of the strategy is tenant rallies plus sustaining relationships with NYCHA staff.

Eventually NYCHA had to cooperate with an Ombudsperson Call Center that tracked repairs and graded a contractor’s reliability. Mold and leak complaints have decreased by 50%, Stanley reports.

Staging one-off protest events gets a mention in the news. Social change, however, means improving each day what was accomplished yesterday; always treating obstinate bureaucrats as temporary opponents, but never as enemies.

Taking the Initiative *Among Delivery Drivers*

Four Star Express Delivery gets U.S. mail at an address in Skokie, IL. That address happens to be an Amazon warehouse, which uses Four Star as a subcontractor. Drivers wear Amazon uniforms and drive Amazon trucks--until that is this past June. When drivers discussed a union, Amazon ended the Four Star contract, leaving the drivers in the lurch.

What happened in Skokie is similar to an incident last year in Palmdale, CA. Amazon used Battle Tested Strategies as a subcontractor for delivery drivers. They talked about a union. The owner of Battle Tested agreed to abide by the employees’ decision. The drivers then joined the Teamsters (www.teamsterslocal396.org). Amazon quickly terminated the contract with Battle Tested.

Who employs whom? Is a company that uses a hiring agency or a subcontractor responsible in some manner for positive labor relations?

In August California Office #21 of National Labor Relations Bureau

(www.nlrb.gov) filed charges against Amazon, saying Amazon is indeed a joint employer and that Amazon’s behavior in Palmdale was wrong. (*Crain’s* [6/26/24], 130 E. Randolph St. #3200, Chicago, IL 60601 & *Labor Notes* [8/24], 55 Washington St. #522, Brooklyn, NY 11201 & *Chicago Tribune*, 8/24/24)

Will the California ruling apply to the Skokie situation and to other subcontracted employees? Get more information from Teamsters Local 705 (1645 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60612; www.teamsterslocal705.net). (*Chicago Tribune*, 9/3/24)

Taking the Initiative *In the Neighborhood*

A sacrament both reveals and conceals. The Eucharist, for example, is the revelation of God/Jesus, really and fully present. Yet, the Eucharist disguises God in the appearance of wine and bread. In Catholic sacramental sensibility a neighborhood is a small sacrament that reveals God. However, God is also disguised amid ordinary encounters at shops, homes, backyards, clubs, taverns and playgrounds.

Some neighborhoods and their denizens reveal God’s grace better than others. A holy neighborhood disposes its residents to “informal, intimate, affectionate, trusting relationships,” writes Fr. Andrew Greeley (1928-2013) of Chicago. A sacramental neighborhood allows for calculated vulnerability, for conviviality. On the other hand, it is harder to see holiness in a neighborhood with gangs, dishonest speculators, corrupt officials and others. People in a dysfunctional environment more likely succumb to fear, and then use their deficient surroundings to excuse themselves from the common good. (*Neighborhood*, Bloomsbury Books, 1977)

Austin is a west side Chicago neighborhood, east of Oak Park. A few Black families moved there after World War II. Gradually so did discriminatory housing practices, inadequate services and fear among residents. By 1980, Austin was 73% Black and is about 90% Black today. Two Catholic grammar schools closed in the 1990s. Some houses were boarded-up. Businesses had closed. Lacking sound analysis and power, longer-term Austin residents (Black and white) put the blame for deterioration on new arrivals.

How to infuse new wealth in Austin and similar neighborhoods? Leaders Network (5600 W. Madison Ave., Chicago, IL 60644;

<https://leadersnetworkchicago.org>) until now has been unable to sufficiently gather the needed resources. But through partnership with Great Lakes Credit Union (www.glcu.org), Leaders Network Financial (22 N. Kildare, Chicago, IL 60624) opened this past June to wide expectation.

In addition to regular bank services, LN Financial jump-starts neighborhood wealth by putting \$1,000 in each member's account for free. After 12 months, that \$1,000 and its interest can be withdrawn. The new bank also features a HUD representative who assists members with housing and credit topics. A second LN Financial location is planned. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 8/19/24)

Taking the Initiative *For Immigrants*

Immigration is not too good or indeed makes our country worse, say 77% of Catholics. Half want more construction of a wall along Mexico's northern border. And, 44% support Texas and Florida governors who reroute migrants to Chicago, NYC and Cape Cod, sometimes unannounced.

These are the findings of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (2300 Wisconsin Ave. NW #400A, Washington, DC 20007; <https://cara.georgetown.edu>), published last June as *U.S. Catholic Attitudes about Immigration, Migrants and Refugees*. CARA drew upon a diversity of survey participants, including non-worshipping Catholics.

Meanwhile, members of four Catholic parishes in Oak Park, IL recently met to discuss immigration. The result was Migrant Ministry (200 S. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302; immigrantministry@gmail.com), located in the former St. Edmund School.

About 1,000 people per month, including repeats, use the program. They came here from Venezuela, Ecuador, Columbia and elsewhere. They receive breakfast and used clothing. Some get medical attention, legal advice, social services and pastoral guidance. There is an ESL opportunity. The program has additionally helped 12 families with rent assistance and more.

The stories of these new arrivals have prompted the volunteers to explore the story their own immigrant ancestors. The interaction between the volunteers and the immigrants has enriched the liturgy at each participating church.

Taking the Initiative *In the Parish*

Long ago God told us that if we want to worship on the Sabbath, we must do justice the rest of the week. This means that God whom we worship on Sunday is the same God we meet at work on Monday.

Fr. Anthony Shonis (anthony.shonis@pastoral.org) of Kentucky is a retired pastor. His discipline was visiting parishioners at their workplace, asking them two simple questions: "What do you do?" And: "How do you feel about what you do?" Later, he would invite them to a small group discussion on the relationship between faith and work.

Shonis began the small group sessions with his characterization of spirituality at work:

- Doing a competent job: a fair day's work for a fair days pay.
- Being a good team member (the modern face of work is teams).
- Affirming co-workers for their good work.

The parishioners, among other themes, often mentioned their resentment of *slackers*, workers who do not pull their own weight, causing others to compensate.

Shonis tells INITIATIVES: "If you are a good worker and a good team or crew member people notice you. And eventually they will wonder about what makes you tick. Then--and only then--you can talk about your Christian faith."

In his preaching Shonis often pointed out that the most important sign in the church is the *Exit Sign*. "After we have been renewed and energized by worship, we need to march out of church and make the world the way God wants it to be." (See *Amos* 5:21-24)

Taking the Initiative *In Liturgy*

Christians in Secular Ministry (<https://chrism.org.uk>) has a "Prayer Diary for People at Work." Each day of each month names an occupation like physical therapist, baker, computer technician, security guard. Those who use the diary say a prayer for the named workers. (Enter the Chrism website, and then go into *Resources*, then *Chrism Papers*, then *Paper #14*.)

The word *liturgy* means *the work of the people*. Thus, piggy-backing on Chrism's idea, one occupation could be highlighted one Sunday

each month. A clever liturgy planner writes about that occupation in the bulletin and even displays pictures about it in the narthex. At Mass worshippers associated with the designated occupation stand for a blessing. One example follows:

As we gather, let us take a moment to pray for public servants.

We are all called by baptism to serve one another. Some, however, serve more publicly.

Jesus is direct and unambiguous about how we will be judged. The standard was surprising to most at the time and is still surprising. The final judgment is not about how well we follow the rules, but rather what we do for those less fortunate. (*Matthew 25*)

We observe Jesus' commandment in our private lives. We might feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, or care for the sick. Public servants don't just serve privately, quietly, anonymously. Their service is also public. And it is challenging.

Public servants are subject to scrutiny, which has only grown because of social media and cable TV.

What public servants do is controversial precisely because others propose alternate means to an end.

Public servants care for everyone in their jurisdiction, not just the people they like.

Public servants treat everyone fairly, but not exactly the same. Some people have more needs than others.

So this morning, we bless our wonderful public servants who do what all of us have to do, but who also were chosen to render service in their public life.

Then the king will say to them, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Amen.

Work and Art

The anthology, *100 Great Catholic Poems* (Word on Fire [2023]; \$32.29) by Sally Read, herself a poet and convert, covers a span of centuries from Our Blessed Lady's *Magnificat* to the work of 20th century poets Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO, Czeslaw Milosz and Denise Levertov.

Read launched the project to highlight the Catholic poetic tradition because of her conviction that "the truths of the faith have *always* been transmitted through poetry, because

it is memorable; because some things are too complex for stark prose."

What to her mind makes a poem Catholic? Though most of the book's entries have explicit Catholic themes, settings or references and the poets are adherents of the Church of Rome, more central to her is that the poem springs from a Catholic imagination and arises from a Catholic worldview. She includes three works of William Shakespeare, for example. She argues that "the dynamism of his poetry is rooted in a Catholic mindset...all-embracing of human emotion, far-reaching--that is catholic, and therefore Catholic." Her criterion for a Catholic poem is that "it beats with a Catholic heart." On that basis, she includes poems by Oscar Wilde and Wallace Stevens, both of whom became Catholic only at the very end of their lives.

The compendium includes essential Catholic writers Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer and Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ as well as once popular 19th century poets like Charles Pegúy, Paul Claudel and Francis Thompson. Saints are represented as well--Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, among others. Interestingly, most of the 20th century poets represented joined Catholicism after belonging to another denomination.

It would be difficult to truly understand Catholicism without delving into its expansive history of poetry, art and music. In this anthology, Sally Read gives voice to the Catholic literary tradition of written and spoken word. Through these poems and her commentaries, she invites readers to reclaim this rich heritage.

Rest in Peace

Jane McAlevey (1964-2024)

Big rallies are popular with many activists. Some are fond of strong policy statements placed in a newspaper. These strategies in themselves, however, fall short of social improvement.

McAlevey was in it for the long haul.

Among labor union leaders there is a tension between assisting current members (aka *servicing the contract*) and organizing new locals. McAlevey believed that fixation on the service model leads to complacency and soon enough erodes the very thing unions want to accomplish. She practiced and taught organizing.

McAlevey's mission wasn't easy. Even when unions turn their attention to new workplaces, they too often use secondary means: posters, news stories, internet pages, off-site rallies and the like. Meanwhile, in McAlevey's opinion, they neglect "deep organizing." That is, the slow, tedious process of listening to non-union workers, truly listening one-to-one. It may seem counter-intuitive, but the listener comes with no prior sales pitch. "Change from the inside out," she often said.

Don't misunderstand: McAlevey was hardly opposed to picket lines, strikes and other familiar tactics. But each action had to build on

the social trust gained through prior, honest listening. Her book on this topic is *No Shortcuts* (Oxford Press [2018]; \$21.99).

Excellent middle-managers, administrators, service providers and others can also benefit from McAlevey's ideas and her inspiration. So too can parish leaders and Chancery employees who, challenged by a decline in worshipers and an increase in overhead, are tempted to use shortcuts like requesting volunteers through a bulletin item or pitching a capital campaign with slick brochures. These shortcuts unfortunately substitute for a discipline of one-to-one listening appointments.

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

This past June our U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a case called "Grants Pass, Oregon vs. Johnson" that a municipality can prohibit a homeless person from sleeping in a public park or on a sidewalk or alongside an expressway. The ban can apply even when no temporary housing is available in the area, like in Grants Pass. (*Catholic Agitator* [8/24], 632 N. Britannia St., Los Angeles, CA 90033)

Homelessness is not a simple issue. Multiple interests are at play. However, the following ironic quotation is worth reflection: "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread." --Anatole France (1844-1924), winner of a Nobel Prize for literature.