

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

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

February  
2007

Number  
162

## Technology Individuates?

Access to computers and the requisite education to creatively use the Internet is what stands between poverty and development, says globalization enthusiast Thomas Friedman. (*The World Is Flat*, Farrar, Straus [2005], 19 Union Sq. W., New York, NY 10003; \$30)

Interesting then that Friedman was recently unnerved in Paris when his African-born taxi driver talked ceaselessly on a phone while watching a dashboard-mounted TV. Meanwhile in the back seat Friedman typed on a laptop while listening to an iPod. "Technology is dividing us as much as it is uniting us," Friedman reflects. The taxi driver could have been talking to relatives in another continent and Friedman was sending a story to New York, yet the two of them communicated hardly at all. "And we were sitting two feet from each other." Friedman suggests that *continuous partial attention disorder* is "the disease of the Internet age." Everyone is so accessible that no one is accessible. (*N.Y. Times*, 11/1/06)

"Isolation is on the rise despite the seemingly endless opportunities to connect with others," reports Mary DeTurrís Poust. As evidence, she describes a study showing that people "have fewer close friends today than they did two decades ago, and the friends they do have tend to be within the circle of their own immediate families." ("Social Isolation in America" by Miller McPherson et al., *American Sociological Review* [6/06], 1307 New York Ave. NW #700, Washington, DC 20005)

A culprit is TV and the computer, F. Clark Power (Center for Ethical Education, 10 Earth Science Bldg., Notre Dame, IN 46556; <http://cee.nd.edu>) tells Poust. Technology, the default setting for most people, is eroding social capital and increasing isolation. (*Our Sunday Visitor* [11/12/06], 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750)

Philosopher Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) argues that technology plants self-perpetuating assumptions in its users. For example, technology convinces people that they cannot navigate their surroundings without more

technology; that "every technical activity is superior to every non-technical activity;" and that every technological experiment must be tried. Technology by its nature individuates, says Ellul. It thus threatens true freedom and the Christian faith. (*The Technological Society*, Alfred Knopf [1964], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$12.95)

Please tell INITIATIVES: Is there something inherently depersonalizing about technology? Is techno-indulgence a sin? Send comments by U.S. Post, a technology, to National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629) or by e-mail, another technology, to [wdroel@cs.com](mailto:wdroel@cs.com) or by fax to 773 776 9036.

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## Taking the Initiative

*In Public Life*

R. Sargent Shriver participated in the March 1979 founding convention of our National Center for the Laity. Along the way, he has accomplished a couple other things. Smile. Shriver founded or led the Special Olympics, the Peace Corps, Community Action, Head Start, VISTA and many other programs to help working people.

Bruce Orenstein (Chicago Video Project, 800 W. Huron #3S, Chicago, IL 60622; [www.chicagovideo.com](http://www.chicagovideo.com)) has just produced a 90-minute DVD, *American Idealist: the Story of Sargent Shriver*.

The film shows how Shriver's public service was an expression of his Catholicism. Orenstein says Shriver "was the most prominent public Catholic in the U.S. during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." The film raises important questions about Catholic action. "A main focus is the constant tension between moral ideals and political realities," Orenstein tells INITIATIVES. "Shriver is sometimes dismissed as a naïve idealist, but this film clearly shows how he featured a Christian existentialist's recognition that good works are always performed in the context of an imperfect political system."

It is fitting that a Chicago-based company produce this film because Shriver has good Chicago credentials. He joined the Catholic Interracial Council here in 1952 and was its president from 1955-1959. He was a founder of the Chicago-based National Catholic Conference on Interracial Justice. He was president of the Chicago Board of Education and he was a trustee of St. Xavier University.

In addition to the film there is an inspiring biography, *Sarge: the Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* by Scott Stossel (Smithsonian Books [2004], 245 Fifth Ave. #1003, New York, NY 10016; \$32.50)

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

The Securities and Exchange Commission (100 F St. NE, Washington, DC 20549; [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov)) has new rules about disclosing the total compensation package for CEOs, other executives and a company's directors.

A CEO at a big company is paid \$8million on average, an increase over the previous year. Additional perks, stock options and accounting benefits are standard. A senior executive's salary, reports Eric Dash in *N.Y. Times* (12/30/06), is 170 times greater than the average salary in that company.

Boards of directors can gradually reverse the scandalous situation, Dash details. They must use compensation consultants who are not with the company's auditing firm. They must eliminate golden parachutes, set specific goals for management and more. Of course at the moment, the type of person who would hold management accountable is not invited to serve on boards of directors.

Maybe investors can turn the tide. But big mutual funds don't often criticize executive compensation. Sometimes pension funds take action. Religious institutions, through Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (475 Riverside Dr. #1842, New York, NY 10115; [www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)) and other entities, regularly use their stock to demand better corporate governance. In England, companies must annually put executive pay to shareholder vote.

Catholic doctrine does not specify a maximum salary for a CEO, a precise ratio between an executive's salary and that of other workers, or a specific dollar figure for the minimum wage. But contrary to a recent article

in a Catholic magazine, Catholicism does say these topics must be guided by the principles of *participation* and *social justice*. Wages are not merely individual goods; they have a bearing on *the common good*.

The new Congress is addressing the wage and wealth gaps by deliberating over the minimum wage—fixed at \$5.15 since 1997. Interestingly, reports Cheryl Ward, the majority of “states plus the District of Columbia have their own minimum wages set slightly higher than [\$5.15].” Voters in six states approved a wage increase in November 2006. In addition, “many cities have passed living wage ordinances” that require certain businesses with government contracts or local tax breaks and subsidies to pay in excess of \$5.15. (*Voices from the Heartland* [9/06], 6819 Indianapolis Blvd., Hammond, IN 46324)

The Living Wage Resource Center (739 Eighth St. SE, Washington, DC 20003; [www.livingwagecampaign.org](http://www.livingwagecampaign.org)) tracks state and municipal wage ordinances and assists groups lobbying for a wage increase. The Tides Foundation (Lincoln Blvd. & Torney Ave. #1014, San Francisco, CA 94129; [www.tides.org](http://www.tides.org)) likewise assists living wage groups. United for a Fair Economy (29 Winter St. #200, Boston, MA 02108; [www.faireconomy.org](http://www.faireconomy.org)) is a resource on this topic of wage and wealth disparity.

## **Taking the Initiative** *In the Steel Industry*

Sparrows Point Mill (5111 N. Point Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21219), like other U.S. steel mills, has been in decline for half a century. It employed over 30,000 in the mid-1960s, but has less than 2,500 workers now. However, reports Chris Kirkham, Sparrows Point is poised as an interesting piece of “a global realignment in the business of making steel.” That's because in 2005 Lakshmi Mittal (Arcelor Mittal, Berkeley Sq. House #700, London, England W1J 6DA), the fifth richest person in the world, acquired International Steel Group, which includes the former Bethlehem Steel and its Sparrows Point Mill.

With his global consolidation of the steel industry Mittal can control prices and supply, explains Kirkham. For example, he can put coal and ore in reserve; move capital, information and engineers from Kazakhstan to India to South Africa; temporarily idle a plant

here or there, and more. In a twist on a standard argument (i.e., globalization encourages start-up competitors), Mittal's wide control is good for the steel industry because it eliminates competition—or so some believe. (*Washington Post Weekly*, 11/19/06)

Mark Reutter, an expert on U.S. mills, says globalization per se is not the issue. Sparrows Point Mill was part of the global economy since its founding in 1889, importing ore from Cuba and elsewhere. The difference is that globalization once benefited U.S.-based companies. Now overseas firms outclass steel and related industries.

Mittal makes “no long-term commitment” to Sparrows Point or any other mill, Reutter cautions. In fact, Mittal recently expressed willingness to sell Sparrows Point to avoid anti-trust trouble. He actually reduced capital investment in U.S. mills. The United Steel Workers of America (5 Gateway Center, Pittsburgh, PA 15222) support Mittal's acquisition of ISG and his hostile takeover of Arcelor. Yet, Reutter notes, union-negotiated benefits to retirees are being withdrawn.

Globalization is not the main theme in the steel story, Reutter repeats. The domestic demand for traditional steel products gradually decreased from the late 1950s. Instead of developing new markets and instead of making some plastic and aluminum products, the steel industry hiked prices, reduced wages, and lobbied for trade barriers and government bailouts. The unions blamed management, management blamed unions and both blamed the public. Like other industries, steel focused too narrowly on keeping quarterly stock prices afloat, neglecting research, development of markets and improvements in education for subsequent generations of U.S. workers. (*Making Steel* [3/7/06 & 8/24/06], PO Box 517, Urbana, IL 61803; [www.makingsteel.com](http://www.makingsteel.com) and *Sparrows Point: Making Steel* by Mark Reutter, University of Illinois Press [1988], 11030 S. Langley Ave., Chicago, IL 60628; \$21.95 and *Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community* by David Bensman & Roberta Lynch, University of California Press [1987], 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720; \$15.95)

## **Taking the Initiative** *In Sports*

Participation in sports can be “a real school of humanity, education and virtue,” says

*The World of Sport Today: Field of Christian Mission* (Pontifical Council for the Laity [2006], Palazzo San Calisto, 00120 Citta del Vaticano; [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia.va](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia.va); \$13). Further, a winning team--as was evident in Chicago during October 2005--can boost morale and a local economy.

Commentators like Franklin Foer (*How Soccer Explains the World*, Harper Collins [2004], 10 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> St., New York, NY 10022; \$13.95) and Thomas Friedman (*The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Alfred Knopf [2000], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$15.95) note that, as in ancient Greece, sports today can productively channel hostility between factions and nations. Indeed, says the Vatican booklet, a major sports event has the “capacity to unite the entire planet.”

On the other hand, the intensity and economics of sports encourages athletes to place their health at risk and temps parents, coaches, advertisers and others to place winning ahead of education, character development and even the entertainment of the game.

*The World of Sport Today* uses quotes from Pope John Paul II--a skier, canoeist, soccer goalie and hiker—to laud the benefits of sporting activities and competition. The booklet affirms Christian sports associations and chaplains, while challenging the laity to devise more mechanisms for deriving the best from sports.

## **Taking the Initiative** *In Food Preparation*

Major grocery stores have cleanliness safeguards for meat and produce. Likewise, most restaurants take precautions with meat, fish, vegetables and dairy products. Yet 325,000 people in this country were hospitalized in 2006 because of tainted food.

Most often, says Eric Schlosser, the problem originates with food producers. Government safety agencies are not independent enough to adequately regulate the producers, says Schlosser, the author of *Fast Food Nation* (Harper Collins [2001], 10 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> St., New York, NY 10022; \$14.95).

Schlosser's best-selling book is now a movie with the same title, *Fast Food Nation* (Fox Searchlight, 2006). Richard Linklater, with assistance from Participant Productions (335 N. Maple Dr. #245, Beverly Hills, CA 90210; [www.participantproductions.com](http://www.participantproductions.com)), is the producer.

The movie is not simply an expose of conditions in feedlots and slaughterhouses, writes A.O. Scott. “*Fast Food Nation* is thick with debate, argument, rumination and repartee.” If, says Scott, “we are what we eat, then how, this film asks, do we even know who we are?” (*N.Y. Times*, 10/30/05 & 11/17/06 and *This Week* [12/22/06], 1040 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10018)

## **Taking the Initiative**

### *Within the Weekend*

*A Day Apart* by Christopher Ringwald (Oxford University Press [2007], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$27) is an intriguing meditation on the centrality of Sunday (the Lord’s Day) to Christianity, of Friday evening-Saturday (the Shabbat) to Judaism and of Friday (the Day of Assembly, Juma) to Islam.

The meaning of work is common to the three holy days. In Islam, however, Friday is not exactly “a day apart.” That’s because, according to Islam, God does not need rest. Therefore, the Muslim holy day is a sandwich of morning work, Friday afternoon prayers and late afternoon work. One’s daily work, Islam insists, is proper worship of God. The pause for prayer is a way to remind people of the dignity of their work.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritans were very strict about the Lord’s Day, Ringwald details. But through the 20<sup>th</sup> century the weekend took over from the Sabbath. By 1970 Sunday was the major shopping day of the week. Drawing upon Witold Rybczynski (*Waiting for the Weekend*, Penguin [1991], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014), Ringwald suggests that for many people the Sabbath is ironically a type of enslavement.

Ringwald concludes with a chapter on Sabbath themes. Although accented differently in each religion, they include peace, forgiveness, liberation from the irrational, liberation from the self and more. Then Ringwald offers 25 tips for a Sabbath revival.

Religious leaders are concerned about young adult religious identity. Ringwald suggests that the best way to attract and retain young adult Catholics (or Jews, Muslims or other Christians) is to thoroughly promote the Sabbath. While its practices might have the feel of *individual spirituality*, the Sabbath by its nature attaches people to a religion—indeed, it actually forms a religion.

## **Taking the Initiative**

### *During a Job Search*

Students at Notre Dame now get a two-page flyer, “Ethical Business Practice: Importance for the Recruiting Process.” Published by the Institute for Ethical Business Worldwide (255 Mendoza College, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556; [www.ethicalbusiness.nd.edu](http://www.ethicalbusiness.nd.edu)), the flyer reminds students that recruiters rank integrity as an “important attribute.” It warns students not to “embellish a resume” or deceptively arrange interviews and it also gives some practice questions that a recruiter might ask: For example, what elements of your personal code of ethics actually influence you?

The flyer will be distributed nationally through the Ethics Resource Center (1747 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #400, Washington, DC 20006; [www.ethics.org](http://www.ethics.org)) and others.

## **Taking the Initiative**

### *As Chaplains*

Workplace chaplaincy has grown steadily for over 20 years, expanding from the Bible Belt to the Midwest, California and elsewhere. About 650 companies—small and large, including some with unions—have a paid chaplain. Some companies hire local ministers, others contract with an agency like Marketplace Chaplains USA (12900 Preston Rd. #1215, Dallas, TX 75230; [www.marketplaceministries.com](http://www.marketplaceministries.com)) or Chaplains of America (2018 S. Main St. #804, Wake Forest, NC 27587; [www.iamchap.org](http://www.iamchap.org)).

Most of these chaplains are evangelical Christians. Catholic chaplains, of course, have long been assigned to colleges, fire departments, airports, wharfs, hospitals, branches of the service and other work locales.

The company-sponsored chaplains function like employee assistance programs. In addition to crisis intervention the chaplains might visit a worker’s home or church as warranted.

Because the chaplains help workers regardless of religious affiliation the companies are not *faith-based*, explains David Miller of Yale Center for Faith and Culture (409 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511; [www.yale.edu](http://www.yale.edu)). Rather, they are *faith-friendly*. (*N.Y. Times*, 10/3/96 & 12/4/06 and *Today’s Catholic*, 9/3/06)

Greg Pierce (Acta Publications, 5559 W. Howard St., Skokie, IL 60077; [www.actapublications.com](http://www.actapublications.com)), former president of our National Center for the Laity, has an opinion on nearly everything. Smile. Regarding workplace chaplaincy, Pierce is generally positive—with some cautions.

Chaplain programs can perpetuate the wrong notion that only religious professionals can minister in the workplace, Pierce warns. Like the faith at work movement in general, Pierce continues, these programs “devolve into issues about pious practices in the workplace or into individual counseling. The chaplain movement can overshadow needed attention to justice in the workplace.”

Kim Bobo (Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr #400, Chicago, IL 60660; [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)) shares Pierce’s concern. Meatpacking and poultry companies are leaders in the chaplain movement, she notes. Yet “the chaplains do absolutely nothing [about] major violations in labor law [within the company].”

## Taking the Initiative

### *In the Parish*

“About six years ago I became a pastor for the first time,” writes Fr. Anthony Shonis (Holy Name of Jesus, 511 Second St., Henderson, KY 42420). “I was opened to new ideas. A book, *Creative Communion* by Joe Holland (Paulist Press [1989], 997 MacArthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430), mentioned workplace visits, so I started it.

“I set up an appointment with a parishioner for a 10-minute visit. I tell them it is not a tour. I ask two questions derived from *Working* by Studs Terkel (New Press [1974], 38 Greene St., New York, NY 10013; \$16.95): What do you do? How do you feel about what you do?”

“I give them a prayer card. My bulletin column, *Sunday-Monday Connection*, has a short synopsis of the visits. After awhile I convene a one-hour small group with those I have visited. Workplace visits are the fastest way for a pastor to know his parishioners. Here in the South I meet people from other denominations at the worksites, so the practice is also evangelization.”

For about 10 years a small group of men (mostly Catholic) have met for breakfast on the Fridays of Advent and Lent, reports Kevin Kindelan (St. Joseph, 532 M Ave. NW, Winter Haven, FL 33881). “Recently the group began

coordinating open sessions on Saturday morning. The sessions are called Symposium on the Eucharist. The theme is transforming the world.

“We recently considered *Living the Mass* by Fr. Dom Grassi and Joe Paprocki (Loyola Press [2006], 3441 N. Ashland, Chicago, IL 60657; \$13.95). In Lent 2007 we will focus on your book, *Full-Time Christians*.”

Of note to Kindelan and others: *Full-Time Christians* by Bill Droel went out-of-print this past Christmas. Fifty first-come-first-serve copies are available from National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$10).

## Taking the Initiative

### *Assisting the Unemployed*

Inspiration Café (4554 N. Broadway #207, Chicago, IL 60640), founded by police officer Lisa Nigro in 1989, serves the homeless in a restaurant-like setting. It is not primarily, however, a walk-in facility. It is an intensive, three-month job training and health care program. Several of the participants learn culinary arts and restaurant management.

*A Recipe of Hope* by Karen Skalitzy (Acta Publications [2007], 5559 W. Howard St., Skokie, IL 60077; \$9.95) is a Studs Terkel-like collection of stories from Inspiration Café participants. Some are rendered as poems. Each chapter concludes with a recipe, like pumpkin chicken, pumpkin soup and more.

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## Work and Art

*Work: the World in Photographs* edited by Ferdinand Protzman (National Geographic [2006], 1145 17<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; \$35) is a coffee-table book of 190 workplace scenes. There are six chapters, each featuring one area of the world. Other chapters treat agriculture, manufacturing and mining. A short essay about the photos opens each chapter.

Most workers in our world don’t labor in skyscraper offices. *Work* has lots of *heavy lifting* pictures. Many people live off the sea or farm arid land. Children labor in sweatshops. There is a startling photo of a baby begging.

A few pictures are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century; most are contemporary. This 350-page book is published in seven countries.

## 110+ Years

### *Of Catholic Social Thought*

Many pastors and other Catholic leaders encourage their immigrant flock to participate in labor unions. Catholic thinking does not buy the argument that freedom and happiness automatically accrue as individuals pursue their own interest. Catholicism finds that people experience true freedom through participation in the family and other mediating structures, including unions.

The labor movement, in decline for several years, is now recruiting Mexican-American workers and other immigrants—something potentially beneficial both to the unions and to U.S. Catholicism. But there's a problem, writes Fr. George Schultze, SJ in *Strangers in a Foreign Land: the Organizing of Catholic Latinos in the U.S.* (Lexington Books [2007], 4501 Forbes Blvd. #200, Lanham, MD 20706; \$24.95).

Many unions, Schultze says, reach far beyond economic development by taking positions on cultural issues like abortion that are

offensive to immigrant Catholics. Schultze, a historian who has contacts within the building trades and other groups, finds “no strong Catholic voice in the labor movement” to question alliances with pro-abortion forces.

The title of Schultze' book does not primarily refer to Mexicans as the “strangers,” but to the labor movement which is a stranger in the pro-abortion movement. Likewise, a pro-abortion union organizer is a stranger to the Mexican-American community.

In his report on Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles, David Reiff similarly notes the tension around abortion and other cultural issues. Reiff, writing in *N.Y. Times Magazine* (12/24/06), highlights the essential mediating role of parishes for Mexican-Americans. The solidarity within the church is a mixed-blessing, however. Just as with previous immigrant groups, Reiff predicts Mexican-Americans will gain power through their churches and unions only to succumb to “individualism and the quest for prosperity.” The so-called individual *right to abortion* is, says Catholicism, one symptom of the unaccountable individualism in our country.

## Happenings

“Faith and Work Breakfast Series” has resumed at St. Olaf Church (215 S. Eighth St., Minneapolis, MN 55402). The 7 A.M. sessions on February 15, 2007 and April 19, 2007 consider the gospel of poverty in our land of plenty.

The Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (2015 NE Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78217; [www.dailylifeministry.org](http://www.dailylifeministry.org)) holds its annual conference April 13-15, 2007 in Cleveland. Our National Center for the Laity, a CMDL partner and a co-sponsor of the conference, wants a good showing of Catholics at the April gathering.

The Metanexus Institute (3624 Market St. #301, Philadelphia, PA 19104; [www.metanexus.net](http://www.metanexus.net)) sponsors a June 2-6, 2007 conference on science and religion at the University of Pennsylvania.

The Institute is also the home for Spiritual Capital Research Program. It will shortly publish a book on measurements of U.S. religiosity by David Campbell of the University of Notre Dame and Robert Putnam of Harvard University. Putnam is known for his study on the decline in volunteerism and citizenship, *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster [2000], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$16). Maybe the new book will be titled *Worshipping Alone*. Smile. (*Religion Watch* [11/06], PO Box 652, North Bellmore, NY 11710)

## Websites

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (16 Piazza San Calisto, Rome 00153, Italy; [www.justpax.it](http://www.justpax.it)) has launched a website featuring statements from Pope Benedict XVI and Vatican officials on human rights, poverty, war and other issues—more than a dozen statements a month. The site, still under construction, has links to about 14 randomly selected Catholic groups.

The new website of the Biomedical Ethics Commission (328 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102; [www.archspm.org/biomedical\\_ethics](http://www.archspm.org/biomedical_ethics)) features succinct moral information about illness, dying, medical research, conception and more. It has links to other Catholic sites, including National Catholic Bioethics Center (6399 Drexel Rd., Philadelphia, PA 19151; [www.ncbcenter.org](http://www.ncbcenter.org)) and Catholic Medical Association (333 E. Lancaster Ave. #348, Wynnewood, PA 19096; [www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org)).

Bob Senser, longtime friend of our National Center for the Laity, edits an informative cyber-newsletter *Human Rights for Workers* ([www.senser.com](http://www.senser.com)). Senser has great contacts, allowing him to include news from Asia and elsewhere in *Human Rights*.

Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity, hosts a cyberspace “Dialogue on the Spirituality of Work.” Send your e-mail address to his secure site: [gpierce@actapublications.com](mailto:gpierce@actapublications.com).

Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; [www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)) hosts our National Center for the Laity website ([www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm](http://www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm)).

For more from your INITIATIVES’ editor, go into cyberspace at [www.sacredheartpalos.org](http://www.sacredheartpalos.org). Look in the “Let Us Rebuild” section.

“The priest and the Levite (*Luke 10: 30-35*) wondered: If I stop to help this person, what will happen to me? The good Samaritan reversed the question: If I do not stop to help, what will happen to me?” -Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

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