

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm

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Natural Grace

The passengers on US Airways flight 1549 prayed as the plane glided over the Bronx. Their ordeal ended in what Governor David Paterson rightly calls “the miracle on the Hudson River.” It is worth noting, however, that this miracle was largely mediated through ordinary human work.

Pilot Chesley Sullenberger III deserves thanks and praise. But he boasts of nothing; simply the application of his keen interest in safety and his extensive aviation experience. The flight crew, including copilot Jeff Skiles, “routinely” applied the procedures they review several times each workday. The rescuers in the river didn’t suddenly acquire supernatural power. They too, without waiting for special instructions, applied standard training.

Jim Dwyer, a terrific reporter for the *N.Y. Times* (1/17/09), caught up with 20-year old Brittany Catanzaro, captain of the Thomas Kean ferry. She has been on the river since two years old. “It was hard to stay next to [the airplane],” she explains. But we “practice that by throwing life rings in the water and trying to stay alongside them.” The rescued passengers were congratulating her crew. But according to Catanzaro, “We’re just working as if we’re training and drilling.”

There was a ticket taker, a bus driver and others who stepped out of their normal roles to aid the rescue. But again, hundreds of others just did their “normal” excellent job: the hospital staff, the reporters, police, ambulance technicians, hotel staff, the Red Cross team, public officials, telephone operators, Coast Guard enlistees, and all those at the airport the following day who got survivors safely to their original destinations.

It is true that shoddy work and greed (a lot of it in New York City) has lately wrought suffering in society. Most days, however, most workers go about their jobs with appropriate *routine excellence*, thereby revealing God’s grace for those who have *eyes to see*.

Taking the Initiative

Against Foreclosures

Unbelievably some people are swindling those who are losing their homes in the wake of the economic fiasco, which was largely caused by similar swindlers marketing and repackaging unrealistic mortgages. These defrauders call themselves *foreclosure rescue companies* or *workout consultants*. They promise to forestall eviction by negotiating with the mortgagee. They demand about \$3,000 upfront and then swamp the beleaguered homeowner with official-looking letters or they just disappear. Federal departments and states’ attorneys are chasing the so-called *foreclosure rescue companies*.

For the most part the predatory loan problem cannot be blamed on neighborhood banks. Judith Fox (Notre Dame Legal Aid Clinic, 725 Howard St., South Bend, IN 46617; <http://law.nd.edu>) and her students now spend countless hours on mortgage foreclosures. Yet she has confidence in local banks where honest employees are willing to help with difficulties as possible. (*Notre Dame Magazine* [Winter/09], 538 Grace Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556).

There are also reputable non-profit housing centers assisting those approaching foreclosure, free of charge. Over 200 are affiliated with NeighborWorks America (1325 G St. NW #800, Washington, DC 20005; www.nw.org), a government funded and certified agency. NWA has a relationship with Neighborhood Housing Service of America (1970 Broadway #470, Oakland, CA 94612; www.nhsonline.org), which can purchase some mortgages and amend their terms. (*N.Y. Times*, 1/15/09)

The sub-prime lending fiasco, remember, was not targeted only at low-wage workers. Therefore the housing centers are located even in supposedly upwardly mobile suburbs, including Institute for Consumer Credit Education (16335 S. Harlem Ave., Tinley Park, IL 60477). Other centers have added foreclosure counseling to their original programs, like St. Ambrose Housing Aid (321 E. 25th St.,

Baltimore, MD 21218) and Regional Fair Housing Center (9730 S. Western Ave. #502, Evergreen Park, IL 60805). (*Southtown Star*, 1/14/09)

From its attic office INITIATIVES can see the Greater Southwest Development Corporation (2601 W. 63rd St., Chicago, IL 60629; www.greatersouthwest.org) and its companion Neighborhood Housing Service (2609 W. 63rd St., Chicago, IL 60629). Some time ago the DevCorp devised an interesting approach to stopping foreclosures before they germinate. Backed by legislation, potential homebuyers in the DevCorp's turf (and in a few other zip codes) participate in mandatory loan counseling before closing on the house. The free program showed early progress. But for reasons related to the dysfunctional politics in Illinois, the requirement was lifted. Social policy thinkers in the new federal administration are, however, studying the DevCorp for positive lessons. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 1/11/09)

Ocwen Financial Corp. (1661 Worthington Rd. #100, West Palm Beach, FL 33409) is a major sub-prime loan agency. Its reputation comes from its ability to get payments out of delinquent mortgagors. But recently Ocwen changed its hardnosed tactics and, according to reporter Barbara Kiviat, "has done more than almost anyone else to keep struggling homeowners in their houses."

Kiviat makes a point of Ocwen's mixed motives: The company is not altruistic, yet has calculated that lenders and Ocwen make money by keeping people in their homes. Their approach requires new computer programs that modify loan terms, including principal write-downs. The Ocwen computer uses numbers unique to each family, even including some psychology in its loan modification. Ocwen is even willing to deal with absentee landlords delinquent on their mortgages, thereby keeping tenants in a house. (*Time*, 1/12/09)

Financial Shock by Mark Zandi (Financial Times [2009], 1 Lake St., Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458; \$24.99) is a timely summary of the housing crisis with pertinent lessons.

Taking the Initiative *For Bureaucrats*

There is a vocation crisis in public service. Amy Wilkinson, a young worker in the Office of U.S. Trade Representatives explains:

"My old business school friends and my colleagues [in the private sector are] perplexed. Why would anyone want to serve in the federal government, the epitome of everything that is slow, bureaucratic and opaque?"

This vocation crisis comes at the very moment more competent government workers are needed in our recovery from the implosion of deregulation and economic slight of hand. So, asks Wilkinson, "How [do we] attract young people—not just to the prestigious jobs [in, for example, the White House] but to the line jobs that exist across civil service?" (*Wilson Quarterly* [Winter/09], 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20004)

Chris Myers Asch is proposing a Public Service Academy (1225 I St. NW #600, Washington, DC 20005; www.uspublicserviceacademy.org). Young adults get a four-year education for free in exchange for five years of government service, similar to military academies.

There are objections to Asch: that his proposal is too expensive and redundant, given the 150 schools of public administration in established universities. He replies that PSA uniquely recruits undergrads. (*N.Y. Times*, 1/7/09)

Any suggestions from INITIATIVES' readers? How to make public service an attractive vocation? How to get out of the paradox of distrust for government at a time when people are calling upon government for more assistance and coordination? And, as a curiosity, might some attention to this vocation crisis in public service by Church offices and Catholic newspapers lead to more creative responses to the relative shortage of vowed religious and ordained priests?

Taking the Initiative *For the Neighborhood*

An "agenda that focuses exclusively on the problems in our cities" is outdated, write Bruce Katz & Jennifer Bradley of Metropolitan Policy Program (Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; www.brookings.edu). Many of the key issues of the day, including the housing crisis and the immigration question, are playing out in the suburbs, particularly in the post-World War II suburbs. (*Newsweek*, 1/26/09)

Interestingly, those suburbs seek a second spring by using a concept they once

rejected or neglected. Suburbs are refashioning themselves as *neighborhoods*.

Jay Walljasper, author of *The Great Neighborhood Book* (New Society Publs. [2007], c/o Consortium, 1094 Flex Dr., Jackson, TN 38301; \$19.95) reports on some suburbs contiguous to cities that are refurbishing train and bus stations near new or remodeled coffee shops, sports bars, maybe a library and more. Bike and walking paths, brick lanes, better sidewalks with more lighting and decorative plants as well as other amenities are part of the emerging *neighborhood suburb* approach.

Of course, says Walljasper, the need to refashion these suburbs comes just when their tax base is eroding. He and others therefore hope the new federal administration--borrowing ideas from President Franklin Roosevelt--provides workers and funds to specific projects. The effort, Walljasper concludes, must retrofit homes, churches, schools and shops with more insulation and other green material to attract quality-conscious young families.

Walljasper names some organizations spearheading and lobbying for the *neighborhood suburb movement*, including Transportation for America (1707 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; www.t4america.org) and Apollo Alliance (330 Townsend St. #205, San Francisco, CA 94107; www.apolloalliance.org). (*AARP Bulletin* [2/09], 601 E. St. NW, Washington, DC 20049)

Other hubs for the latest in neighborhood planning include New Urbanism (824 King St. #103, Alexandria, VA 22314; www.newurbanism.org) and Congress for New Urbanism (140 S. Dearborn St. #404, Chicago, IL 60603; www.cnu.org).

INITIATIVES, a Catholic publication, must add a codicil to this positive report on suburbia: A focus on hardware is very incomplete. While renewal of the ring suburbs (and of the Great Lakes and Atlantic coast cities) is desirable, federal money and programs may in fact accelerate the withering of what Catholics mean by the *sacrament of neighborhood*. Our Catholic *principle of subsidiarity* (no bigger than necessary) cautions against social legislation and federal renewal programs that disrespect family life, ethnic culture and particularity. The hardware looks good, but the government intervention can actually obliterate communities. (See *Neighborhood* by Fr. Andrew Greeley, Seabury Press [1977], 3101 N. Seventh St., Harrisburg, PA 17110)

Taking the Initiative *In the Liturgy*

Is there any perfectly made product? Is there any perfectly harmonious workplace? The product at Cavanagh Company (610 Putnam Pike, Greenville, RI 02828) "is about as close to perfect as earthly possible," reports the *N.Y. Times* (12/25/08). And the three brothers who run the plant "never had an argument over business."

So what's the product at Cavanagh? About 80% of all Eucharistic bread used in *real presence* churches comes from this bakery. Those churches include Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran, but not Orthodox. Southern Baptists also buy from Cavanagh, although their hosts have different ingredients baked in a separate section of the plant. A parish might purchase from an order of nuns or from a religious goods store but Cavanagh likely baked the hosts.

It's a business, says general manager Andy Cavanagh. "We're a bakery and all we're making is bread. [The bread's] transformation is out of our hands. The best thing we can do is make sure the bread is perfect in every way possible." That means care in mixing the correct ingredients, preserving freshness, sealing the crumb-proof edges, imprinting designs and more. The Cavanagh hosts are so popular that there are distributors in Canada, England, Australia and recently in West Africa.

The bread and the wine on the offertory table during the first half hour of Mass represents the work we do Monday through Saturday, including work around the home and in the community. After the homily that bread and wine, "the work of human hands," is brought to the altar and in the drama of the Mass becomes our Lord and our God, really and truly present.

Is our daily work worthy to become God? Can we, like Andy Cavanagh but with a little different inflection and meaning, say: "The bread and the wine's transformation are out of our hands, the work of human hands?"

Taking the Initiative *Assisting the Unemployed*

The Center for Workplace Spirituality (Seton Hall University, 400 S. Orange Ave., South Orange, NJ 07079) has a Christian Employment Outreach Program. Parish leaders attend a three-hour workshop before launching a

parish ministry. CWS provides ongoing resources. Several parishes in New Jersey are taking the initiative.

Interfaith Worker Justice (1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org) has a *Congregational Toolkit* designed for church-based support groups of the unemployed. It includes practical suggestions, reflection starters on “the spiritual meaning of the economic crisis,” and liturgy ideas “for lifting up unemployed workers and employers in this time of crisis.”

Catholic New World (3525 S. Lake Park Ave., Chicago, IL 60653) is compiling a list of church-based support groups for the unemployed in the greater Chicago area.

Catholic New World can add to its directory, Help Our Parish with Employment (St. Elizabeth Seton, 9300 167th St., Orland Hills, IL 60487).

The economic crisis, of course, is not confined to one industry or to one area of town. St. Elizabeth Seton, for example, is located in a relatively prosperous part of the diocese.

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Free market liberalism and an individualistic strain in religion team up in a formidable political movement, writes National Center for the Laity board member Vincent Rougeau in *Christians in the American Empire* (Oxford University Press [2009], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$29.95). The result is counter-productive militarism, insensitive social policy and harmful economics.

Catholic social thought could be a timely counterweight, Rougeau says. Because it is not entirely based in “contract theories of rights” and “notions of autonomy,” Catholic social thought sees freedom as “meaningful only in the context of a web of communal relationships that nurture both rights and duties.”

Freedom is often equated with our country’s highest purpose. Yet to some people *freedom* only means distance from regulation, market constraints and a priori social responsibility; the so-called *ownership society*. To other people *freedom* means toleration of any and all lifestyles or personal behaviors and the ability to go shopping. By contrast, Catholic social thought insists that true freedom is situated in relationships, obligations and particular cultures.

Rougeau through six chapters explains Catholic social principles and applies them to welfare, immigration, race relations and international affairs. Among those principles, he highlights *subsidiarity*. Instead of policies directed toward maximum individual opportunity, subsidiarity points to maximum human dignity within the context of family life and through the kaleidoscopic pluralism that constitutes our beautiful country.

An aside: Rougeau sorts through the possible confusion between *Catholic social thought* and *Catholic social teaching*. INITIATIVES uses *Catholic social teaching*, as an inclusive term for both magisterial texts and the laity’s experience and reflections. More on *Christians in the American Empire* in a subsequent INITIATIVES.

Rest in Peace

Fr. Alcuin Coyle, OFM (1929-2008)

Coyle was an original signer of our National Center for the Laity’s 1977 charter, *A Chicago Declaration for Christian Concern*. At that time he was president of Catholic Theological Union (5401 S. Cornell Ave., Chicago, IL 60615; www.ctu.edu). CTU, a Chicago treasure sharing a neighborhood with President Barack Obama’s Western White House, educates seminarians and lay people for ministry in the U.S. and overseas.

Coyle once apologized to NCL. He assumed that one or more of his critics were unfairly associating NCL with him. NCL had the opposite assumption: It is an honor to be associated with someone holding a doctorate in canon law, someone who served as a general secretary for the first and second sessions of Vatican II, someone who taught at and led three seminaries and someone who, upon retirement, developed the largest adult education program in the New York diocese at St. Francis of Assisi (135 W. 31st St., New York, NY 10001).

Rest in Peace

Pete Hammond (1936-2008)

Hammond called it “the agitated pew,” those rows in church where lay people wonder how to live faith once the service concludes. Unfortunately, congregational and parish staff often don’t attend to the laity’s agitation. Consequently, Hammond, a Presbyterian elder, invested his energy in para-church movements.

For 41 years Hammond worked for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (PO Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707; www.intervarsity.org). He was not content with campus ministry that settles for six or eight similar-looking students in a weekly Bible sharing group. Not that he was opposed to Bible study—in fact, Hammond is an editor of *Word In Life Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, PO Box 141000, Nashville, TN 37214; \$19.99).

From day one Hammond promoted interracial and multi-ethnic campus ministry programs, particularly those that connect faith with a student's career. He devised forums for graduate students to discuss faith and work with young lawyers, doctors, business managers and the like. Hammond's influence has produced a Ministry in Daily Life division within IVCF (www.ivmdl.org).

Hammond enjoyed compiling bibliographies including *The Marketplace Annotated Bibliography* (InterVarsity Press [2002], PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515; \$20). He recently confessed to your INITIATIVES' editor that about 1,500 books on faith and work were clogging the hallways in his Madison home. Hammond also apparently collected newsletters for not long ago he sent NCL a surprise gift: bound volumes containing 30 years of INITIATIVES.

The National Center for the Laity saw Hammond at meetings of the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (c/o Workshop, 2015 NE Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78217; www.dailylifeministry.org). Last May at a four day conference hosted by NCL Hammond grabbed the microphone at the end of each session with a three minute book review, drawing upon evangelical, mainline, Catholic and so-called secular publications.

His book, *Lessons, Prayers & Scripture on the Faith Journey* (IVCF [2007], PO Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707), includes this poem, lightly edited:

Faith practiced at work turns
Bosses into people developers,
Business leaders into job creators,
Educators into spiritual directors,
Financial advisors into stewardship
counselors,
Grocers into health and nutrition suppliers,
Insurance agents into wise advisors,
Journalists into voices for the least among us,
Politicians into justice brokers,

Technology experts into relationship
managers,
Writers and publishers into dream weavers,
And all Jesus' followers at work into
developers of the kingdom of God on earth as
it is in heaven.

Rest in Peace

Archbishop Jean Jadot (1909-2009)

Jadot of Belgium is the only person directly quoted in our National Center for the Laity's 1977 charter, *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. "I believe in the laity as laity," he says. Too much emphasis on what is now called lay ecclesial ministry "will kill the laity in the church because it will reinforce the conviction already existing that to work for the church you must be [employed by the church]."

Jadot was the Vatican's delegate to the U.S. from 1973 to 1980. His vision of the church was a community of faith, not a hierarchical organization. By 1980 at least one-third of the U.S. Catholic bishops were people whom Jadot thought shared his definition of church.

Rest in Peace

Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus (1936-2009)

In 1977 your INITIATIVES' editor happened upon a pamphlet, *To Empower People: the Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* by Neuhaus and Peter Berger (American Enterprise Institute, 1150 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036). It celebrated those intermediate institutions like parish, neighborhood and family that negotiate the area between a person and the big forces of business and government. Your editor, using the pamphlet and four AEI companion books, then wrote a thesis paper equating Neuhaus' mediating structures language with the neglected Catholic principle of *subsidiarity*, which means *no bigger than necessary*.

The mediating structures concept shows a way out of the paradox of citizens who object to government and medical bureaucracy and yet expect more health care and social services. The concept also suggests an alternative to, on one hand, a political party that believes in *leaving things to the individual* and on the other hand a party that wants *government programs* to address every situation. Subsidiarity says that local institutions better respect people's freedom and better deliver social services.

In coming months Neuhaus' concept could enhance our economic recovery and our replenishment of social capital. Neuhaus did not usually include accountable labor unions and reputable community organizations (including

those funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development) in his list of mediating structures. As social policies unfold, those institutions and others are critical to creative implementation.

Happenings

Villanova University (800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085; www.villanova.edu) is offering a "curriculum development workshop," June 8-12, 2009. Its purpose is to help high school and college teachers in all disciplines insert elements of Catholic social thought into their courses. One session is specifically on "Catholic Social Thought and Human Work."

The Aquinas Center of Theology (1256 Briarcliff Rd. #A221, Atlanta, GA 30306; www.aquinas.emory.edu) has launched the Atlanta Business Conference with a one-day session in late February. Michael Naughton (John A. Ryan Institute, 2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105; www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies) was a featured presenter. ABC will use additional programs to help executives integrate their Catholic faith and their work.

Websites

INITIATIVES recently asked for a single website or newsletter that tracks current boycotts and conversely preferred business. In turn, INITIATIVES will help its readers do good by doing what they normally do, only with more premeditation. INITIATIVES' request still stands. In the meantime, Internet shoppers can consult Sweatshop Free Communities (30 Blackstone St., Bangor, ME 04401; www.sweatfree.org/shoppingguide) for a directory of apparel stores and more using humane labor policies.

Among those stores, INITIATIVES' friend Solidarity Committee of the Capital District (33 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12210; www.solidaritycommittee.org) highly recommends Fuerza Unida (710 New Laredo Hwy., San Antonio, TX 78211; www.lafuerzaunida.org). In 1990 Levi Strauss abandoned a plant in favor of production in Costa Rica. Several of the left behind workers organized their own production group and now sell quality apparel.

National Center for the Laity's friend Bob Senser supplies reports on sweatshop conditions in Bangladesh, China, Mexico and even the U.S. in his *Human Rights for Workers* (<http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>).

The Society of Human Resource Management (1800 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314; www.shrm.org) has posted several articles on religion in the workplace and features the topic in its *HR Magazine* (12/08). Topics include religious discrimination, corporate chaplains and more.

Lynn Delaney writes INITIATIVES to note a new name for her organization, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (1367 Connecticut Ave. NW #200, Washington, DC 20036; www.rfkcenter.org). The website has timely information on human rights issues from around the world.

Pax Romana (1025 Connecticut Ave. NW #1000, Washington, DC 20036; www.pax-romana-cmica-usa.org) tracks human rights issues through the lens of Catholic social teaching. Within a few weeks it will publish a study guide for the Vatican's *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The Vatican document is available from National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$22).

Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity, publishes an occasional *Spirituality of Work* interactive e-mail. His production schedule, which slowed down while Pierce was involved in the sale of the Chicago Cubs, is now more frequent. Smile. Join by sending your e-mail address to his secure site gpierce@actapublications.com.

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Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642;
www.catholiclabor.org) hosts the web version of INITIATIVES at
www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm.

Board Members of NCL include Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, John Hazard, Terry Mambu Rasch, Vince Rougeau, Phil Moore, Lauren Sukal, Frosty Pipal and Vaile Scott (president).

Our NCL, an independent 501-C-3 organization, chartered 30 years ago in the State of Illinois, survives entirely on donations. See the back page of this newsletter for information about making your 2009 donation. Please also send items about faith and work from your parish bulletin, your diocesan or town newspaper, or from magazines and websites to INITIATIVES.

Our NCL has three projects in the hopper:

- A supportive gathering of Catholic leaders (and others) involved with the immigration question, particularly those dealing with the aftermath of Homeland Security raids on workplaces, particularly those leaders in the Midwest.
- A booklet titled *Catholic Administrators and Labor Unions*.
- A listening session with young adults, alumni of Catholic volunteer corps and others, who are living in or in other ways participating in an intentional community.

NCL welcomes contacts, participation and funding for these projects.

"The solidarity between work and religion is an ancient and venerable one. Western civilization's earliest piece of labor legislation was a religious commandment given to Moses: *Keep holy the Sabbath*. That precept was not simply a reminder to respect God's special day with worship; it was also a milestone of social justice. The Israelites had personal experience with slave labor in Egypt from which they were liberated. The Sabbath is a day to relish in the dignity of work." -- Ed Marciniak (1917-2004)

