

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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Taking the Initiative

For Engineers

Henry Petroski of Duke University has previously appeared in INITIATIVES for his reflections on engineering. His latest is *An Engineer's Alphabet* (Cambridge University Press [2011], 32 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10013; \$21.99). It is a 368-page encyclopedia chock-full of with short items, interesting enough for the common reader.

The entry *asphalt cookies* demonstrates the properties of road paving to students; edibles at the end of class. Learn the history and application of the phrase *back of the envelope* in another entry. Read about *pocket protectors* and also about the Dilbert stereotype of nerdy engineers.

There are several amusing entries and a section on jokes—the light bulb question, of course, and comparisons of engineers with priests, mathematicians and lawyers. There are lists too: Of engineering schools, five different lists of the *seven wonders of the world* and two lists of the greatest engineers. George Goethals (1858-1928), noted for the Panama Canal, and George Westinghouse (1846-1914), who developed alternating current and more, make both the “all time” and the more recent list. There are short sections on *duty, creed, faith, pride and obligations*.

The *Catholic Almanac* lists St. Ferdinand III as the patron of engineers. Petroski details how engineering students established a claim on St. Patrick as their patron saint. In fact, in 1919 representatives of 11 schools met to form the Guard of St. Patrick.

Any profession (nursing, priesthood, or banking) will have a vocation crisis if its living culture is not communicated to young adults. Petroski makes the vocation of engineer accessible and attractive.

Taking the Initiative

Through Coops

This country's fabrication mills and textile mills began as family-owned businesses that gave opportunity to thousands of workers. These mills were eventually sold to larger corporations with a wider reach. Eventually parent companies fragmented their mill operations--moving product lines to various locations, using capital for other ventures, including investments in real estate, insurance and unrelated products. Small towns with a declining factory base suffered. (*The Company Town* by Hardy Green, Basic Books [2010], 387 Park Ave. S., New York, NY 10016; \$26.95)

In response people in Connecticut's Naugatuck River Valley launched several worker-owner efforts. Their story is told in *Banded Together: Economic Democratization in the Brass Valley* by Jeremy Brecher (University of Illinois Press [2011], 1325 S. Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820; \$27).

Church leaders, foundations, charities and civic leaders in the Valley gave emergency aid, engaged in regional planning and stretched their limited resources to deal with layoffs and closures. A new ingredient was added when Ken Galdston, whom INITIATIVES has known since the early 1970s, arrived on the scene in summer of 1982. He organized Naugatuck Valley Project (26 Lundlow St., Waterbury, CT 06710). It helped workers buy Seymour Specialty Wire in April 1985. It was, writes Brecher, “the largest and most democratically structured 100% employee-owned industrial buyout in the U.S.” However, buying an old mill is not a magic solution and Seymour was in bankruptcy by 1993.

Galdston and NVP reflected on their actions. They persisted with other modestly successful buyouts. NVP then turned its expertise to several start-up coops in home services, health care, housing and more. The effort has expanded all over New England under the umbrella of Inter-Valley Project (1075 Washington St., West Newton, MA 02465; www.intervalleyproject.org).

Banded Together is a valuable case study. A network of leaders realizes that improvement is not, for example, one campaign to stop one plant closing. It is a relational process over months and years, pooling resources from church, business, legal, academic, union, community, government and other interests.

Drawing upon pioneers like NVP and others, the coop movement in the U.S. is quietly growing. Evergreen Cooperatives (540 E. 105th St., Cleveland, OH 44108), for example, is a cluster of businesses involved in solar energy, laundries and small farms, reports Gar Alperovitz. (*N.Y. Times*, 12/15/11)

The largest coop in the world is inspired by Catholic social thought. Mondragon (Jose Arrizmendiarieta 5, 20500 Mondragon, Gipuzkoa, Spain; www.mcc.es.ENG.aspx) is the result of Fr. Jose Maria Arrizmendiarieta's (1915-1976) application of Catholic principles among young workers. It now has 42,000 worker-owners in 120 different manufacturing, service and retail companies.

Each worker, says Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), is entitled to be part-owner of the economy; to have a share in *the great workbench*. Pope Benedict XVI likewise says that "every worker should have the chance to make his [or her] contribution" and in some way to be the *owner* of the business. (*Pope John Paul II's Gospel of Work* by Bill Droel; \$8 and *Love in Truth* by Pope Benedict XVI; \$5, National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629)

Taking the Initiative *Against Evictions*

Real estate was booming. Then beginning in 2006 (or earlier in some places) the air leaked out. Nearly all homeowners since then have experienced depreciation. Some have doubly suffered because they were victims of predatory lending and/or a foreclosure scheme.

Bill Spielberger (Spielberger Associates, 53 W. Jackson Blvd. #1231, Chicago, IL 60604), a longtime friend of National Center for the Laity, is an expert on the housing crisis because he represents its victims.

Spielberger explains the term *sewer service*. "A process server is legally required to hand-deliver the court papers on foreclosures. Instead, to save time and money, some agents throw the papers into the sewer or a garbage can.

"One Latino couple was astounded to find out that a foreclosure lawsuit had been filed against them, a default judgment had been entered, and that their home was scheduled for auction within 48 hours--all this without ever being informed that they had been sued for foreclosure. They rushed to court to get the sale postponed. In a hearing, the process server for a major bank swore that not only had he personally served the necessary court papers to the couple but also swore that just minutes before that he delivered papers to a distant house on the 2400 block of N. Clark in Chicago, and then one minute later served a another set of court papers at another north side address, a distance of over eight miles! The judge believed him. The Latinos' home was sold at auction. It is called *sewer service*.

"Another major bank swore in court that their process server had personally hand-delivered foreclosure papers to *Mr. Smith*, that Smith had not appeared in court, and therefore they wanted a default judgment against Smith. But there was a problem: Smith died and was buried over ten years ago. The case was transferred to another judge, and the major bank again filed its foreclosure case against the same Mr. Smith. One more *sewer service*.

"A 97-year old WWII vet, after getting a mortgage loan for home repairs, got stuck with a \$3,000 water bill from the City of Chicago. He contacted the water department which insisted that he was spending too much time in the bathroom. He went to court several times, complaining that he had no water leaks. The bill mushroomed to \$16,000. Finally, the water department went to his home, disconnected his meter, repaired water lines, withdrew their lawsuit and informed the judge that the vet owed no money. Four months later he got another water bill--this time, based on non-existent meter readings. He now supposedly owes the city \$19,238.95. More *sewer service*."

Response to the foreclosure crisis has come on various fronts using a variety of tactics.

Karen Gargamelli (Common Law Inc., 1170 Broadway #902, New York, NY 10001) frequently represents people in housing court. As an "alternative to more *pre-foreclosure settlement conferences*, she and 250 others successfully blockaded a home in Brooklyn last August, forestalling the eviction officers. This direct action and others like it are coordinated by Organizing for Occupation (www.o4onyc.org). Vida Urbana (284 Amory St. #100, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130; www.clvu.org) also uses civil

disobedience against foreclosures. Take Back the Land Rochester (285 Clarissa St., Rochester, NY 14608; www.takebackroc.rocus.org) is another action group, affiliated with a national network, Take Back the Land (PO Box 4570, Washington, DC 20017; www.takebacktheland.org). Vocal NY (80A Fourth Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217; www.vocal-ny.org) has a squatters' campaign in which they clean and repair foreclosed houses and then welcome a family to them. (*The Catholic Worker* [11/11], 36 E. First St., New York, NY 10003; *N.Y. Times*, 2/7/11; *Chicago Tribune*, 12/29/11)

On another front, neighbors who consistently tackle housing issues through community organizations and non-profit development corporations stay ahead of the process. Dudley St. Neighborhood Initiative (504 Dudley St., Roxbury, MA 02119; www.dsni.org) in the Roxbury and North Dorchester neighborhoods faced run down conditions in the early 1980s. DSNI decided not to directly fight the big decision makers. Instead in 1988, under the radar, DSNI won the *power of eminent domain* over vacant land and thus began to shift trends away from speculators and government entities and toward the community. DSNI established *community land trusts* through which new homeowners purchase the building but agree to a 99-year renewable land lease, held by the non-profit. The lease has provisions to deter speculation and to monitor for good quality repairs to the home. DSNI approves the mortgages, voiding bogus schemes. It then helps homeowners keep current with their payments.

In a peak year for foreclosures in 2008, not a single home in the Dudley land trust faced foreclosure. Further, DSNI gets involved with other homeowners in its turf to avoid foreclosure. National Community Land Trust Network (2710 NE 14th Ave., Portland, OR 97212; www.cltnetwork.org) tracks the effective land trust strategy elsewhere. (*Yes!* [Winter/09], 284 Madrona Way NE #116, Brainbridge Island, WA 98110)

Arguing that reduced mortgage interest rates do not help at-risk homeowners, a coalition of investors like PIMCO (1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019) and Allianz Global (680 Newport Center #250, North Beach, CA 92660), plus community groups like Neighborhood Assistance Corporation (3707 Washington St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130; www.naca.com) are pressuring banks and finance firms for *principal reduction*. It is the only way to keep people in a home that is valued for less than its mortgage;

for the lender to recoup any cash; and then for refinancing to actually help homeowners and the economy. (*Wall St. Journal*, 2/9/10)

In that the manner of foreclosure is shoddy and frequently fraudulent (*sewer service*), the attorney generals of all 50 states formed a coalition to investigate lenders who use faulty or illegal foreclosure documents. The coalition is coordinated by Attorney General Tom Miller (1305 E. Walnut St., Des Moines, IA 50319). Upon hearing of the attorney generals' action, several lenders, including Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs, pledged an internal review of documents and suspended cases in several states. (*Housing Wire* [10/13/10], 2701 Dallas Pkwy. #200, Plano, TX 75093)

Taking the Initiative Against Slavery

N.Y. Times columnist Nicholas Kristof regularly writes about slavery, often reporting from Cambodia. He actually bought teenagers there, marketed as sex property that a purchaser takes along for the duration. Kristof took his *property* to an aid organization which supplies job training. Sadly, some return to their former life. The slave master initially uses force and cruelty, Kristof explains. As the teenagers become resigned to their fate, they appear to be voluntarily participating.

Kristof recommends Somaly (PO Box 1272, Wheat Ridge, CO 80034; www.somaly.org). It was founded in 2007 by a former sex slave, Somaly Mam of Cambodia. It rescues and educates children. It also advocates for enforcement of international laws and it informs the wider public.

Likewise, the Maryknoll Sisters (PO Box 317, Maryknoll, NY 10545) are involved in rescuing slaves and in advocacy. For example, Sr. Helene O'Sullivan at the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center in Phnom Penh helps young girls begin anew. The Maryknoll Sisters, in cooperation with others, have produced a documentary on modern slavery, *Lives for Sale* (www.maryknollmall.org). Like everything with which women religious are involved, the video comes with a discussion guide, questions and suggestions for further action.

For 25 years the Institute for Global Labor and Human Rights (5 Gateway Center #600, Pittsburgh, PA 15222; www.globallaborrights.org) has advocated

against child labor, focusing on specific companies that abet slavery.

The companies that contribute to slavery include familiar stores and products. Bargain seekers unwittingly benefit from unacceptable practices overseas and even exploitation in our country, says Kevin Clarke. He recommends that consumers inform their conscience by taking a test at www.slaveryfootprint.org. (*U.S. Catholic* [1/12], 205 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60606)

Under a new California law large businesses must disclose their efforts in eradicating slavery in their supply chain. Christian Brothers Investment Services (777 Third Ave. #2900, New York, NY 10017; www.cbisonline.com) has guidelines to help those businesses comply. (*National Catholic Reporter* [1/19/12], PO Box 410890, Kansas City, MO 64141)

Taking the Initiative

Among the Disabled

The Partnership for a Disability Friendly Community (Good Shepherd, 850 S. Fifth St., Allentown, PA 18103; www.disabilityfriendlylv.com) is an organization of about 90 disabled people, plus representatives from several service agencies. It advocates in areas like housing, employment and transportation. It recently launched a business recognition program. Stores, shops, public facilities and restaurants that accommodate or hire the disabled are allowed to display a decal.

Taking the Initiative

In Labor Relations

Nearly all labor contracts are negotiated without any newsworthy incident—even in this difficult economy. However, David Berg, president of American Crystal Sugar (101 N. Third St., Moorhead, MN 56560; www.crystalsugar.com), made news by comparing the union to a cancer tumor that must be removed.

Regular negotiations with the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco and Grain Millers Local 167G (100 N. Third St. #50, Grand Forks, ND 58203; www.bctgmlocal67g.com) began in May 2011. In August the company suspended talks and locked its workers out of the plant. Yet Crystal Sugar profits set records in each of the previous four years. Berg's own compensation

more than tripled during that period. Crystal Sugar now uses about 900 so-called *replacement workers*.

Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton offers to mediate. Church leaders, including about 12 Catholic parishes, are urging a resumption of talks. Shoppers are familiar with Crystal's Sugar's white and blue bag, with the company name encircled in red. (*St. Paul Union Advocate* [12/11], 411 Main St. #202, St. Paul, MN 55102 & *N.Y. Times*, 1/23/12)

Taking the Initiative

Assisting the Unemployed

Batavia Reemployment Ministry, a cooperate effort between St. Peter Church and Holy Cross Church (2300 Main St., Batavia, IL 60510; www.holycross-batavia.org), meets on the second and fourth Thursdays at 7 P.M. for support, job search coaching and more. Participants are able to stay connected and follow job leads through an Internet site. The group uses this prayer:

Dear St. Joseph, You were faced with the responsibility of providing the necessities of life for Jesus and Mary. Look down with fatherly compassion on me in my anxiety over my present inability to support my family. Help me to find gainful employment soon, so that this heavy burden will be lifted from my heart and so that I can provide for those whom God has entrusted to my care. Help all of us to guard against bitterness and discouragement, so that we emerge from this trial spiritually enriched with great blessings from God. Amen.

120+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Columnist Michael Powell finds hypocrisy in New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's opposition to a proposal that workers receive a \$10 an hour minimum for their labor at firms subsidized by taxpayers, including Goldman Sachs, Bank of America or Yankee Stadium.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (637 S. Dearborn St. #100, Chicago, IL 60605; www.industrialareasfoundation.org), which is involved in the New York proposal, introduced the *living wage* concept about 18 years ago with the conviction that "food service workers, security guards and temporary office workers"

working fulltime should not be poor, Powell explains. (*N.Y. Times*, 12/20/11)

Catholic social thought supports this living wage effort, writes Chelsea Pingree. In the Catholic picture of society the government should not run most businesses. Nor should families upon first resort normally depend on state aid. In a healthy economy families should procure goods and services “by the wages they receive from their work.” In order then for businesses to remain private and for families to be self-supporting, Pingree continues, “wages must be sufficient.” The specifics of a sufficient wage, she notes, depend “greatly on the cost of living for a specific location.”

A minimum wage ordinance might be necessary because an individual company acting alone risks falling to its competitors. Catholicism also allows for a wage ordinance because the market alone cannot account for the innate dignity of each person. “A living wage is a matter of human dignity,” Pingree concludes. (*Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* [Fall/11], 1216 Sunbury Rd., Columbus, OH 43219)

News and Views

According to a strain in U.S. Catholicism, the church “should recover its supposedly lost integrity by taking a resolute stand against American culture,” says historian David O’Brien. He is reacting to an exchange in *Commonweal* between Fr. Robert Imbelli of Boston College and Andrew Bacevich at Boston University. U.S. Catholicism has failed, Bacevich writes. Its members “chose a path of accommodation and compromise” with the wider culture.

Others sound this note. Catholic Workers, for example, recommend a *counter-cultural* faith. In some circumstances bishops and other Church employees talk about a *pure Catholicism* or a *remnant community*, characterizing the wider culture as a *culture of death*.

Wittingly or not these culture despisers, says O’Brien, call “into question the aspirations of immigrant Catholic families, past and present,” who make their way in our pluralistic society. This negativity, O’Brien continues, turns ordinary lay life “into a contradiction of Christian discipleship, and makes most of what we do in Catholic higher education a facilitation of this dreaded secularization.” The wholesale disdain for culture divorces what is celebrated on

Sunday from the weekday life of most Catholics—those civic leaders, educators, health care professionals, business people and others who might otherwise bring their values and savvy to the defects in their institutions, he concludes. (*Commonweal* [8/12 & 10/7/11 & 1/13/12], 475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115)

The National Center for the Laity is opposed to excessive individualism, consumerism and relativism in U.S. culture. The over 1million abortions procured last year are a tragic consequence. At the same time NCL is sensitive to the tone and style of those *insiders* who incrementally broker peace, respect for life and justice on the job, around the home and in the neighborhood. It is wiser, believes NCL, for the church to start with the achievements of U.S. culture. Adopting a positive accent, the whole church can then support ordinary Catholics and other like-minded people who, from the inside, recall their particular institutions to original aspirations.

NCL’s distinction between *insiders* and *outsiders* is fluid. A person can be either depending on circumstances and milieu. Further, NCL appreciates that prophetic outsiders sometimes prepare the way for courageous insiders. Indeed, INITIATIVES often mentions those prophets. But eventually the *virtue of social justice* is a collective action for reform of a policy performed *within* one’s own occupational or community setting. (*What Is Social Justice?*, NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$4)

Moralizing is easier than the discipline of intentional one-to-one relationships. But only by listening to what it is like on the inside, can Christians initiate prudent collective action. Moralizing looks good or feels good. Relationships change the world.

Rest in Peace

Bishop John Jukes, OFM Conv. (1923-2011)

Jukes was bishop of Southwark, England. Our National Center for the Laity knew him as the 20-year chair of the Committee for World of Work, under the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. Jukes began the committee, his cousin Austen Ivereigh says, because “middle managers” within the Church made a specialty of social justice, losing touch with “the reality of laypeople.” The committee

was a forum for businesspeople, trades people, service workers and ordinary laity.

In 2001 the committee published a remarkable booklet, *A Spirituality of Work*. Ivereigh calls it Jukes' "major written legacy." (*The Tablet* [12/2/11], 1 King St. Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W60QZ, England)

Modern Catholic social thought, says the booklet, began because many workers and families did not benefit from the promise of urban industrialization, but instead suffered poverty. After World War II concerns about the meaning of work and about rootedness amid upward mobility entered the picture. And so, a phrase like *spirituality of work* was added to the Catholic lexicon. People "can sanctify their work," Jukes' booklet says, by honoring specific virtues and applying Catholic principles like *social justice, subsidiarity and solidarity*.

In his contribution to *God and the Marketplace: Essays on the Morality of Wealth Creation* (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2 Lord North St. Westminster, London, SW1P 3LB England) Jukes says competition has a place in a healthy economy. But competition must be tempered by the recognition that everything on earth is a gift from God; what Catholicism calls *the universal destination of material goods*. Therefore, there is a social mortgage on private property. Further, labor is prior to capital in the sense that the first purpose of work is the growth of workers, not wealth for its own sake. Competition cannot be enthroned as a "theological doctrine." It cannot mean *domination* or a contest with winners and losers among people. "A better phrase to describe competition," he concludes, might be "*free work, enterprise and participation*."

Happenings

Mayslake Ministries (450 E. 22nd St. #170), Lombard, IL 60148; www.mayslakeministries.org) offers two retreat opportunities for veterans, one February 3-5, 2012 and the other May 11-13, 2012. There is also a retreat for medical professionals, March 5-7, 2012. Mayslake uses various locations for its retreats.

"Corporate Citizenship: Managing Many Environments" is a March 25-27, 2012 conference in Phoenix sponsored by Center for Corporate Citizenship (140 Commonwealth Ave., Chestnut Hill, MA 02467; www.bccorporatecitizenship.org). Speakers include Donald Brandt of Pinnacle West Capital, Trisa Thompson of Dell Corp. and more.

A conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of Vatican II will be held at Sacred Heart University (5151 Park Ave., Fairfield, CT 06432; www.sacredheart.edu/vii/conference.cfm) on April 23-24, 2012. Presenters include Scott Appleby from the University of Notre Dame and Nancy Dallavalle of Fairfield University who will discuss the Council's message to workers.

Peter Steinfels, former columnist for the *N.Y. Times* and longtime friend of the National Center for the Laity, is the featured speaker at "Vatican II Reconsidered," May 3-5, 2012 at Walsh University (2020 Maple St., North Canton, OH 44720; www.walsh.edu/vatican2/conference). "Catholic Social Justice" is one of eight topics to be highlighted at the conference. There are student events during the semester tied to the Vatican II theme.

Other events tied to the 50 year anniversary of Vatican II include a September 20-22, 2012 conference at the University of St. Thomas (2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105; www.stthomas.edu/theology/vatican2).

Likewise, Catholic University of America (Michigan Ave. & Forth St. NE, Washington, DC 20064; <http://trs.cua.edu/vaticanII>) hosts "Reform and Renewal: Vatican II after 50 Years," September 26-29, 2012.

Labor Notes (7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210; www.labornotes.org) is a newsletter that highlights innovative and smaller labor groups (although all labor groups are small these days). On May 4-6, 2012 *Labor Notes* hosts a conference here in Chicago, near O'Hare Airport.

Christians in Secular Ministry (139 Wiltshire Ct., Nod Rise, Coventry, England CV5 7JP; phil.aspinall@arcadis-vecetra.com) sponsors a May 24-28, 2012 conference for European Worker Priests, to be held in Lourdes. CHRISM publishes an informative journal, *Ministers at Work* (www.chrism.org.uk).

Our National Center for the Laity, in cooperation with Center for Social Concerns (Geddes Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556; www.socialconcerns.nd.edu), will sponsor a March 21-23, 2013 conference at the University of Notre Dame marking the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Peace on Earth* by Pope John XXIII (NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$2.50). Yes, this is a 2013 event; obviously, details will follow.

Resources

The Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development (USCCB, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.usccb.org/jphd) has a series of two-page handouts connecting the sacraments to justice. The latest is *Holy Orders: Ordained to Serve, Gather, Transform and Send*. It describes priests as “evangelizers of social realities” and reminds presiders that worshipers are to leave Mass ready to live our faith in daily life.

William Bole, whom INITIATIVES first heard of through his association with Msgr. George Higgins (1916-2002), has a blog on the relationship between religion and culture, *Theo Pol* (www.williambole.com). He, in turn, recommends a blog by Bill Tammeus on religion and ethics, *Faith Matters* (www.billtammeus.typepad.com).

Then there is a blog on international workers’ issues by NCL’s friend, Bob Senser, titled *Human Rights for Workers* (<http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>). And don’t forget *The Working Catholic* blog (www.chicagocatholicnews.com) by your INITIATIVES’ editor.

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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.

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“There are already Christians who occupy Wall St. every day in their occupations as businessmen and women, bankers and investors, traders and executives, secretaries and receptionists, janitors and security guards. The Church’s responsibility to these *occupiers* is to provide them with the moral and spiritual formation necessary to be faithful followers of Christ every day in their productive service to others.” – Jordan Ballor in *Member Mission News* (PO Box 494, Hinesburg, VT 05461; www.membermission.org)

