

<h1>Initiatives</h1> <p>In Support of Christians in the World</p>	<p>National Center for the Laity PO Box 291102 Chicago, IL 60629</p> <p>www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm</p>	<p>May 2006</p> <p>Number 156</p>
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Taking the Initiative

Assisting the Unemployed

Felipe Gomez and Arturo Rodriguez are founders of Back on Track Ministry (St. John Neumann, 12125 SW 107th Ave., Miami, FL 33176; www.backontracknet.org). About 20 people gather every Thursday to practice job search skills, to find job leads and to reflect on spiritual topics in light of their unemployment. Gomez and Rodriguez are eager to export their program to other parishes. (*Florida Catholic*, 3/17/06)

Deacon Raymond Sullivan and financial planner Bob Griffin, with cooperation from the Conventional Franciscan Friars, have launched Assisi in Albany (St. John's Lutheran Church, 160 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206). It provides job counseling and some job leads. The state department of labor, which has an office across the street, refers people to Assisi. (*The Evangelist*, 2/16/06)

Taking the Initiative

In the Mines

Competency, a key virtue in the spirituality of work, is at issue following a January 2, 2006 explosion in an underground West Virginia mine, killing 12 workers. Less than three weeks later a fire in another mine killed two.

Were the specific companies competent to operate coalmines? Were state and federal agencies competent in regulating mines?

Governor Joe Manchin (West Virginia's first Catholic governor) wasted no time in addressing the questions. With West Virginia House Speaker Bob Kiss (only the second Catholic to hold the post) he oversaw passage of new safety rules to provide miners with more emergency oxygen and better communication systems, while also requiring operators to more quickly notify rescue forces.

Manchin also called on veteran safety expert and advocate Davitt McAteer to spearhead a state inquiry into the accidents.

McAteer, currently vice president of Wheeling Jesuit University (316 Washington Ave., Wheeling, WV 26003), directed the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration under President Bill Clinton. McAteer will recommend additional safety measures.

Asked if it is possible "to make a coalmine completely safe," McAteer unequivocally answers "Yes." The safest mines "are those," he says, "where management takes training seriously and where rules are followed rigorously, to the point where workers are threatened with dismissal for ignoring them. Some of the better companies today were the worst offenders in the past."

McAteer's report is expected by July 1, 2006. (*Charlestown Gazette*, 1/2, 1/4, 1/10 & 1/20/06 and *N.Y. Times*, 1/8/06 and *Wrap Up*, West Virginia Legislature [1/25/06], State Capitol Bldg., Charleston, WV 25301)

Meanwhile, the United Mine Workers of America (8315 Lee Hwy, Fairfax, VA 22031; www.justiceatpeabody.org) believes working conditions at Peabody Energy Company (701 Market St., St. Louis, MO 63101; www.peabodyenergy.com) will be safer if more employees are covered by a union contract. The UMWA seeks cyber-signatures from "religious leaders" in support of their organizing campaign. More information: Interfaith Worker Justice (1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. #400, Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org).

Taking the Initiative

Among Doctors

Farr Curlin (MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics (5841 S. Maryland Ave. #MC6098, Chicago, IL 60637) knows that patients can recover more quickly and thoroughly with prayer and attention to their spiritual life. With colleagues from the University of Chicago, Curlin published a unique study of doctors' relationship to prayer, spirituality and religion in *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (Regenstrief Health Center #600, 1050 Wishard Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202; 7/05).

A full 55% of physicians say their “religious beliefs influence how they practice medicine.” Interestingly, the survey includes Jewish, Muslim and Hindu doctors, as well as Christians. The percentage of non-Christian doctors is higher than in the general population.

The survey in no way says that doctors display their religion on the hospital floor or in the office. Just that many take their spirituality and/or religion seriously. Curlin admits it is not clear what this study implies or what a follow-up might look like. Simply that the medical community was open to it and they validate its method and preliminary conclusions.

Curlin himself thinks there is a place for the mediation of God’s healing power through health care professionals. This notion of grace, he mentions, exists in many religious traditions. (*Florida Catholic*, 3/17/06)

Taking the Initiative *With Day Laborers*

Who are those people (usually men) who gather early in the morning in clumps outside home improvement stores or near busy intersections? *On the Corner: Day Labor in the U.S.* by Nik Theodore et al. (University of Illinois Urban Planning & Public Affairs, 412 S. Peoria #115, Chicago, IL 60607; www.uic.edu/cuppa/uicued) is “the first systematic and scientific study of the day-labor sector.”

Most day laborers are recent immigrants, primarily from Mexico and Central America. Most are undocumented. They are not “drifters.” Many attend church and participate in soccer leagues and the like. They are about evenly employed by individual homeowners and contractors. Their median hourly wage is \$10. Their jobs are mostly in construction and then in landscaping, painting, and roofing.

“The day-labor market is rife with violations of workers’ rights,” says *On the Corner*. Employers frequently don’t pay what they promise or don’t pay at all. Safety precautions are often nonexistent. For obvious reasons, the workers don’t complain publicly. (*Newsweek*, 1/30/06)

The workers who pack razors for Gillette (1 Gillette Park, South Boston, MA 02127) at two plants in Lawrence, MA represent a slightly different situation. They register with a temp agency, including the reputable Snelling Personnel Services (12801 N. Central Xway.

#700, Dallas, TX 75243), founded in Philadelphia in the 1950s. Then, one of two subcontractors of Gillette gets some workers through the temp agency. It all gets complicated for a worker, usually an immigrant from the Dominican Republic or maybe from Portugal, when there’s a problem: Gillette passes to the subcontractor who, in turn, passes to Snelling.

The Merrimack Valley Project, part of Intervalley Project (95 Fair Oaks Ave., West Newton, MA 02460; www.intervalleyproject.org) is pressuring Gillette to modify its business model. After some stalling, Gillette is negotiating. More permanent jobs may be added. English classes will be offered. A bilingual workers’ handbook will be distributed. (*Eagle Tribune*, 4/4/05 & *N.Y. Times*, 11/8/05)

Several churches and community organizations are beginning to sponsor hiring halls or worker centers as a response to violations against day laborers and temp workers. The National Day Laborer Organizing Network (675 Park View St. #B, Los Angeles, CA 90057; www.ndlon.org) is a resource for churches considering such a program.

The National Employment Law Project (55 John St. #700, New York, NY 10038; www.nelp.org) keeps track of research and policy resources on this general topic.

Taking the Initiative *On Health Insurance*

Like-minded people practice the virtue of social justice when, from within their workplace milieu, they improve institutional policies and practices.

HR Policy Association (1015 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005; www.hrpolicy.org) is a professional association for top human resource executives. HRP recently launched National Health Access, a health care coverage plan for part-time and contract workers at General Electric, Sears, IBM and several other large companies. With such a large pool of workers, National Health Access offers lower cost policies and discounts through many participating doctors, clinics, pharmacies and more.

There’s one problem. Very few workers took advantage of National Health Access in its initial enrollment. The HRP leaders will do some advertising and try to lower costs and

increase coverage before a second enrollment this summer. (*Wall St. Journal*, 2/8/06)

Taking the Initiative *In Business*

Texas Instrument (12500 TI Blvd., Richardson, TX 75080) needs a new facility for its semiconductors. An overseas location is tempting. But TI executives challenged their engineers to design a cost-efficient plant locally. With the help of the Rocky Mountain Institute (1739 Snowmass Creek Rd., Snowmass, CO 81654; www.rmi.org) the TI team decided that an environmentally sensitive or *green* facility would, over time, reduce energy costs in excess of construction outlays.

Normally, reports Thomas Friedman (*N.Y. Times*, 1/18/06), this type of factory needs “three floors because of the complicated cooling and manufacturing process.” But the team came up with a two-floor design, saving energy. They also used bigger water pipes with fewer elbows, saving on pumps. There is some solar innovation and nearly total recycling. A green building, says Paul Westbrook of TI, adds some upfront costs but it substantially lowers costs once the 1,000 high-tech workers start their jobs. “Amazing things happen when people claim responsibility for creating the impossible,” says TI vice-president Shauna Sowell.

Inspired by TI’s decision to stay in Texas, the University of Texas will invest \$300million over ten years in its science and engineering department, providing TI and other companies with competent workers.

“Hats off to the leaders of TI,” Friedman concludes. “Real Americans—and real Texans—build green.”

Taking the Initiative *Among Immigrants*

The Border Protection Control Bill (HR 4437), sponsored by Rep. James Sensenbrenner of WI, was approved in the House on December 16, 2005. Since then thousands of young workers in many cities, including 100,000 in Chicago, have marched in protest against the bill—often with the encouragement of their employer and the blessing of their pastor. The bill imposes criminal penalties on the 11million Mexican, Polish, Chinese, Palestinian and other immigrant workers who are here illegally. Likewise, Church

employees and others who assist the undocumented are subject to arrest.

As INITIATIVES goes to press, the Senate Judiciary Committee approves an alternate bill to streamline the process for immigrants to become citizens. (*Chicago Sun Times*, 3/11/06 & *N.Y. Times*, 3/28/06 & *Houston Catholic Worker* [4/06], PO Box 70113, Houston, TX 77270)

To stay current on this issue, contact the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (36 S. Wabash Ave. #1425, Chicago, IL 60603; www.icirr.org) and Catholic Migration and Refugee Service (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.justiceforimmigrants.org).

Cardinal Francis George, OMI of Chicago, along with other bishops, supports Senate Bill 1033 on immigration reform. INITIATIVES warns him about the consequences of bishops endorsing specific bills in Congress.

First, the role of the laity is usurped. Rather than his flurry of press releases, George would better communicate the Christian gospel to lay leaders and his clergy by, for example, quietly riding the bus with immigrant protestors to the rally.

Second, Catholic moral principles are potentially undermined by equating them with one piece of legislation. What happens if there are two pro-immigrant bills in the Senate? Is the one endorsed by George considered the Catholic position? Are opposing legislators committing a sin? How seriously should a lawmaker take George’s next partisan position on, for example, abortion?

The Church (capital C) boldly and loudly preaches compassion for the stranger, the dignity of work and the right to life. The church (lower case c) lobbies Congress.

Taking the Initiative *In Iran*

Independent labor unions are banned in Iran. Nonetheless, the Union of Workers of the United Bus Company organized and called for a strike against Tehran Bus Co. (*Sherkat-e Vahed*) this January. The union explicitly omits any grievance against the government. Instead, it wants “two sets of winter and summer uniforms, basic stationary for record keeping” and some coins for lunch, reports Roya Hakakian, author

of *Journey from the Land of No* (Crown [2005], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$13).

Iran's so-called Revolutionary Court has Mansour Ossanloo and five other union leaders in prison. Meanwhile, Hakakian editorializes, the world's press covers the story about Iran and nuclear weapons and a story about a few "hoodlums throwing rocks at the Danish embassy in Tehran." The story of democracy, as being fought by the Union of Workers, is neglected. (*Wall St. Journal*, 3/2/06)

More information on the transportation workers: Amnesty International (5 Penn Plaza #1400, New York, NY 10001; www.amnestyusa.org) and *Prison's Dialogue* (Postlagernd 04104, Leipzig, Germany; www.dialogt.org).

Taking the Initiative In India

It's called *trafficking*. A broker gives some money to a destitute family in India in exchange for a child. The broker leases the children to wealthier households miles away. The children work continuously, receive no education, and are vulnerable to abuse. They often are never reunited with their family.

For 20 years Sr. Jeanne Devos, ICM has directed the National Domestic Workers Movement (St. Mary's, 104A Mazagon, Mumbai 400 010, India; www.indianngos.com/interviews/jeannedevos.htm). NDWM assists communities to fight trafficking and it lobbies agencies, including the International Labor Organization, on the issue of child slavery.

In addition, Devos is involved with Young Christian Students (National Catholic Center, 64 Armenian St., Madras 600 001, India; <http://education.vsnl.com/yicsindia>), a network of support groups for young workers.

To donate to NDWM send a check payable "Catholic Relief Services" (209 W. Fayette St., Baltimore, MD 21201). Earmark your donation for Devos and her NDWM. (*Catholic New York*, 2/16/06)

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Rod Dreher, an editor at the *Dallas Morning News*, joins a growing number of U.S. Catholics who are uneasy with both political parties. The Democratic Party preaches

unrestricted cultural choice. The Republican Party preaches unfettered economic choices. Both seem stuck on an individual approach to happiness or goodness.

Dreher, in *Crunchy Cons* (Crown [2006], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$24), makes a case for "a sensibility, an attitude, a fundamental stance toward reality" that says "accumulating wealth and power is not the point of life" and that true religion must be more than "a pious veneer over our own unconscious worship of materialism."

Dreher contrasts his *crunchy conservative* movement with the conservatism embedded in the Republican Party and the so-called Christian Right. Conservatism, as now popularly understood, is "carried along on the swift currents of consumer culture, and end[s] up in a place where [it is a] general approval of whatever commercial interests want to do." If crunchy conservatism gains a foothold, he hopes, it will bring back the best of an older conservatism.

There's some commonality between Dreher's take on society and Catholic social thought. For example, Catholicism appreciates that "culture is what drives history over the long haul," as notes George Weigel in *The Cube and the Cathedral* (Basic Books [2006], 387 Park Ave. S., New York, NY 10016; \$14). Dreher too believes "culture is more important than politics and economics."

Catholic morality is premised on a sacramental view of the world; on the belief that God is creating and redeeming through our artifacts and institutions. So too, crunchy conservatives differ from popular conservatives precisely in the belief that the world is full of "vessels containing or transmitting [transcendent] ideals."

Both Catholic social thought and crunchy conservatives value the family (not the individual or the state) as society's foundational institution. Crunchy conservatives and Catholic social thought favor local institutions over distant, bureaucratic agencies. Curiously, on this point, Dreher doesn't mention the Catholic principle of *subsidiarity* nor labor unions (though presumably he's a union member), whereas Catholic doctrine insists that unions are an essential person-to-person institution in a free society.

Several inconsistencies in crunchy conservatism upset an easy fit with Catholicism, however. For example, Dreher correctly rails against individualism in churches, political

parties and the U.S. culture in general. Yet he is big on home schooling—a most individualistic movement. He says nothing about religious schools. Dreher rightly wants, in a second example, to conserve neighborhoods and other communities. Then he advises shopping on the Internet without dealing personally with sellers.

Crunchy conservatism is counter-cultural. For example, Dreher has no patience for advancing true conservative values through committees in normal parishes. Instead, he features a Catholic who is involved with a fringe restoration group.

There is a place for a counter-cultural approach within U.S. Catholicism. It is most often associated with the inspiring Catholic Worker movement. The majority of U.S. Catholics, however, must search for the best way to live their faith within workplace, community and political institutions. Sometimes that means affirming parts of U.S. culture, other times it requires organizing for reform.

Dreher and the crunchy cons raise important questions. His suggestions are still too individualistic, too peculiar and too pessimistic to help most Catholics and others, even those trying to improve the Republican Party.

North American Spirituality

Msgr. Jack Egan (1916-2001)

Egan, who died five years ago this month, was the best-known disciple of Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand (1904-1979), the pioneering rector of Chicago's major seminary. Egan embodied the confident style of Catholic thinking and action for which Chicago was once famous.

Out of Egan's lifelong habit of listening to people one-by-one came scores of organizations and campaigns. Ordained in 1943 and assigned to St. Justin Martyr, he was a chaplain to the Young Christian Students and the Young Christian Workers as well as director of the Cana Conference from 1947 to 1958, where he developed marriage preparation programs and materials that, with revisions, are still in use. He bonded with hundreds of couples, keeping in touch by typing short, pointed notes on a half-sheet of stationary or on a postcard.

During the 1960s Egan was pastor of Presentation parish and director of the Office of Urban Affairs for the Archdiocese of Chicago. He collaborated with Saul Alinsky on several community organization efforts.

Egan spent the 1970s and early 1980s at the University of Notre Dame where he headed the Institute for Pastoral and Social Ministry and, with his assistant Peggy Roach, facilitated the Catholic Committee for Urban Ministry. He returned to Chicago in 1983 to direct the Office of Human Relations and Ecumenism for the Archdiocese and then the Office of Community Affairs at DePaul University.

On the day of his ordination, in addition to his public vows, Egan made a private vow "to work for the enhancement of the lay role in the church." In subsequent years he and the leaders he nurtured made major contributions to ecumenism (especially in Jewish/Catholic dialogue), to marriage preparation, to family life ministry, to labor relations, to the community organization movement and more.

In 1981 the Association of Chicago Priests (PO Box 3584, Oak Park, IL 60303) bestowed its "Pope John XXIII Award" upon Egan. In his acceptance speech Egan noted that some people think of John XXIII (1881-1963) as "a sweet old man who brought unintended changes to our church from which we shall probably never recover." There has certainly been some confusion in the years since Vatican II, Egan admits. But John XXIII knew what he was doing. "Vatican II brought many needed changes in our worship, the role of the laity, our relationship to other religions, to the world in general, to the priests, the bishops, and the place of the pope himself in the governance of the church of Christ."

John XXIII's opening address at Vatican II, Egan continues, placed our church "in direct opposition to [those] who hold to a more authoritarian, defensive and punitive vision." Vatican II was not intended to refute errors or clarify doctrine. Christianity, says John XXIII, "meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations."

"I have tried to live my life by this vision," Egan told his fellow priests at the ACP dinner. "The church and the world learn from each other."

There is tension nowadays in Chicago, as elsewhere, between the Catholic Chancery and government agencies, foundations, unions, political parties, newspapers, courts and more over hospitals, wayward clergy, child welfare, abortion, schools and other issues. Chicago misses Egan's ability to put the church and the world in dialogue, looking for points of agreement.

In the following paragraphs, here edited, Egan hints at how the church invites and challenges the world to live its best ideals. Egan's article, "Justice Is Not Enough," interestingly anticipates a main theme from Pope Benedict XVI's December 2005 encyclical, *God Is Love*.

[When institutions comport with justice, true community becomes more possible.] "But justice is only the beginning point in the recreation of communities. It is an indispensable first step. It is not an end in itself. Justice, even perfect justice, will not create a community.

[Take, for example, suburbia, where generally people have] justice before the law and [the opportunity for] economic and social participation...[Yet] a suburban person can be lonely. Engaged in a multiplicity of organizational groupings, a suburbanite can have many acquaintances and few friends. *Homo suburbientis* is an island, not [necessarily] a community. This is to say, we cannot rebuild our communities with brick and mortar alone, nor with justice alone. No comprehensive plan, no open occupancy law, no quota control no matter how brilliantly conceived and executed, can rectify the human loneliness that is the characteristic disease of our society.

The key to rebuilding our communities is not in a regional planning report, nor in a municipal study, nor in a Congressional Act. It is to be found in books like *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt, *The Art of Loving* by Eric Fromm and in others that from different points of view point to our inability to extend ourselves, to become personally involved in the suffering of others, our inability to love as the root of depersonalization.

A concern for justice is or can be a purely human invention. Only when God is

acknowledged does the meaning of compassion become clear. Once God is accepted people no longer deserve our attention because of what is due them, but because of what they are. We can never be fully human without God.

This makes our churches centripetal to the reconstruction of community because the compassion we seek is a specifically religious property. Through churches, people are motivated to true human compassion. [Or at least they should be.] Some churches need convincing that their most essential role is to motivate, foster and implement the exercise of human compassion on the community level. Let them do this not because they are one more institution in the power structure but because their role [in fostering] person-to-person compassion or charity is indispensable." (*New City*, 5/15/62—the predecessor publication to INITIATIVES)

The Industrial Areas Foundation (220 W. Kinzie St. #500, Chicago, IL 60610), on whose board Egan served, erected a public monument to him at DePaul University (2300 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago, IL 60614). His papers are archived at the University of Notre Dame (607 Hesburgh Library, Notre Dame, IN 46556). *An Alley in Chicago: the Ministry of a City Priest* by Margery Frisbie (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$9) is Egan's biography. Frisbie's title is taken from a well-traveled and well-connected monsignor whom Egan heard say: "I have seen the great boulevards of the world, the boulevards of Rome, the boulevards of Paris, and the boulevards of Rio de Janeiro. They are all grand. But I would rather have an alley in Chicago than any one of them." So too, Frisbie writes, Egan's spirit always "lifted at the thought of the vital, demanding, electrifying energy symbolized by Chicago's alleys."

Happenings

Mount Angel Abbey (St. Benedict, OR 97373; www.mtangel.edu) features Fr. John Haughey, SJ at its 23rd annual summer conference, July 9-14, 2006. Haughey, a longtime friend of the National Center for the Laity, will talk about a spirituality of daily work, among other topics. The conference attracts many 30-something women and men.

Mimi Schaefer and Bobbie Weber (who serves as an NCL advisor) were once members of Young Christian Students. Along with Fr. Bernard Sander, they brought the YCS spirit to Oregon and perpetuate it through this conference. Specifically, says Weber, "We are convinced that holiness is found through our daily activities at work, in the home and in our communities and that our vocation is to transform ourselves and the people and places we touch daily."

National Farm Worker Ministry (438 N. Skinner Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63130; www.nfwm.org) hosts a “young adult summit” on Leadership Development and Farm Worker Solidarity, July 14-16, 2006 in Keene, CA.

The second annual Workplace Chaplaincy Conference will be held at Yale Divinity School (409 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06040; www.yale.edu/faith) on August 16-18, 2006.

Villanova University School of Law (299 N. Spring Mill Rd., Villanova, PA 19085; www.law.villanova.edu) hosts a symposium on Catholic social thought, October 27, 2006. The topic is “The Preferential Option for the Poor.”

Websites

Catholic Democracy Institute (PO Box 43206, Washington, DC 20010; www.catholicdemocracy.org), dedicated to educating “Catholic Americans about the fullness of the Catholic faith as it relates to...democratic society,” has launched *Catholic Media Report*. It is a cyber-digest of coverage in newspapers and magazines on issues like abortion, health care, immigration, stem cell research and more.

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“It’s all right to talk about *long white robes over yonder* in all its [heavenly] symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It’s all right to talk about *streets flowing with milk and honey*, but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and [God’s] children who can’t eat three square meals a day. It’s all right to talk about *the New Jerusalem*, but one day God’s [leaders] must talk about the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, [and] the new Memphis.”

--Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in Memphis, 4/3/68