

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
PO Box 291102
Chicago, IL 60629

www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm

Special
2012

Number
200

200 Issues of INITIATIVES!

Nostalgia Trip?

A director of a diocesan office for the laity once commented: “The National Center for the Laity is a nostalgia trip that went out and got itself a tax exemption.” The jibe carries a worthwhile caution. This anniversary edition of INITIATIVES looks back, but not to recreate a long lost time and place. It is one attempt to give thanks for our inheritance, to stay close to our original aspirations and to find lessons for the future.

Bad Math?

Technically there have been 204 issues of INITIATIVES. It began in May 1978 to keep alive the conversation provoked by the Advent 1977 *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*, a short statement signed by about 50 Catholic leaders.

The *Declaration* says that a major theme of Vatican II (1962-1965)—that the church is the people of God in service to the modern world—gets lost because Church leaders (albeit for understandable reasons) are preoccupied with internal matters. Specifically, says the *Declaration*, lay involvement is usually equated with internal parish ministry or with volunteering in a Church-endorsed social project. Vatican II, by contrast, envisioned an informed laity brokering justice and peace out in their own normal occupational and community settings—with Church employees giving the laity support and constructive criticism. The *Declaration* struck a nerve. It generated so much mail that a secretariat (called National Center for the Laity) was formed. (The complete text of the *Declaration* is in *Church, Chicago Style*, NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$2.)

INITIATIVES appeared four times from May 1978 to July 1979, chronicling reaction to the *Declaration* and covering NCL’s founding convention. Then INITIATIVES went into hibernation.

Bill Droel, current editor of INITIATIVES, moved to Chicago from Upstate

New York in the late 1970s. High on his agenda was connecting to the Chicago tradition of Catholic activism. It was not quickly found in those days, however. He knew about Chicago’s Msgr. Jack Egan (1917-2001), but learned that Egan was at the University of Notre Dame, not in Chicago. Eventually, Droel met Sr. Carol Frances Jegen, BVM who in turn introduced him to Russ Barta (1918-1997), the founding president of NCL--then dormant. Droel and Barta decided to produce another issue of INITIATIVES; judge the reaction to it; and, if warranted, revive NCL. That issue was mailed in October 1983. Rather than explain where we had been for over four years, that 1983 issue was called *number one*. Thus you are reading the 200th issue since INITIATIVES made its 1983 comeback, but actually the 204th issue ever published. Smile.

Direct Antecedents

Among NCL’s founders its trinity is Russ Barta (previously mentioned), Msgr. Dan Cantwell (1915-1996) and Ed Marciniak (1917-2004). Each was involved in numerous groups and many publications for about 60 years. Thus, there are several entry points for the history of NCL and INITIATIVES.

One place to start is with the *trinity*’s admiration for the Catholic Worker movement, founded in New York in 1933 by Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and Peter Maurin (1877-1949).

In June 1936 Maurin visited Chicago, as detailed by Francis Sicius in *The Word Made Flesh: the Catholic Worker in Chicago* (University Press of America [1960], 4501 Forbes Blvd. #200, Lanham, MD 20706). He gave a talk at St. Ignatius (6559 N. Glenwood Ave., Chicago, IL 60626). Looking up at the ceiling, Maurin commented: “We need parish homes as well as parish domes.” Rather than stay at St. Ignatius, Maurin made his way to lower Wacker Dr., where even today the homeless sleep. “Although you may be called bums and panhandlers, you are in fact ambassadors of God,” Maurin told his overnight companions.

Arthur Falls (1901-2000), a doctor, was perhaps the only Catholic Worker in Chicago at

that time. He is the person who suggested that the masthead for the New York newspaper include a black worker, which today it does. Shortly after Maurin's Chicago visit, Falls convened a meeting at Old St. Patrick's (711 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60661) that launched Chicago's first Catholic Worker house at 1841 Taylor St.

Day visited Chicago early in 1937 and again in February 1938, when she spoke at the seminary in Mundelein, IL. Along the way Day acquired a house near St. Elizabeth's (50 E. 41st St., Chicago, IL 60653), entrusting it to John Cogley (1916-1976). Meanwhile, future NCL founder Marciniak (20 years old at the time), along with Al Reser and Marty Paul, opened a Catholic Worker house at 868 Blue Island Ave. Cogley soon joined them. They first served breakfast on Good Friday 1938--oatmeal, bread and coffee to 350 unemployed workers. Cogley and Marciniak began to publish a Chicago version of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. They told readers: "If you have one quarter, send it to Mott St. [in New York] where Dorothy Day and her gang are doing the best job of Catholic journalism in the country. But if you have two quarters, take a chance on the *Chicago Catholic Worker*. We shall do our best."

Beginning in July 1943 Marciniak, with the help of Bob Senser and others, began a monthly newspaper titled *Work* under the auspice of Catholic Labor Alliance. This paper developed a national reputation for its reporting on labor issues, race relations, instances of anti-Semitism, including those involving a well-known Catholic priest, and more. (NCL has a disk of most issues of *Chicago Catholic Worker* and *Work*. Libraries can copy it.)

Then in the 1960s Marciniak with Barta, Larry Ragan (1922-1995) and others started a magazine with a long name, *New City: Man in Metropolis, A Christian Response*. Several well-known figures contributed to it.

These three publications (*Chicago Catholic Worker*, *Work* newspaper and *New City*) are direct antecedents of INITIATIVES.

Family Tree

There are several others on INITIATIVES' family tree because every Catholic group, it seems, has a newsletter or nowadays a web-publication. And, several of INITIATIVES' writers (then and now) were also involved with other publications.

Senser, for example, still writes for INITIATIVES as well as for his own *Human Rights for Workers* (<http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>).

Similarly, Ragan was once the editor of *ACT*, the newsletter of the Christian Family Movement. Ragan went on to form his own company, Ragan Communications (111 E. Wacker Dr. #500, Chicago, IL 60601; www.ragan.com). He was helpful to INITIATIVES as it began its 1983 comeback. In fact, INITIATIVES is patterned on *The Ragan Report*, a weekly newsletter relied upon by corporate communication editors. Ragan donated typesetting for INITIATIVES in those days and directed INITIATIVES to printers and mail houses.

Ragan and Marciniak had a philosophy which they called *advocacy journalism Chicago-style*. Newsletter writing is different from reporting in a major newspaper, Ragan taught. "You must tell the truth," he stressed. "But tell the truth from our side of things. If the other side wants to give their perspective, they can start a newsletter." In fact, Ragan joked, "The other side probably already owns a TV network."

The distinction between *even-handed* or *two-sided reporting* and *advocacy journalism* was brought home to your INITIATIVES' editor when, some years ago, he and Marciniak were studying the prospects for Catholic parishes on the rim of Chicago's expanding Loop (downtown). We were interviewing a prominent official about what happens to the poor in an urban area with burgeoning real estate values. "So you fellows are social science researchers," the official greeted us. "No," replied Marciniak. "We are journalists who try to use some facts to back up our point of view." Smile.

A good newsletter, Ragan advised your editor, does not exist in a computer or even on the printed page. It exists *among* its readers. In advocacy journalism, a newsletter is supposed to get readers connecting to one another. That's why INITIATIVES compulsively lists sources and addresses. Readers are supposed to follow through.

Further Up the Tree

The first Catholic lay publication from Chicago, titled *The Monthly*, appeared in 1865. It was published out of the University of St. Mary of the Lake, located at that time in the Watertown area. There is no straight line from *The Monthly* to NCL and INITIATIVES.

However, the University of St. Mary of the Lake—now located in Mundelein, IL—is a part of our story.

In 1936 Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand (1904-1979) was at age 31 appointed as rector of that seminary. Hillenbrand was among a small number who introduced Catholic Action (capital A on *Action*), also known as “specialized lay apostolate,” to the U.S.

Hillenbrand’s disciples influenced NCL. Most were involved in Catholic Action, although some concentrated on other outward-looking efforts. The disciples included NCL’s *trinity* of Barta, Cantwell and Marciniak. Others were Msgr. Egan (previously mentioned) and Msgr. George Higgins (1916-2002), Msgr. William Quinn (1915-2004), Fr. Gerry Weber (1918-2009), Patrick (1911-1974) and Patty (1913-2005) Crowley, Peggy Roach (1927-2006), Paul Hazard (1912-1982), Fr. Dennis Geaney, OSA (1914-1992) and many others.

Hillenbrand learned about Catholic Action by studying the efforts of Fr. (later Cardinal) Joseph Leo Cardijn (1882-1967) of Belgium, who in 1912 began an experiment. He grouped 30 young people in study circles. This Christian Workers League discussed family and work conditions from a Catholic perspective. The concept spread and was embodied in groups like Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers and Christian Family Movement.

Several NCL leaders were previously involved in one or another of these Catholic Action groups, including NCL’s immediate past-president Vaile Scott, who was the first full-time YCS organizer in the U.S. All these groups had newsletters. The Catholic Action Federation, an umbrella for the groups, published *Apostolate* magazine.

Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action was a Jesuit ministry, begun in 1927. It introduced hundreds of students to Catholic social tradition and like Catholic Action it presented a method for addressing family and work issues. Marciniak was president of CISCA in the late 1930s and involved with its *Today* magazine.

To all the Chicago leaders, Hillenbrand and other pioneers stressed these points:

- Authentic Catholicism has a social mission, including support for workers.
- Lay formation happens best in small groups, preferably using the Inquiry Method; that is, observe, judge and act.
- The liturgy is a school for social justice.

NCL is not a Catholic Action group, in the sense of adhering to the Cardijn/Hillenbrand model. Nor is NCL proposing that the model is adequate for today. On the other hand, NCL draws heavily upon Catholic Action insights, especially its attention to young workers.

A Crucial Distinction

In February 1937 John Cort (1913-2006) and others, meeting in the kitchen of New York’s Catholic Worker House, formed the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. NCL’s Marciniak got involved with ACTU, contributing to its *Labor Leader* newspaper.

On March 19, 1943 (the feast of St. Joseph) Marciniak, Hillenbrand and others started a similar group in Chicago, the Catholic Labor Alliance with its newspaper *Work*. CLA changed its name to Catholic Council on Working Life in the mid-1950s with Pat Crowley as president. Under Marciniak CLA, and later CCWL and then NCL, took a distinct direction.

Number one, CLA was not limited to trade unionists as was ACTU. (Today, NCL’s friends at Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; www.catholiclabor.org and at Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. #400, Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org focus primarily on unions.) CLA inclusively reached out to managers, labor relations lawyers, public officials as well as union members. In the same way, NCL and INITIATIVES regard *work* and *worker* as inclusive terms, applying to homemakers, teachers, health care providers, union members, students and executives alike.

Marciniak’s second point made him a controversial figure in Catholic social action for the rest of his life. (It is lower case *a* on *action*, unless referring to Cardijn-inspired groups.) The failure to grasp this point, he said (and NCL says) accounts in large degree to the church’s disconnection from young adults today.

CLA (and now NCL) is not meant to create Catholic labor unions, Catholic political positions, Catholic lobby groups, or Catholic social action organizations. Catholics should be active in unions as good trade unionists who happen to be Catholic, not as Catholics per se, said CLA. Policies in a union, in Congress, in a hospital, or in a school are Catholic because they are true and good. Policies are not true and good because they are Catholic.

A Catholic support group for lawyers or nurses or neighbors can be worthwhile. But

when it comes to acting for the public good, Catholics are better advised to be involved inside their own professional association, their neighborhood organization or their political party rather than lobby directly through a specifically Catholic peace and justice group.

Marciniak's CLA (and now NCL) represented a style of Catholicism that is sometimes overshadowed today. It is a style sensitive to the importance of an informed conscience making sense of the incremental application of moral teaching in daily life. NCL is uncomfortable with the impression given by some Catholic leaders that there is one specific (often partisan) take on matters in housing, banking, legislation, or neighborhood affairs. When, for example, Church employees moralize too specifically over public positions, they unwittingly marginalize our faith. When the institutional Church gives the impression that there is only one way to be on the side of peace and justice, thoughtful young adult workers are alienated. None of this is to say Church employees should be quiet. NCL insists, however, that implementing Catholic teaching is primarily the duty of lay people on their jobs, in their community and within their families.

Several criticized Marciniak, and they now criticize NCL for inserting an artificial distinction between lay social action and Church-endorsed justice and peace efforts. NCL wants a *two-tiered church*, the critics contend. Marciniak wanted (and NCL wants), the critics claim, lay people to stay out of the sanctuary and Church employees to stay out of the world. This charge of *dualism* has been leveled against NCL numerous times.

One Response

On the occasion of the World Synod on the Laity, Msgr. Cantwell (previously mentioned as an NCL founder) wrote to a U.S. bishops' advisor. "I hope you do not carry to the Synod the notion that NCL invented the words *lay*, *clergy*, *ministry*, *world*, *secular* and the multitude of distinctions implied in them," said Cantwell. The NCL preaches a simple message: that "the church exists to help the human family understand itself as the kingdom of God, the domain of God, the place where God works... It is crucial that those who guide the church listen to men and women tell of their experience in finding God as they repair an automobile, write a sonnet, discover healing medicines, create children, establish a business, support a spouse,

and dance a ballet. Equally important is for those who speak for the church to enlarge our horizons and the Mystery of God." The teaching Church will fail, Cantwell concluded, "if it issues *know-it-all* [statements] or *we've got the answers* pronouncements or shrivels our hearts and minds from facing full challenges of God in the world. The world is the arena."

Lay Formation

To understand and influence the world of work and culture lay Catholics need grace, knowledge of doctrine and competence in public skills.

Cantwell and Russ Barta, NCL's first president, began the Adult Education Centers in 1955. Vaile Scott, immediate past-president of NCL, soon joined the AEC team.

AEC made use of several high schools and some parishes to host its mostly evening courses in film criticism, foreign relations, Bible scholarship, labor relations, social doctrine and more. The volunteer teachers came from area colleges and from business.

AEC appreciated that adults bring lots of experience, albeit sometimes undigested, to a learning environment. For that reason, AEC "relied primarily on the small group method as the ideal vehicle for education," Barta reflected. Further, AEC was convinced that adult Catholics are searching for meaning in their work and community, not for oodles and oodles of information.

Access to information increases "at a fantastic rate," Barta said. Yet most lay people experience the world "as increasingly unknowable and to a large extent beyond personal control." Thus genuine formation has to be empowerment for action. AEC, in Barta's opinion, was "an invitation to the *fullness of life*, the mark of a true person."

Drawing upon AEC insights, NCL is keenly interested in, for example, the conversation two friends share over lunch; their concerns and aspirations about children, spouses, health care, and employment. From that starting point NCL pays attention to any program that attempts to sustain relationships long enough for people to truly engage with their fellow workers and neighbors. INITIATIVES regularly publicizes such programs, no matter how modest.

Taking the Initiative

INITIATIVES is the newsletter of NCL, but INITIATIVES does not dwell on the comings-and-goings of NCL. Instead, it is focused on small initiatives undertaken to improve the world of work—work on the job, in the community and around the home. Its intent is to inspire readers to join with like-minded people and do something good.

INITIATIVES is a Catholic publication, and therefore it reports on good efforts regardless of denomination. Some internal Church controversies are admittedly important. INITIATIVES, however, does not comment on those matters which seem to divide liberal Catholics from conservative Catholics these days. Instead, INITIATIVES has a different agenda: It champions *outward Catholics* over *inward Catholics*. Say it this way: internal renewal of the Church and other institutions is crucial. But none of the Church's faults (those grating to conservatives and those displeasing to liberals) prevents any Christian from doing God's work in the world—as a parent, a business executive, a journalist, an educator, a health care provider or a citizen.

It is to these outward Christians that INITIATIVES is directed. Thus when it comes to editorial policy, INITIATIVES generally favors anything that humanizes the worlds of parenting, manufacturing, commerce, broadcasting, science, art, the neighborhood, the classroom, the legislature. INITIATIVES opposes anything that makes it harder for a person to be a Christian in the courts, in the hospital, in shops, schools, banks, police stations, neighborhoods or elsewhere.

Ginger Group

NCL, like everyone else, is disgusted with the scandalous behavior of many bishops in their negligent supervision of wayward personnel. NCL understands the readiness of young adults to abandon the church.

Msgr. Cantwell speaks to this inclination: “The temptation to say *To hell with the church* is in the air around us these days. But that is a comfortable self-righteous feeling and makes the church something impersonal. For me to say *The hell with the bishop[s]* is really an admission of failure on my part to work with human being[s] who [have] at once strengths and

limitations. To give in to such a temptation is an intellectual and moral weakness.”

Instead of forsaking the church, NCL takes the role of *ginger group*. That is, NCL acts as a conscience within a broader movement for change. Not to say NCL is flawless or that it has all the answers. Simply that NCL's vision (shared by others) of a church in service to the world is the best chance to make Christianity vital for young adult workers, spouses, parents and citizens.

Again, Cantwell: “The church (the whole people of God) is supposed to build a human world in our moment of time. The church shares questions with the world, with the rest of the human family... God is not unhappy with modernity; not unhappy with exploration; not unhappy that we are trying to eliminate patriarchy in the church and in married life... The secular is the sacred and the service of the laity is every bit as important to God as the service of the ordained.”

Cantwell constantly reminded us that “God's milieu is here and now. Unless we really love life right now for what it really is, we will never grow to attain the full measure of life that God wants for us in eternity. To aim toward the greater life that is to come is not to despise the present life. It is precisely when we begin to appreciate the marvelous life we now have that we also begin to realize how much more God has in store for us.”

Many Thanks

INITIATIVES is impossible without the prayers, news clippings and dollars sent along by faithful readers for 34 years. In all that time INITIATIVES has never been delinquent paying a bill. Our anxiety level is high at the moment, but blessings abound.

INITIATIVES benefits from the competent work of many. There are, to begin, two anonymous women who track donations, send letters, prepare finance reports and more.

INITIATIVES is printed by Central Printers and Graphics (6109 W. 63rd St., Chicago, IL 60638), just west of Midway Airport. Ed and Frank there are thorough and easy to converse with.

From that shop, INITIATIVES travels a short distance to Rescigno's Marketing Connections (7501 W. 85th St., Bridgeview, IL 60455) where Sue, Larry, Christy, Marilyn and others add the mailing labels and carry INITIATIVES to the post office. INITIATIVES

first met Rescigno's when the business was housed in the family's garage. The company now assists many customers, including lots of Catholic schools, with fundraising, mailing, printing, cyber-presence and more.

Thousands of postal workers, represented by American Postal Workers Union (1300 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20005), bring INITIATIVES to its 3,000+ readers. A special shout out to Jeff and others at the Kedzie post office where NCL has its PO Box and to Teresa and the others at the Worth post office where NCL buys stamps and mails its books.

Once a year NCL reviews its bookkeeping and submits documents to Internal Revenue Service. Tom McGreal (5740 W. 95th St., Oak Lawn, IL 60453) and his team, Colleen and others, prepare those reports.

At a time when banks have become impersonal, NCL enjoys dealing with Lourdes and others at Park Federal Savings Bank (5400 S. Pulaski, Chicago, IL 60632). NCL's meager investment account is maintained by our friend Mike McGillicuddy (LPL Financial, 410 W. Grand, Chicago, IL 60654) and his colleague Greg Bork.

Archives

NCL's 1977 charter *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* as well as NCL's *Nine Principles for Lay Initiative* can be found in *Church, Chicago-Style* by Bill Droel (NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$2).

Pete Hammond (1936-2008) of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship donated a two-volume bound collection of INITIATIVES to NCL. In addition, NCL has four complete copies of INITIATIVES in folders. Half a dozen libraries subscribe to INITIATIVES and presumably preserve its editions. Finally, Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642) hosts the web version of INITIATIVES at www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm.

Msgr. Cantwell's papers are at Chicago Historical Society (1601 N. Clark St., Chicago,

IL 60614) and Marciniak's papers are at Bernardin Archives (711 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60661).

Closing Prayer

Mary Beth Toomey Dunne (1953-2010) was the youngest founder of our National Center for the Laity and its longest serving board member. One of her gifts was the ability to summarize a meeting or convention. At the conclusion of one weekend-long NCL gathering (at which all of the occupations below were represented) Dunne composed and offered this prayer:

“Let us join hands to pray:
Father, You have gathered us in,
The homemaker and brick maker
The doctor and the lawyer
The editor and the writer
The postal workers and the computer analyst
To explore the tapestries of our lives as
Christians of the world, of the U.S. Catholic
variety.
As your Son transformed water into wine at
the wedding feast,
You have called each of us here to partake at
the Eucharistic table and then bring your love
and message to those who gather at
Kitchen tables
Picnic tables
Boardroom tables
And drafting tables
Through our individual vocations.
We give thanks for the lives of NCL founders
Russ Barta, Msgr. Dan Cantwell, Ed
Marciniak, as well as for all the North
American saints—canonized or not.
In particular we give thanks that NCL is still
doing good and still doing well.
Hear our prayer as we close this gathering
with the same prayer that closed our founding
convention at Notre Dame in 1978. Our
Father... Amen.”

INITIATIVES

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Board Members of NCL include Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, John Hazard, Caroline Hopkinson, Phil Moore, Terry Mambu Rasch, Lauren Sukal, Frosty Pipal and Vaile Scott.

NCL's national advisors include Tom Bausch, Charlie DiSalvo, Kevin Doyle, Kathy McGarvey Hidy, Bill McGarvey, Vince Rougeau, Gerry Shea, Peggy O'Brien Steinfels, Vinal Van Benthem and Bobbie Weber.

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“Any enterprise begins to die when it is run for the benefit of insiders rather than for the benefit of outsiders.” –Peter Drucker (1909-2005)