

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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Taking the Initiative For Health Care

The debate over how to overhaul health care must continue in Congress and in the public square without the fruitless squabbling over ideology and the perpetuation of unsustainable and inaccurate horror stories. Any successful reform must meet three criteria: consistently provide quality care; provide care at a reasonable cost while fairly compensating health care providers; make care available to everyone. Pragmatic examples are especially needed—rewarding those practices with a proven track record while discarding those that fail to meet professional standards. This type of reform requires longitudinal research and long-term behavioral changes.

Atul Gawande at the Harvard School of Public Health (677 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02155; www.hsph.harvard.edu) notably advances research in “The Cost Conundrum.” (*The New Yorker* [6/1/09], 4 Times Sq., New York, NY 10036 and *N.Y. Times*, 7/30/09)

Why does medical care cost so much in the U.S. and why is it costlier in some cities than in other comparable places? As he delves into the questions, Gawande finds that the quality of care is generally as good in lower cost markets, in some cases even better, than in areas with higher sticker prices for drugs and procedures. After much research he determines that doctors, hospitals and others tend to perform many more procedures in higher cost areas. They tend to emphasize the business end of medicine and promote quantity of service—usually for noble motives. Nonetheless, “the primary cause [of] extreme costs,” Gawande concludes, is “very simply, the across-the-board overuse of medicine.”

Gawande writes: “This is a disturbing and perhaps surprising diagnosis... Americans like to believe that, as with most things, more is better. But research suggests that where medicine is concerned it may actually be worse.

The Mayo Clinic (200 First St. SW, Rochester, MN 55905; www.mayoclinic.org) is a positive exception to trends. It has, Gawande writes, “fantastically high levels of technological capability and quality, but its Medicare spending is in the lowest 15% in the country... The core tenet of Mayo Clinic is *the needs of the patient come first* not the convenience of the doctors, not their revenues.”

The Mayo Clinic succeeds because long

ago a small group of doctors agreed not to base their fees on quantity of tests and room visits. Instead they receive a base salary and pool resources. They include all personnel, like technicians and janitors, in a conversation about improving care. Skeptics say Mayo cannot be duplicated; yet it now has branches in Florida and Arizona. There are other low-cost markets in Colorado, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Utah and California. “All of them function on similar principles,” Gawande writes. “All are non-profit institutions. And all have produced enviable higher quality and lower costs than the average American town enjoys.” In every instance the process depends on medical professionals initiating the dialogue and including all stakeholders.

There might be merits on one side or the other of the debate about government vs. private health insurance. But costs will not decline, this article demonstrates, until doctors and hospital administrators agree among themselves to step away from business as usual. Their initiative will likely occur in sixes and eights, one town and then another.

George Packer Berry (1898-1986) was dean of Harvard Medical School. “Welcome,” he would address the freshmen. “Tell me the definition of *a profession*.” A physician who studied in that era describes the reaction: “We had never thought of it. We’re going into this lifelong profession and we didn’t have a clue. So [Berry] would call on people and have them stand up. They usually would drone on about [how a professional] *learned everything*. After an hour [Berry] slams his hand and says: *No. A profession is a set of behaviors, a code of behavior above the marketplace. You do not lie to your patients. You do not deceive them. You do not overcharge them and you do not abandon them*. And he walked out.” (*Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* by Howard Gardner et al., Basic Books [2001], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$26)

For over 30 years our National Center for the Laity has said that change occurs when a small group of like-minded people set out to improve a policy or practice within the hallways they inhabit Monday through Saturday. Are there clumps of doctors and others who approach the delivery of health care in fresh ways? Are there small groups of lawyers, judges and insurance executives who are discussing ways to assist courageous doctors? To be continued...

Taking the Initiative

In the Mines

Society rarely reforms without first experiencing some shock to its system. Dramatic events sometimes wake up a reform instinct. Recall the response to the 1979 disaster at Three Mile Island nuclear reactor: the construction of nuclear plants in the U.S. was, for all practical purposes, halted and intense scrutiny was given to existing sites.

Another form of energy, coal, has its own risks, particularly to the men and women who mine it. There was little regulation in place when several hundred at Consolidated Coal Company in Monongah, West Virginia on the morning of December 6, 1907. The mine exploded that day, killing over 500 workers, most of them Catholic. Monongah remains the worst coal-mining disaster in U.S. history.

Davitt McAteer of Wheeling Jesuit University chronicles the causes of that explosion in *Monongah: the Tragic Story of the 1907 Mine Disaster* (West Virginia University Press [2007], PO Box 6295, Morgantown, WV 26506; \$32.95). McAteer, who served as assistant secretary for mine safety in the U.S. Department of Labor under President Bill Clinton, draws a straight line from the public reaction to that disaster to the establishment of stricter regulations, designed to protect the health and safety of workers.

Worker safety again came to public attention during the Sago mine disaster in January 2006 at the International Coal Group mine near Buckhannon, West Virginia. Governor Joe Manchin appointed McAteer to head an investigation, out of which came new state statutory law and federal regulation.

Sago figures prominently in *Coal Mountain Elementary* by Mark Nowak (Coffee House Press [2009], 79 13th Ave. NE #110, Minneapolis, MN 55413; \$20). In addition this book deals with several disasters of greater proportion in Chinese provinces. There is no narrative in the book; it is a unique blend of stark photographs in and around Appalachian and Chinese coalfields with news reports and first-person accounts of disasters. The effect is sympathetic and even heart wrenching. It begins with a Chinese widow saying, "There is no way anybody else can understand." It ends with a U.S. widow saying, "It's something you never get over."

The challenge is to prove these widows wrong by understanding the need for regulation without the prior necessity of a tragedy.

Taking the Initiative

In the Airlines

The Association of Flight Attendants

(501 Third St. NW, Washington, DC 20001; www.afanet.org) could become the union for Delta Airline flight crews later this year. Delta is the only major non-union airline, but its merger with Northwest Airlines brings some union people into its workforce.

There are peculiarities in airline labor relations. Because the Railway Labor Act covers the industry, the National Mediation Board (1301 K St. NW, Washington, DC 20005), not the NLRB, monitors an election. The NMB, for some reason, counts anyone who doesn't vote as a *No* vote. The airline, of course, supplies a list of eligible voters but sometimes includes people who are not actively working. (*Labor Notes* [8/29], 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210)

On the Ground by Liesl Miller Orenic (University of Illinois Press [2009], 1325 S. Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820; \$25) is a history of labor relations in U.S. airlines from 1925 to the present. Orenic of Dominican University goes in depth at four airlines, focusing on the baggage handlers. The result is a thorough examination of an area of work unappreciated by travelers—until baggage is lost, that is.

North American Spirituality

Frances Perkins Wilson (1880-1965)

Perkins, the longest-serving and first woman Cabinet member, was raised in a New England Congregationalist household. She became Episcopalian immediately after college, while working in Chicago. For many years Perkins frequently made days of recollection at All Saints Convent (PO Box 3127, Catonsville, MD 21228), staffed by the Anglican All Saints Sisters of the Poor. Her faith, writes Kirstin Downey, was the motivation "that drove her and fueled all that she had done." Further, Perkins believed that without people of active faith our country reverts to a selfish individualism. She was convinced, Downey writes, that religion aids prosperity because it brings "communal thinking [and] planning for the good of the majority." (*The Woman Behind the New Deal*, Nan A. Talese [2009], 1745 Broadway #2000, New York, NY 10019; \$35)

Unfortunately, very few young adults know about Perkins. Yet she is responsible for most of the benefits they enjoy as workers and consumers. Kim Bobo, director of Interfaith Worker Justice (1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave. #400, Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org), summarizes Perkins' accomplishments while in President Franklin Roosevelt's (1882-1945) Cabinet: the Civilian Conservation Corps, the U.S. Employment Service, U.S. membership in the International Labor Organization, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Civil Works Administration, the National Industrial

Recovery Act, the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, plus immigration reform, unemployment insurance, advancements in labor relations and more. (*Wage Theft in America* [2009], 38 Greene St., New York, NY 10013; \$17.95)

Perkins came to the White House with a track record as Roosevelt's industrial commissioner in New York. She fought there "for factory safety, workmen's compensation, minimum wages and maximum hour laws, and relief and public works. Her success in New York [made] the state a model for other states." (*Nothing To Fear: FDR's Inner Circle* by Adam Cohen, Penguin Press [2009], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$29.95)

A college teacher who assigned a field report on conditions in a nearby textile mill introduced Perkins to the social question. "Perkins had been brought up to believe that people were poor because of some kind of moral failing," writes Cohen. Her teacher opened her eyes to economic conditions. Her first job, teaching in a Chicago suburb, led to involvements at Jane Addams' (1860-1935) Hull House (1030 W. Van Buren, Chicago, IL 60607; www.hullhouse.org). She briefly worked in Philadelphia and then for Florence Kelley (1859-1932) and the National Consumers League (1701 K St. NW #1200, Washington, DC 20006; www.nclnet.org). Today as then, the Consumers League is in the forefront of anti-child labor and anti-predatory credit campaigns, as well as monitoring health, safety and nutrition. In 1911 Perkins happened to be across the street from the Triangle Shirtwaist Company when a fire took the lives of 146 sweatshop workers. In short time she became the nation's expert in fire prevention and overall factory safety. (*Triangle: the Fire that Changed America* by David Von Drehle, Grove Press [2003], 841 Broadway, New York, NY 10003; \$14)

Our National Center for the Laity trumpets the *insider's approach to social justice*, in contrast to the necessary outsider's prophetic critique of the system. Perkins was an *insider*. She compromised. For example, she frequently teamed with corrupt Tammany Hall leaders on legislative matters. Under the principle of *half-a-loaf* she backed a wage and hour bill that explicitly excluded cannery workers, to the discomfort of her idealistic friends. Downey summarizes the insider's moral challenge: Perkins "ability to accept human foibles, to see both failings and strengths, was...a core personality trait, bolstering her effectiveness. She found that making deals with imperfect people and focusing on their strengths provided a pathway to actually achieving social change."

Perkins did more for labor unions than any comparable public official, yet many labor leaders opposed her. Some were jealous that the

Secretary of Labor was not from their own ranks. Some opposition was perhaps instinctually correct: The more government extends workers' benefits, the less workers are inclined to organize unions. Yet over time, as evident today, the government can fail to extend those benefits or to enforce its laws and statutes.

Perkins' husband suffered from serious mental illness. Her daughter, likewise afflicted, was often reckless. Perkins found it necessary to live with friends in order to use her salary for family needs. At each juncture, as Downey details, Perkins drew upon her experience to conclude:

- That "from crisis opportunities emerge."
- That "just 50 people could make a difference. She would act on this theory again and again."
- That Christianity compels its believers "to help the poor."
- And that a daily discipline of prayer tempers self-pity and pride while it focuses people on their vocation. She kept this prayer on her desk: "Remember...we are only day laborers in the vineyard of the Lord—we are not the architect...We are to do our daily stint faithfully...lay our course of bricks and not to question or worry about the total structure—that is God's business."

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

On July 7, 2009 (after several months delay) Pope Benedict XVI released his first social encyclical, *Charity in Truth* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6), which focuses on the challenges of authentic human and economic development in the global context. In 93 pages Benedict XVI builds on Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and upon Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961).

INITIATIVES asks experts to comment on *Charity in Truth*:

Marv Mich: Benedict XVI says: "I intend to pay tribute and to honor the memory of the great Pope Paul VI, revisiting his teachings on *integral human development* and taking my place within the path that they marked out, so as to apply them to the present moment."

Benedict XVI believes that "charity in truth...is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all of humanity." With this perspective the pope brings his own voice and tone to the mantra of his predecessors that economic development must include the *whole person* and *every person*—including "people's spiritual and moral welfare."

With this starting point of “charity in truth,” Benedict XVI links the gospel mandate of love (charity) with the Catholic conviction that there are truths in nature (the natural law) that are not optional for humanity’s flourishing. He unpacks some of those truths or principles, such as *the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity* in the current context of globalization. He calls for a strengthening of the United Nations and other international political authorities to protect the global common good and the needs of weaker (poorer) nations.

The letter is a treasure trove of themes to ponder, including a discussion of “decent work,” intergenerational justice, labor unions and more.

Benedict XVI introduces “*the principle of gratuitousness*” and “*an economy of gratuitousness.*” This is a fresh concept in Catholic social thought, although the notion is deeply rooted in Catholic theological assumptions about the centrality of God’s gift and grace. “Charity in truth is a force that builds community,” he writes. He then calls for “increasing openness...to forms of economic activity marked by quotas of gratuitousness and communion.” But how can *gift* and *gratuitousness* be principles for economic development? The whole church needs to lift up examples.

Charles Wilber: There was a rumor making the rounds that Fr. Robert Sirico of the libertarian Acton Institute (161 Ottawa Ave. NW #301, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; www.acton.org) was in Rome advising the pope on what to write. It is hard, however, to find any Sirico-like influences within *Charity in Truth*. The heart of the encyclical is its argument that integral human development is more than economic, political, and cultural development. Those are necessary but insufficient. Humans have received the gift of life from God and are meant to build a world that honors God. A development that allows for and generates evil (abortion, contraception, consumerism, corruption, etc) is not true integral human development. It is an implicit attack on so-called Western style development that ignores God’s commandments, that places individual choice above community needs, and elevates a thin humanism as a false guide to life. While food, clothing, and shelter are absolutely essential for life and while development must focus on creating them for all people, they are not enough. “Man does not live by bread alone.” Spiritual development cannot be left out if development is to be truly human.

There could be a silent battle going on behind the text. Ever since Vatican II, and particularly since Pope John Paul II, there has been a struggle over enculturation of the faith. This has been a particular problem between the Vatican and some elements in the U. S. and

elsewhere. The Vatican sees some Catholic leaders as too willing to compromise in the face of secular humanism. Benedict XVI goes out of his way to argue that Vatican II and Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio* were not a break with tradition but were a continuation applied to new issues in new times. The universal truths of the faith must inform everything, including all cultures and social processes such as development.

Bob Senser: INITIATIVES, of course, is especially attuned to *Charity in Truth*’s comments on work. Like his predecessors going back to Pope Leo XIII in his 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor*, Benedict XVI endorses the right to unionize. In fact, he deems the need for unions to be greater now than ever. Unions are a necessary part of a healthy “civil society,” the network of private groups and institutions between the government and its citizens. But that role is weakened these days because “governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or negotiating capacity of labor unions.” The restrictions come at a bad time because, amid the financial crisis, worker associations are needed to help build “new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level.”

Benedict XVI lists major changes that have occurred since Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, creating challenges for social justice. Among those changes:

- production and investment, which once took place predominantly within national boundaries, are now global.
- the cross-border mobility of workers is much greater.
- employment and unemployment now have an international dimension.
- job shortages lead to a sense of personal and group insecurity with international repercussions.

A key to understanding the whole encyclical is what Benedict XVI means by *development*. He does not restrict it to improving the economic lot of poor or underdeveloped countries. On the contrary, in the very first sentence he calls for “the authentic development of every person, of all humanity,” and identifies “the principal driving force” behind such development: *love, caritas*, which is also “at the heart of the church’s social doctrine.”

The result is not a blueprint. Rather, an outline, a rough paradigm, for a better world, one dedicated to the common good, including the *global common good*.

Popes are not economists, and so their teachings on economic life are often wrongly dismissed for lack of the usual academic credentials. But the economic arena can’t escape judgment on its morality. And even some credentialed economists are subjecting today’s

economy to moral scrutiny. For example, Nobel-prize-winning economist Amartya Sen does so in *The Idea of Justice* (Harvard University Press [2009], 79 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138; \$29.95).

INITIATIVES' readers who obtain *Charity In Truth* through NCL receive a free eight-page commentary published by *The Catholic Spirit* (244 Dayton Ave., St. Paul, MN 55102).

Rest in Peace

P. David Finks (1930-2009)

"The ancient Exodus has become modern," said Bishop Fulton Sheen (1895-1979) about his new city, Rochester, in January 1967, just three weeks after his arrival. We witness "a flight from and a flight to [as] the result of a crowd striving to get in and another crowd stumbling to get out. [This] produces what might be called the inner city. As I look at [Rochester] I see Christ weeping over it as he once wept over the city of Jerusalem." With this introduction at a press conference Sheen appointed Finks the urban vicar for his diocese, the first such office in the country.

Finks was ordained to the priesthood in 1956. Some years later he resigned and married Christy Bulkeley. He was a high school and community college teacher, a researcher, foster parent, and parish volunteer and spiritual director to many activists.

Finks' relationship to Sheen had a dramatic context. In July 1964 Rochester experienced a major race riot, more than a year before the Watts riot, which is now equated with the beginning of the urban crisis. Since 1960 Finks had participated in the Board of Urban Ministry. After the riot the board invited the Industrial Areas Foundation (220 W. Kinzie #500, Chicago, IL 60654) to their city to form a community organization, eventually called FIGHT. Rochester's bishop in 1964 did not encourage the effort. Sheen with his background in the missions and his participation at Vatican II was different. Finks remained active in FIGHT and other urban projects. In fact, he was among a small number of whites with official delegate status at FIGHT, a mostly black organization.

In 1967 Finks became a leader in Msgr. Jack Egan's (1916-2001) Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry, a national network. His involvement in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' urban task force teamed him with Msgr. Geno Baroni (1930-1984). The two wrote memos and convened discussions that directly led to the 1969 creation of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.usccb.org/cchd), an anti-poverty foundation focused exclusively on self-help

projects.

Finks was a supporter of the National Center for the Laity, including once donating several copies of his book, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky*, now out-of-print.

Rest in Peace

John F. Henning (1915-2009)

Henning of San Francisco had a relationship with our National Center for the Laity dating to the late 1930s when he joined the staff of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. (Even though the NCL was chartered in 1978, its predecessor groups go back to the 1930s.) Interestingly, Henning's father was fired for his involvement with ACTU early in the early 1920s.

Henning was eventually hired by the California Labor Federation, where he served for nearly 50 years. During that time he held positions in the U.S. Labor Department and the California Department of Industrial Relations. He was also U.S. ambassador to New Zealand. Henning assisted several Irish-American organizations and was a friend to all immigrants. He received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

Two centers preserve his memory: The Henning Center for International Labor Relations (University of California, 2521 Channing Way # 5 5 5 5, Berkeley, CA 9 4 7 2 0 ; www.henningcenter.berkeley.edu) and Henning Institute for Catholic Social Thought (St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA 94575; www.stmarys-ca.edu).

Rest in Peace

Eunice Kennedy Shriver (1921-2009)

Through her Special Olympics (1133 19th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; www.specialolympics.org), Shriver elevated the profile of handicapped athletes and thereby educated people around the world about the dignity of each person, regardless of their mental or physical handicap.

Sometime after graduating from college, Shriver moved to Chicago to work in a Catholic agency for juvenile delinquents. In 1953 she married R. Sargent Shriver, who worked in Chicago and was involved in Catholic social action here. The founders of our National Center for the Laity collaborated with the Shriviers in those years and the Shriviers, in turn, participated in NCL's founding convention in 1978.

True to Shriver's ideals, Msgr. Dan Cantwell, one NCL founder, later co-founded the Vineyard Home for Mentally Challenged (101 Cantwell Ct., Purgitsville, WV 26852). Likewise your INITIATIVES' editor serves on the board of St. Coletta's of Illinois (18350 Crossing Dr., Tinley Park, IL 60487; www.stcolettasofil.com),

which includes the Joseph P. Kennedy School to provide education for developmentally disabled and autistic children.

Shriver's brother, Edward Kennedy (1932-2009) died at press time.

Happenings

A cyber-organization, January Adventure (www.januaryadventure.org), hosts "A Social Gospel in the First and 21st Century," January 15-17, 2010 and repeated January 18-20, 2010. The sessions are based on Rev. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), a pioneer in applying Christianity to work life. The sessions feature John Dominic Crossan and Paul Raushenbush. It will be held at the Methodist Center (100 Arthur Moore Dr., St. Simon Island, GA 31522).

The Rauschenbusch Center (4 Nickerson St. #300, Seattle, WA 98109; www.rauschenbusch.org) tracks talks and references.

The Siena Center (7200 W. Division St. #Priory 115, River Forest, IL 60305; www.siena.dom.edu) starts its 2010 Albertus Magnus series with a January 21, 2010 talk on "Neurotheology" by Hugh McElwain of Dominican University. Subsequent topics include "care of the dying," "Eastern medical techniques," and more.

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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.

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

NCL Financial Report, July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009

Income

Individual Donations	31,301.00
Resale of Books	1,527.40
Interest	<u>206.88</u>
TOTAL	33,035.28

Expenses

Printing & Postage	31,179.78
Secretarial & Professional Service	5,781.75
Office Supplies & Telephone	1,334.62
Travel & Meetings	1,389.17
Govt. fees & Audit	1,875.00
Purchase of Books for Resale	<u>1,183.75</u>
TOTAL	42,744.07

Operating Deficit = -- (\$9,708.79)

"Social justice [is] the virtue that inclines one to cooperate with others in order to help make the institutions of society better and serve the common good. While the obligation of social justice falls upon the individual, that person cannot fulfill the obligation alone, but must work in concert with others, through organized bodies, as a member of a group whose purpose is to identify the needs of society and by the use of appropriate means to meet these needs locally, regionally, nationally and even globally." -- *Modern Catholic Dictionary* by Fr. John Hardon, S.J. (Doubleday & Co. [1980], 1745 Broadway #1000, New York, NY 10019; \$12.95.

