

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

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

[www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm](http://www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm)

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## Diversity Individuates

Immigration and diversity will over time add to economic growth and likely to tolerance, reports Robert Putnam in the June 2007 issue of *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Blackwell Publishing, 350 Main St., Malden, MA 02148). However, diversity is correlated with isolation—not just one group isolating itself from another. Individuals in a diverse community tend “to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worse from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and work on community projects less often.” How then do people in a diverse neighborhood or city spend their time? The more diversity, Putnam finds, “the more individuals “huddle unhappily in front of the television.” (*City Journal* [Spring/07], 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, NY 10017 and *N.Y. Times*, 6/17/07)

INITIATIVES’ readers are acquainted with Putnam as the author of *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster [2001], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$16), a report on the steady decline of all voluntary associations. Putnam’s disturbing finding on the insidious negative influence of diversity on social capital and neighborliness is the result of five years of research in 41 U.S. locations and in Europe. One implication is that multi-cultural diversity programs in schools and elsewhere actually discourage individuals from joining voluntary groups and participating in civic life.

Is there some wisdom in the old Catholic approach to immigration and diversity? Through ethnic parishes and parochial schools U.S. Catholicism promoted particularity with the expectation that secure roots paradoxically assist assimilation during the workweek. Can INITIATIVES’ readers share examples of building cross-ethnic social capital, counteracting the tendency of individuals to retreat to their TV room?

## Taking the Initiative

### *In Labor Relations*

The tab is over \$100,000 a year, says financial officer Terrence O’Connor of St. Thomas University (16401 NW 37<sup>th</sup> Ave., Miami Gardens, FL 33054; [www.stu.edu](http://www.stu.edu)). But “a living wage policy [for our housekeeping and maintenance employees] is true to our Catholic mission and is important.” As of July 2, 2007 the minimum at St. Thomas moved up to \$10.27 hourly.

The school has a Center for Justice and Peace that backed a municipal living wage ordinance, raising the question: Are we practicing what we preach? The Faculty Forum then took up the question. The school’s president, Msgr. Franklyn Casale, is pleased. He wants St. Thomas to review all of its subcontracts, pushing its vendors on the living wage issue. (*Catholic News Service*, 7/9/07)

Fr. Anthony Shonis (Holy Name, 511 Second St., Henderson, KY 42402) is helping his Owensboro diocese develop guidelines for parishes during construction projects. The diocese wants to be in harmony with a bishops’ document, *Practicing What We Teach* (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017).

“The architect is the key,” Shonis tells INITIATIVES. “Each contractor has to see reference to the prevailing wage and health care insurance in the bidding requirements. The architect has to take responsibility for overseeing the bid requirements.” So far, says Shonis, there is positive reaction from pastors, architects and contractors to the proposal.

Shonis, by the way, is a regular contributor to *Rank and File Catholic* (141 Bruce Ave., Paducah, KY 42001; [www.thecatholicjourney.com](http://www.thecatholicjourney.com)).

“The hotel industry is one of the fastest growing in our economy,” writes Fr. Bill Spilly, a numismatist and the pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (PO Box 149, Hamlin, NY 14464). “Unfortunately, hotel workers who provide hospitality to travelers and guests are often denied what they need to survive.” Spilly’s

bulletin column then says that the parish council and a parish committee are circulating a petition on behalf of Clergy and Laity United (750 East Ave., Rochester, NY 14607; [www.uniterrjb.org](http://www.uniterrjb.org)).

The petition reminds Crown Plaza Hotel (70 State St., Rochester, NY 14614) that workers “deserve the right to organize for improved working conditions without fear or intimidation.”

INITIATIVES will follow the story.

Meanwhile, organizations that are planning a conference are advised to check with Informed Meeting Exchange ([www.inmex.org](http://www.inmex.org)) regarding labor issues at hotels and convention sites. IME, which receives union funding, offers other services for meeting planners.

## **Taking the Initiative**

### *In the Classroom*

Seven years ago Liverpool High School (4338 Wetzel Rd., Liverpool, NY 13090) arranged for each student to get a laptop. This semester the laptops are mothballed.

These are the reasons for the change: 1.) Students misused the Internet. 2.) The laptops broke down regularly. 3.) There is no improvement in educational performance. In sum, says board president Mark Lawson, the technology is “a distraction to the educational process.”

A few other high schools around the country are abandoning laptops and/or curtailing access to computers. (*N.Y. Times*, 5/4/07 and *America* [5/28/07], 106 W. 56<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10019)

Are there other such examples—not examples of a newer technology replacing an outdated one, but of technologies being abandoned?

## **Taking the Initiative**

### *In Law School*

For most law students a break from class is a time to catch up on sleep, look for an internship or prepare for exams. However, a group of 19 students from Marquette University Law School (PO Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201) recently spent a week in post-Katrina New Orleans with Common Ground Legal Collective (221 Idora, Vallejo, CA 94591; [www.commongroundrelief.org](http://www.commongroundrelief.org)).

The students traveled on behalf of the law school and their student chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (132 Nassau St. #992,

New York, NY 10038; [www.nlg.org](http://www.nlg.org)). Terry Mambu, a board member of the National Center for the Laity, was the leader of the group, along with classmates Camille Monahan and Anne Jaspers. Two Marquette alums and retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske accompanied the students.

Common Ground emerged in the days after Hurricane Katrina. It researches insurance claims for displaced residents, canvasses neighborhoods in regard to a class action suit and more.

The Marquette students, who stayed in the now well known Upper Ninth Ward, were overwhelmed with the widespread suffering so close to abundance and prosperity. “Many sections of the city look as if the levees broke a few weeks ago; not two years ago,” Mambu reports. “The loss and suffering is a devastating crime against humanity.”

Each evening the students participated in a prayer and reflection session at a nearby convent. They came home convinced of the need for more *pro bono* legal service in our country. Hundreds of students from Marquette, as well as many other colleges, have volunteered with recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast.

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## **Work and Art**

About 15 years ago Celia Roberts (PO Box 5, Paonia, CO 81428; [www.paonia.com/~celiaroberts](http://www.paonia.com/~celiaroberts)) was asked to take photographs of migrant workers for a state conference on health care. The assignment became a vocation.

Most of the photos in her collection are black-and-white. The scenes are simple but poignant. Roberts selects various pictures for exhibits, recently one called “The Migrant Experience” at Centro San Juan Diego (2830 Lawrence St., Denver, CO 80205). The exhibit is now available to other organizations that want to highlight the workers who, as Roberts says, “make it possible for us to eat.”

Roberts also produces an annual bilingual calendar, sales of which support three migrant advocacy groups.

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## **110+ Years**

### *Of Catholic Social Thought*

*United States Welfare Reform: A Catholic Response* by Fr. Thomas Massaro, SJ (Georgetown University Press [2007], 3240

Prospect St. NW, Washington, DC 20007: \$26.95) is a clear presentation of Catholic moral principles, using the 1996 welfare law as a case study.

Massaro of Weston School of Theology rests his exposition on the innate dignity of each person, with the Catholic understanding that a person is communal by nature. This premise makes Catholic social thought different from “any version of individualism.”

Massaro’s book, which is an update of *Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Welfare Reform* (Liturgical Press, 1998), names principles that yield a person-centered society—principles like *subsidiarity, the common good* and several more. Catholic social thought allows for different outcomes among persons (in wages or wealth, for example), as long as each person participates in the institutions that affect him or her.

Adequate participation means that workers should not routinely fall below a minimum income floor. Thus the government, which helps establish conditions for economic performance, must consider the poor. It is “immoral,” Massaro writes, to “place people in impossible situations.” Parents are expected to provide for their children. The economy therefore cannot get to a point where it “deprive[s] people of opportunity for honorable means of subsistence.”

*United States Welfare Reform* concludes with an evaluation of the current law, to be reviewed by Congress in 2010.

President George Bush (who will be our former president when a new law is approved) wants stricter work requirements. He proposes that a state have 70% of its so-called *welfare recipients* in a 40-hour job before the state gets its Federal block grant. Further, Bush wants states to spend a substantial portion of their block grant on abstinence-based sex education programs.

A job is better than a government subsidy, says Massaro. But some workers, particularly single parents, need “substantial job preparation and transitional help,” otherwise they quickly move “back into dependency.” An overly rigid work requirement, he says, might “conflict with the prohibition against placing people in impossible situations.”

Likewise, marriage is better than single-parent families. However, Massaro is uncomfortable about withholding assistance from someone who does not complete a marriage preparation program. Further, he thinks churches

and families are more effective in promoting and sustaining marriage than a moralistic government regulation.

As Massaro knows, the anxiety level at our National Center for the Laity rises whenever bishops and other Church employees comment on specific public policies as if their take on the matter is the same as “the church’s position.” The NCL believes that Catholic social principles (like *the right to life* or *the necessity of labor unions*) are morally binding. However, the prudent implementation of the principle is the province of the laity and there can likely be equally moral (equally *Catholic*) strategies on, for example, the criteria for welfare assistance, the amount of assistance and the means of delivery.

Massaro is most familiar with the bishops, noting that their position on welfare legislation is not dogmatic like the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, for example. Further, he acknowledges a “track of unofficial Catholic social teaching” (what the NCL calls *Catholic social thought and practice*) and he names a couple of its lay leaders. The NCL, writes Massaro, is a hub for a type of “lay activism [that] is gradually coming to occupy its rightful but long-delayed place as the center of gravity.” INITIATIVES wonders if it isn’t more accurate to call Church officials, not the laity, the historic latecomers to issues like the right to life, labor relations, the delivery of social services and more?

*Can a Health Care Market Be Moral? A Catholic Vision* by Mary McDonough (Georgetown University Press [2007]; \$29.95) is similar to *United States Welfare Reform*.

Because the market defines *health* as physical well-being its value (i.e., *cost*) will necessarily escalate to infinity. Individual consumers will never curtail their desire for relief from illness and death. Catholicism, as McDonough details, cannot accept the ideas that suffering contributes nothing to health and holiness, that aging is to be resisted and further that medical research automatically trumps other good things like affordable housing or educational opportunity in the realm of distributive justice. McDonough, a former Montana legislator, tries mightily to broaden the public policy debate.

McDonough presents the positions of several economists, philosophers and even novelists—each in a concise paragraph. She also explains many concepts like managed care, health savings accounts and more. McDonough

devotes a chapter and more to Daniel Callahan of the Hastings Center (21 Malcolm Gordon Rd., Garrison, NY 10524; [www.thehastingscenter.org](http://www.thehastingscenter.org)), a premier bioethics think tank. Callahan, who was recently profiled in *Commonweal* (475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115; 6/1/07), has long argued “a value dimension” in which medical research is not a moral imperative, the medical enterprise is not the end purpose of health care and wholeness includes a meaningful life, an appreciation for aging and an acceptance of death.

McDonough admits that moral values (Catholic or otherwise) must eventually be planted in a specific culture. “The U.S. has a history of love for market ideology and individualism,” she notes. Realistically then, any health care plan has to use a combination of market mechanisms and government oversight, subsidy and tax policy. Catholicism must insist, however, that any plan include access to basic care for all. Full access means, as McDonough realizes, that joining the insurance pool is mandatory. (Several major presidential candidates do not include mandatory health insurance in their reform plan.)

Further, Catholicism can support a plan only if it is sustainable. That means some rationing of beyond-the-basic medical procedures will likely be necessary. Finally, any moral plan must be effective. That is, it must really enhance health, not primarily the medical industry.

There is a March 25-27, 2008 conference on “Catholic Social Teaching and Health Care,” sponsored by *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* (Villanova University, 202 Vasey Hall, Villanova, PA 19085; [www3.villanova.edu](http://www3.villanova.edu)).

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## North American Spirituality

*Russ Barta (1918-1997)*

Barta, who died ten years ago this month, was founding president of our National Center for the Laity, serving from 1978 to 1986. (There have been four presidents since.) Barta was also the editor of *INITIATIVES* from 1978-1983 and co-editor from 1983-1984.

Barta taught at Nazareth College in Michigan in the early 1950s and at Mundelein College in Chicago, now part of Loyola University, from 1963 until 1985. In between those assignments, Barta was director of the Adult Education Centers of the Archdiocese of

Chicago. AEC offered classes on social issues, Biblical studies and the arts in about 12 neighborhood locations. Throughout his career Barta contributed articles on public policy and on theology to many journals. During the 1960s he was editor of a twice-monthly magazine, *New City*—the predecessor of *INITIATIVES*. He was always involved in race relations, particularly with Catholic Interracial Council and Friendship House, often teaming up with Msgr. Dan Cantwell, another founder of our NCL, and with Ed Marciniak, his brother-in-law.

Barta, like Socrates, constantly participated in small group discussions, often convening them in a college lounge or in his home or at a restaurant. Barta would typically arrive with a quotation or paragraph from *Newsweek* or the *N.Y. Times*, calling it “suggestive,” or “intriguing,” or “provocative.” During lulls in the conversation, Barta pressed for a definition of terms or “some fresh language.”

“An adult is a special kind of student,” Barta said. “Adults have innumerable experiences with love, family life, work, the community and their personalities; adults are preoccupied with existential questions around freedom, integrity, effective moral agency, personal and social awareness and more. An adult learner wants the hodge-podge of disconnected spheres of activity to add up to some meaningful whole.”

From that viewpoint Barta taught hundreds of women returning to school at Mundelein College and many graduate students in religious studies there. He did the same during summer institutes of priests and women religious eager to learn the theology of Vatican II. Over the years Barta led many other discussion groups of neighbors, cronies and assorted activists.

Barta, his wife Bernice and their many friends were Vatican II Catholics before, during and after the 1962-1965 Council. In the following excerpt Barta explains Vatican II’s refreshing turn toward the world:

Christians, in view of their primordial vocation, have a duty to collaborate in the creation of the world and to embellish it. The church must proclaim a positive understanding of the modern world, its tasks and its destiny. Our earthly task is to marry and beget, to establish civilizations and cultures, to create cities and industries, to search relentlessly for justice in institutions, to pursue the mysteries of life scientifically

and philosophically, to fashion the best in the arts, to mediate harmony among people.

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even until Vatican II, Catholicism often said *NO* to the achievements of modernity: to science and human evolution, to psychoanalysis, the revolt of workers against industrial bondage, to feminism, to a new understanding of married life, to the rise of democracy and more. To be fair, these ideas and movements sometimes are accompanied by atheism, materialism or relativism. But alertness to the dangers of certain negative trends in our society should not blind Catholics to their overall promise and significance.

It is important to distinguish the *secular* from *secularism*. Our society is secular because it is not organized around a religion. Its central values, however, are human and its aspirations are expressed in ethical language. A secular society allows religion to be at its best, not too dependent on identification with other groups.

Some members of our church, official or unofficial, criticize secular society, and some negativity about our situation is understandable because a society separate from any one religion is a new experience for Catholicism. But severe criticism of the world by Christians is based on a model of church that is removed from our day and age by about seven centuries...

We ought to abolish the phrase *to Christianize society*. It is more in keeping with the church's present reality to describe our task as an effort *to humanize the world*...

Yes, a secular society does raise difficulties. U.S. society must resist *secularism*, becoming organized around values that are antihuman and antireligious. But are the churches so unimaginative, so uncreative, so lacking in inner resources that Christianity's survival depends on making our society explicitly Christian, in the way Catholicism once made the state? It would be a great tragedy if our concern for the gospel led us to misjudge the nature of the U.S. experiment in democracy and to fail to see the promise in our particular historic moment.

Barta became disappointed in the 1970s because Vatican II was being interpreted too narrowly in U.S. parishes. Thirty years ago this month he, along with a few others, wrote *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. By

Advent 1977 the controversial document had nearly 50 prominent signatories and an initial press run of 100,000. It generated so much attention that a secretariat, called the National Center for the Laity, was established.

Barta explains the purpose of our NCL:

The NCL is somewhat unique in its exclusive focus on the laity in the world. It consciously excludes from its agenda a consideration of lay ministry inside the Church. This does not reflect, contrary to criticisms of the NCL, a negative attitude toward lay ministry. It simply reflects the fact that lay ministry receives a lot of attention and programming while the laity's indispensable contribution through their work, their family life and social involvements needs amplification.

Through Vatican II and other theological efforts, Catholicism has sufficient *theory* about the laity in the world. The church's challenge is *pastoral*: How to help lay people, especially young adults, develop a compelling sense of the world of work as a genuine religious vocation.

We need a period of experimentation with different approaches and plenty of lay input. It is essential that the whole church listen attentively to ordinary workers. Unfortunately, some of those who staff Church offices have a negative view of U.S. institutions and of the people who work within them. Yet lay Catholics, the insiders to economic and political institutions, need commendation, encouragement and support, not judgment and condemnation.

Catholicism generally has a religious language to describe *saintly* activity. There is, however, no clear religious language to describe the work of a banker, an executive, a bus driver or an assembly worker. A number of phrases are floating around like *ministry to the world* or *lay spirituality*. But a compelling language must be one that ordinary lay people are comfortable with. It must fit their experience of work.

This problem of language is linked to the problem of appropriate lay models for the Christian in the world. The church has its calendar of saints. They are a daily reminder of what is possible with God's grace. But how many of them are women and men who lived in a technological, modern society?

There are plenty of unofficial saints, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—women

and men admired for moral integrity and the competence with which they carry out the tasks of the world as politicians, professionals, trades people and more. Can the whole church lift up such people as models for Christian living?

Our NCL is a modest effort to make the world of work religiously significant. The NCL is a ginger group attempting to turn the attention of the whole church toward its mission to the world. The NCL takes no partisan positions. The NCL newsletter is called INITIATIVES, and that name implies that the NCL is generally supportive of whatever little efforts people make to enhance the dignity and democracy of the workplace. Since the goal for which the NCL strives transcends any of the issues on which Catholics are commonly divided, the NCL receives support from the right, left and those in the middle of the road.

The Catholic church in the U.S. has never lamented the nearly complete loss of its working class, as has the church in Europe. The U.S. church in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was profoundly attuned to the needs of workers and immigrants. Its challenge today is to do as well for young adult Catholics who aspire to positions of power and

responsibility and to assist new arrivals to this country, as they make their contribution to the fabric of our society.

"I'm having a long love affair with the church," Barta once told your INITIATIVES' editor. To know him at all meant to know that he didn't confine his affection to what he called the *big C Church*, although he was a good friend to many priests, to the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to other religious, and he thoroughly studied Vatican documents and the Catholic tradition. But Barta's true affection was for the *small c church*: his wife, children and grandchildren, his nieces and nephews, his fellow teachers, neighbors in Evanston, many students, and a wide circle of community leaders in Chicago. Barta never slipped into the presumption that any one person (a pastor, a bishop's lobbyist, a prominent theologian) was synonymous with *the church*.

A Catholic subculture is not exclusionary, Barta believed. Just the opposite. "The liturgical year, the sacred songs, the sacramentals, Catholic magazines, nurturing priests and lay ministers, renewal movements, parish groups and more all together can create an incredibly firm support system, a conviction, a steadfast vision and an aptitude for joining with like-minded people of all backgrounds in improving our world."

## Happenings

The Liturgical Institute (1000 E. Maple Ave., Mundelein, IL 60060; [www.liturgicalinstitute.org](http://www.liturgicalinstitute.org)) is sponsoring an April 2-4, 2008 conference, "Liturgy, Justice and Social Reconstruction." Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus of New York is the keynote speaker.

## Websites

Bill McGarvey, an advisor to our National Center for the Laity, edits a website for young adult Catholics: [www.bustedhalo.com](http://www.bustedhalo.com). It has features on ethics, popular culture and "street spirituality." McGarvey is also a musician. Two CDs, *Beautiful Mess* and *Tell Your Mother* are available at [www.billmgarvey.com](http://www.billmgarvey.com).

Bob Senser, longtime friend of our National Center for the Laity, edits an informative cyber-newsletter *Human Rights for Workers* ([www.senser.com](http://www.senser.com)) about trade and labor issues from around the world. Senser is currently following litigation brought on behalf of exploited workers in Liberia and Guatemala by International Rights Advocates (218 D St. SE #300, Washington, DC 20003; [www.iradvocates.org](http://www.iradvocates.org)).

Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity, hosts a cyberspace "Dialogue on the Spirituality of Work." Send your e-mail address to his secure site: [gpierce@actapublications.com](mailto:gpierce@actapublications.com). Pierce, by the way, has a new book at the printer: *The Mass Is Never Ended*. Order a copy in advance and at a discount from National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$10.25).

Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; [www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)) hosts our National Center for the Laity website ([www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm](http://www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm)).

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PO Box 291102

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Editor: Bill Droel ([wdroel@cs.com](mailto:wdroel@cs.com))

Contributing to this issue: Teresa (Terry) Mambu

NCL Board Members: Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, John Hazard, Lauren Jennings, Nicole Kramer, Frosty Pipal, Terry Mambu, Phil Moore and Vaile Scott (president).

The NCL is an independent (501 C 3) organization, chartered in the State of Illinois since April 1978.

The NCL will mail a fundraising letter in a few weeks, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of its charter, *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*.

The response to that 1977 document (both in the U.S. and overseas) was so overwhelming that a secretariat was needed, at first simply to answer the mail. That secretariat, known as the National Center for the Laity, went on to publish a regular newsletter on faith and work (INITIATIVES), to host and support conferences, to encourage research, and to network institutions and leaders (Catholics and others) who share an interest in the intersection of the gospel and the world.

The seven-page *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* appears as an appendix in *Full-Time Christians* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$9.25—only 56 copies remain).

The Christian gospel of work, says Pope Benedict XVI, draws upon each worker's talents and uses them for the common good "in a spirit of justice and solidarity...Today more than ever it urgent and necessary" to live as Christians in the workplace and to be "apostles among workers."

Benedict XVI spoke in Rocca di Papa, Italy during a conference, "Christ's Witness in the World of Work."

Luigi Marchitelli (Pontifical Council for the Laity, 00153 Roma, Piazza S. Calisto, Vatican City 00120), a leader of the conference, explains how to give successful witness: It is "not by trying to convert [other workers], but by showing our joy, our hopes, our desire to do things well" and by maintaining high ethical practices. (*Florida Catholic*, 5/3/07)

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