

Initiatives

In support of Christians in the world

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Rest In Peace

Ed Marciniak (1917-2004)

Personal Reflection

By Bill Droel

Once upon a time (before I was married), a woman at a Loyola University party asked me: "So what do you do?"

"I wait for Ed Marciniak's call each morning and get involved in whatever he commands," I replied. "Well not literally," I amended my remark. "Sometimes Marciniak calls in the afternoon or evening." Smile.

As best I can remember, I was first introduced to Marciniak in June 1982 at a National Center for the Laity conference on Pope John Paul II's encyclical *On Human Work*. Marciniak was disturbed that in a nation of over 50 million Catholics, only 10,000 copies of the encyclical had been printed. How did he know? Like with many other topics, Marciniak did his research. He called all the Catholic publishers, scolding them while he had them on the line.

At first, Marciniak's gruff voice and demeanor put me off. Yet we must have clicked somewhere along the way because over the years we met for lunch at least 800 times.

On one of those occasions Marciniak defined a *friend* as "anyone who will return my phone call." By that definition, Marciniak had thousands of friends. His quip helped me grasp why he appealed to me.

Marciniak believed in *the strength of weak links*. That is, he understood that in public life information is shared, creative ideas are

surfaced and power for the common good is brokered by people who are sincerely present to one another, but who are comfortable remaining *public friends*. This is in contrast to some work environments where people are constantly getting *bent out of shape*, always taking things too personally. Marciniak, by contrast, routinely disagreed with someone in the morning, only to call him or her for support on another issue in the afternoon.

Marciniak, I should quickly say, was *very* solicitous for my welfare, in his own noninvasive way. But he never wasted time on gossip. The topic at lunch or in his office was always strategy: Can we find a donor to help a struggling grammar school on the west side? Can we get a chancery bureaucrat out of the "cocoon" by sending her or him to this or that event? (For most of his career Marciniak had a binocular view of the Archdiocese of Chicago Chancery. He assisted five Chicago archbishops—those that appreciated his nudging and those that didn't.)

I moved to Chicago from Rochester in 1978 precisely because I was interested in Catholic social action, for which Chicago has a grand reputation. I was at a loss, however, locating that tradition in the late 1970s. Then I met Russ Barta at Mundelein College and, in turn, his brother-in-law, Ed Marciniak. Through them I happily met scores of *urban characters*, including several now in heaven's Chicago caucus.

For me there is something special about being a Chicago Catholic. I hope my children will feel something similar. (My son Robert shares a birthday with Marciniak...and Robert can impersonate Marciniak's gravely voice.)

Marciniak's Catholic Worker Years

In 1933 Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin began the Catholic Worker movement in New York. The movement was introduced to Chicago in June 1936 when Maurin gave a talk at St. Ignatius (6559 N. Glenwood, Chicago, IL 60618). Gazing up at the vaulted ceiling, he said, "We need parish homes [for the homeless] as well as parish domes." Maurin declined rectory lodging that evening, choosing to spend the night on lower

Wacker Dr. where he told the homeless: "Although you may be called bums and panhandlers, you are in fact ambassadors of God."

Two months later the first meeting of Catholic Workers in Chicago was held at Old St. Patrick's (711 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60661) and within a few weeks a Catholic Worker center, under the leadership of Arthur Falls, opened at 1841 W. Taylor St.

Day, then 40, visited Chicago in the Spring of 1937. At her encouragement Al Reser, Marty Paul, John Cogley and Marciniak--then 20 years old--opened another Catholic Worker house at 868 Blue Island Ave. on Good Friday 1938. They served oatmeal, bread and coffee to 350 that morning, several of whom returned to sleep on the floor that night.

Cogley and Marciniak began to publish the *Chicago Catholic Worker*. "If you have one quarter," they said, "send it to Mott St. [in New York City], where Dorothy Day and their gang are doing the best job of Catholic journalism in the country. But if you have two quarters, take a chance on Blue Island Ave. We shall do our best." The circulation of the Chicago paper grew rapidly and got national attention when it attacked Fr. Charles Coughlin, the famous radio priest, for his anti-Semitism.

Marciniak was so incensed with Coughlin that in May 1939 he, Dorothy Day, Fr. Martin Carribine, SJ and a few others started the Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism. They published another newspaper, *Voice*, and hawked it on the streets--"sometimes in direct confrontation with [Coughlin's] salespeople." (*Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* by Nancy Roberts, State University of New York Press, 1984)

Marciniak was responsible for making the Catholic Worker an important force in the industrial union movement. In New York Peter Maurin was fond of saying, "Strikes don't strike me." The dignity of labor, for Maurin, was associated with craftsmen somehow freely serving the community. But Marciniak believed that Catholics had to be involved in the messy, internal politics of the union movement. Thanks to Marciniak and his friends the word *Catholic* became part of the history of the U.S. labor movement, especially in Chicago.

Marciniak was also in the center of the debate among Catholic Workers over pacifism in World War II. Several Catholic Worker leaders, including John Cogley, Tom Sullivan and James O'Gara of Chicago, joined the armed forces to battle the Nazi injustice, over the objection of

Dorothy Day. Marciniak was among the few who stuck with Day's very unpopular position. (*The Word Made Flesh: the Chicago Catholic Worker and the Emergence of Lay Activism* by Francis Sicius, University Press of America, 1990)

Marciniak was asked what he gained from his association with Dorothy Day: "Constancy is the word that fits her so well. Constancy to the church and to social teaching. Too many activists flit from cause to cause. From the beginning Day stood against injustice. While others move on to more fashionable things, she stood her ground.

"In her own way Day pioneered a lay role for me within the church, a Christian life style. In those days lay people tended to shuffle to the rectory or chancery seeking approbation for some project. Day had us find our true identity as Christians by identifying with the suffering, the abandoned, the alienated and the young of heart--whatever their age. Her appeal was for personal responsibility. She wasted little time blaming stodgy pastors or cautious prelates. She never ran with the crowd who only saw progress in confrontation with the Church. She reminded us that the initiative was ours, as was the yoke of responsibility. We too were the church. And to wait and do nothing was to be nothing." (*Kairos* [11/97], Su Casa Catholic Worker, 5045 S. Laflin St., Chicago, IL 60609)

Marciniak and the Dignity of Work

After the Blue Island Ave. Catholic Worker closed Marciniak hired on with the typesetters union and was later involved with the Newspaper Guild. All through the 1940s he was very active in labor/management relations.

Marciniak was aware that the Catholic social movement in Europe predated Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor*, whereas in the U.S., as late as 1940, only a handful of specialists were interested in Catholic social thought. On the other hand, the working class in Europe left the church while U.S. workers were its backbone. Thus, he concluded, an opportunity awaited Catholic social action in the U.S.

Marciniak and his friends simply assumed that Catholic social principles, as articulated in the encyclicals and other documents, could be applied with evident benefit to labor relations, race relations, social policy and urban affairs.

For starters, Marciniak took up the recommendation in Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Reconstructing the Social Order* that the trade

union movement be augmented by independent associations that give workers "a thorough religious and moral training" so that unions might more likely "exert a benefit far beyond the ranks of their own members."

To Marciniak the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, begun in February 1937 in the kitchen of the Catholic Worker House in New York, was an example of an association designed to assist the union movement. Marciniak got involved with ACTU, contributing to its *Labor Leader* newspaper.

On March 19, 1943 (the feast of St. Joseph) Marciniak, with Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand and Frank Delaney, founded the Catholic Labor Alliance--Chicago's counterpart to ACTU.

Marciniak made some changes with CLA. Membership in ACTU was limited to Catholics who belonged to "bona fide trade unions," whereas CLA reached out to managers, labor relations lawyers and others.

A second trait of CLA had implications that made Marciniak extremely controversial in Catholic social action circles for the rest of his life.

ACTU, in contrast to Fr. Charles Coughlin's Workers Councils, was not meant to create Catholic unions. Gradually though ACTU groups around the country became voting blocks inside union locals. Marciniak pushed the original ACTU intention to its fullest, arguing that Catholics should be active in unions as good trade unionists who happen to be Catholic, not as Catholics *per se*. The good trade unionist is "careful not to involve the Church in the temporal problems of the union." (Marciniak capitalized *Church* when it referred exclusively to the institutional Church; lower case when *church* meant *people of God*.)

Policies are Catholic because they are true and good, Marciniak argued. Policies are not true and good because they are Catholic. Understanding of this distinction, he wrote, "will determine in great measure the amount of influence that Catholic labor groups and indeed the whole Catholic social movement will exert." It is worthwhile to have a Catholic support group for lawyers, nurses or neighbors. But when it comes to advocating public policies, said Marciniak, those lawyers, nurses or neighbors are better advised to act inside their professional association, their union or their political party rather than through a specifically Catholic peace and justice organization. (*The American Apostolate* edited by Fr. Leo Ward, C.S.C., Newman Press, 1952)

This distinction put Marciniak into conflict, bitterly on occasion, with Church employees who gave opinions on specific public policies, as if speaking for the whole church or the whole diocese. Those Church employees are unwittingly undermining the responsibility of baptized Christians, he believed.

Gary Wills puts Marciniak and his distinction into historical context. Marciniak represented an older style of Catholic liberalism that was overshadowed by the so-called radicals of the late 1960s. While exceptions can be made (the 1964 Civil Rights Act, for example), the older style liberals did not think clergy and other Church employees should normally be taking partisan positions and calling them moral issues. Wills explains: "If conscience is to mediate between moral teaching and politics, while preserving the wall of separation, [the laity] must be the mediators. The clergy speak too directly of moral imperatives, making Churchly claims too little negotiable, too unyielding for the pluralistic marketplace." (*Bare Ruined Choirs*, Delta Books, 1971)

Beginning in July 1943 Marciniak published a monthly newspaper, *Work*, for the Catholic Labor Alliance. Fr. Steven Avella describes it: "Marciniak boldly led a group of seminarians to the gate of a large Chicago factory and distributed 2,000 copies of the first issue. *Work's* hard-hitting editorials and labor reporting made the tabloid a hit with working men and women throughout the city. By the late 1940s it had a circulation of around 10,000." With Bob Senser, Marciniak kept publishing *Work* into the 1950s, "long after Catholic concern for labor issues had evaporated." (*This Confident Church*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1992)

In the 1960s Marciniak was, with Russ Barta and others, an editor of a magazine, *New City: Man in Metropolis, A Christian Response*. *New City* was the forerunner of INITIATIVES, first published in May 1978. Marciniak was a frequent contributor to INITIATIVES. In fact, from September 1984 to July 1999 INITIATIVES used Marciniak's office at Loyola University as its mailing address.

Marciniak's Love of the City

During the 1950s and 1960s Marciniak was deeply involved in improving race relations. He was active in the Catholic Interracial Council in Chicago. He was a founder of the National Catholic Conference on Interracial Justice and

cofounder of the National Catholic Social Action Conference. Marciniak was also head of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations under the original Mayor Richard Daley. He became president of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, succeeding Msgr. Geno Baroni.

Like Studs Terkel or Mike Royko or Msgr. Jack Egan, Marciniak knew hundreds of Chicago *urban characters*. Lunch with him in Chinatown or Logan Square or Humboldt Park or Chatham or near the Water Tower always included a seemingly chance encounter with another "old friend."

From late in the 1970s until his final days Marciniak was president of the Institute of Urban Life at Loyola University. There he wrote a series of books on various neighborhoods: *Reclaiming the Inner City*, *Reviving an Inner-City Community*, *Reversing Urban Decline* and *Non-Profits With Hard Hats*. Critics charged that Marciniak in these books was pro-gentrification and against public housing tenants. Actually, he was convinced that high-rise public housing was entrapping the poor and that alternative types of affordable housing needed to be developed.

Marciniak was an "unabashed backer of private religious schools." He had his own scholarship fund for public housing students and he was constantly using his influence with foundations and individual donors to obtain money for private schools. He regularly wrote reports like *The Role of Chicago's Private Schools in Neighborhood Revitalization*.

"A city is not great simply because of its historic buildings and unique architecture, however grand," Marciniak believed. "A city is not great simply because it has been blessed with natural endowments, such as a river or a fresh water lake. A city's true greatness arises from its hospitality to immigrants, refugees seeking a new life, misfits, the dispossessed, the uneducated, the poor. From this unlikely mixture come poets, taxi drivers, teachers and property owners. Cities are the incubators of civilization and culture. The city is the place where men and women come to live; then stay to enjoy the good life. This is why the city is called the noblest work of humankind."

Marciniak and the National Center for the Laity

By 1970 Marciniak was in such "despair over the pernicious anemia afflicting Catholic social action" that he suggested rather than celebrating the 50th anniversary of the US

Catholic bishops' *Program of Social Reconstruction*, his social action friends should "call the undertaker" and have a wake. (*America* [12/12/70], 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

But in the middle 1970s Marciniak decided to give it one more try. The occasion was the convening by the Chicago Priests' Senate of a "committee on the laity." Marciniak thought it strange that only priests were on the committee! Fortunately, Marciniak's comrade in arms, Msgr. Dan Cantwell, was committee chair. The group quickly expanded to include bankers, journalists, homemakers, union officials, lawyers, women religious, students and others.

"A major decision," Marciniak later explained, "was whether to issue a report as a committee of the Priests' Senate or as a free-standing, ad hoc group of concerned Christians--priests, religious and laity. We unanimously agreed that we would go our own way as Christians, on our own authority and responsibility." (*Commonweal* [9/11/92], 475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115)

The result was *the Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*--the charter for the National Center for the Laity.

"The *Declaration*," Marciniak said, "was not a hit-and-run manifesto." It did not, "let me make clear, [have] a modest purpose. The *Declaration* was an ambitious undertaking." Through the institution it launched, the National Center for the Laity, it seeks "to redirect the church's strategic approach to social action and to urban ministry; to refocus attention on the secular role of the laity; to update the peace and justice agenda of the church..."

"I signed the *Declaration* not because I felt that the laity had been pushed around, stepped upon, crushed by some ecclesiastical yoke or an authoritarian pastor. My signature is there because we laity have been ignored..."

"Our vocation is seen as unimportant. Our workaday world has been slighted... We have been wooed for our money and our time--toasted if we gave, roasted if we did not. We have been assigned the seats of honor if called to a Church vocation. But what about our worldly vocations as lawyers or laborers, journalists or factory workers, teachers or typists, homemakers or government workers? The work to which God has called us has been depreciated in everyday practice." (*Challenge to the Laity* edited by Russ Barta, National Center for the Laity, 1980)

The late director of the now defunct Archdiocese of Chicago Office of the Laity once

called the National Center for the Laity a "nostalgia trip for the Marciniaks of this world." That was about 25 years ago. The NCL has since hosted several conferences, has published books, booklets, articles. The NCL has spun off a support group for business executives, has flown to the Vatican to lobby a bishops' synod, has given presentations in 450 church basements, Newman centers and banquet halls in Illinois, Minnesota, California, New York, West Virginia and Michigan. The NCL has cosponsored ten retreats, has nurtured a network of 5,000 people through INITIATIVES and has held countless board meetings at Loyola University, Villa Redeemer

Retreat House, Holy Name Cathedral, the law offices of Schiff, Hardin & Waite, Catholic Theological Union, at Old St. Patrick's and lately aboard the Columbia Yacht Club. The NCL has also convened scores of informal discussions (now called the Russell Barta Roundtable) at numerous restaurants.

Admittedly, the NCL has a long way to go in packaging its message of Christian responsibility, making it known and vital for a mass audience. That's the challenge Marciniak leaves today's generation of Catholic activists: "To wait and do nothing is to be nothing."

Quotations From Chairman Ed:

Two journalists from rival newspapers are having a drink when they spot a burglary underway at a bank across the street. Ignoring each other, they reach for their cellphones. One reporter calls the police to report the crime. The other calls her city editor with the story just in time for the morning edition. The two journalists were managing their values differently.

The familiar New Testament reminder *The poor you will always have with you* has been misconstrued and even at times used to rationalize indifference to human misery and destitution. It is, however, a religious imperative that, whatever one's faith or economic status, *the poor you will always be with*. An association with the poor, together with a passion for justice, keeps faith vibrant.

True ministry is to move among the people of God, to help open their eyes and ears so that they respond personally to Christ. It is to overcome inertia within the community of faith, to give Christians spine and spunk. It is to move the hopeless to where there is hope. It is to quench people's thirst for meaning amid the absurdity of the world. It is to produce an élan, an inner-directed spirit that encourages a personal commitment. It is to make people less cocksure about ready answers to ancient human problems. It is to create a fellowship of Christians through which the spirit refreshes women and men and transforms them into servants for others.

I recently counted 40 different occupations in the New Testament. If St. Paul and the evangelists can use ordinary occupations to tell the Christian story, so can preachers and teachers.

Mike Wallace once interviewed a Mafia member who turned state's evidence. Wallace asked the man if he was Catholic. "Yes," he replied. Then Wallace asked: "How can you lead your life, how can you do the things you do and call yourself a Christian?" The man responded: "Because I'm a hypocrite." Despite his unfaithfulness to the gospel, that Mafioso understood deep down that his faith was supposed to inspire the daily grind.

If the most powerful four-letter word in the free world is *vote*, what does the decline in political participation mean for us? Is there anyone willing to argue that the crisis of political participation is less serious than the hemorrhage in priestly vocations? If there is a Catholic law school in your community find out why on Election Day the students and professors don't set a good example by volunteering as election judges, poll watchers or doorbell ringers on behalf of a candidate. You might remind the dean of the law school that such a practice would be fitting tribute to an outstanding layman, a dedicated public official and a practicing lawyer--St. Thomas More.

Everyone is called. The worst kind of unemployment for any woman or man is to be without a vocation.

Two proposals were being considered in the Chancery. One called for a commission on the laity; the other for a campaign against hunger. Most Christians, if given the choice, would quickly pick the second. Waging a war against hunger would do far more to spell out the role of the laity.

An artist was commissioned to paint the figure of God the Father. Thrilled by the greatness of the subject, the painter vowed to do the painting on his knees. After a few days God appeared to him and thundered: "My son, you are not supposed to paint me on your knees. You are supposed to paint me well."

"The God I acknowledge," said composer Antonio Salieri, "lives, for example, in bars 34 to 44 of a Mozart composition." God is into details. Holiness is being familiar enough with Robert's Rules of Order to run a smooth meeting; being able to balance a family budget; knowing when to plant the corn and harvest it; knowing when to hoist the sail or lower it.

Mahatma Gandhi was not a saint meddling in politics; he was a politician trying to become a saint.

What bedevils our pastoral theology and existing practice is the mind-set that automatically expects a layperson who is deeply committed to Jesus Christ to become a *paracleric* in the Church's civil service as a mini-priest or mini-sister.

The Christian symbol of ministry is the towel, the washcloth which Jesus used on the evening of the first eucharist. The word *service* needs rehabilitation. It is a high-risk calling, not for the weak of heart. It is not synonymous with upward mobility.

The cemeteries of this world are appropriate resting places for countless Christians who spent their lives waiting for cues that never came and summonses that were never delivered; who bided their time looking for others to take the initiative and to bear the burden of responsibility. While others make excuses, a Christian of personal responsibility recites an act of contrition, shoulders a share of the burden and then takes the initiative. To wait and do nothing is to be nothing.