



INITIATIVE REPORT

CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

Spring 2016

Announcing the 2016 Bernardin Award and Murnion Lecture

We are pleased to announce the CCGI annual Bernardin Award and Murnion Lecture to be held on June 24, 2016, at 7 p.m., in the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's Augustana Chapel. Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, will be receiving the Bernardin Award, and John Carr will be presenting the Murnion Lecture. The lecture is entitled, "Faithful Citizenship in 2016: Is There Common Ground to Pursue the Common Good?"



Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, travels the world speaking about her Ministry Against the Death Penalty and in so doing has sparked national dialogue on the subject. Sr. Prejean's work has shaped the Catholic Church's

opposition to state executions. A member of the Congregation of St. Joseph, Sr. Prejean was inspired to be in solidarity with the poor. In 1981, she moved into the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans, working at Hope House until 1984. At this time, Sr. Prejean began corresponding with a death row inmate, Patrick Sonnier, at Angola (Louisiana State Penitentiary) and became his spiritual advisor. Her well known book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* (Random House, Inc., 1994), addresses this relationship and was subsequently made into a movie, an opera, and a play.

Since 1984, Sr. Prejean has divided her time between educating citizens about the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners. In doing so, she learned that some of those executed were not responsible for the crimes of which they had been accused. This realization

inspired her second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* (Random House, Inc., 2005). Sr. Prejean is presently at work on another book, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*.



John Carr is Founder and Director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. The Initiative, launched in 2013, is a unique effort to share the wisdom of

Catholic Social Thought more deeply and broadly and to help educate and encourage a new generation of Catholic lay leaders in carrying out their vocation to be "salt, light, and leaven" in public life.

About the lecture:

Faithful Citizenship in 2016: Is There Common Ground to Pursue the Common Good?

Both Pope Francis and the U.S. Catholic bishops insist, "responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation" (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* 2015, no. 13). John Carr, the Director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, will explore what that means in the surprising and challenging politics of 2016. Mr. Carr served for more than two decades as the director of justice and peace efforts at the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference and as a Residential Fellow at the Harvard Institute of Politics. He will examine the mission and message of Pope Francis in public life and offer some directions and dangers for the Church and Catholics in this election year. Mr. Carr will also look at the promise and problems of Cardinal Bernardin's call for a consistent ethic of life and his search

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for common ground in a polarized nation and Church. Looking to the future, he will suggest where Catholics might find common ground to pursue the common good in U.S. public life.

To register for this event, visit catholiccommonground.org

Culture as Common Ground: Lessons from University Ministry

A reflection by John DeCostanza, Jr., who is the Director of University Ministry at Dominican University in River Forest, Ill., and a Bernardin Scholar pursuing an Ecumenical Doctor of Ministry degree at CTU.

Tonight the college students and staff team that I accompany in ministry prayed at Mason Temple, the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famed "Mountaintop" speech, or perhaps more aptly termed, his final sermon given on April 3, 1968. It was a prayer with a man whose life was liturgy in the truest sense of the word (*leitourgia*), a duty enacted in the public square for the good of the people.

This is one of the most diverse student groups that I have accompanied on an alternative break immersion, a week of service and immersion into a crucial justice issue during one of their "rests" from academic life. There is not much rest time when you build a week of service and justice exploration around the theme of racial justice in the United States. The lens we use is the long, uneven recovery of New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina. This week is a prayer, a liturgy, a duty enacted on a public stage that can catalyze students' vocations or, at the very least, demonstrate to them that they can hold complex ideas together in community with one another while living inside the discomfort of the questions.

extraordinary for a number of reasons. It engages the critiques of dialogue that stem from perceptions of the implicit and explicit aims of the project in light of culture. Archbishop Lipscomb also engages in a thorough and important review of the use of dialogue in magisterial documents. Finally, and most importantly, the Archbishop locates dialogue within Cardinal Bernardin's conception of liturgy and liturgical ministers as those who "build our bridges between the source of our spirit and its expression in the world where we live."

Bridge building is not an easy proposition for university ministers who are holding communion together across difference in many ways. Many college students come to us already disaffiliated. Others don't know what to name their spirituality and belief system. Still other students are very devout and well-practiced in their faith. At times, some of them are trapped in rigid categories that come from catechetical formation that up until that point is grounded in answers more than questions. Others live the Gospel through witness, but are not quite able to articulate the reasons why their moral and ethical commitments are grounded in a story of God's ongoing love with Creation. These students have names and faces and are working hard to be in community with one another. They so desperately want and need that. Whatever we might call these postures of faith they all can be understood as cultural expressions of faith. They coexist in complex, intersecting fashions, and they make our jobs really wonderful and really difficult.

If that complexity is not dizzying enough, I have found that students' culture of origin is even more important in meeting some of their expectations about what that community should look like. Latin@, Black, and White students have very different perceptions of good worship. Preparing the group to go to an African-American Gospel Mass in Memphis, I found myself asking if anyone had ever attended a Gospel Mass. No one had. I told them, "Most of our expectations about worshipping God come from our own lived experience of the faith." The Mass was an exhilarating experience. Afterward, there was a very honest and real discussion of the ways that experiencing prayer across difference called us to examine our feelings and perceptions of what was happening. It was a true sacramental experience — both the Mass and the dia-



Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb speaking at a CCGI event

This is the kind of labor that I believe Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb described in his address, "Dialogue: A Labor in Love" at the first Catholic Common Ground Initiative Conference in March 1997. The address is

logue. It was powerful to see notions of “how things are supposed to be” become so quickly challenged by the grace of invitation and embrace across difference. The students’ dialogue afterward hinted at the depth of unity, but that unity was experienced through concrete bridge building. “I am so glad we were there.” Indeed, the only way to be present to one another is “to be there.”

Dominican University, where I work, is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, in which the total undergraduate Latin@ population is approaching 50% (this year’s freshmen are 63% Latino). The truth of the matter is that all college students’ expectations about faith and community are embedded in culture. That culture, however, is more of an examined part of one’s identity when encountered across difference as is the case in my ministry praxis. Our team in University Ministry has been working hard to honestly engage this cultural complexity by regarding it as our primary strength rather than a barrier to be overcome.

It is here that I return to that probing question that Archbishop Lipscomb asked in 1997: “How can we ensure that our efforts will be animated by the deep love and desire for unity about which our ecclesial documents speak so forcefully?” The answer given in that address is, in a word, *agape*, Christ’s sacrificial love.

I believe that holds true nearly twenty years later in my context. Culture wars do not have to be wars at all. That is one of Cardinal Bernardin’s enduring contributions to the Church. The notion of dialogue pushes us to recognize that difference is not erased in unity, but held together in mystery by the Holy Spirit. “It is this liturgical epiclesis,” writes Archbishop Lipscomb, “that calls forth the Spirit that binds us together as one family and fills us with the fire of love.”

We make spaces holy through the hard work of holding the community together and calling each other to become our best selves. King’s “Mountaintop” speech famously unpacks the Good Samaritan as Jesus inverting the equation of fear on the dangerous Jericho road. King calls for “dangerous unselfishness.” Dialogue invites us to develop the ability to risk the encounter across difference. We do this not because of fear of what will happen to us or to our faith tradition, but because of what’s at stake for the other if we do not. If we cannot begin to conceive of

Catholic Common Ground as a space that honors and celebrates cultural differences as part of the Mystery, we will never cross to the other side of the road and engage those sisters and brothers who are hurting.

As one of my students shared during prayer in front of Mason Temple, “I didn’t think that the Civil Rights movement was my story, but now I realize that it’s part of everyone’s story. There was a piece of today that touched each one of us no matter our background.”

Amen.



John DeCostanza, Jr.

Help us go green!

Visit www.catholiccommonground.org and sign up to receive this newsletter via email.

Gratitude for the past..



...Hope for the future

This year, 2016, we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the death of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, founder of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. The Bernardin Center of Theology and Ministry will be offering a number of events to celebrate the life of Cardinal Bernardin.

To view those events, visit www.ctu.edu/bernardincenter

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