

**Catholic Labor Network Gathering
USCCB Social Ministries Gathering
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Speaker: Mr. John Carr
Office of Social Development and World Peace**

Msgr. George Higgins was a mentor to me. If he were around today, he would be very concerned about the 2 institutions he loved most: The Catholic Church and Labor. The context of the culture and the economy have made great changes to both institutions.

Higgins would say, “Be Careful”. He urged restraint in judging, and commenting about other institutions. He built bridges between the 2 but felt both must remain separate.

I believe the 2 are more alike than different. They both start with fundamental values. Church starts with the human person and work is central to that. One must have a voice in work and be able to participate in it.

Labor movement founded on the dignity and rights of workers (e.g.: the right to organize). Both start with principles that interact, but are not the same.

Both Institutions are Struggling: Churches are struggling right now, for example, fewer people are in the pews.

Labor is struggling right now. Union membership is down to 12% overall and 8% in the private work place. Jack Joyce talks about this in his *Commonweal* article.

Lots of Divisions: Those divisions in Church are harder to see but they’re there. For instance, there is the split between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Churches, old bishops vs. new bishops.

In Labor the split is highly visible. There has been the split in the AFL-CIO. Some of these were splits due to personality differences.

Generational problem: Older bishops had a commitment of the heart to the Labor movement. New bishops and priests by and large, do not have that commitment. They may know it theoretically, but when it comes down to it, they don’t have an understanding of it, and are therefore not able to truly commit.

Today, it’s not a given that the Church will support workers. When I was growing up, no one crossed picket lines. I didn’t know why, but you just didn’t do it. Nowadays, kids don’t understand that. People have to have it explained to them in a way that will bring them in.

Most people in our society don't see Labor as a thing of today. It's a thing of the past.

Scandal is a reality which greatly affected the Church and Labor: The Catholic Church has lost trust, credibility, and money... We're paying for it and we should. The Bishops' I'm working for are trying to change it, and I believe they will...Let's get back to Mission.

Some say labor unions are incredibly corrupt. Maybe some locals are. If they are, this problem must be dealt with.

Both institutions have the myth of hierarchy:

Each Bishop runs his own Diocese.

Each local runs their part of the Union - Part of the Union split was on whether individual Unions could go their own way.

The Church doesn't fit in the accepted categories. We believe in Human Life and Dignity.

The Labor Unions have put their money behind the Democratic Party. This puts them against the Catholic Church and against many of their own Union members.

We both have holy days which no one pays attention to:
All Saints Day vs. Labor Day

No one came to Labor Day Mass anymore...everyone's at the beach.

We have a common agenda around workers, wages, participation and increasingly around wages and participation.

Higgins would tell me to be aware of giving advice. But...

Both institutions must recover a sense of Mission. We have to be more than our mistakes. Church should be standing with workers.

Labor should be organizing workers. Building a worker movement.

There must be respect for differences. The Labor movement has cast its lot with the Democratic Party at a time when the Democrats are much more consistent with its view against Life and much less with workers. The labor movement gets used in a partisan context and doesn't get much out of it.

The Church is misunderstood and misused by both parties. To one side we're a Democratic stooge, which is a surprise to Democrats!

Relationships matter We can't communicate through statements. You have to know people within and be able to talk about what we're going to do together and what we can not do together. This can't happen just at the national level. Relationships must exist at the local level.

Biggest issue: Both the Church and Labor must practice what they preach: about Human Life, Human Dignity, Rights of Workers, etc.

At the USCCB, one good thing they've done, is try to sit down with the leaders of Catholic Health Care and Labor. What are the principles that should guide institutions in a work campaign? (Cause we've seen the worse!) It is the right of the worker to choose! (Not the Church, not business, not Labor.)

What we must do:

- Focus on the fundamentals
- respect our differences
- find common causes around wages, healthcare, the budget, immigration

“Aint it awful, is not a motivating slogan!”

Catholic Lay persons are the Church in the Labor movement. It is the job of the Church to support their work.

Higgins said:

- Labor Unions are the most effective force in society for the protection of worker rights. No amount of benevolent support, legislation, etc, can substitute for workers representing themselves. Our work is no substitute for that.

In the end, it's not about politics. It's about the cleaning lady in your office, and whether or not she can support her family, and whether she has health coverage for her family.