



The Rank and File Catholic

(Connecting the teaching of the Church with the struggles of Labor)

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Building With Dignity A Pastor's Viewpoint

By: Fr. Ed Bradley, Pastor
Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY

At Holy Name we are embarking on a two million dollar construction project. We are adding an addition onto our present school facility to house the two pre-school classes that are now being taught in a portable classroom building (double-wide trailer). We are also constructing a building which will be connected to our present church structure to house the parish offices, youth ministry center, and parish nurse ministry.

Our challenge was "practice what we teach" in our selection of the contractor. Fr. Anthony Shonis met with our architect, Tim Townsend, and carefully covered the bishops' document as well as our diocesan safe environment for children document. It was **important** that Tim understand where we were coming from in wanting to insure that the person who would be selected to construct the project would first of all, pay the prevailing wage; and, secondly, would provide insurance benefits to his employees. Tim was very cooperative in helping us realize our stated goal, to practice what we preach.

Some of the parish pastoral council and finance committee members were a little hesitant in their acceptance of the basic principles of the bishops' document. However, with some education and discussion on social justice issues and with a challenge to them they approved. Holy Name of Jesus is the largest parish in our diocese and the challenge to those in leadership positions was to set an example for the rest of the diocese.

Instead of inviting all those interested in bidding on the project to a meeting, with the help of Tim Townsend, we were able to **identify four contractors that paid the prevailing wage and provided benefits**. These four were invited to a meeting in which the basic principles of the two documents, the pastoral letter of the bishops and the safe environment policy of our diocese, were covered. They were told that they were invited to bid on the project because of their history in doing what was just and right. We also told them that we would appreciate their giving consideration to hiring local sub-contractors. One of the contractors dropped-out after attending the meeting.

On a specific date the three bids were opened. One bid was considerably higher than the other two and was not considered. After much discussion, and again wanting to "practice what we teach" and make the just and right decision, **we did not go with the lowest bidder**. In our discussions it was revealed that about eighty percent of his subcontractors would not be members of the local community. The contractor that was awarded the bid assured us that all of the people who would be given sub-contracts would be from the community. *Continued on Page 2 bottom 2nd column.*

Building With Dignity A Contractor's Viewpoint

By: John M. Vitniski, Director of Operations
Sterling Boiler & Mechanical, Inc.
Evansville, Indiana
Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY

In a continual effort to provide for and improve the needs of the parish community, many parishes undertake significant building or capital expenditure campaigns spearheaded by the parish pastor and the parish council or capital campaign committees. The councils or committees are tasked with considerable responsibilities in guiding the efforts of the project from concept to completion. While financial responsibility easily comes to mind in considering these varying responsibilities, it is one of the most significant, and impacts so many other aspects of the projects such as budgets, quality, scope, schedule and selection of an architect/engineer and construction contractor.

However a capital campaign responsibility that should be an important ingredient is often overlooked by the parish teams or can easily get lost in the shuffle of guiding the project thru completion. The title of "Building with Dignity" is intended to call attention to or focus on the responsibility that exists in the execution phase of the project. That concern is for the well-being and dignity of the building contractor(s) employees who are equally important members of the parish capital project team, for without their skills and hard work the project would not be accomplished. Too often their importance is overlooked or left to be the concern of others.

This is not intended to be critical of the parish team and the great job that they do as volunteers, giving of their time and talents. We should be extremely grateful for their time and efforts.

You may say that the well-being and treatment of employees is the responsibility of the selected contractors, and theirs alone. I believe this to be a short-sided approach or philosophy to a fundamental fact that the selected contractor(s) who represent the parish as part of the project team. Furthermore in keeping with the teachings of the Church it is an important consideration simply from the basic teaching of treating others as you would expect to be treated.

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ALERT KY. CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The Catholic Bishops of Kentucky are preparing a letter to be distributed to all parishes in Kentucky on labor. It is expected out on or around Labor Day.

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR IT!!!

See: The Catholic Conference Of KY

www.ccky.org

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Building With Dignity A Contractor's Viewpoint

From a contractor's perspective, labor or our craftsmen and laborers to perform the building or project in accordance with the plans and specifications, are our most valuable asset. They are to be treated with respect and the dignity of their calling in life including:

- respect for the rights of workers
- fair wages for their toils
- safe and good working conditions
- compassion and concern for their well-being
- provision of or assistance with healthcare benefits
- use of the parish's local community resources.

The responsibility of the parish and parish council goes beyond just the "best price" for the project construction, but also and equally important the "moral or ethical responsibility" to follow thru and to safeguard and respect the rights of workers. The Church after all is perceived by the public as being an indirect employer in this contractual relationship with the contractor. It is no secret in today's world that there are contractors who will take advantage of their workers, or of illegal immigrants for their profit or gain. We are all aware of such cases. Is this a situation that the Church or the parish wants to be a part of or give the appearance of condoning? Once a contractor is selected, and the only overriding selection criteria is pricing, it is virtually impossible to influence what the contractor does regarding the fair treatment of his construction labor force. Even with laws in place to prevent such, there are those that choose to circumvent or violate these laws for their benefit, many times without consequences or despite checks and balances to ensure compliance. Can we honestly choose to overlook this concern?

So you ask how can the pastor and parish council influence the execution phase of the capital project such that the concern for workers' rights and the teachings of the Church are established and communicated? These expectations must be made part of the project goals. It begins with the planning phase of the project, where expectations are set for the project and communicated to all involved in the project, along with periodic review thru the various project phases. Once such expectations or project goals are established, it becomes the responsibility of the project team to be the stewards of these goals. The usual components of the project team are as follows:

- Pastor
- Parish Council or Capital Campaign Committee
- Architect/Engineer - Contractor(s)

They begin from a concept or idea and work together as a team thru the completion of the project. The architect is tasked with the defining project scope, producing specifications and plans, and establishing guidelines for selecting qualified building contractors. He will also issue the request for proposal documents to the qualified contractors. It must be remembered that the architect selected by the parish represents the parish and is key to establishing the project goals and communicating them on behalf of the parish.

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Building With Dignity A Contractor's Viewpoint

It is in the planning phase of the project where the moral and ethical goals and responsibilities are developed between the pastor, parish council and architect and incorporated into the project requirements. The architect's services are paid for by the parish and he should be responsive and cooperative in this regard understanding that the parish concerns go beyond the bricks, mortar and lumber of the new building or addition.

Once the project goals are established in the planning stages, it should include implementation procedures, as well as follow-up procedures to ensure the goals are attained. A charter should be developed to memorialize the project goals, with signatures of assent from each team member including the contractor. Communication is a very essential ingredient to making the established goals or expectations a reality.

So then, the challenge going forward for our parishes and parish councils is to ensure that from concept to completion that we are "building with dignity."

The Chaplain's Corner

By: Fr. Anthony Shonis

Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY

You may have noticed that the theme for this issue of R+F Catholic is "Building with Dignity". This is a subject dear to my heart as a diocesan priest who works in a parish and who is pro-labor. Here at Holy Name of Jesus in Henderson, Kentucky, thanks to our pastor, Fr. Ed Bradley, we are implementing the bishops teaching on ethics in church construction. The parish is beginning a significant building project and is following the guidelines outlined in the bishops' document "Practicing What We Teach".

Moreover at the same time I have been working with the Priest Council of Owensboro to draft a policy on church construction following the directives of the Catholic bishops. At this point I cannot tell you for sure how this will all turn out, all I can say is that doors have been opening each step of the way.

If all goes well and we do develop a policy and it is accepted by the priest council I think it will be a model for other dioceses in the United States to emulate. At the same time let's not forget to pray that we formulate a good construction policy and that it passes the priest council. Happy Labor Day to all ... union and non-union alike!

Fr. Shonis

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Fr. Bradley, Building With Dignity

This has been a very rewarding process for the entire faith community at Holy Name. It has not only raised the social justice consciousness of our parishioners, it has also given us the opportunity to model this process for the diocese.

**Building With Dignity
A Parishioner's / Parish Council
Member Viewpoint**

**By: Todd Johnson
Sprinkler Fitters Local Union 669
St. Stephen Cathedral, Owensboro, KY**

Concrete, wood, plumbing, electricity, materials, and design are a few components involved when attempting new construction or renovation of an existing building. Quality of goods, size, and affordability are also things to consider. New construction certainly offers many opportunities and innumerable choices but a major component required for any construction project, yet often given little consideration, is labor.

Labor, regardless of skill and ability, is often the way a contractor will lower its overall bid for a project. Workers may not be offered any type of health insurance or retirement benefits much less a living wage. If the contractor avoids these costs, he can lower his bid substantially. The customer, unaware of the maneuver, will award the job to the lowest bidder. The contractor continues to make his profit at the expense of his workers and often with poor quality workmanship. Contractors that are guilty of this are often OSHA safety violators and would never consider advancing their employees marketability with a registered apprenticeship training program. Their interests lie solely in their profits.

As Catholics we are called to respect others. It is our responsibility to be educated and informed and to defend those being exploited. It is time that we as a diocese consider implementing a construction policy. The policy should include language that is advantageous not only to the worker on the construction site but also provides quality workmanship for our parishes. Before a contract is awarded contractors would provide documentation that employee benefits are provided; mandate health insurance, retirement benefits, registered apprenticeship training programs, a proven record of company compliance with OSHA safety standards, drug screening and living area wages. The policy would also provide opportunity for all area contractors to bid projects that the Diocese of Owensboro is pursuing. Language should include completing our projects with local companies and local workers when available. There are many local companies that provide fair wages and benefits to their employees. This policy will insure that they are awarded the jobs.

As a member of St. Stephen Cathedral Church and of the parish council, I recently introduced the above ideas to my fellow council members. Our parish is planning extensive renovation to the Church building and interior. Further discussion and consideration are needed before such a policy is implemented; however, we are all interested in doing what is right and with prayer and faith our project will be completed to the best of our abilities by workers that are provided fair reimbursement for their labor.

A FRIEND OF LABOR

**By: Rev. Larry Hostetter
President Brescia University, Owensboro KY.**

As someone who teaches a course in Catholic social teaching, I am well aware of the Catholic Church's teaching on the importance and dignity of labor. Beginning with Leo XIII in 1891, the Catholic Church has consistently supported the worker's right to organize as a means for ensuring the recognition of that dignity. Central to this teaching is the insistency by the Church that the individual human person is not simply a cog in a machine whose worth is determined by market variables, but has value independent of economic realities.

It is not only through Church teaching that I've gained an appreciation for the necessity of labor unions. I've also seen the benefits first hand in my family. Both of my grandfathers were union members after they returned from World War II. They both benefited from the work and advocacy of unions, which enabled them to provide for their families and realize their own potential as valuable members of the community. It was after their deaths that I personally became aware of an additional benefit of organized labor in the care and concern fellow members showed my grandmothers. I realized then that the unions provided more than economic benefits; they also provided a community for my grandfathers and their families.

EDITORS NOTE: The staff and contributors of The Rank and File Catholic wish to congratulate Fr. Hostetter on his recent promotion to President of Brescia University located in Owensboro, Kentucky. May God continue to bless you in your ministry at Brescia! For additional information please see The Western Kentucky Catholic, the official newspaper of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, KY, Volume 34, Number 1, page 5, "Brescia's new president Fr. Larry depends on God's providence for the future".

**WATCH FOR THE
NEXT ISSUE OF
"THE RANK AND
FILE CATHOLIC";
MARCH, 14TH 2008**

The reason we have chosen March 14 as the date for spring issue of the Rank and File Catholic is that it was on March 14, 1891 that Pope Leo XIII issued the Magna Carta encyclical on labor RERUM NOVARUM (On the Condition of Labor).

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The major expense we have in the publication of this newsletter is the cost of distribution! It would be helpful if we could e-mail it to as many as possible. If e-mail would work for you, please send your e-mail address to: dmgrief@bellsouth.net, **NOTE NEW EMAIL ADDRESS.** THANKS

TR AFC V3 N2 R20

Back issues of TR AFC may be found on Fr. Shonis's WEB page, www.thecatholicjourney.com under "THE RANK AND FILE CATHOLIC" Tab.

"The Rank and File Catholic" (TR AFC) newsletter debuted on Television on September 30th, 2005. This ½ hour program was recorded at the "West Kentucky Community and Technical College" located in Paducah, KY as part of a series titled "THE UNION LABEL" and was hosted by Berry Craig. Fr. Anthony Shonis, Chaplain of TR AFC, and Mike Roby, Editor of TR AFC, were his guest. A "**FREE**" DVD of the program may be obtained from the TR AFC staff.

Additional information may be found on the internet at:
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/labor.htm
CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF KENTUCKY: www.ccky.org
The Catholic – Labor Network: www.catholiclabor.org
Catholic Social Teaching: www.osjspm.org