



INITIATIVE REPORT

CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

May 2013

As Those Who Serve Award

On November 1, 2012, the *As Those Who Serve* Award was conferred on the Rev. Daniel P. Coughlin, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Fr. Coughlin made many important contributions to the life of the Church in Chicago and beyond. He served as founding director of the Archdiocese's Office of Divine Worship, as pastor-in-residence at the North American College in Rome, and pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish in LaGrange, Ill. He was the director of the Cardinal Stritch Retreat House and also the Vicar for Priests for the Archdiocese.



Friends of CCGI.

In 2000 Fr. Coughlin went to Washington, D.C., to serve as the first Catholic chaplain of the United States House of Representatives. There he served with a pastor's heart and a contemplative spirit that was deep and reassuring. He understood his role to be keeping prayer alive in Congress. He initiated



Rev. Daniel Coughlin receiving the As Those Who Serve Award.

numerous creative practices, especially after the tragedy of 9/11. He created opportunities for interreligious dialogue, and encouraged the use of the interfaith meditation room in the Capitol Building. His pastoral concern included the extended families of the legislators, and he strongly supported the use of the members' family room. He began numerous prayer groups for a variety of constituents, and sought opportunities to bring people together across party lines. In an increasingly partisan environment, Fr. Coughlin was loved and respected by members of both political parties.

For his life-long efforts to strengthen the bonds of ecclesial communion through extraordinary pastoral leadership, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative was proud to present Fr. Coughlin with the 2012 *As Those Who Serve* Award.

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Excerpt from Fr. Coughlin's Remarks

"Nothing is more authentic or creative in us or in another person than his or her own prayer. Prayer reveals our personal secrets, our unique perceptions and deepest needs. Because true prayer is the Spirit moving and groaning in us, prayer cannot be manufactured for an audience, nor can it be a spiritual cloud we wrap ourselves in, to fool others, ourselves or God. Through prayer the Lord empowers anyone to name one's pretences, even ego-centered compulsions. But only with time and grace will prayer reveal our deepest illusions and fictitious ideas about others.

"These days I pray to the Almighty to be free of agendas. I name persons and issues, but I trust God knows what is best to do at all times. Assured of the Lord's relentless love for all and unconditional love for each of us, I believe the Lord trusts us also. Much will be left for us to figure out, because the Lord believes we could be much better ourselves and work harder ourselves for peace, justice and common ground."

Practicing Dialogue

by Sr. Kathleen Dolphin, P.V.B.M.

Saint Mary's College, an all-women's college located in Notre Dame, Ind., became a formal affiliate of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative (CCGI) in the spring of 2001. Catholic Common Ground events are administered through the College's Center for Spirituality. Members of the college community gather to address current issues from a faith perspective, using the dialogical methods of the CCGI.

For the past 12 years the Center has organized one Catholic Common Ground Conversation each semester.* The first CCGI Conversation at Saint Mary's took place in late September, 2001, in response to the 9/11 tragedy. The conversation was titled, "From Horror to Hope: Diverse Voices in Conversation." Three "Conversation Starters" were invited to offer a very brief personal reflection prior to opening the conversation. The Starters included a military officer, a pacifist, and a faculty member knowledgeable about Just War theory.

The overall format that has evolved works well. The venue is a large room in which conversation circles have been set up, with approximately six chairs per circle. The presider welcomes everyone and gives a very brief introduction, using the ground rules for the Common Ground Conversations. Each Starter has five minutes to express an opinion on the theme of the conversation. After doing so, the Starter blends into one of the circles. The Starter does not act in any formal capacity in the circle, just as in ordinary adult conversations there are no official facilitators.



Rev. Daniel Coughlin



A CCGI Conversation dialogue group in action.

The presider invites the participants to read together the opening paragraph:

"As Common Ground Conversation Partners, we affirm and promote the full range and demands of authentic unity, acceptable diversity, and respectful dialogue, not just as a way to dampen conflict but as a way to make our conflicts constructive. Therefore we agree to the following practical rules..." (The rules use gentle humor to make a point and are well received by the participants.)

Although our student body is mostly undergraduate, the Common Ground format is intended to draw undergraduate students into a more adult conversation, in which, as mentioned earlier, there are no formal facilitators. Mature adults can have dynamic, enlightened conversations about controversial topics and become better people as a result. Common Ground Conversations are not intended to lead to definite decisions at the end of the session. They are intended to be springboards into deeper ongoing conversations that ultimately lead to action on behalf of the greater good of all people.



Sr. Kathleen Dolphin, P.B.V.M., and friends.

*Examples of conversation themes have included:

- Catholic Identity: Is Saint Mary's College too Catholic? Is it not Catholic enough? Does it Matter?
- Sexual Orientation: Questions and Concerns
- Religious Commitment and Politics
- Faith and Political Responsibility: Voting for the Common Good
- The Church Women Want
- Church and the Academy: Building Our Shared Future
- Welcoming the Stranger: Immigration Issues
- The Marriage of Eros and Grace: Sexuality and Spirituality
- Catholic Teaching on Evolution
- More Than One Way to Be Catholic

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CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

The Philip J. Murnion Lecture

Shaping Parish Life: Ongoing Influences of Vatican II and the Catholic Common Ground Initiative

Professor Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., University of St. Thomas

*Bernardin Award Recipient
Professor Zeni V. Fox, Seton Hall University*

June 7, 2013 6:00 p.m.

**Lecture held at the American Bible Society
1865 Broadway, New York**

Free to the public. Register online at catholiccommonground.org

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of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative***

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