



INITIATIVE REPORT

CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

November 2013

2013 Bernardin Award

The Catholic Common Ground Initiative was pleased to hold its 2013 Murnion Lecture at the American Bible Association in New York City on June 7, 2013. We received a wonderful welcome, and despite torrential rains, an appreciative crowd gathered. This year marked the 10th anniversary of Msgr. Philip Murnion's death and the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. Many friends and relatives were present.

Professor Zeni Fox of Seton Hall University received the Bernardin Award for her tireless work in teaching and forming pastoral ministers. The citation read in part: "Professor Fox served with distinction as an advisor for over 15 years for the USCCB Committee on the Laity and the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry that produced the important document on Lay Ecclesial Ministry, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. This work culminated in the publication of her latest book, *Called and*

Chosen: Toward A Spirituality for Lay Leaders.

"Zeni has participated in many consultations with diverse Church representatives, including canonists, diocesan leaders, leaders of lay organizations and theologians, from this country and beyond. She has recently been involved with leaders of Catholic healthcare and Catholic education throughout this country, as well as Australia.



2013 Bernardin Award recipient Dr. Zeni Fox.

"Like Cardinal Bernardin, she has a gentle and inviting way of offering her insights and observations – which are always grounded in her experience as theologian, teacher of seminarians and prospective lay ecclesial ministers, and parish ministers.

"With deep appreciation for her extraordinary contribution to building Common Ground among her colleagues, students, fellow parishioners and friends, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative proudly presents Professor Zeni Fox with the Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Award for 2013."

2013 Murnion Lecture

Sr. Katarina Schuth, OSF, delivered the Murnion Lecture, titled, "Shaping Parish Life." To help the audience further appreciate Msgr. Murnion, Sr. Katarina not only described his passion and his commitment to his ministry, but also shared some of the pastoral principles that guided his extraordinary leadership. The following are excerpts from the presentation.



Sr. Katarina Schuth, OSF, delivering the 2013 Murnion Lecture.

Excerpts from the 2013 Murnion Lecture:

"The anniversaries of several momentous events have been instrumental in bringing us together tonight. We celebrate with joyful remembrance the 50th anniversary of Msgr. Phil Murnion's ordination and with lingering heartache the 10th anniversary of his death. How he would have loved to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his ordina-

tion and of Vatican II! That life-changing event captivated Fr. Murnion's energy and enthusiasm in ways that led him to the forefront of many advances and improvements in church ministry. High on the list of his attention was parish life. During his many years of ministry he contributed extensively and meaningfully to the shape of parishes as we know them today. When Fr. Murnion was ordained on June 1, 1963, the Church was in the initial stages of momentous change. The first session of Vatican II signaled a fresh vision that must have thrilled the newly ordained priest. The early documents and general atmosphere emanating from Rome in those days heralded transformation of so many aspects of Church life that would engage Fr. Murnion for the next 40 years.

"In those days few would have imagined the transformation that was about to begin in parishes. Perhaps most striking was the composition of the personnel, those who ministered in the parish. Typically, in 1963, the pastor was over 50 and well-seasoned, with long experience as an associate. Parish schools flourished in almost every parish of reasonable size, led by and staffed by sisters, often up to 20 or more in the convent. Classrooms often held up to 50 children. The responsibilities of the sisters often included many

other tasks around the parish: teaching 'catechism' classes on Saturdays to children not in Catholic schools, caring for the sacristy and altar linens, training servers and even organizing fundraisers.

"Three months after his ordination, Fr. Murnion was on his way to our nation's capital to join in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington. No doubt inspired by his first assignment to a black parish in Harlem, he had first-hand experience with civil rights and anti-poverty movements, and later taught at a Catholic high school. With his creativity, energy, and keen powers of observation, themes from these early assignments would show up in his later work with the National Pastoral Life Center, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative and on many other occasions.

"The theological theme of 'Incarnation' permeated the writings of Fr. Murnion. He spoke of it in this way: 'The Incarnation inaugurated a divine-human dialogue that resonated from the depths of being—the being of God and our own being—and calls us into dialogue.' As anyone who knew Phil Murnion remembers, promoting dialogue was vital to him. He thought in terms of both/and rather than either/or. Through his own experience and in his interactions with pastors and other parish ministers, he appreciated the range of beliefs and viewpoints parishioners held; he recognized their varied perspectives and pathways to God; and he acknowledged their spiritual needs and diverse expressions of faith. Reconciling differing positions of liberals and conservatives and bringing them together to dialogue was a passion for Phil.

"From beginning to end, Fr. Murnion urged cooperation and collaboration at all levels of the Church. Partnership was one of his favorite words to connote mutual participation and this practice,



Members of the CCGI Advisory Committee at the 2013 Murnion Lecture.

he said, was becoming a more common feature in Church life. He was acutely aware of the work of lay ministers and commended their ministry as essential in parish settings. Behind the good relationships, he emphasized, was the necessity of shaping our lives through relationship with Christ.

“The intent of being in relationship was to ensure the health of the parish. In numerous articles, he reiterated the value of the parish and discussed ways to organize for the greatest impact. In his last editorial, published after his death, he wrote, ‘Besides defining and expressing the identity of the individual as sacred, relational, and responsible, parishes define the world in ways that will affect one’s involvement with the world.’ He was always conscious of the wide variety of parish structures and practices with their prevailing ecclesiologies, yet attentive to the needs of all, alert for that which united rather than that which divided. His instinct was to teach the necessity of analyzing the parish setting if pastoral ministers were to respond appropriately to the congregation to which they were responsible. The analysis always focused on the pastoral dimensions, with the Eucharist at the heart of it. Using the image of the Body of Christ for the Church, he insisted that church design and worship practice should make clear the relationship between word and sacrament, the congregation and the presider, the spiritual and physical, material reality and action. Thus he concluded, ‘Our gathering in the Eucharist and our going out to the poor are intrinsic to each other.’ It was that understanding of Eucharist that shaped Phil’s life. Pastoring, he maintained, requires ‘constantly

reaching out to those who are not part of the community and especially those who are most marginal, most distressed, most in need. It means enabling parishioners to be missionary in their families, workplaces, and communities—bringing the life, meaning and message of Jesus and his Gospel to all they do.’

“Those of us working with the Common Ground Initiative are deeply grateful for the privilege of working with and learning from Monsignor Philip Murnion.”



Kathleen Murnion sharing reflections.

Reflections of a Bernardin Scholar

by Emily Ruskamp

The Catholic Common Ground Initiative was founded on principles of “authentic unity, acceptable diversity, and respectful dialogue.” However, looking at world events—from politics in the United States to the war in Syria—might cause one to wonder: Is there any space for unity, diversity, and dialogue in today’s world? In recent months CCGI has been spiritually renewed by the fortifying answer of our Holy Father: most definitely, yes.

Pope Francis affirms that the search for unity is difficult, but necessary. Highlighting the misunderstanding, conflict, tension

continued on back

Help us go green!

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

and division that has injured the Church, he says, "It is necessary to seek to build communion, to teach communion, to get the better of misunderstandings and divisions, starting with the family, with ecclesial reality, in ecumenical dialogue, too."

In fact, in an address to leaders in Brazil, he offered "constructive dialogue" as an essential component to building society, saying, "[Dialogue] is the only way for individuals, families and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress... Others always have something to give me, if we know how to approach them in a spirit of openness and without prejudice. I call this attitude of openness and availability without prejudice, social humility, and it is this that favors dialogue."

While recognizing the need for dialogue in larger society, CCGI prioritizes the need for constructive dialogue within the Catholic Church. Pope Francis, too, recognizes internal division: "So much damage to the Church comes from division among Christians, from biases, from narrow interests. Division among us, but also division among communities: Evangelical Christians, Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, why are we divided? We must try to bring about unity."

Emphasizing unity, the pope calls us to follow Jesus. "Conflict can help us to grow, but it can also divide us. Let us not go down the path of division, of fighting among ourselves! All united, all united in our differences, but united, always: this is the way of Jesus. Unity is superior to conflict," he said.

The pope's call to open the way for dialogue in the Church is clear. Recently, he highlighted that this coming together in diversity is part of the core catholicity of the Church: "The Church is catholic because she reconciles the wonderful diversity of God's gifts to build up his People in unity and harmony," he writes. Then he offers a petition, seemingly in response to the desperation and division that today's society seems to offer us.

He says, "Let us ask the Lord to make us more catholic – to enable us, like a great family, to grow together in faith and love, to draw others to Jesus in the communion of the Church, and to welcome the gifts and contributions of everyone, in order to create a joyful symphony of praise to God for his goodness, his grace, and his redemptive love."

Become a Friend of the CCGI!

***Sustain the Legacy and Support the work
of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative***

DONATE HERE