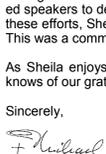




A Celebration and Tribute to 16 Years of Service



Dear Friends of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative (CCGI),

As Chair of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative of all involved in the CCGI for the leadership and service Sheila McLaughlin has provided as the Director of the Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union. At a time when the future of the Initiative was in question, Sheila offered to provide the CCGI a 'home' within the Bernardin Center. As someone who had known and worked with Cardinal Bernardin, Sheila knew how important the search for common ground, through a spirituality of dialogue, was to the legacy the Cardinal imparted to the Church -- a legacy that the Bernardin Center was founded to promote.

During her time in the Bernardin Center, Sheila worked to strengthen the work of the Advisory Committee, to select noted speakers to deliver the annual Murnion Lecture, and to organize successful Bernardin Conferences. Throughout all of these efforts, Sheila brought her commitment to the centrality of quality liturgical prayer to all Common Ground activities. This was a commitment that most certainly resonated with the Bernardin pastoral and theological vision.

As Sheila enjoys a well-deserved retirement, with her husband Bill and her children and grandchildren, we trust she knows of our gratitude and affection. We wish her all the best in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Fr. Michael Wojcicki

Most Rev. Michael W. Wojcicki, D.D., is the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Montana
Chair of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative Advisory Committee

Announcing the 2017 Bernardin Award and Murnion Lecture

Please plan to join us in honoring one of the first supporters of the Initiative and long-time member of the CCGI Advisory Committee, Most Rev. Ricardo Ramirez, C.S.B., Bishop Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico. The Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Award will be presented to Bishop Ramirez at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 29, 2017 at Catholic Theological Union, in Chicago, Illinois, home of the Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry. Following the award presentation, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, Illinois, will give the Msgr. Philip J. Murnion Lecture. Cardinal Cupich's lecture, entitled "Dialogue in the Key of Pope Francis," will draw on the Cardinal's experience with dialogue to inspire the building of common ground into the future.

Most Rev. Ricardo Ramirez, C.S.B., D.D., is the Bishop Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Ordained a presbyter of the Roman Catholic order of the Congregation of St. Basil in 1966, he was subsequently consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio, Texas, in 1981. Only a year following, Bishop Ramirez was given the task of shepherding a new diocese into existence, the aforementioned Diocese of Las Cruces. After 31 years as leader and administrator of Las Cruces, Pope Francis accepted his resignation in 2013.

(Continued in the next column, above)

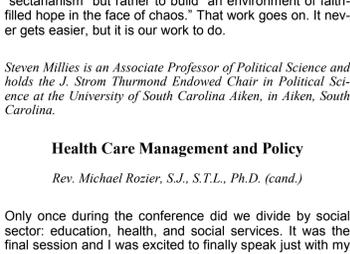


Captured before his retirement, this video showcases Most Rev. Ricardo Ramirez, C.S.B.'s life, vocation, and impending future.

Still, he continues his involvement on numerous committees of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). He has past experience in a variety of settings, including pastoral ministry in Canada, young adult ministry in Mexico, and religious and cultural identity ministries in Texas, once serving as the Executive Vice President of the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC). Known for his ability to bring people together as one family in Christ through authentic dialogue, Bishop Ramirez has been an active supporter of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative since its founding in 1996.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, S.T.D., is the current Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, Illinois. He was ordained a priest and incardinated into the Archdiocese of Omaha in 1975. Consecrated Bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota, in 1998, he was reappointed to the Diocese of Spokane, Washington, in 2010. In 2014, Pope Francis named him to the See of Chicago, where Cardinal Cupich was subsequently honored as a member of the College of Cardinals in November of 2016.

Like his brother Bishop, Ricardo Ramirez, Cardinal Cupich holds membership on a variety of committees at the USCCB. Moreover, he was named to the Congregation for Bishops in 2016, and travels to the Vatican regularly for such responsibilities. Finally, and in addition to the above, he serves as Chancellor of the Catholic Church Extension Society and the University of St. Mary of the Lake.



Newly elevated Cardinal Blase J. Cupich comments upon the November 19, 2016 Consistory in Rome, Italy.

Reflections on the 2016 Bernardin Conference

The Fifteenth Bernardin Conference was held from September 30-October 2, 2016 at Techy Towers Conference and Retreat Center in Techy Towers, Illinois, featuring keynote speaker Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Th.D., of Harvard University. You can find a link to the abstract of Rev. Hehir's lecture, entitled "Catholic Institutions and Identity: Some History and Some New Questions," as well as other resources from the 2016 Bernardin Conference, by clicking [HERE](#).



Rev. J. Bryan Hehir delivers the keynote address at the 2016 Bernardin Conference. Click the above video to view the lecture in its entirety.

The 2016 Bernardin Conference, entitled *In the World and in the Church: The Identity of Catholic Institutions*, brought together innovators and administrators affiliated with Catholic education, health care, social and international services, as well as other ecclesial leaders from across the country, in order to dialogue on the important topic of Catholic identity in the present age. Dr. Steven Millies, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin biographer and graduate of The Catholic University of America, was charged with the rather difficult and daunting responsibility of reflecting upon and summarizing the Bernardin Conference as a whole. His offers readers not only a glimpse at the intimate and dialogical happenings of the three-day meeting, specifically referencing key insights Fr. Hehir's lecture, but the hope of what is to come for Catholic identity in a disjointed and polarized world. Additionally featured are four conference participants -- one from health care, one from social services, and two from higher education. They have been asked and have reflected on the conference in light of their experience and context as members of Catholic institutions. Millies's summary and the four reflections can be found below.

Conference Synopsis and Conclusions

Steven P. Millies, Ph.D.

As we try to summarize all that has happened in our conversations this weekend, perhaps we should begin with something Father Hehir said, something we have not returned to since he said it: "For the world wants to know what the Church of Christ is in our time." When we pose the question of Catholic identity, we are accountable not only internally to ourselves. As Cardinal Montini reminded the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council at the conclusion of the first session, we are accountable also to the world. We must not overlook what Catholic identity is from the perspectives of those outside the Church.

That claim has theological substance. The Church is in a created world, part of a whole Act of Creation. There is a visible Church in the world because the world is the field in which the Church works toward sanctification. The world is not beside the point of Catholic identity.

Father Hehir reminded us of four goals that the Church seeks in its ministry to the world, four ways that the world can know the Church of Christ as the Second Vatican Council identified them:

1. Protection of human dignity
2. Promotion of human rights
3. Providing a sense of meaning for human action
4. Fostering the unity of the human family (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40-42).

So, perhaps we should ask the question of identity from the other side for a moment, in the sense of Montini's challenge. What does the world see when it looks at the Church and its institutions? How do we measure up to the standard of the Gospel, "So by their fruits you will know them" (Mt. 7:20)? After all, in some important way our sense of our own identity is not really that important if the world sees us some other way. We cannot afford to conceive of identity only in inward-looking ways, not least because we must be aware that those who are served by our institutions and those who staff them are watching us. And, in any event, we are called to be a light for the world, not for a locked room.

"What does the world see when it looks at the Church and its institutions?"

With those thoughts in mind, let us ask what our conversation this weekend has disclosed about what we might assume the world sees when it looks at Catholic institutions. First, as Father Hehir observed and our discussions have agreed, we in the Church have some difficulty distinguishing our core principles from peripherals. That difficulty cultivates a dangerous instinct toward regarding every compromise as a moral collapse. We should not overlook that working with our principles in the concrete world of action hardly is simple. We observed yesterday in our discussions that, in even as in another sense institutions face the question of identity in contingent, variable circumstances. These are messy problems, by their nature, but what is clear is that the wider discussions about identity and the authority in the Church to define identity have not been helpful.

Something else disclosed by our conversations: Catholics have no Catholic identity problem until we have a Catholic identity problem. Father Hehir introduced this idea with a quotation from Philip Gleason, but we have returned to it again and again. We know that there is something real that we all know, even if it is implicit, and our challenge lies in finding the ways to make it explicit. That challenge arises only when something disrupts the *status quo* and what we understand implicitly must become manifest more explicitly. This also is a situational problem, resistant to a one-size-fits-all solution because solutions are tied so intimately to circumstances.

We have talked about the fact that institutions in sponsorship relationships with religious institutes have an advantage if they have access to a charisma that can (for want of a better way to say it) 'package' Catholic identity in a way that makes it easier to transmit. As much as those relationships appear as a strength to those outside the Church and to us, we have talked here about the fact that charisma is not identity. We cannot depend on charisma so much that we confuse it with the Catholic tradition, of which any charisma is only a part. Those sponsorship relationships pose other problems, too, not least in terms of governance while the numbers, too, do not institutes dwindle downward. The question of who will define Catholic identity, and who holds authority in other cases as well, becomes murky and difficult.

The whole world can see as well as we can see that, whether millennials or baby boomers, the Catholic Church as an institution seems an unappealing to large numbers of people. Confidence in institutions of all types has waned, but the Church has worsened its own problem. Particularly among baby boomers, the Church has lost its credibility as a result of the sexual abuse crisis. It has raised a question -- do we even believe our own message, ourselves? The way in which we failed to care for the weakest and the most vulnerable for so long raises a doubt. For this reason, and for others, the Church appears to the rest of the world as one more struggling institution among the others no longer commanding loyalty.

The world sees that we Catholics are divided among ourselves, and a narrow range of voices dominates our arguments. The world sees that well-funded forces inside the Church with dark intentions seek conflict and provoke dissension, depriving those who seek dialogue the partners who might join with us. The world sees these things, and all other signs that the broader dissension outside the Church has seeped in. The world sees what CARA has measured with polling, something which tells us that only 13% of Catholics have a favorable view of Muslims, to name perhaps the most disturbing thing we heard this weekend. For better and for worse, all these signs, each individually and all together, affirm beyond any doubt that the Church is in the world.

What is the good news? Happily, there is some.

"What is the good news? Happily, there is some."

We can take some comfort because there are other things that the world can see. The world sees our institutions doing those things Father Hehir named, fulfilling the mandate we find in *Gaudium et Spes*. The Church does protect human dignity and promote human rights, provide meaning for human activity and foster the unity of the human family. Catholic social services, healthcare, and education are ministries, they give witness to our faith, and they are the most vital source of our credibility because the world sees what we are doing. Consider the extraordinary popularity of women religious, who poll better than clergy or any other constituency inside the Church. People identify those women with their ministries, their work in education, in healthcare, and in charitable works. They are known as a face of concern and of love. The sisters have no Catholic identity problem, and the world sees that, too.

The sisters remind us that the secret of success is not complicated, even if also it is not easy. "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." Or, we can think of Tertullian's report of how Romans regarded the Christians among them -- "See how they love one another!" I am wary of reducing a complex problem to naively optimistic bromides about Christian love. At the same time, as Christians, we must affirm that love (*caritas*) is the answer to the problem of Catholic identity from its beginning as we ask the question to its end, when our answer finds its satisfaction in doing the hard work of the Gospel. This is, as we have described it, a work of conversion and evangelization -- *metanoia*, even. The work is one-on-one, and the work affords us no comforting certainty that we will be effective. We know that best practices always emphasize a personal encounter in ways that disrupt people's habitual patterns of behavior, break them from those habits of mind that wall them off from joining in a dialogue. We know also that, even in those cases when we are successful, the results are frustratingly difficult to measure.

Because the encounters each are *sui generis*, all particular to their own circumstances, the devil is in the details. In the challenging choices we face in the realm of bioethics, or as we encounter a world unformed by the Gospel or the Catholic tradition, or engaging the ever-present, ancient problem of Church and state, defining and affirming Catholic identity always will test our ability to resist discouragement. It is folly to hope that we will strike upon a formula suited to every situation. Still, this is our work. This is the work of the Church, and -- though difficult -- we are proud to do it, to proclaim it. This is our baptismal calling, and we already are fulfilling it.

By way of a final word, I would look back to yesterday afternoon when Brother Paul asked each of us to choose a word that summed up what is needed. A word came to me last night that I did not hear when we were together, or at least I did not record it: hope. In his pastoral survey on healthcare, "A Sign of Hope," Cardinal Bernardin surveyed a landscape of suffering and, like Habakkuk in this weekend's Mass readings, he asked, "What is God doing in the world?" just as we with Father Hehir and Cardinal Montini have asked what God's Church is in the world. Our challenges have not changed from the time of the prophets to Cardinal Bernardin, writing twenty years ago, to now.

"Our challenges have not changed from the time of the prophets to Cardinal Bernardin, writing twenty years ago, to now."

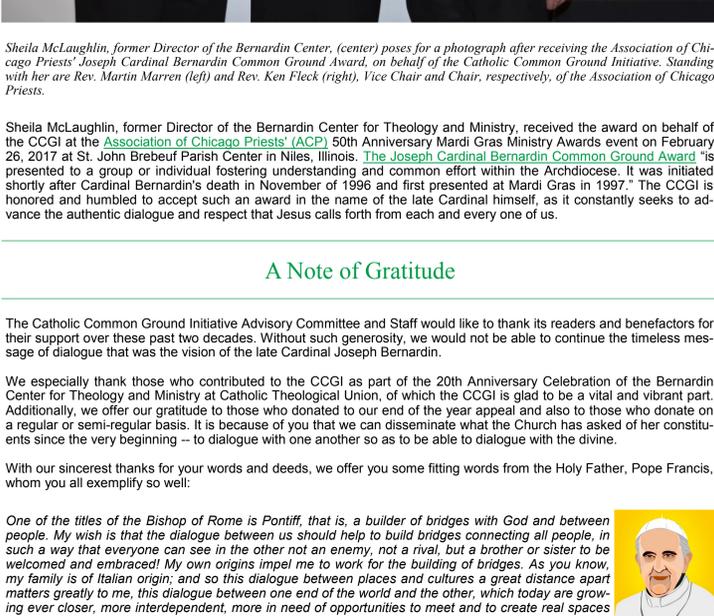
Cardinal Bernardin went on. Jesus not only healed the sick, but amid their suffering He strengthened their faith so that they might live in hope. In a similar way, we may hope that from our fractiousness and our division can come the opportunity for dialogue just as illness provides the opportunity for deeper conversation. But for that to happen, we must live the message. We must live in hope first.

(Continued in the next column, above)



Participants of the 2016 Bernardin Conference listen attentively to Rev. J. Bryan Hehir's keynote address.

2017 Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Common Ground Award Bestowed Upon the CCGI



Sheila McLaughlin, former Director of the Bernardin Center, (center) poses for a photograph after receiving the Association of Chicago Priests' Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Common Ground Award, on behalf of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. Standing with her are Rev. Martin Marren (left) and Rev. Ken Fleck (right), Vice Chair and Chair, respectively, of the Association of Chicago Priests.

Sheila McLaughlin, former Director of the Bernardin Center of the CCGI at the Association of Chicago Priests' (ACP), Illinois 2017 at St. John Brebeuf Parish Center in Ailes, Illinois presented to a group of individual fostering understanding and common effort within the Archdiocese. It was initiated shortly after Cardinal Bernardin's death in November of 1996 and first presented at Mardi Gras in 1997. The CCGI is honored and humbled to accept such an award in the name of the late Cardinal himself, as it constantly seeks to advance the authentic dialogue and respect that Jesus calls forth from each and every one of us.

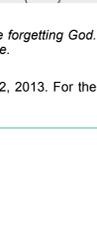
A Note of Gratitude

The Catholic Common Ground Initiative Advisory Committee and Staff would like to thank its readers and benefactors for their support over these past two decades. Without such generosity, we would not be able to continue the timeless message of dialogue that was the vision of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin.

We especially thank those who contributed to the CCGI as part of the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union, of which the CCGI is glad to be a vital and vibrant part. Additionally, we offer our gratitude to those who donated to our end of the year appeal and also to those who donate on a regular or semi-regular basis. It is because of you that we are able to dialogue with the divine.

With our sincerest thanks for your words and deeds, we offer you some fitting words from the Holy Father, Pope Francis, whom you all exemplify so well:

One of the titles of the Bishop of Rome is Pontiff, that is, a builder of bridges with God and between people. My wish is that the dialogue between us should help to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, but a rival, but a brother or sister; to be welcomed and embraced! My own origins impel me to work for the building of bridges. As you know, my family is of Italian origin; and so this dialogue between places and cultures a great distance apart matters greatly to me, this dialogue between one end of the world and the other, which today are growing ever closer, more interdependent, more in need of opportunities to meet and to create real spaces of authentic fraternity.



In this work, the role of religion is fundamental. It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people.

(Audience with the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See: Address of Pope Francis." March 22, 2013. For the complete text and a link to the video, click [HERE](#).)

Become a Friend of the CCGI!

Sustain the Legacy and Support the Work of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative

DONATE HERE



Find us on

Join Our Mailing List