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Teacher organizations in Catholic Schools
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TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

A Report

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Catholic Conference

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A. INTRODUCTION

A "working paper" on Catholic teacher organizations was presented to the Administrative Board at its meeting in February 1977 in Washington. At that meeting a resolution was approved authorizing the USCC Subcommittee on Teacher Organizations to use the "working paper" as a basis for continued consultation with interested parties on the subject of collective bargaining.

The release of the text of the "working paper" was the occasion for many favorable comments and this acceptance was also broadly evident throughout the hearings that followed. However, it should be noted that this generally favorable response did not preclude minor criticisms or suggestions for improving the document. It was accepted as a "working paper" with all that that title implies in regard to opportunities for change of style, content and emphasis.

B. HEARINGS

Even before the first meeting of the Subcommittee on Teacher Organizations, the two Subcommittee Chairmen, Bishops McManus and McNicholas, arranged a hearing which those dioceses in which litigation was in progress could attend and present a review of the local situation for the information of the Committee. Such a meeting was held on September 13, 1976 with representation from Brooklyn, Fort Wayne-South Bend, Gary, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Each described the special circumstances of the cases under discussion; all accepted the right of teachers to organize, and all rejected "improper" National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) intervention.

Opinions varied a good deal on the desirability of issuing a statement and, if issued, what it would contain. The unique character of the Catholic school was universally emphasized. A discussion of a draft statement prepared by USCC staff followed.

The first formal meeting of the Subcommittee was held on November 5, 1976 with a report to the members regarding the September 13 meeting. After a long discussion it was agreed to work on a "statement of principles" which would include reference to the NLRB problem and emphasize the unique character of Catholic schools.

The second Subcommittee meeting was held on January 5, 1977 and began with a report on the status of the NLRB cases then in the courts. A motion was carried which was designed to seek the approval of the Administrative Board in February on a "value judgment" by the Subcommittee on the advisability of an appeal to the Supreme Court if an unsatisfactory court decision was made on NLRB jurisdiction. It was also agreed that staff prepare a "working paper," approved by both departmental committees, to be presented to the Administrative Board as a basis for further discussion with "interested parties."

On March 31, 1977 the Subcommittee held an all-day meeting—representatives of teachers' organizations were in attendance—and the discussion moved across a wide range of topics. In general there was satisfaction with the "working paper" although some modifications were suggested. Nearly all union representatives emphasized the difficulty of direct communication and said

they felt forced to go to outside agencies (NLRB, AFT, etc.) as a last resort. They accepted the concept that the bishop has a special role in the Catholic school picture as the final voice in matters of faith and morals.

In the afternoon, nine school administrators presented their views. Several felt that the "working paper" needed further development and more practical application. They also sought a more ecclesial formulation with a pastoral tone. A real dissatisfaction was expressed concerning AFT and NEA affiliations and a suggestion was made for the exploration of alternatives. It was further suggested that the paper should describe the multiple relationships that are involved in the school picture—parents, teachers, administrators, pastors, bishops, etc. Furthermore, the paper should be the beginning of what must be a long process of development on the practical level.

The latest meeting of the Subcommittee was held on June 3, 1977 and involved religious, principals, school board representation, parents and parish priests. Eleven people presented their views and joined in the discussion. The sister representatives seemed to agree that the "working paper" offered a good expression of Church teaching but felt that a wider involvement of parents and others was required. They were unable to achieve a consensus on the position of religious in regard to union participation by religious teachers. Several speakers urged a more cooperative attitude regarding NLRB association with Catholic schools. They also expressed the view that salary adjustment is not always the principal grievance of the teachers—personality conflicts and participation in decision-making were mentioned in this connection.

One speaker urged a new philosophy of negotiation and a new climate of cooperation. ("Responsible negotiations" should replace the term "collective bargaining.") The parent observer present called for new contacts between parents and the local school on all levels, ("We do not even know the needs of the teachers.") She also asked for "models" which demonstrate the successful operation of labor-management relations in Catholic schools.

The president of an association of Archdiocesan high school principals with ten years experience in negotiation with a teacher

association commented very favorably on collective bargaining in Catholic schools. He reassured the Subcommittee that many of the problems anticipated by those facing collective bargaining for the first time are indeed solvable.

Fund raising to keep schools open through "Bingo," etc., were discussed, as well as the fact that parish schools often serve only a minority of parish children. The meeting ended with a long discussion on the necessity of increasing the training of school administrators in the skills required for inter-personal relationships and negotiations.

As a result of the hearings, a new draft of the "working paper" was prepared for the summer meetings of the Committee on Education and the Committee on Social Development and World Peace.

The Committee on Education prepared an additional draft which was presented to the Committee on Social Development and World Peace, along with the earlier one. This present paper, prepared at the direction of the Chairmen of both committees, represents an integration of the two papers.

I. The Community of the School

1. The Catholic School: A Community of Faith

The Catholic school is best described as a community of faith, formed by gospel values, whose purpose is service of others. To be a community of faith whose members are united by the very Spirit of God into a "unique fellowship," the school must be consciously and publicly guided in all its actions by the teachings and the spirit of Jesus. Not only is this true of all individuals associated with the school in any way, it is also true of all groups and organizations related to the school.

In this community, it is fitting and, indeed, necessary that the question of teacher organization be approached, not in a negative or adversarial way, but in an atmosphere of trust and understanding. There is no intrinsic reason to fear the consequences of a teacher organization established according to the wishes of the teacher employees. The very fact that a Catholic school is called to be a community of faith should persuade the administration to accept and welcome employee initiative in this regard.

The authors of this report are comfortable with the fact that Catholic teachers, in all probability, will seek, in organized ways, to participate more fully in the governance of Catholic schools. We are confident, however, that employers and employees in these situations can, without prejudice to the unique purpose and character of the Catholic school, achieve a mode of operation that will be satisfactory to all.

Of paramount importance, of course, is the integrity of the Catholic school. Its unique purpose and character must never be compromised. In saying this, however, we do not believe and do not intend to convey the impression that teachers who seek to organize are less committed to that ideal and standard of Catholic education than other members of the Catholic school community.

2. Vocation of the Catholic Teacher

The American bishops, in their pastoral message, *To Teach As Jesus Did*, invited all Catholics and especially faculty members themselves to see the work of a faculty as a "vocation." In their statement on Catholic schools, *Teach Them*, the bishops said that the integration of religious truth and values with the rest of life, which distinguishes Catholic schools from others, is expressed in many ways but "above all in the lives of teachers." In both pastoral documents, the bishops were speaking not only for themselves but for all the Catholic community when they expressed gratitude to the men and women who staff Catholic schools. A faculty, with parents, administrators and others, has a strategic share in the educational ministry.

3. One Essential Consequence

It is critically important that the special character of Catholic educational institutions be maintained. Catholic schools are particularly committed to instruction of religious and moral values. Supervisory agencies have the duty to give just recognition to these essential objectives of Catholic schools and to understand the responsibility of Church leadership to protect these functions.

4. Capabilities, Free-will Support

It is imperative to understand that Catholic schools differ considerably from their counterparts in the tax-supported school system. This is particularly true in terms of their capabilities,

their organization and most importantly, in their objectives. Catholic schools are, for example, supported by the free-will offerings of the families which they serve. These schools exist only because of the generosity, dedication and sacrifice of all the Catholic people and in particular the teachers and parents.

5. Pluralistic Character

The distinctively pluralistic structure of the Catholic school system is important to take into account as well. The structure differs from diocese to diocese in terms of administration and resources. Some schools are diocesan, others parochial, others private.

II. Collective Bargaining by Teachers

1. Catholic social teaching strongly supports the rights of employees to organize and to bargain collectively with their employers. The free exercise of these rights pertains to Catholic school teachers and other school employees in the same way it relates to the employees of other Catholic institutions and secular organizations. We firmly believe that Catholic school teachers should not only study and understand these rights but should consider a responsibility toward their fellow teachers as they examine the possibility or even necessity of collective bargaining.

2. A corollary to the right of Catholic school teachers to organize into teacher associations is the right which they possess to determine for themselves the agency or organization which is to represent them in the bargaining process.

3. Catholic teachers have the right to free elections, full negotiations, mediation, conciliation and similar services under the auspices of a neutral body. In the exercise of this right, every effort should be made to arrive at a supervisory agency acceptable to both employee and employer.

These three principles concerning the right to collective bargaining, to choice of agency to represent the teacher, and to agency of supervision must, as noted above, take into account certain unique characteristics of these schools.

The inclusion of religious in any bargaining unit remains a question requiring further study.

Religious and lay teachers, since they are part of the same faculty, should communicate in a manner that allows for the exchange of views on matters of mutual interest. It is not clear what character this should take in specific cases.

Finally and fundamentally, the special nature and mission of Catholic schools noted in the principles above require that Catholic teaching and moral standards be upheld at all levels of operation.

III. *Procedural Recommendations*

1. Every diocese and school should, in consultation with its teachers, develop written personnel policies for its teachers. Such policies are an advantage to all concerned. As a minimum, they should treat of procedures for dealing with salary scales and their improvement, job security, advancement, and a grievance procedure which respects the principles of subsidiarity. Each diocese should identify the agencies and persons responsible for establishing or reviewing (in those many dioceses and schools where personnel policies are already in written form) handbooks of written policies and procedures.

2. Structures should be created whereby teachers are involved in the development and review of personnel policies. Also, ways should be developed by which they are involved in the curricular procedures and decisions of the school. Prior to initiating such processes, the nature of the consultation and the final agency and method of decision should be clarified. In many cases, parents and other interested parties should be involved in these processes.

3. Where the teachers want an organization to be their way of participating in decisions, school administrators should cooperate with it and its officers. Teacher organizations can bring benefits not only to teachers but to Catholic education in general. The organization, for its part, should ask how it meets the rationale of a teacher organization in a Catholic school.

4. Where lawyers or labor-management consultants enter into a collective bargaining process, steps should be taken both by school administrators and teacher organizations to examine with them the concept of the school as a community of faith. Because of their special role in helping to shape policy decisions, con-

sultants should be chosen whose professional background has prepared them to understand fully the special role of the Catholic school within the total mission of the Church.

5. In some cases the reconciliation of separated parties will be indicated. Personal and interpersonal relationships occasionally became tense or even broken in some places. Leadership is especially important. A few people working together and agreeing to seek reconciliation can provide a climate agreeable to exchange and understanding.

C. CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of the Subcommittee on Teacher Organizations, after a year of study, that the teacher union question is a manageable one for the Catholic community. Although experience to date has at times been characterized as acrimonious and contentious so as to militate almost completely against the possibility of a faith community, the Subcommittee has noted on all sides reservoirs of good will and concern which, if tapped and given the benefit of good communication, will result in a meaningful realization or restoration of such a community.

Although the role of government in monitoring the civil aspects of the above effort has yet to be defined, it is the belief of the Subcommittee that even this question of the relationship of government to Catholic school management is capable ultimately of a solution which will be satisfactory to all concerned parties.

The question of the relationship of teacher organizations to Catholic elementary and secondary schools is a comparatively recent one. Some issues related to it are clear and others are not. Additional thought and planning should come not only from teachers and administrators but also from parents, parish priests, school boards and others in the Catholic community.

The USCC Subcommittee on Catholic Schools and Teacher Organizations is grateful for the cooperation of so many in assisting its work and expresses the hope that this report will be of assistance to national organizations, individual dioceses and schools in focusing attention on this very important matter.

APPENDIX

Some Suggestions for Those Engaged in the Bargaining Process

Teachers, teacher representatives, and school administrators should be provided with the interpersonal skills needed to resolve problems which inevitably arise in a school situation. These skills must be learned, especially if problems are to be resolved in a manner that promotes the good of all concerned.

School administrators in particular need preparation because of their central role. Toward more effective preparation of themselves as persons in the process, two areas are particularly suggested: 1) increase of skills of communication; 2) knowledge of the history of teacher/school negotiations in the Catholic context: this will require following those publications that increase understanding of the issues and that relate experience in resolving them. Moreover, an ecclesial approach precludes anything that could be interpreted as patronizing or merely legalistic.

The "Office Agenda" should include the following: 1) regular and effective communication with teachers, who ought also to share in decision-making; 2) together with teachers, a regular review of personnel policies and procedures, especially touching on working conditions and security; 3) encourage continuous study into the nature of a Catholic school. (This would lead to clarifying roles of parents, teachers, pastors and bishops.) 4) an ongoing dialogue with religious with respect to the advisability of being included in teachers' associations; 5) this dialogue ought to extend also to the large community in the form of public information programs.

To meet disputes, the administration and the teachers ought to have agreed upon a regular arbitration and conciliation system. They should also come to an understanding concerning specific articles in the contract where conflict may arise because of imprecision of language.

Teachers must allow for inexperience in handling union affairs by those to whom it is a new procedure. They, too, should encourage the development of communication skills and correct union procedures.

The teacher properly sees himself or herself as an essential part of the Catholic school community and should insist that others respect this position.

With administrators, parents and others, the teacher should find the role that allows for the most significant contribution to the Catholic educational process.

School funding is now, and will continue to be, a matter that concerns all school personnel as well as the wider Catholic community.



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Report of the Subcommittee on Teacher Organizations.

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