

# US Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development is part of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. It was from this Committee that a letter was sent to the Bush Administration and Leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives urging them to consider the moral aspects of the current financial crisis.

The letter stresses the importance of responsibility, accountability, awareness of the advantages and limitations of the market, solidarity and the common good. It also emphasises that the search for just and effective responses to the economic turmoil has to consider the human impact and ethical dimension.

This Bishops' Conference has a long standing public commitment to justice and peace issues at home as well as abroad. Their pastoral letter 'Economic Justice for All' stated 'The impact of national economic policies on the poor and the vulnerable is the primary criterion for judging their moral value. National economic policies that contribute to building a true commonwealth should reflect this by standing firmly for the rights of those who fall through the cracks of our economy: the poor, the unemployed, the homeless and the displaced.'

The press release on this letter and other information can be seen on <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/news.shtml>

## MCW's World Assembly 2009



**Can you help** to support a delegate from some of the world's poorest Movements to take part in the World Assembly?

Later in the year we will be launching an appeal to ask for donations to help enable delegates from Movements around the world to attend this meeting in 2009.

It's really important that a world assembly is just that and not only a gathering of those Movements who can afford to send someone.

We know it is a hard time currently for us all with food, petrol and house fuel bills rising seemingly day by day. However, we would ask that you could see your way to helping us help others.

## You are all invited to the: **MCW National Day Conference, incorporating the AGM**

on  
Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2008  
at St Bede's Pastoral Centre, York  
from 11 am until 3.30 pm

(a light buffet lunch will be provided)

The theme of the Conference will be **MIGRATION**, which is also the focus of the 2009 World Assembly in Nantes.

David McLoughlin, a member of the MCW and a senior lecturer in Theology at Newman College, Birmingham will assist us in our theological reflections.

The Conference is open to ALL. Please advise MCW HQ as soon as possible if you are able to attend by telephoning 020 8203 6290 or email [mcworkers@aol.com](mailto:mcworkers@aol.com).

*The views expressed by contributors to MCW Review do not necessarily represent the views of the MCW*



## It's a Strange World! Some reflections on the Global Financial Crisis

When we hear that George W Bush has been called a Socialist by some of the senior members of his own Republican Party we know we are living in extraordinary times! What is illustrated is how the so called 'credit crunch' is challenging many of our political leaders and their former economic beliefs.

Many people are rightly concerned about the value of their savings, pensions and investments and are afraid of the unknown in that the world as we know it might be coming to an end. Governments across the globe are scrambling to 'save' or prop up the system in whatever way they can. The solutions proposed for this 'credit crunch' and accompanying financial crisis around the world does however raise some very important questions and reflections.

Some people have identified the present crisis as having its' roots in the deregulation of the market, privatisation of key institutions and demutualisation of Building Societies which was firstly promoted by the Thatcher Governments of the 1980s and continued under the Blair administration. These actions emerged out of the political and economic philosophy which valued individualism over society resulting in, some would say inevitably, the present chaos. This leads some to wonder why such a system, that is inherently exploitative and based on inequality, should be saved.

One danger in trying to ensure the stability of the banking system as we know it is that governments over react and make unlimited amounts of taxpayers money available to banks who have made hundreds of billions of pounds profit over the last twenty years. As one of

Garry Trudeau's characters in his Doonesbur strip said "they are privatising profit and socialising [nationalising] risk"

It is instructive to observe how mutual financial institutions like Building Societies and Credit Unions are surviving the crisis. None of these have any significant exposure to sub-prime mortgage lending (a trigger of the present crisis) and most are well capitalised. None will need any public money to bail them out. The values of not-for-profit quality service that members have stood the test of time and should be regarded as models of good practice for the future of the industry.

Many of these same values are echoed in the US Bishops' Conference letter to their political leaders in response to the crisis. They emphasise the human and moral dimension of the situation and insist on responsibility and accountability for those who have directly contributed to or profited from the crisis. They also highlight the necessity of solidarity and the Common Good. There is more on the letter within this edition along with some reflection from a Christian Worker activist in the US. He is a member of the Catholic Labour Network who have recently affiliated to the World Movement of Christian Workers.

It would be an error of historic proportions to waste the opportunity which the crisis presents: A financial system can be built which is more in tune with the Gospel values of fairness, solidarity and inclusiveness, putting the most vulnerable at the centre of things without forgetting the rest. Let's not waste this chance to do something better for everyone.

# TO JEAN MARIE ON THE JUBILEE OF THE 50 year of your Priesthood

*from Ray Turner, NEC Representative, Liverpool*

Can I take you back to the summer of 1976 when inflation was running at nearly 20% and companies were closing at the rate of two a week. Unemployment was touching 15% and the trades unions were at the peak of their power, or at least that is what the government at the time told us! Imagine the scene in a tiny dingy smoke filled room in a large factory in Liverpool. The room is used at the concession of management by the shop stewards' committee and there is a heated discussion going on about what action should be taken to avoid a complete walk out of 2,000 production workers in a dispute over 5 men not being paid the correct bonus. In the midst of all this mayhem in walks a little bloke in a long mac and beret accompanied by another member of the committee.

"Who is this bloke? Is he a new member of management come to spy on us?" "No, he's a French priest, he is here learning to speak English."

"He won't learn any here we only speak ... scouse."

"Why have you brought him in here?"

"He is the Chaplain to the World Movement of Christian Workers and he is interested in the worker movements around the world and in particular the British Trades Unions at grass roots level."

This was the beginning of a long and disorderly discussion, made worse by the different translation and culture of those involved. But from this insignificant meeting came what I like to believe, the seed from which our Movement in its present form has grown. It has withered a bit along the way.

It was at that meeting that I first heard some of the Gospel (Good News) according to St. Jean Marie and like some of the words of the Good Lord may be a little lost in translation: When asked why a priest would be interested in the

problems of workers rather than those of his flock his answer was that he hoped that if he had a flock then they were an important part of it. To their amazement he said, "I am convinced that where people are struggling together for justice and their rights, then Christ is present whether they know it or not, even if they profess to be non-believers. If we so called Christians cannot find God in our neighbour next door needing a cup of tea, then we will never find Him in church."

A short time later two of that committee joined a small group of members of the FSA (Family & Social Action) who were trying to form an adult worker service of the Movement. The rest is history and those of us who have been involved from the beginning know how much we depended on our friend Jean Marie for his support and inspiration during some very difficult but exciting times.

For my part I would like to say that it has been an honour and privilege to have had Jean Marie as a father confessor and very dear friend. He has been part of my life for the last thirty odd years, both within the Movement and with my family and my (his) friends here in the City of Culture. If I can be so bold as to make the comparison of our relationship it would be with that of Cardijn and Pat Keegan (well just a little bit). I can at least boast of having achieved a small contribution to Jean Marie's conversion to be a proper drinker by convincing by my good example that good single malt is far superior to any of that cognac rubbish!



**Conratulations and Best Wishes from the Movement of Christian**

# The American Mortgage Crisis – A personal view of Clayton Sinyai a member of the Catholic Labor Network (USA)



In the 1960s Prime Minister Harold Wilson spent about US\$10 Billion (in today's currency) from the British Exchequer to assume public ownership of Britain's steel industry. In 1982, President Francois Mitterand incited massive capital flight when his new Socialist government purchased most of France's basic industry for less than US\$15 Billion. But comes now US President George W. Bush and with a plan to dwarf these great nationalizations, extending nearly US\$1 trillion in funds and loan guarantees to acquire a bankrupt insurer, shares in several wobbly banks, and perhaps a million home mortgages of questionable value. I, for one, wish my Treasury secretary could have held out for at least a few tangible assets.

The financial crisis on Wall Street that has now spread across the globe is rooted in the collapse of a speculative housing bubble that brought with it mass defaults of the high-interest loans that had sustained it. Now, the American suburb with its attendant car culture is surely poor urban planning and probably environmentally unsustainable. It has long been a figure of amusement – or disdain – to *bien-pensants* at home and abroad. But it is important to recognize the social and cultural value of the ubiquitous single-family home in American life. Catholic social teaching, after all, has differed from various forms of socialism in the value it assigns to private property – precisely as the basis for family life.

Nineteenth century Americans celebrated the abundant land that enabled virtually every man to escape the curse of serfdom or servitude and acquire property, setting up with his family as a yeoman farmer or small tradesman. As work was collectivized in the factory or office during the twentieth century, the home remained. As socially disruptive markets tore at the fabric of community life, the single-family home represented private property as it was meant to be: a source of stability, which

relation to a shared space and article of property

Indeed, the very firms that created the speculative bubble in housing values with massive expansions of mortgage lending unhinged from the value of the underlying properties have taken to explaining the usurious 'subprime' lending as an attempt to extend homeownership to social classes otherwise ineligible. (That high interest loan were more often offered to tempt comfortable middle class families out of modest ranches and into 4,000+ square foot 'McMansions' is seldom mentioned.)

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops can claim credit for a consistent support of affordable housing while taking an early stand against the predatory lending practices – practices that we now see were not just unethical but economically imprudent. The Bishops, like the AFL-CIO trade union federation, support national housing trusts as a more suitable vehicle than unregulated financial markets to enable working people to secure housing.

One thing is for certain: the 'American mode of deregulated capital and labor markets has proven to have feet of clay, failing to deliver the limitless growth and endlessly increasing consumption promised by its advocates. Like Belshazzar holding his wanton feast on the Temple silver, we have been putting the gift of God's creation to profane and selfish ends. If the spreading economic suffering engendered by this crisis is to have any redemptive value it will be in the call to renew our understanding of property as an instrument for fostering solidarity in our relations with men and women everywhere.