

# Some Principles of Catholic Community Building

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These are ideas summarized from experiences in the past week, from time out in NH and Steubenville, OH at the New Polity Conference. These are mostly principles, not programs: the How is more important than the What. And I certainly am not saying I'm walking the walk as well as I ought.

## The Call

We are not trying to assemble a bunch of Catholics together just to commiserate, be friends, do nice things, or pray. We really are engaged in the thing the magisterium has been driving squarely at for the past 150 years: social reform. We are seeking to undo the cycles of sin, to liberate men and women so that they can be the full flourishing images of God that they are called to be!

The World seeks to atomize us and reduce us to cogs in a technocratic soul-devouring machine. God wants to elevate us sons and daughters, to full and eternal life, to image Him who is all-holy!

## Radical Thinking, Desiring Heaven

"Radical" means root. We must always be about getting to the source of things. If your hand offends you, cut it off. Christ demands radical things of us. Are we willing to make the sacrifices to live as we ought? Are we willing to cast off cell phones, cars, places, jobs, family, and maybe more to answer the calls that Christ has for us - a call to a greater happiness than fleeting pleasures?

I met many men who left well-paying and stable careers to take up work that they could involve their children with. I met some who pulled entirely out of the stock market in order to invest their money with their neighbors in need. I met families who moved out of nice neighborhoods to ones where they could afford with friends to be alongside one another in geographic community, and many who simply put community as such an important factor over career.

## Friends First, Institutions Second

Marc Barnes said something very interesting about Steubenville: when they first got started doing things to improve the town, he thought that they needed to make all these places and then people would be attracted to them. Quite the opposite turned out to be true: as people met and became friends, they started making these places of their own accord. The institutions outflowed from friendship, not vice versa.

## Convert, Stack, and Integrate - Don't Tack On

We should work towards a society where we have more free time. But we aren't there yet. Adding churchy stuff to an already busy life is just... hassle. At best it's tiring and at worst it distracts us from the daily encounters with Christ we have in our work. Especially when that stuff is irregular. We have to find ways of either replacing an existing structure of sin, or enhancing an existing good. The devil wants to divert, destroy, and disintegrate. We can convert (take something and redirect it), stack (multitask, do multiple things at the same time), and integrate (take two separate things and unite them). This *especially* applies to "economic" (productive) life. How we earn and spend money or make and consume things is an incredibly significant part of our lives to offer to Christ, we should not act as if it is merely a means to the end of continued existence.

## Subsidiarity

Issues should be dealt with at the smallest level reasonable, so as not to trample on their authority and agency. Don't escalate problems that you haven't bothered to solve directly. Don't petition the parish

council for new programs or funding if you have time, energy, and money. Get stuff done. Don't use large entities when small ones will do.

## Openness to Life, not Contraception

Do we really believe in the infinite potential of a man? Do we really believe in God's providence? Or do we think He can only do so much? We cannot over-constrain what He does, and have to be open to the ideas and initiative of our fellow man, acting as facilitators and shepherds, not gatekeepers. New life always surprises us: are we going to stifle it because it doesn't do as we think it ought, or are we going to guide it to be the fullness of what it could be - something beyond our understanding?

## The Importance of Real Things

Go touch grass. Get out into the world. Study and revel, yes - but carve, dance, build, paint, craft, hike, fish, brew, garden, shepherd. In modernity we are alienated not just from our fellow man but from even God's creation. We need to learn not just from the Word of God, but the Book of Life which He also wrote. So much anxiety in the world comes from us not really belonging to the created order; we have absconded our agency, our ability to do things, even the simple things like cooking and singing.

## Fasting & Feasting

Many diseases are healed by fasting. It is a process of purgation, of removing all that dross which does not please God, and really, doesn't please us. It is a time of increasing our appetites, so that we desire Heavenly things, rather than just nicer things of the World. But we must also feast: and we need to really feast. The Church calendar gives us so much opportunity to feast, and gives cause to our joy and celebration. We can't just reduce our feasting to sending a text about "Happy St. Lucy's Day!" Go out and kill the fattened calf - literally, even. Is our salvation not cause for great celebration?

## Music

God made us to be musical. Not just some of us - most, perhaps even all of us. We need to practice music fit for maximal active participation. This means things such as folk song, sea shanties, traditional hymns, and the like - not the band or concert format, but that which can be done anywhere, so we always have a song on our lips (especially a song that praises God, even if not fit for the liturgy). When many mediocre voices join, they become beautiful. "Pop" music, by and large, does not lend itself to group singing. Music is a fundamental aspect of culture and we have a rich tradition to pull from.

## Acting Manfully

For the men: our society is actively and wickedly opposed to the masculine spirit. It wants to tame us, to make us weak and impotent, to crush our rebelliousness and milk our remaining creativity. We must fight against this notion! Doing "manly things", whether that be working out, shooting skeet, hiking, rock climbing, etc.... it can feel fake and artificial at first. But push past it, and the organic stuff will happen. So much of the anxiety of the world comes from our lack of agency with it. We don't know how to use even basic tools anymore - we are impotent! We need to be seeking out and thirsting for opportunities to upskill so at the very least we can fix basic problems around a home, and from there, fix the problems in our world.

## Responsiveness, not Ideology

We need to respond to the particulars that we are presented with, not try to fit the world into preconceived notions of what it should be. We must accept the given-ness of the world. I fear even this paper risks this; I'll say no more.