

The Center of Concern

Richard McBrien | Jul. 11, 2011 Essays in Theology

Only my close boyhood friends knew this, until now, but I was the playing manager of a baseball team in the Jaycee-Courant League in Hartford, Connecticut, many summers ago. "Jaycee" was short for "Junior Chamber of Commerce," and "Courant" referred to *The Hartford Courant*, the oldest continuing daily newspaper in the United States.

We were originally called "The Terrors," but I changed the name in the second year when our sponsor, Donald Williams, a young insurance executive, gave us uniforms.

Previously, we wore the inscribed tee-shirts, with the name of the team and the sponsor (Fred H. Williams Insurance) that were distributed to each team at the beginning of the season.

I thought "Terrors" was inappropriate, and changed it to "Eagles." Also, we lost most of our games that first year. We didn't frighten anybody.

Our proudest achievement was that we didn't forfeit any of our games. The team always showed up. I had seen to that by phoning the players before each game.

Don Williams wasn't happy about the name-change (he had a sentimental attachment to the original name), but it was a *fait accompli*.

This is a long, roundabout way of explaining why this week's column is about an independent faith-based organization with ties to the Catholic Church, The Center of Concern.

My star pitcher, Ken Melley, is now treasurer for The Center of Concern and he asked me to consider doing a column about the organization sometime.

Founded some forty years ago with the direct assistance of the late Jesuit priest William Callahan, it has continued its efforts on behalf of social transformation, especially at the international level.

Over these four decades The Center of Concern has been a prophetic voice pointing to the root causes of hunger, economic and social injustice, and human rights violations, while working to transform them.

Its key projects include Education for Justice, the Global Women's Project, the Rethinking Bretton Woods Project, and the Ecology and Development Project.

The Education for Justice Project reaches out to educators, parishes, and other faith-communities to provide them with the resources of Catholic social teaching on a wide range of social and economic issues.

The Global Women's Project analyzes the effects of political, economic, and social policies on women, men, families and other communities in order to advocate more just policies.

The Rethinking Bretton Woods Project works with governmental and non-governmental leaders, policy-makers, academics, grassroots activists, and the general public to reform international financial institutions.

And Ecology and Development Project analyzes the root causes of the ecological crisis, underscoring the social justice ramifications.

Although Callahan is not mentioned in any of the literature that I have seen, he did have an important role in the Center's founding some forty years ago.

Callahan died at age 78 from the complications of Parkinson's disease almost exactly a year ago. He was a Jesuit until 1991 when the Society expelled him mainly for his strong advocacy of the ordination of women to the priesthood -- a much milder stance got Bishop William Morris sacked recently in Australia.

He was also controversial for his support of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and for his initiating a ministry for gay Catholics. ?It is not clear to this day,? [the obituary in the *National Catholic Reporter* observed](#) [1], ?what specific issue(s) motivated his final dismissal from the New England Jesuits.?

Callahan was a self-described ?impossible dreamer,? which is why one of the several organizations he helped to found was called the Quixote Center.

According to the obituary in *The New York Times*, Callahan aggravated church officials during the U.S. tour of Pope John Paul II in 1979 by urging priests to refuse to help the pope distribute Holy Communion so that more lay and religious women would have to be enlisted.

When the same pope insisted that ordination was not a human rights issue, Callahan retorted, ?Perhaps this is not a human rights issue because women are not human or they do not have rights.?

He also founded in 1975 Priests for Equality to work for the ordination of women, and the Quixote Center the following year, along with Dolly Pomerleau, whom he eventually married days before he died.

Such are the origins of The Center of Concern. Its Web site is: <http://coc.org>

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