

National center marks 30 years of helping Catholic laity

ROMEDEVILLE, Ill. – For 30 years the Chicago-based National Center for the Laity has been helping lay Catholics respond to the Second Vatican Council's call to them to change the world through their daily activities and regular responsibilities.

The center "is fairly small, but it's been a light and voice for many years," said John Hazard, a center board member. It has been implementing the ideas of Vatican II at a grass-roots level one person at a time, he said.

"There's something like 2.6 billion Christians in the world. If every Christian was (adhering) to the values of the Gospel, this world would be a different world," added Hazard, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Downers Grove, which is in the Joliet Diocese.

Vaile Scott, president of the National Center for the Laity, said that more than 40 years after the close of Vatican II in 1965 some are still waiting for the message of council documents to be implemented, especially the call for the church to look outward and the laity to bring the Gospel message to the world.

Instead, integrating the laity into the institutions of the Catholic Church has become the center of attention, said Scott in a telephone interview with the Catholic Explorer, Joliet's diocesan newspaper.

Hazard said the faith community's role is to support individual Catholics in carrying their faith beyond the church walls and into their everyday lives.

"A parish exists to provide Catholics with the pastoral care needed to enable them to undertake the task of evangelization," Hazard said.

That vision calls on parish ministries to become true support groups, said Bill Droel, another center board member and a pastoral associate at Sacred Heart Parish in Palos Hills.

They should sustain laypeople working in their families, professions and communities to promote the Gospel, he said, and should include those who work for justice by changing internal workplace policies on labor practices.

“We’re going to lose an entire generation of people if they don’t realize their vocation is in the workplace,” Droel said.

Over the last three decades, the National Center for the Laity has developed into a network of support for those who have embraced the concepts of Vatican II, he added. A newsletter Droel edits links together more than 3,200 people in the United States and abroad.

The center also has become a recognized resource for research on the topic of church, world and society. Droel said individuals and organizations consult the organization on various matters of poverty, justice, family and labor.

Editor’s Note: More information about the National Center for the Laity is available online at www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm.