

Nonprofit Sector Unionization and Gender Equity

Learning Lessons From a Case Study
of a Teacher Organization in the
St. Louis Archdiocese

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This article examines issues that arose between a large Catholic archdiocese and its elementary school teachers when the latter organized to form a union to negotiate over wages, benefits, working conditions, and grievance procedures. Similar tensions are likely to reoccur in archdioceses across the country as the number of nuns continues to decline and parochial schools are forced to hire lay teachers. The St. Louis, Missouri, story underscores the gender inequity inherent in this area of nonprofit organizations' labor relations; indeed, gender equity is the silent and heretofore invisible dimension driving major developments observed in the St. Louis experience. Similar gender equity-oriented developments likely lie ahead in labor relations in the nonprofit sector as it expands its role in the contemporary hollow state of American government.

In 1997, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* published a special issue that focused on small religious nonprofits. In the introduction to the special issue, Cnaan and Milofsky noted that “action related to and rooted in religious life has increasingly important policy significance” (p. S4). If small religious nonprofits are having increasingly evident impacts on public policy, consider the role that the Catholic Church and its many large archdioceses and associated nonprofits (e.g., St. Vincent De Paul, Catholic Charities, etc.) can have in their communities. Religious institutions absorb more than half of all private charitable contributions in the United States, and they account

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for a disproportionate share of the private voluntary effort in American communities (Salamon, 1999, p. 149). It is important to understand that more than half of the revenues of both Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services come from *government* grants and contracts (De Vita, 1999, p. 222). Under the Charitable Choice provision of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (P.L. 104-193 § 104), religious affiliated nonprofits can compete for government contracts or accept vouchers on an equal basis with private sector parties without giving up the religious character of their faith-based programs. Whether one considers welfare reform, K-12 education, or criminal justice “community-based” programs, the growing role of religious and secular nonprofit organizations is clearly evident.

What might happen, however, if the practices of some religious organizations serve to diminish the role of women and their contributions in society? How might these practices affect the delivery of services provided? In *Women and Power in the Nonprofit Sector*, many contributors argued that although the preponderance of the workforce in the nonprofit sector is female, the sector as a whole is controlled by an elite male power structure. Moreover, many scholars pointed out that within the nonprofit sector, occupations tend to be distributed by gender. For example, men are financial officers and doctors, whereas women are teachers and nurses (Odendahl & O’Neil, 1994; Odendahl & Youmans, 1994; O’Neill, 1994; Steinberg & Jacobs, 1994). Viewed from within this nonprofit sector setting, will the growing influence of religious institutions on nonprofit services further reinforce the inequitable status of women within nonprofit organizations?

This article presents the results of a case study on the attempt to unionize on the part of Catholic elementary school teachers in St. Louis, Missouri. The value of the case is that it calls attention to the “stained glass ceiling,” an issue that is affecting communities across the country. Although the case focuses on the gender power issues of Catholic school elementary teachers, the tensions and issues it discusses may be generalized to other nonprofits as well, as they inevitably confront unionization drives among their employees in other female-dominated professions such as health and child care (Peters & Masaoka, 2000; Pynes, 1997).

The discussion of gender equity and economic justice in the case study of the St. Louis Archdiocese requires some background on church policy and practices. The *Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, approved by the

National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 12, 1996, states the following:

All people have a right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.

On the second day of its 1996 semiannual session, the Conference approved a 10-point guide for Catholics and church decision makers based on the premise of the right of economic and social justice. These statements of principle represented a reaffirmation of the principles articulated in the 1986 Pastoral Letter from U.S. Catholic Bishops, which states, in part, that

All Church institutions must . . . fully recognize the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively with the institution through whatever association or organization they freely choose. . . . All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the church and its agencies and institutions; indeed, the church should be exemplary. . . . No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself.

Despite the clarity of these policy proclamations, these principles were not adhered to by the St. Louis Archdiocese and the Board of Catholic Education for the archdiocese when they refused to recognize the Association of Catholic Elementary Educators (ACE) as an organized labor unit. What follows is a case history of the efforts undertaken by elementary school teachers seeking to have their association recognized as a union by the St. Louis Archdiocese. The St. Louis experience illustrates the gender power dynamics that shaped events in this labor relations dispute and likely will shape events in the many nonprofit workforce unionization efforts that lie ahead in the American “hollow state” (Milward, 1994; Milward, Provan, & Else, 1993).

GENDER, POWER, AND THE CHURCH

To place this case study in a broader context, we begin with a discussion of gender equity as it exists in society at large. We then examine the gendered nature of organized and institutionalized religion in this country as it is reflected in the major institutions of American Catholicism. Clearly, the administration and functioning of a Catholic archdiocese do not exist

in a vacuum but rather are reflective of—and shaped by—both official church structures and practices and broader societal, economic, and political gendered assumptions and power relations.

Gender equity (or inequity) is best understood as a manifestation of the myriad relations existing between women and men (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995). The character of interpersonal relationships and the nature of assumptions held about gender very often “mask and subsume power relations” (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995, p. 19). Following this line of reasoning, gender relations in most societies have been (and continue to be) more or less relations of domination (Flax cited in Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995, p. 19). In the American polity, virtually all major avenues of public power, and the authoritative organizations used in their implementation (including religious organizations), have historically been controlled by males. “Public authority, whatever the particular arrangement, has rested with men” (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995, p. 19).

One important but largely invisible byproduct of men’s domination of institutional power has been their ability to allocate societal values and resources through a self-justifying ideology. Men’s position atop social institutions has enabled them to structure institutions, create laws, legitimize particular knowledge, establish moral codes, and shape culture in ways that perpetuate their power over women (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995, p. 20).

From this perspective, masculine assumptions underpin the norms of social relations. This ensures that in most circumstances, when women engage in organizational leadership and politics, they do so within masculine norms (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995, p. 20). These constraints act to restrict the successful integration of women into positions of organizational power, leadership, and authority. It can be argued that this ideology of male dominance undergirds most religious organizations.

The stained glass ceiling is evident across religious organizations. We use the concept of the *stained glass ceiling* to refer to the barriers that preclude most women from breaking through to the upper levels of religious organizational hierarchies. Most fundamentally, women’s place in religion is strictly circumscribed by adherence to tradition and to some biblical teachings. Debate centers on whether biblical teachings are (or should be) absolute or subject to interpretation. This issue is at the heart of gender equity in religion debates, not only among Catholics but also among Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Jews, and Baptists. For example, according to the Reverend Bill Merrell, official spokesman for the Baptist

Church's national convention's executive committee, "most Southern Baptists support the Apostle Paul's assertion: 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence'" (Broadway, 2000, p. A6). Furthermore, although women can be ordained and serve in such positions as youth pastor, minister of music, and education director, "we believe that the office of pastor is reserved to men as qualified by Scripture" (Broadway, 2000, p. A6). This holds true for Catholicism, in which the church limits the priesthood to men (Levins, 1999).

The masculine norms that frame gender relations ensure that women's place and contributions within religious organizations either go unnoticed (are rendered invisible) or, when their actions move women into the spotlight (for example, protesting for equal rights or, if permitted to do so, preaching), their behavior becomes trivialized or, at worst, even vilified. Interpreted through a gender lens, pro-status quo/antiwomen rhetoric serves to remind women of their place—namely, strictly subservient to men in the organizational schema. In way of a salient example, the following account is instructive.

In 1984, Kelly Sisson became the first woman to preach in the chapel at New Orleans Theological Seminary, one of six graduate schools run by the Southern Baptist Convention. The next Sunday, a local pastor pronounced the chapel's pulpit "demonically possessed" because a woman had preached there. The next month, delegates . . . at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution discouraging the ordination of women for "pastoral functions and leadership roles." (Broadway, 2000, p. A6)

Although this reference to a female preacher and the devil may be atypical, it is clear that, whatever the purported justification, women remain underrepresented in positions of power, leadership, and authority within the religious hierarchy across denominations. The numbers speak for themselves. For example, within the Baptist Church there are approximately 40 female pastors in the 15.8-million-member denomination (Broadway, 2000, p. A6). Given the current decision to reserve the role of pastor for men only, these numbers are unlikely to increase. In our specific case study of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, the numbers are similarly revealing. Of the clergy, comprising the archbishop, 3 auxiliary bishops, 458 diocesan priests, 363 religious priests, and 213 permanent deacons, none are women. It is revealing that, subordinate to the clergy, there are 145 religious brothers and 2,120 religious sisters. Clearly, men hold all the upper division roles, with women holding the majority (68%) of subordinate roles.

Religious organizations manifest the broader societal norms and assumptions that we have described as masculinist in nature. Women are very much underrepresented at the top of the church's hierarchy in all categories. At the same time, women make up a majority of Catholic teachers at all levels, with men dominating at the administrative, leadership levels. Such overrepresentation of men in positions of power, and the corresponding overrepresentation of women in subordinate positions, provides fertile ground for the expression of gender power relations.

To illustrate gender power relations, we turn now to a case history of Catholic elementary school teachers and their attempt to win approval to form a union. On its face, this process should have been uneventful. Interpreted through a gender lens, however, the teachers' attempts to gain an equitable allocation and distribution of power and resources were frustrated with numerous serious obstacles. "Seeing"¹ gender in this case study clarifies the power dynamics at the center of relations between the elementary teachers and the archdiocesan leadership and helps explain why their demands could, for the most part, be summarily dismissed.

BACKGROUND

The archdiocesan school district is Missouri's oldest and largest school district. The first Catholic school in St. Louis was established in 1818, 30 years before the first public school. According to the Catholic Education Office, in the 1996-1997 school year there were 44,218 students in the 157 Catholic elementary schools and 15,193 students in the 29 Catholic high schools in the archdiocese ("Fast Facts," 1997). ACE formed during the spring of 1996 to institute a grievance procedure and fight for parity in pay and benefits with teachers who work in archdiocesan high schools. High school teachers have had union representation since 1968, and they are represented by the St. Louis Archdiocesan Teachers Association. The St. Louis Archdiocesan Teachers Association negotiates salary and benefits, working conditions, and the rights and responsibilities of high school teachers within the archdiocese.

Such union representation has clearly served them well. In terms of pay and benefits, the high school teachers are better off than their counterparts at the elementary school level. Elementary teacher salaries range from \$16,890 to \$32,530 a year, whereas high school teacher salaries are considerably higher (up to \$40,500 per year). In addition to their higher salaries, high school teachers receive more generous benefits than elementary teach-

ers. The archdiocese pays 100% of high school teachers' health insurance premiums and 85% of their families' health insurance costs. By contrast, the archdiocese pays only 85% of the elementary teachers' insurance and 50% of their family health insurance. High school teachers can accumulate 175 sick days, whereas the elementary teachers can only accumulate 60 sick days. A final disparity between the elementary and high school teachers is that the high school teachers receive free tuition to the archdiocese high schools, whereas the elementary teachers get \$500 off the high school tuition for their children (Sauerwein, 1996).

According to equity theory, employee motivation not only depends on the pay and performance relationship that the employee experiences, but it also depends on the pay and performance of *other* employees with whom the person compares himself or herself. Social comparisons are very important (Adams, 1965). After comparing their salaries and benefits to those of the high school teachers, the elementary teachers sought to correct a situation that they perceived to be in serious imbalance.

Research suggests that employees are most often attracted to unions as a result of being dissatisfied with organizational rewards, or because of the lack of responsiveness by management to employees' needs, or because of perceived arbitrariness in supervisory behavior (Berger, Olson, & Boudreau, 1983; Farber & Saks, 1980; Walker & Lawler, 1979). All three of these conditions played a role in this case. The initial catalyst for union membership concerned the lack of representation on a committee charged with setting salaries and benefits. The elementary teachers were not permitted to select teaching staff representatives for this committee—a committee that convenes once every 3 years for the sole purpose of determining the pay and benefits of elementary school teachers. In December 1996, the Catholic Board of Education, composed of 24 religious and lay members, approved a salary and benefits package for elementary teachers that would give teachers, on average, a 4% raise for the 1997-1998 school year. A committee of 10 people, including 3 lay teachers, devised the specific compensation contract. ACE protested the committee's lack of representation at the negotiating table. Thus, at the behest of elementary school teachers, ACE sought to receive recognition of teacher grievances by the archdiocese and to represent them in negotiating and ratifying grievance procedures, working conditions, benefits, and salaries.

In June 1996, Rita Schwartz, a representative of the National Association of Catholic School Teachers (NACST), came to St. Louis to speak to elementary school teachers about forming a union. NACST, founded in

1978, is a nationwide organization of elementary and secondary lay teachers employed in Catholic schools working for the welfare of teachers and students; it currently has more than 5,000 members throughout the nation. Catholic elementary teachers have formed unions in a number of states, including Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, Youngstown, Scranton, and Pittsburgh), Ohio (Columbus), and New York (Buffalo and New York City).

Although the elementary teachers in the St. Louis archdiocese suffered from low pay and benefits, among their most fundamental concerns was a perceived lack of respect on the part of the archdiocese (Huppke, 1996). This is a common complaint among teachers. For example, in an early study of teacher satisfaction (Sergiovanni, 1967), it was concluded that sense of achievement, recognition for one's work, and respect are the main contributors to satisfaction among elementary teachers. Similarly, Wickstrom (1973) found that teacher satisfaction came from a sense of achievement, the work itself, good interpersonal relationships, and the sense of responsibility felt for the welfare of one's school. By contrast, dissatisfaction came from a sense of lack of achievement, poor school policy and administration, unfavorable working conditions, and negative job effects on the teachers' personal life. Mylketum (1985) also found that teachers were satisfied by social interactions at work, exercise of control over work processes, adequacy of demands, and perception of meaning and pride from one's work. Sweeney (1981) found that teachers' satisfaction increased with levels of personal discretion, sense of empowerment, and feelings of collegiality in the school. Taken together, these findings are reflective of the classic two-factor theory of motivation articulated by Herzberg (1959).

During October 1996, the dissatisfied elementary teachers of St. Louis convened and voted on a constitution and elected officers from among their number. Robin Heimos was elected president of ACE. Archdiocesan officials, however, refused to recognize ACE as a union, arguing that because the elementary teachers were employed by individual parishes, the archdiocese was not the legitimate employer and, hence, lacked the authority to recognize ACE as the collective bargaining agent.

This argument is subject to reasonable challenge. The financial resources for parish schools come mostly from tuition, fund-raisers, and church donations. The archdiocese gives about \$1 million each year to help subsidize nine elementary schools from poorer parishes. This financial assistance comes from the Archdiocesan Development Appeal, an annual fund-raising drive that begins each spring and raises about \$8.5 million. Monies

from the Archdiocesan Development Appeal fund are used to maintain existing parishes and to build new ones. With this context in mind, it can be argued that most of the individual parishes pay for the schools they run, with the exception of the poorer north St. Louis schools that receive financial aid from the archdiocese. However, to avoid competition between schools in more affluent areas and schools in poorer areas, the salaries for elementary school teachers are the same throughout the archdiocese. No district may pay salaries higher than the poorest parish can afford. In reality, then, it is the archdiocese and not the parishes that sets teacher salaries and establishes conditions of employment. ACE contended that the archdiocese is a de facto employer because it sets the policies of the parishes (Sauerwein, 1997b).

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The archdiocese's lack of recognition of ACE as a union provoked more assertive actions from ACE and its supporters. In February 1997, a group of Catholic elementary teachers hand delivered a letter one Saturday morning to Archbishop Rigali asking him to appoint a task force to study the possibilities and financial implications of recognizing the group as a union. The letter stated that if the archbishop failed to respond by 10 a.m. Sunday, the teachers would peacefully protest from 6 to 7 p.m. Sunday evening in front of the St. Louis Cathedral. That was an hour before Rigali, numerous archdiocesan officials, and local parish representatives were to gather for a prayer service.

The ACE threat went unheeded and the protest rally took place as threatened. Approximately 200 elementary teachers sang Christian songs and waved signs of protest. The teachers marched in a circle and carried blue and white signs that read, "We have the right to be recognized by the Archdiocese" and "ACE teachers have the right to economic justice." Members of the carpenters, plumbers, and Teamsters unions supported the rally and protested alongside the teachers. Other union members distributed information to members of their own parishes (Sauerwein, 1997a, pp. B1, B4).²

Although this civil disobedience did not move the archdiocese, it made quite an impression with members of the St. Louis community. Such intense attention was not surprising, of course, given that the largest religious denomination in the St. Louis region is Roman Catholic, featuring more than 549,000 members (Cargas, 1997). Support for the elementary teachers was clearly building. On Friday, January 31, 1997, the St. Louis

Board of Aldermen passed a resolution supporting the teachers' efforts to be recognized as a union. Teachers also received financial and other support from the Carpenters District Council of Greater St. Louis. The St. Louis Labor Council also supported the teachers and urged its members to write officials in the archdiocese asking them to reconsider recognizing the group as a union. St. Louis has a strong tradition of collective bargaining, with more than one fifth of the area's households having at least one union member. Labor and its interests are typically given a serious hearing (Jones, 1997).

Lacking any response (official or otherwise) from the archbishop, ACE attempted to increase the pressure on the archdiocese incrementally. One month after the February protests, the Catholic elementary teachers voted to ask parishioners to withhold church donations until the archdiocese recognized the teachers' new union. ACE asked that donations be withheld from weekly parish collection baskets, the annual Archdiocesan Development Appeal, and other fund-raising efforts. ACE wanted parishioners to set the money aside and donate it to the church later, once the union was recognized. Another strategy used by ACE was to picket in front of Archbishop Rigali's residence for 2 hours every Saturday and Sunday.

Together, these several tactics produced a first response from the archbishop. Toward the end of March 1997, Archbishop Rigali canceled a meeting he had previously scheduled with 15 teachers (Sauerwein, 1997c). To demonstrate their disappointment with the cancellation and the archbishop's apparent disregard for their grievances, 30 teachers picketed St. Louis Cathedral 1 hour before Archbishop Rigali and other priests were to gather for a Holy Thursday Mass. Fifteen members of the St. Louis carpenters union also showed their support by picketing with the teachers. The archbishop finally relented, at least symbolically.

ARCHDIOCESE RESPONSE

Archbishop Rigali appointed a commission to study how elementary teachers could receive higher pay and benefits. The commission was officially called the Archbishop's Commission on Parish School Teacher Relations. Commission membership included six teachers (two seats for leaders of ACE), pastors, principals, parents, and members of the Catholic Board of Education (Sauerwein, 1997d, p. B4). Archbishop Rigali appointed Joan Hrubetz, the dean of St. Louis University's School of Nursing, as chair of

the commission. The commission was scheduled to report its findings to Archbishop Rigali and the Catholic community in June 1997.

One could argue that this appointed commission, charged with studying the problem, represented little more than a symbolic gesture on the part of the archbishop. The archbishop appointed each of the members, and the parameters of the discussion were set by the archdiocese. The commission was specifically prohibited from discussing collective bargaining and from holding any discussions on restructuring the elementary school system.

Predictably, ACE criticized the archbishop's refusal to allow the commission to discuss collective bargaining, given that those rights represented the central plank in the teachers' platform. It should be noted that ACE did contend that the commission was more or less the task force it had originally proposed. But given the events of the preceding several months and the lack of response by the archbishop, ACE members remained dissatisfied. In reflection of this dissatisfaction, they voted to suspend their subscription to the *St. Louis Review*, a newspaper issued by the archdiocese that the group believed was biased against them.³ Subscribers were asked to write *ACE* on the front page of the paper and mail it back to the archdiocese. ACE members also voted to continue picketing the archbishop's residence on weekends. More significantly, Robin Heimos, the president of ACE, explicitly failed to rule out the possibility of a strike (Jauhar, 1997).

On June 19, 1997, the Archbishop's Commission on Parish School Teacher Relations submitted a progress report to Archbishop Rigali. The report stated that the commission planned to discuss, over the next several weeks, the following issues: (a) who should be represented in the compensation process; (b) how information will be gathered during the process; (c) how to determine what will be discussed and accepted in the process; and (d) how the archdiocese can better communicate with teachers, parishes, and pastors (Kenny, 1997). These sessions were attended mostly by teachers but also by numerous parishioners, priests, and other interested parties. Many session participants recommended that elected representatives are needed on a committee that determines compensation issues.

WHERE THINGS STOOD

In the past four decades, dioceses nationwide have felt increased financial pressures as lay teachers replace their religious counterparts. Indeed, many parish schools have no nuns. Nationally, there are 98,000 lay teachers

and 8,000 religious teachers at the elementary level, a ratio of 12:1. At the secondary level, the proportions are similar, with 43,000 lay teachers and 4,000 religious teachers (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Dioceses can no longer rely on paying nuns low salaries; they must hire lay teachers who have greater financial demands. Not surprisingly, labor and church experts expect more lay teachers to attempt unionization to have their demands met (Sauerwein, 1997b). Archdioceses across the country must reconcile how they can uphold the church's teachings on economic justice as they set teachers' salaries and benefits and attempt to bridge the gap between Catholic elementary teachers and their counterparts in public schools. In the St. Louis example, Catholic elementary school teachers start at approximately \$17,000 per academic year, whereas teachers in the St. Louis public school system start at \$25,000—a discrepancy of some 32%. ACE president Heimos predicts that if Catholic teacher salaries remain low, higher teacher turnover and lower quality education will follow.

It should be noted that the Catholic elementary teachers are not of one mind regarding the issue of unionization. Instead of supporting the ACE agenda, some teachers are embarrassed by the picketing at Archbishop Rigali's home and by asking parishioners to withhold donations. One dissenting teacher stated, "nobody becomes a Catholic school teacher to get rich" (Sauerwein, 1997b, p. A13). One principal shared his concern that with a budget of \$500,000, his school barely breaks even. He said that if the teachers' salaries increased, the school would have to cut back correspondingly in other areas. The school also cannot afford to lose students whose parents cannot afford to pay more than the school's \$2,400 tuition (Sauerwein, 1997b).

Viewed from a gender lens, it can be argued that the Catholic elementary teachers (mostly women) are being placed in an unenviable position. Either they continue to be silent and remain largely invisible (and reject their claims for fair and equitable treatment on the job) or they pursue their collective bargaining goals and thus become responsible for the sad fate of Catholic elementary schools in the poorest area of the city. In both scenarios, the outcome rests squarely on their collective shoulders. Such a moral and economic burden placed (either implicitly or explicitly) on the majority of the female teachers by the prevailing power structure (mostly male) is a reminder of gender power dynamics at play and reflects a "blame the victim" approach.

In October 1997, the Archbishop's Commission for Parish School Teacher Relations presented its recommendations to Archbishop Rigali for

his review and response. The report recommended that the elementary teachers should have a real voice and continuous involvement in salary and benefit discussions. Similarly, parishioners, pastors, parents, and others in the Catholic community have a major stake in these issues, and their respective voices should be heard. It was further recommended that collaboration and consensus, rather than confrontation, are effective in promoting the educational mission of parish schools. Parish schools are a parish responsibility, but consistency among schools on salary and benefit issues is in the interest of all parishes and families ("Archbishop Rigali Studying Process," 1997). Joan Hrubetz, chair of the commission, was optimistic that Archbishop Rigali would follow the commission's report.

Initially, Archbishop Rigali agreed to present his public response in early November 1997. However, Rigali postponed making a formal announcement, citing his hectic travel schedule and a need to consult more widely within the archdiocese. He announced that his response would come after further study, which would include additional discussions with the various constituencies represented on the commission and others. At that point, 1,000 teachers had signed membership forms to join ACE (Autman, 1997b).

Although Archbishop Rigali had not yet released or commented on the commission's report, the archdiocese announced that Catholic parish school teachers would now be eligible for financial aid to help send their own children to parish schools or other Catholic schools in the following year. The aid would come through a \$1 million endowment established by the archdiocese. Interest on the \$1 million would be applied to school tuition. Teachers could apply for grants in the spring of 1998, and grants would be awarded in the summer of 1998. Initially, there would be \$50,000 in scholarships available. That amount would grow as the endowment principal grew. These grants were in addition to the \$500 tuition assistance currently available to elementary teachers for archdiocesan, regional, and parochial high schools.

At the same time, and still with no official response to the commission's report, a committee in the archdiocese's Human Rights Commission advised Archbishop Rigali to permit the elementary teachers to unionize. According to a confidential memo released in November 1997, the Reverend Richard Creason, Chair of the Labor and Religion Committee of the archdiocese's Human Rights Commission, called on Rigali to acknowledge ACE as a bargaining unit (Autman, 1997a, p. A8).

Frustrated by the archbishop's silence, ACE began to contemplate taking him to court if he did not recognize the organization and grant teachers collective bargaining rights. During the week of November 16, 1997, members of the organization agreed to recruit 200 more members to bring the association's membership to 51% of the elementary teachers in the archdiocese.

By December 13, 1997, ACE had secured 1,206 signatures, which represented a majority of teachers working for the St. Louis archdiocese, and requested that the archdiocese recognize ACE as a union. According to Robin Heimos,

All along, any time I have talked to people at the archdiocese they say "You don't have a majority of the teachers." Well that's no longer an excuse to not recognize us. [She continued,] The archbishop could expect to receive a certified letter requesting a face-to-face meeting with ACE leaders. Having a majority of teachers as members gives ACE a legal right to demand a union. (Autman, 1997c, p. 8)

ACE sent a certified letter to the archbishop asking him to meet with them now that their membership included 1,206 teachers. In the letter, ACE president Robin Heimos threatened to release the commission's report the next month if the archbishop refused (Autman, 1997d, p. C2). On January 9, 1998, and with no word on the report, Archbishop Rigali awarded \$160,000 in funding to a scholarship endowment fund benefiting children of parish teachers and staff members. Fund interest would be used for tuition-assistance grants for the 1998-1999 school year. This financial assistance came from money raised by the 1997 Archdiocesan Development Appeal, which had exceeded its goal of \$48.68 million by \$320,000. In an effort to support the parish teachers in other ways, the 1998 Archdiocesan Development Appeal designated \$100,000 to the elementary teachers' professional growth fund. These offers of assistance for tuition and training may be viewed more as ad hoc attempts to lower the voices of ACE and its supporters than as a genuine attempt to be responsive. We believe this to be the case because ACE and teachers had requested a meeting with the archbishop along with the release of the commission's report and were denied on both counts.

THE ARCHBISHOP'S DECISION

After waiting for months, Archbishop Justin Rigali issued a formal *no* to union recognition and collective bargaining on January 15, 1998. Instead, he proposed a new partnership committee between teachers and the archdiocese. The 20-member committee would be called the Parish Teacher Compensation Committee. The archbishop stated,

Teachers spoke; they were heard, and action is being taken to address their concerns, the new partnership is about representation for teachers. It is also about support for our shared education mission . . . I believe this is the most effective structure to proclaim the mission of Jesus Christ in our own schools. (Ellick, 1998a, p. A6; Schremp, 1998a, pp. A1, A10)

The committee would be composed of 10 teachers elected by their peers, representing elementary teachers in the area's 152 Catholic elementary schools. One elected teacher would represent each of the 10 deaneries throughout the archdiocese. Elections would be held in spring 1998, with the first committee meeting scheduled for May. The other 10 members would consist of pastors, parishioners, parents, and others appointed by the Board of Catholic Education. This new committee would replace the current Educator Relations Committee. Recommendations from the Parish Teacher Compensation Committee would be submitted to the Board of Catholic Education and the archbishop for approval by late fall 1998 (Ellick, 1998a; Kenny, 1998a; Schremp, 1998a). As such, the committee was strictly advisory in nature with limited power and authority.

The official rhetoric masks this reality. According to Archbishop Rigali, "the creation of the Parish Teacher Compensation Committee will greatly strengthen the voice of teachers and recognize their right to a significant role in compensation matters" (Ellick, 1998a, p. A6). He said he would commit the archdiocese to increasing the pay of elementary teachers and to making that pay comparable to that of Catholic high school teachers. As a caveat to the archbishop's promises, the superintendent of the board, George Henry, stated that pay equity was not possible in the short term (this would require about \$12 million), nor was he sure how long it would take to achieve in the longer term (Ellick, 1998a, p. A6).

The archbishop's formal refusal to recognize the union was justified on the grounds that he wanted to uphold the "unique structure of parish schools within the archdiocese and the unique relationship between parish teachers, parish schools and the archdiocese" (Ellick, 1998a, p. A6; Kenny,

1998b, p. 10; Schremp, 1998b, p. B4). Furthermore, he wanted to respect teachers' rights to decide whether to join and wanted teachers to avoid penalties or pressure for not doing so. The archdiocese issued a statement saying, "there will be no sanctions imposed or pressure brought upon any teacher as a result of joining or declining to join a professional organization or union" (Ellick 1998a, p. A6).

The teachers had also asked for ways to resolve noncompensation issues such as working conditions and grievance procedures. The archbishop asked the Board of Catholic Education to address this issue as an "urgent priority" and to report to the vicar of education by May 31, 1998, with recommendations that would address the concerns within the context of parish-based schools. The archbishop characterized the new committee and partnership as follows:

Our new partnership is about listening to teachers, hearing what they say and taking action to make sure their rights are honored and needs addressed. The teachers have clearly said they want to be valued for the work they do, paid equitably and treated fairly. Teachers must have good working conditions in which they are treated with respect. (Kenny, 1998b, p. 10)

Taken together, the various official pronouncements by the archbishop were more symbolic than substantive. ACE complained that the "new partnership" gave power to the vicar of education and to the archbishop, not to the teachers. According to ACE president Heimos,

There are many things missing in this plan, and there is very little representation for the teachers. This is not much better than what we've got now. Under the plan the teachers elected to the compensation committee would only have the power to make recommendations. Those ten teachers also would not need to go back to the teachers for approval of any salary agreement. (Ellick, 1998b, p. A2)

Heimos also objected to the plan's omission of any process for dealing with working conditions or grievances. ACE wanted the teachers to have a vote on any agreement that the compensation committee would reach. ACE also wanted the archdiocese, not individual parishes, to oversee working conditions. The elementary teachers characterized the archbishop's plan as divisive and a waste of time and money (Singer, 1998, pp. B1-B2). According to a teacher with three decades' experience in the archdiocesan system, "Teachers have no ownership. The archbishop has the same control he's had for 31 years" (Singer, 1998, pp. B1-B2). For his part, archdiocesan

school superintendent George Henry defended the proposal, saying it would bring both sides together to reach consensus. “Everybody wants salaries for the teachers to improve, but the issue here is one of finances and how we can best get the people to the table to make this happen” (Singer, 1998, p. B2).

The leadership of NACST and ACE rejected framing the issue as one of financial constraints. Rather, Rita Schwartz (of NACST) and Robin Heimos (ACE president) highlighted the gender power relations that were shaping the process. Schwartz is quoted as saying, “Father *doesn’t* [italics added] know best. . . . He’s going to tell you he doesn’t have the money” (Huppke, 1996, p. B10). For her part, Heimos stated that if the majority of the teachers in ACE were men instead of women, the current situation would be quite different. “Women have always taken a back seat in the church,” she said, “I’m sure if this were largely a men’s organization, we’d have our recognition by now” (Singer, 1998, p. B2). The election process was similarly gendered. According to Heimos,

The election at the school level is supervised by the principal—that’s a problem. An archdiocesan official approves it at the deanery level. Moreover, the archdiocese has the ultimate say in any contract decision. In the end, the teachers have no say. (Schremp, 1998b, p. B1)

OUTCOMES

During February 1998, the archdiocese leadership finally agreed to meet with members of ACE to discuss the implementation of the partnership—with a number of qualifiers. First, ACE had to agree “to write in its bylaws that it is a Catholic teacher *union-association* [italics added] and agree not to participate in negative tactics associated with unions, ending the picketing and economic boycotting of the archdiocese” (Autman, 1998a, p. B1). Archdiocese leaders tentatively agreed to terms that would allow the teachers a voice in any salary negotiations. It should be noted that this tentative agreement does not recognize the teachers’ group as a union nor provide collective bargaining, but it allows ACE an advisory role. The terms of the tentative agreement include the following: (a) Members of the teachers’ group will be able to vote on any recommendations by the Partnership Committee before the committee sends its recommendation to the Catholic Board of Education; (b) the teachers’ group will be allowed to recruit members openly and pass out information to members as salaries and bene-

fits are being negotiated; (c) the group will set up a system to provide updated information to its members as compensation packages are being worked out; (d) the archdiocese will pay for a reasonable number of mailings to all 2,400 elementary teachers; (e) 2 of the 10 teachers on the compensation committee will be able to talk freely with the Catholic Board of Education and answer any questions the board has about the committee's recommendations; (f) the teachers will not ratify any contracts but will be allowed to vote on salary recommendations before they go to the Catholic Board of Education, but ultimately Archbishop Rigali has the final authority over salaries and benefits; and (g) the archdiocese will set up a grievance board so that teachers will have a forum for concerns about working conditions (Autman, 1998b, p. C1; Autman, 1998c, p. B4; Ellick, 1998c, p. A1).

On February 28, 1998, approximately 400 Catholic elementary teachers voted in favor of the agreement. Almost 2 years after organizing efforts began, ACE and the archdiocese reached an agreement that, for the most part, resolved their differences. The teachers will now have input on salaries, benefits, working conditions, and grievance procedures. The archdiocese will also recognize ACE as an acceptable professional organization for Catholic elementary teachers (Volland, 1998) but not as a union.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church has long been committed to worker justice and supports labor unions. So what explains the St. Louis archdiocese's refusal to accept ACE as the union representative for elementary school teachers? We believe it is because religion is a gendered enterprise. The trivialization of the Catholic elementary teachers' struggle for recognition and for fair and equitable working conditions has implications well beyond the archdiocese of St. Louis.

Nonprofits are the entry point into the labor force for many women (Boris & Steuerle, 1999; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Abrahams, Crutchfield, & Stevenson, 1996). Today, more single mothers are taking jobs (Pear, 2000), and the number of families in which two parents work is now a majority (Lewin, 2000). Most of the employees in today's nonprofit service sector are women. Whether it is caregivers in nursing homes and agencies for the developmentally disabled, nurses and health care technicians, or childcare workers, nonprofit employees are organizing for better staffing, professional development, improved wages, and family benefits.

Any analysis of relations between the administrative elite and employees that ignores the power and presence of gender is likely to produce an incomplete picture. Inequities in power and authority shape the character of relations within organizations. It is telling that ACE referred to the entire process as being about control, whereas the archdiocese characterized it as being all about protocol (Autman, 1998c). We agree with Ring (2000) and Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995), who would view the events as rife with masculinist ideological assumptions and being gendered throughout.

The St. Louis experience reflects many of the values, tensions, and conflicts that characterize the daily lives of women in the workforce. Gender power relations in many religious organizations mirror the power relations embedded in the political culture at large (Newman & Guy, 1999). If nonprofit organizations are to thrive, women and men must collaborate with one another to ensure that women are participants not only in providing direct services such as teaching, counseling, or nursing but also in agenda setting and policy making. As religious organizations and community-based nonprofits are drawn increasingly into the delivery of human and social services, public monies (grants and contracts) should not be provided to nonprofits that undervalue the contributions of women and relegate their legitimate concerns to only symbolic consideration.

NOTES

1. For more on this concept, see, for example, Jennifer Ring's "Feminist Theory as Seeing" (2000).

2. Although unions, in general, have traditionally been inhospitable to female empowerment and women's unionization and participation, this perspective is undergoing change. For example, the role of unions in work life issues has been positive and important (Hoyman & Duer, 2000).

3. Articles from the *St. Louis Review* were used in the preparation of this article. The authors did not notice any particular bias in these articles.

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