

RURAL ROOTS ■ BROTHER DAVID ANDREWS, CSC

Our (Catholic) Localism

Local economies, local food systems, and local control: the word local is in the news frequently these days. The focus seems to be a reaction to the globalization process in general. It also reflects the fact that many in today's economy fear that their welfare is not being included as jobs and markets circle the globe. It is not unusual to hear about the fear of downsizing or re-location of jobs to areas outside the United States. Increasingly this includes agriculture; thus the question is raised in Stephen Blank's book, *The End of Agriculture in the American Portfolio*.

Just recently the newspapers reported that the balance of trade has shown that the United States was importing more food than ever. So, perhaps Blank's thesis is correct, perhaps we don't need to grow our own food!

One of the themes I thought we should explore more fully in *Catholic Rural Life Magazine* is the theme of localism. The principle of subsidiarity, from Catholic Social Teaching, has found a place in international law through the development of the European Union. Subsidiarity is surely "our," meaning "Catholic," localism. It has relevance in many domains: economics, government, parish community development, politics, the law, and corporate governance. Unfortunately it is rarely called upon as an effective instrument for governance or for organizational design and administration. It is a principle recognized in American history in the words of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and that great explorer of *Democracy in America* Alexis de Tocqueville.

This issue of *Catholic Rural Life* explores the concept of subsidiarity and that of the local economy. It does so with a focus on Jane Jacobs, a Canadian commentator,

whom I believe should be better known by Americans, by Catholics, and by people in the rural life and local food movement. She is in her late 80s. Her focus in these pages is on the community as an economic unit...the city, the village, the metropolitan settlement or the rural habitation. I believe that the links between her work and Catholic social teaching on subsidiarity deserve illustration.

By choosing selectively from Jane Jacobs' work, I believe I can communicate how "our" localism is grounded in a kind of "natural law" which can be appreciated by Catholic and non-Catholic alike. I hope the exploration of these ideas can lead to more effective support among our friends

and among citizens generally, for local economies, local control, anti-corporate farming laws, local food systems, the parish as a dynamic entity for parishioner engagement, the localization process as a necessary contemporary dynamic. Our localism appreciates the local, the inter-local and the trans-local as three interrelated processes.



Subsidiarity is our localism; it reflects a bias toward the local. But in Catholic Social Teaching it is balanced by solidarity, which takes us beyond the local to the interlocal or regional and the translocal or national and international.

The three perspectives belong together in a holistic perspective. But in a priority situation, the bias toward the local, or subsidiarity deserves to find its effective place in activism, policy development and advocacy. Unfortunately the phrase *think global, act local* doesn't adequately capture the significance of the priority words, **Act Local.** ■

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference is a membership organization grounded in a spiritual tradition that brings together the Church, care of community and care of creation.