

STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY



How teachers at Catholic scho

The educational system in the Catholic Church has been firmly in place for hundreds of years and the story of people challenging that system dates at least from the 12th century founding of the universities of Bologna and Salerno. But our brief history begins closer to the present day with what Nick Bridger, former president of the San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation of Teachers, affectionately referred to in a letter to *California Teacher* as “our brave little Catholic school union.”

The struggle to be recognized as dedicated professionals sharing financial parity with their public school counterparts began in times of great change, shortly after the Second Vatican Council ended and the Civil Rights Act had become U.S. law. For many teachers, motivation stemmed from the Catholic Church’s teaching on the dignity and rights of the worker coupled with the drive to make their schools better.

Though it came at a cost, their struggle was not in vain. Built on a proud tradition, today the Archdiocesan Federation is a group of professionals with a shared vision of a brighter future for the Catholic high school communities we serve. We walk in the footsteps of those who helped us arrive at where we are today. This history is dedicated to those courageous men and women.

Teachers strike for recognition

During the 1960s, teachers in the San Francisco diocesan high schools began to voice opposition to being

treated as if they were clergy who had taken a vow of poverty. They formed the Lay Teachers Association in June 1967. Within a year the new movement morphed into the Secondary Teachers Association with its constitution signed on June 12, 1968.

Contract negotiations with church officials began in January 1971, with the Teachers Association asking for a 12 percent raise over three years and the Archdiocese offering 8 percent. Frustrations boiled over in early November. Members rejected the offer and then voted to strike on November 15. The strike soon saw emotions escalate.

Twenty-two teachers held a sit-in at the Chancery in San Francisco on December 2, and all were arrested. Twelve chose jail time (four days would be served), while 10 others accepted police citations. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, all were lay teachers but one — James

Gallagher, an AFT representative, who was locked up for what the Association President Jerry Killian called “a matter of conscience.”

The 24-day strike ended December 9, with teachers accepting a 10 percent raise over three years. The *Chronicle* quoted Killian as saying, “Both sides compromised... teachers voted to end

ers turned to deciding who would represent them as their voice into the future. The teachers had two groups speaking for them — the CFT, a traditional labor union, and the Secondary Teachers Association, the independent professional association.

Under an agreement between the Association and the Archdiocese, a

The San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation stands alone as the only union in a Catholic secondary system west of the Mississippi whose faculty is affiliated with a national labor union.

the strike because they were hurting financially after 3½ weeks, because they wanted to get back to classes and because they felt they had created a base to get further improvements.”

As teacher representatives were formally recognized, and tempers cooled, the discussion among teach-

secret ballot vote was held January 18, 1972. In the end, 79 teachers sided with the Association and 81 with the CFT. The close vote reflected some teachers’ viewpoint that CFT philosophy was not consistent with private Catholic education. Nonetheless, on March 6, the collective bargaining agreement between the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2240, was signed.

Nick Bridger, a leader for 18 years in the Archdiocesan Federation, put the historic agreement in perspective when he told the *California Teacher*, “Because of the strength of our local union and its collective bargaining agreement, which included strong tenure and grievance provisions (notably binding arbitration), my career as an educator included respect, professional development and use of a wide range of teaching skills in enriched, healthy and balanced educational settings.”

Placing the victory in larger con-



Teachers strike in December 1971 at Junipero Serra High School in San Mateo. This photo was published in the student newspaper, *Serra Friar*. The strike for recognition lasted 24 days.

COURTESY LOCAL 2240



By Christian Clifford

Member schools today

- **Marin Catholic High School**
Kentfield
- **Junipero Serra High School**
San Mateo
- **Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory**
San Francisco
- **Archbishop Mitty High School**
San José
- **Archbishop Riordan High School**
San Francisco

ols built their unions against all odds

text, former CFT Secretary Treasurer Michael Nye explained, “Catholic teachers participated in collective bargaining long before their public school counterparts. Local 2240, the San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation of Teachers, was one of the earliest education collective bargaining units in California, preceded only by private sector AFT locals of film studio teachers and the private Westland School in Los Angeles.”

The Archdiocesan Federation won its collective bargaining agreement three years before Governor Jerry Brown in 1975 signed the Educational Employment Relations Act that brought collective bargaining to public school employees.

Power spreads to Jesuit university

Influenced by this success, elected faculty representatives at the nearby University of San Francisco, a Jesuit school, called for a meeting with the university president in the fall of 1975. He scoffed at their requests.

In a hasty election overseen by the National Labor Relations Board, faculty voted 155-48 in favor of the union. The University of San Francisco Faculty Association, AFT Local 4269, was founded, and began bargaining its first contract in November.

Elliot Neaman, current president of the Faculty Association, said, “I think the main thing that Catholic schools, indeed all schools, are missing when they are not unionized, is leverage. We have a contract which clearly states the rights of the administration and the rights of the faculty. When those rights are violated, we have powerful tools to address them.”



An English class at Archbishop Riordan High School was pictured in the former city newspaper *Call-Bulletin* in the 1950s. Riordan High today, pictured on top, is still a school for young men.

Success and failure in the south

At the same time University of San Francisco faculty began exercising their newly won rights, teachers in one of the largest Catholic school systems in the United States began to empower themselves.

In April 1975, an organization of 600 teachers from 26 high schools formed in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, then consisting of Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Orange counties. United Catholic Secondary Teachers Association, AFT Local 3448, was founded. Marian Hull, a teacher

short-lived. On March 21, 1979, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its devastating ruling *NLRB v. Catholic Bishops of Chicago, et al.* In a 5-4 decision, the court said the government may not regulate labor relations in church-operated schools under the First Amendment. Church officials argued they had never recognized United Catholic as the official voice of the teachers. This decision swiftly ended organizing by United Catholic.

Catholic school unions today

Today, collective bargaining units in Catholic elementary and secondary schools continue to be recognized by church officials in the Archdiocese of New York and dioceses in seven states.

Yet in 2005, at Brother Rice High School in Birmingham, Michigan, an organizing drive was opposed by church officials who argued First Amendment protections and referred to *NLRB v. Catholic Bishop of Chicago, et al.* At Brother Rice, the church, which often bears witness for the cause of labor, was victorious against labor under its own roof.

The San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation stands alone as the only union in a Catholic secondary system west of the Mississippi whose faculty is affiliated with a national labor union. For 39 years we have stood side by side with our brothers and sisters in public schools.

at Mater Dei in Santa Ana, was the founding president who went on to become an inspirational leader in CFT.

Two years later, United Catholic led a strike that resulted in improved communication between United Catholic and the Chancery.

Progress in the Southland was

Christian Clifford teaches theology at Junipero Serra High School in San Mateo and has been a teacher in the Archdiocese for 14 years. He comes from a family with strong union ties and is president of the San Francisco Archdiocesan Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2240.

