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# Frederic Siedenburg, SJ: The Journey of a Social Activist

Edward J. Gumz

*This is an archival study of Frederic Siedenburg, SJ, a Jesuit, who founded the first Catholic-Jesuit School of Social Work in the United States at Loyola University of Chicago in 1914. This study examines the multi-faceted career of this sociologist who served at two Catholic universities from 1914 through the 1930s when Progressivism and the New Deal in the United States were attempts to deal with social reform; the Catholic Church, in a variety of ways, responded to these reform efforts. Siedenburg espoused Catholic social teaching and attempted to carry out its tenets within a Catholic context as an educator and administrator, a social theorist and social activist. He was also an ecumenist and known for his reaching out and engaging in dialogue with other religious bodies.*

**F**REDERIC SIEDENBURG, SJ, WAS ONE OF A HANDFUL OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS who were active in trying to bring about a more socially just society in both the Progressive Era and the New Deal. Distinctive about Siedenburg was his activity at the university level as an administrator, in the community, and at the broader societal level in efforts for justice for women and for the working class. Siedenburg sought to understand the meaning of Catholic social teaching within the American context of his time and also what Catholic social teaching meant to him as a Jesuit priest.

Catholic social teaching refers to the documents issued by those who hold an official teaching position in the Roman Catholic Church, that is, the bishops, and in particular, the bishop of Rome, the pope. This includes papal encyclicals beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of Labor—1891) but also includes documents of the World Synod of Roman Catholic bishops and national conferences of bishops. Catholic social teaching addresses the role of the Church in addressing issues of economic justice, politics, human rights, war and peace. (Thompson, 2010)

For Siedenburg, as one who espoused Catholic social teaching, especially the tenets of *Rerum Novarum*, this study will examine his efforts to advance social and economic justice in an American context. He advocated for the rights of women to obtain an education at the university level, and he urged the passage of various types of legislation to protect the rights of the working class from labor practices that were detrimental to them. He also urged the establishment of parish labor schools where parishioners could learn about their rights as workers and the principles of organizing in the workplace. He believed that social work education should address the big issues of the day—the condition of labor, pensions for the elderly, and child labor laws. Social work, according to Siedenburg, should be the carrying out of Christ's Gospel on a large scale. Yet Siedenburg struggled with the form society needed to take to advance social justice. He was disenchanted with capitalism and its inability to adequately address the social problems that were created due to individualism and competition. He believed that the settlement house movement was a promising effort to bring a new social form to the community. He went so far as to visit Russia to appraise socialism as a way of life but returned disappointed in what socialism had to offer in terms of quality of life for people.

Siedenburg's core identity was not that of a sociologist or social worker but a Jesuit priest. He was a member of the Society of Jesus, which was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. The Jesuit order is composed of men who are followers of Jesus Christ, who take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and who live in community. They serve the Roman Catholic Church in a variety of endeavors, but are known best for being outstanding educators and have founded many schools and universities throughout the world. James Martin, SJ, (2010) in a recent book about Jesuit or Ignatian spirituality, indicates that Jesuit beliefs can be summarized under four headings: 1) Finding God in all things, meaning that God can be found in all dimensions of life is a core Jesuit belief; 2) Jesuits are contemplatives in action—by being aware of the world around us—in the midst of our activity—Jesuits believe we can permit a contemplative stance to inform our actions in the world; 3) Jesuits believe in an incarnational spirituality, meaning that God can be found in the everyday events of one's life; and 4) Ignatian spirituality is about freedom and detachment, meaning separating oneself from whatever keeps one from being free (e.g. status concerns, materialism) so that one can be free, in the Ignatian view, to serve God and one's fellow human beings.

Siedenburg stated that the two most important things for him as a Jesuit were obedience and charity. For him, we can surmise that his interpretation of Catholic social teaching was significantly shaped by his advanced studies in Austria and Germany at a time when the meaning of *Rerum Novarum* and its implications were being debated and implemented. Siedenburg's superiors had wanted him to study chemistry, but he was able

to convince them that he wanted to study sociology—obedience at times can be negotiated. Later in his career, his views on ecumenism clashed with Chicago's cardinal and there was no negotiation, so he was transferred to the University of Detroit where he resolutely continued the work that he had begun in Chicago. For Siedenburgh, through the process of discernment, he strove to make sense out of God's will for him and what Catholic social teaching meant in twentieth century urban America.

### **Formative Years**

Siedenburgh was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1872, to a Lutheran father and a Catholic mother; the family had emigrated from Germany. Frederic was the third of five children. He attended the Cincinnati public schools and graduated from Xavier College in 1893. He had an early interest in political affairs and at age fourteen he regularly read the *Congressional Record*. He entered the Jesuit novitiate and pursued advanced studies in philosophy and science and received his master's degree from St. Louis University in 1899, and he was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1907. His superiors wanted him to study chemistry but he convinced them that he should pursue studies in sociology and economics. From 1909-1911, Siedenburgh studied these subjects at the Universities of Berlin, Innsbruck and Vienna. While there, Siedenburgh became familiar with the works of prominent Catholic social thinkers such as the Jesuit economist, Heinrich Pesch, the Jesuit moral philosopher, Victor Catherin, and Bishop Wilhelm Von Ketteler, all of whom were trying to determine Catholic responses to economic modernization in Europe, and in particular, what should be the Church's response to industrialization and its consequences for the working classes and the poor. The writings of these thinkers influenced the formulation of Pope XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which upheld the dignity of the working person, defended the right to private property, condemned socialism, and offered a dual option for class conflict in capitalist societies—trade associations or Christian trade unions (Gleason, 1968).

Siedenburgh returned to his assignment in Chicago, inspired by his European studies, but also convinced that the Catholic Church must be a leader in social reform. In 1911 he was assigned for two years as headmaster of Loyola Academy. During this time he began to organize the Loyola University Lecture Bureau, which gave extension lectures on topics of social interest. Siedenburgh saw large numbers of religious and lay personnel in Chicago who were interested in being educators and social workers but were not prepared for the work.

Commenting on Siedenburgh's early work at Loyola University, Robert Hartnett, a friend of Siedenburgh for many years, commented, "early Jesuits at Loyola like Father Siedenburgh caught the vision of a Jesuit apostolate on a university scale in Chicago as the best answer to the question: how

can we Jesuits best carry out the mission of the Church in this burgeoning, emerging democratic society?" (1964, p. 2)

The Lecture Bureau provided speakers for both Catholic and non-Catholic groups: church societies, fraternal organizations, and women's clubs. The speakers included Father Siedenburg, Mary Bar telme, the judge of Chicago's new juvenile court, lawyers, social workers, and other reformers. Among the thirty topics offered were The Social Problem Today, Capital and Labor, A Program of Social Reform, Minimum Wage, Workingmen's Compensation Laws, Delinquency and Dependency, and Woman (sic) Suffrage. Schiltz (1989) observes, "in this pre-radio era, such lectures provided one of the widest means of disseminating the new social and philosophical ideas that he (Siedenburg) had encountered in Europe to the growing urban middle classes" (p. 110).

### **The University Administrator**

The appeal of the Lecture Bureau, both in terms of the number of people it attracted as enrollees, but also as an introduction to topics of the day, put Loyola University at the forefront in terms of social reform. The Jesuit magazine, *America*, praised the Lecture Bureau as "the beginning of a great movement that ought to spread over the entire country and praised its constructive work...covering practically the entire industrial, economic and social field" (Blakely, 1915, p. 15).

The success of the Lecture Bureau led to the founding of Loyola's School of Sociology in 1914 with Siedenburg as its first dean; it was the first Catholic/Jesuit school of its kind in the United States. The focus was "applied sociology" or what has become known as professional social work. Austin (1986), in his concise history of social work education, indicates that in the early era of social work education a number of schools were founded, each with a somewhat different focus, as their names indicate (p. 2). For example, in 1903, Graham Taylor, Headworker of Chicago Commons Settlement House, together with Julia Lathrop of Hull House, established the Institute of Social Science which became the School of Social Administration at the University of Chicago; the St. Louis School of Social Economy was established in 1905, and the School of Applied Social Sciences was established at Case Western University in 1916. So it was not unusual at the time to find a School of Sociology educating professional social workers.

The curriculum of the School reflected Siedenburg's educational experiences in Europe—his encounters with German social science and the scientific method, with leaders of Catholic social thought, and his studies of history and economics, especially as these disciplines attempted to make sense of the social changes being brought about by capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization. The curriculum of the School consisted of courses

that explored the origins and causes of social problems such as poverty from economic, social, and psychological viewpoints. The second part of the curriculum dealt with educating students about various strategies and techniques to use in work with individuals, groups, and communities to affect change. Third, students were engaged in the practice of social work by working as interns in a field work agency. Fourth, the curriculum brought a Catholic social justice framework to the education of social workers. Of interest is the fact that a Loyola education in social work had a sociological focus. A 1915 advertisement on file in the Loyola University Archives states "Modern charity workers must have training. Poverty today is not individual but social; most of the relief must be social" (Siedenburgh Collection, Loyola University of Chicago Archives).

As Dean of the School of Sociology, Siedenburgh developed innovative scheduling. The School offered classes in the afternoon from 4:00-6:00 p.m. and the Dean introduced the idea of part-time study throughout the University. This attracted more working adults into the School and the University. The programming of the School of Sociology was so successful that by 1919-1920, it enrolled 1094 students (Cook: 1993, p. 74). As an administrator, Siedenburgh was a pragmatist and he knew that more students would increase the financial resources of both the School of Sociology and the University.

Dean Siedenburgh also introduced co-education to Loyola University. The first women were accepted into classes in the School of Sociology in 1914 and subsequently received their degree. This was a major break from a 350-year-old tradition of admitting only male students to the College of Arts and Sciences in Jesuit schools (Paskey, 1985). Siedenburgh was an outspoken champion of co-educational higher education for women.

In 1921, Siedenburgh undertook the task of reorganizing the School of Law while he served as a regent. In 1922, he helped to establish the Home Study Division, a correspondence school, which lasted for twenty years. In 1926, Siedenburgh helped to establish the School of Commerce and served as its regent; it is now the School of Business of the University.

In spite of these successes, there were storm clouds on the horizon that affected the future of Siedenburgh's work at the University. Father Wlodzienierz Ledochowski, SJ, was Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 1915-1942. This leader saw the order through two world wars during which the size of the order actually increased. But he had strong opinions about which direction the order should be moving. For example, he indicated that co-education was disapproved by the Church and was against the educational traditions of the Society; the Superior General demanded that the attendance of women be discouraged even in summer and extension courses. The Father General's letter was discussed at a Consultors' meeting on November 16, 1928, but the issue was remanded to the rectors of the province where it disappeared. One suspects that if women would not be

allowed to attend the University, this would have resulted in a substantial economic loss (Consultors Meeting Minutes, December 22, 1919, Loyola University of Chicago Archives).

Another issue which affected Jesuit higher education in the 1920s was the desire of a number of Jesuit schools to seek university status by becoming affiliated with professional schools which were predominantly non-Catholic. At Loyola this was not an important issue because it was already a university and professional schools were infused with a Catholic ethos. But the issue of non-Catholics attending Loyola was also raised and what influence that might have on Catholic students. Siedenburg was again a pragmatist in responding to this issue. He indicated that a religiously diverse student body might be appealing to accreditation bodies, there would be more income for the University, prejudices would be lessened, there might be some conversions to Catholicism, and a diverse student body would be a better reflection of the real world. Siedenburg himself was an ecumenist and was well-known in Chicago for his reaching out to other religious groups and articulating the Catholic viewpoint. In 1928, for example, Siedenburg appeared at a forum with a rabbi, a Protestant bishop, and agnostic Clarence Darrow, each articulating their particular religious or non-religious conviction (Skerrett, 2008).

Siedenburg's administrative responsibilities were the Downtown College, which included the School of Sociology, the School of Commerce, the School of Law, and a division of the College of Arts and Sciences. There were initial charges that the academic quality of Arts and Sciences at the Downtown College was not as good as at the Lakeshore Campus, the primary undergraduate campus of the University. An investigation ensued and these charges proved to be unfounded. In addition, William T. Kane, SJ, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, wanted Loyola to be a school only for men; he also felt that professional schools were not part of the core mission of the University and that co-education did much harm. A debate occurred but co-education remained and the professional schools continued. In fact, Siedenburg wanted to expand the downtown campus with an endowment of \$500,000 for professorships, fellowships, and research. Siedenburg wanted to expand the arts and sciences offerings in the Downtown College, add more buildings, (thus competing with DePaul University's expansion), and add more courses to hopefully attract Catholic students who attended the University of Chicago and Northwestern University (Siedenburg Collection, Loyola University of Chicago Archives).

But in the Archdiocese of Chicago, Cardinal Mundelein had his own ideas about higher education, which had an impact on Loyola University and Father Siedenburg. Mundelein was Archbishop of Chicago from 1916-1939. He was known for his prowess in accumulating and using power to further the superiority of the Catholic Church in Chicago. As Edward R. Kantowicz (1983), indicates in his definitive work on Cardinal Mundelein,

*Corporation Sole: Cardinal Mundelein and Chicago Catholicism*, Mundelein wanted the Catholic institutions of Chicago, whether schools, charities, colleges, or churches, to be Catholic, powerful, and the best. He was not an advocate of co-education and established separate women's colleges through the founding of Rosary and Mundelein Colleges. He envisioned one great Catholic university of Chicago under one financial and governing board. This would include St. Xavier on the south side, Rosary on the west side, and Mundelein on the north side. Loyola and DePaul Universities would also be part of this consortium—the Catholic University of Chicago. This vision was never realized.

As much as the Cardinal relished making big plans and watch their implementation, he also involved himself in details of the University's management. He insisted that names of prospective heads of departments be submitted to him first and that he have a say in all decisions. In addition, he was a foe of ecumenism and forbade the rector of the Loyola Jesuit community to speak at an ecumenical meeting.

The Cardinal did not seem to have concerns about the functioning of the Graduate School, the School of Law, or the School of Dentistry, but in a communication between Loyola President, John Furay, SJ, and Matthew Germing, SJ, Head of the Missouri Province, which did have jurisdiction over Siedenburger, the Cardinal had deep concerns about the School of Sociology.

But in the Sociology Department things are different. I don't know why, but his Eminence does not appreciate Fr. Siedenburger. Moreover, Fr. Siedenburger's position brings him into a prominence that often makes him represent the Catholic element in Chicago life. How the new rector is going to act or to solve his problems, I don't know. However, I do know that the Cardinal is a very difficult man to oppose, but I think much more will be gotten out of him by going along with him so far as principles and rights permit (Letter from John B. Furay, SJ, to Matthew Germing, SJ, 1927).

Abruptly in August 1932, after eighteen years at Loyola University, Father Siedenburger was transferred to the University of Detroit where he became executive dean.

The oral tradition of this dismissal and exile involves a conflict between the conservative ideas of Cardinal Mundelein, the Cardinal of Chicago and the progressive ideas of Father Siedenburger, specifically ecumenism, i.e., his extensive religious and social interaction with Protestants and Jews... Father Siedenburger sorted out his personal belongings from his desk and was driven to the University of Detroit by a fellow Jesuit (Paskey, 1985).



This version of what happened seems to have been confirmed in a letter from Robert Hartnett, SJ, one of Siedenburg's close friends.

Mundelein kicked Siedie out of Chicago, after 21 years. No whimpering (sic). Siedie rose to the top in Detroit immediately. Mundelein was offended by Siedie's ecumenism. Siedenburg was just a full generation ahead of the Church (Robert Hartnett to Matthew Schoenbaum, May 15, 1976, Loyola University of Chicago School of Social Work files).

Between the time of the meeting between John Furay, SJ, Loyola University President and Matthew Germany, SJ, Head of the Missouri Providence, which held jurisdiction over Siedenburg, and his leaving Loyola, there was a time span of five years. What may account for this? Siedenburg was a very popular figure in Chicago because of the range of his civic activities, his leadership in the social services and social work education, and his ecumenism. The Cardinal who was so committed to building Catholic institutions may have viewed Siedenburg's ecumenical stance as some kind of threat.

In a statement given to the *Chicago Daily News*, Siedenburg commented briefly on his leaving. "I have tried to interpret the church to the community...and have tried just as sincerely to interpret the outside world to the church. I believe I am a better priest when a better citizen and the better citizen the better priest I am" (Gifford Ernest, "Father Siedenburg's Work Here on the Eve of Departure." *Chicago Daily News*, August 4, 1932: In Skerrett, 2008, p. 128).

### **The Social Theorist**

In Siedenburg's obituary in the Woodstock Letters, it is stated, "Father Siedenburg had not the temperament of a student..." (The Woodstock Letters, 1939, p.190) This may account for the fact that Siedenburg did not write extensively in the scholarly literature of his day. However, he did write three articles (two articles dealing with social work and one dealing with war and the Church) which appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, a peer reviewed journal, in addition to a number of book reviews and other articles in religiously related periodicals. Two articles dealing specifically with social work will be discussed here.

In 1920, one of Siedenburg's articles was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* with the whimsical title of "The Recreational Value of Religion" (Siedenburg, 1920). It is an analysis of settlement houses of the day in light of religion and sociology. Siedenburg indicates that the word "religion" is derived from two Latin words, *re* and *ligo*, meaning "to rebind." "It is the conscious binding of the creature to the Creator" (p. 445). Siedenburg goes on to ask how religion, this link between the hu-

man and the divine, can be a recreational value. Recreation, Siedenburg explains means “to re-create,” “to make new,” “to revitalize,” “to rebuild.” “Religion’s highest recreational function consists in this, that it lifts the mind and heart from the humdrum, the noise, the turmoil, the common-places of life, to the calm, consoling strata of another world” (p. 446). Of course, this is not the primary function of religion, states Siedenburg; it is a personal affair between Creator and creature. Siedenburg asserts that the Church through history has created a range of institutions to assist people to build and to revitalize their lives and community. Using an historical approach, Siedenburg asserts that abbeys and monasteries played vital roles as community centers but with the growth of individualism “preached in religion by the reformers of the sixteenth, in politics by Cromwell and his cohorts in the seventeenth century, and by Ricardo and Adam Smith by the laissez faire school of economics in the eighteenth century...community consciousness received its death blow” (p. 448).

One of Siedenburg’s goals in early twentieth century Chicago was the following: “Today with might and main we are trying to bring the world back to the social consciousness which flourished in the Middle Ages, due primarily to the religious doctrine of the brotherhood of men” (pp. 448-449). Community centers, according to Siedenburg, are schools of citizenship and places where people can develop an appreciation of the arts, music, singing, dancing, and the manual arts. But while religion may inspire the creation of community centers, Siedenburg did not see it as a school of religion. “The program of a social center, while it does not include religion, must if it is intelligent have respect for it, because back of nearly all of its exercises it is religion that supplies the uplifting character. Citizenship, without the dictates of the moral conscience, would be a slavish observance of man-made laws” (p. 453). Siedenburg calls for the separation of Church and State in societal institutions even though he calls for religion to inspire these secular institutions.

In the *American Journal of Sociology*, Siedenburg (1922) wrote an article titled, “The Religious Value of Social Work.” Here Siedenburg seeks to answer the question, “Is there a connection between social work and religion?” Siedenburg argues that this is denied by the pietist philosophy that fails to see the natural basis of the world of the spirit and the materialist mind that sees religion as only a philosophy and not as a way of living. The truth lies somewhere in the middle; religion is basically the observance of God’s law, both materially and spiritually. This is synonymous with social welfare, according to Siedenburg. Social work benefits the individual through the group by scientific thought and action. This does not impair religious values, but multiplies them. “Religion means that the wealth of the world should be so distributed by secondary causes that every child of Adam should enjoy an equality of opportunity, so as to guarantee as Leo XIII said, “a human minimum of frugal contact” (p. 639) (Ryan, *Rerum Novarum*, 1911).

Siedenburg sees “systematic social work” as charity on a large scale—charity that has its roots in a religious impulse, “through such socialized legislation as mothers’ pension funds, workingmen’s compensation acts, and child labor laws, to realize their contributions to the fundamentals of religion” (p. 642).

Siedenburg goes on, “In a word, the ideal of religion is charity to our brother and the ideal of social work is this same charity made efficient by study and method and applied to many brethren” (p. 642). Siedenburg enumerates the historical efforts of the Church to provide charity through the ages. For example, the ministrations of the early Church in its “communitistic life,” the monasteries and their care of the sick, homes for orphans, and the guilds’ establishment of loan banks and legal bureaus. But by the eighteenth century, the efforts of the Church were being supplanted by secular institutions over which the Church had little control. Siedenburg sees the Church as the institution that is the innovator in efforts to help others; “yet today, as in the past, every forward movement for the weaker members of society is inaugurated by the Church or private initiative because the unwieldy and impersonal state is content to follow where they lead” (p. 644).

Siedenburg was also a member of the state commission planning the centenary observance of Illinois’ admission to the union. He believed that Catholics needed to learn more about the role of the church in the history of the state and helped to establish the Illinois Catholic Historical Society at the School of Sociology at Loyola University of Chicago in 1918. From its beginning it was supported both financially and physically by the University. The goal of the society was to study and survey the Catholic history of Illinois, collect historical works, documents, records, physical artifacts and other materials, and create a Catholic library and museum. Knowledge of Catholic history was disseminated in the *Illinois Catholic Historical Review*, a quarterly journal. Siedenburg was the first editor of the journal, with the first volume appearing in 1918 and continuing until 1929 when the name was changed to *Mid-America*. In 1933, the society participated in the Century of Progress World’s Fair in Chicago with an exhibit of Father Marquette’s cabin. The journal, *Mid-America*, was published until 1993 (Young, 2009).

### **The Social Activist**

Siedenburg brought his philosophy of social work into his activities as a social activist. In an article titled, “Training for Social Work,” (Siedenburg, 1921) he outlined the activities that the profession of social work needed to be involved in. He noted that the important word in social work is “social.” All social work takes three forms; the first is temporary or direct relief, meaning provision of food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless and medical aid to the sick. He notes, “under modern conditions social

work is not worthy of the name if it stops with temporary or direct relief” (p. 322). Second, social work may take the form of rehabilitation, “aid given to remove the cause rather than the effect of distress; thus making the charity “clients,” as Miss Richmond, (the founder of the Charity Organization Society Movement in nineteenth century America and casework as a social work technique) calls them, help themselves back to normal life. This is obviously more difficult, and clearly more beneficial than temporary or direct relief. It is “*constructive social work*” (idem.). Today we would refer to this as therapy or counseling efforts by the social worker with the client. Third, the highest form of social work is preventive, “where evil is foreseen and the need of relief anticipated by *prevention*” (idem.). Here Siedenburgh uses the example of tuberculosis, which was prevalent in his day. “Instead of doctoring and burying the consumptive or even of curing the incipient patient by fresh air and wholesome food, we campaign for anti-tuberculosis legislation and anti-tuberculosis modes of living. This is *preventive social work*” (p. 323). To engage in these different types of social work, the curriculum, Siedenburgh believed, needed to educate students with the values and ethics of the profession, knowledge about individuals and societal functioning, strategies and techniques to engage in change, and a fieldwork or internship experience.

Early in his career at Loyola University of Chicago until 1921, Siedenburgh participated actively in the “Central Verein” (mutual aid society or association), composed of American German Catholics who were trying to come to grips with what it meant to be an urban Catholic in this country. There were a number of organizations such as these in American cities, including Chicago, Buffalo, and St. Louis. In addition to maintaining the use of the German language in their meetings and providing charitable acts for their members, these societies were influenced by the work of German Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler (1811-1877), whose ideas were important in trying to formulate the role of the Church in influencing the social order in nineteenth century Germany. Ketteler was concerned about the impact of capitalism on the working class and the poor. He sought to educate workingmen and women about the social problems of the day, along with some proposed solutions—wage increases, shorter hours of work, prohibition of child laborers in factories, and workers’ unions. Ketteler hoped that Christian capitalists, as they would become knowledgeable about the injustice of these conditions, would present ideas for change to legislators.

The Central Verein of Chicago and Siedenburgh wanted to establish a “Study House” in conjunction with Loyola University, “to provide a center for social education and an agency for social action” (Gleason, 1968, p. 120) that would be similar to the Ketteler model. Siedenburgh became involved in a complex dispute with the American Federation of Catholic Societies (AFCS), the Knights of Columbus, and other Catholic organizations, all of which he wanted to support the study house idea, “so

that a real unification of Catholic forces could be achieved in the realm of social action” (p. 149). The leadership of the Central Verein reacted with concern to Siedenburg’s move. They felt that these other groups would reduce the power of German-speaking Catholics and would diminish the bold ideas of Ketteler and more conservative and conciliatory ideas would emerge. Siedenburg served as the broker among these groups to create a social action coalition. One would suspect that because he was exposed to the ideas of Ketteler while he was a student in Germany, he was partial to them. Although Siedenburg continued to talk with German-speaking groups throughout Chicago and the region about the role of the Church in social reform, the advent of World War I delayed the Study House project. It was permanently abandoned in 1921. However, the Church recognized Siedenburg’s interest in labor relations shortly before his death in 1939. He and three other priests and four laymen were appointed by the archbishop of Detroit to establish labor schools in various Detroit parishes. These schools were to teach Catholic views on industrial problems as well as public speaking and parliamentary law.

Siedenburg was involved in a number of arenas to generally improve the quality of how social services were delivered, to mount efforts with others to ameliorate the ills that social problems, particularly poverty, had created for so many, and to advocate for legislation that would prevent social problems from developing in the first place. Robert Hartnett, SJ, a close friend of Siedenburg, commented, “He viewed sociology and social work as the carrying out of Christ’s Gospel of love in the most effective, systematic way possible” (1964, p. 8). Siedenburg was also an exemplary community citizen and was involved as a member in a wide range of activities, even beyond social services. He served on the Board of Directors of the Chicago Public Library, sat on the Illinois Centennial Commission, served on the State of Illinois Welfare Board, was President of the Illinois Conference of Social Work, and was twice a member of a commission that traveled through Latin America to study Pan-American relationships. In Chicago, Siedenburg was involved in various types of committee work with social work leaders as Jane Addams (who gave some lectures in Loyola’s School of Sociology), Edith and Grace Abbott, and Katherine Lenroot. While at the University of Detroit, during the Depression, he was a member of the Detroit Emergency Relief Commission, was appointed by President Roosevelt to serve as Chairman of the Detroit Labor Board, was a trustee of the Detroit Council of Social Agencies, and served twice as President of the Michigan Conference of Social Work, and “served as arbitrator in labor disputes at the request of the governor and mayor” (Woodstock Letters, 1939, p. 188).

Schiltz (1989) comments on Siedenburg’s organizational memberships, examining them in light of his Progressive credentials. He belonged to typically Progressive organizations as the National Conference of Social Work, the American Sociological Society, the Child Labor Commission,

the League of Nations Association, and the American Association of Social Workers. As early as 1921, he was a member of the Society for the Advancement of the Colored Race. Such membership at that time, according to Arthur Link, “was the mark of a “radical Progressive” in the twentieth century” (1963, p. 54).

Siedenburg spoke to a range of audiences—professional, non-professional, and ecumenical—throughout the country on a wide range of topics. He presented a lecture to the Catholic Women’s League of Davenport, Iowa on March 7, 1928, on the topic of sanitary dairies.

By being interested in sanitary dairies, I may do more charity than by giving thousands of dollars to poor widows and orphans; clean dairies mean pure milk and pure milk means less typhoid and more normal healthy families. If we could solve our economic problems, half of our charity problems would solve themselves (Siedenburg Collection).

He goes on to state that tougher governmental standards requiring sanitation would in the long run save money and enhance the quality of life for people.

In a brief 1930 article, Siedenburg inveighed against the film industry in America for the production of films that glorified wealth, luxury, and crime, and de-emphasized the importance of hard work. Siedenburg argued that these films were exported around the world and glorified the superiority of American values over those of other nations, particularly European countries, which Siedenburg saw as being more artistic and refined. Siedenburg supported legislation in the United States Senate in 1930 to regulate the film industry, declaring it a public utility, subject to public control. His support of this legislation is consistent with the Progressive faith in the value of government regulation (Schiltz, 1989, p.111).

As a social activist, Siedenburg’s special area was in labor issues, addressing in a variety of forums such concerns as inadequate wages, especially for women, efforts to regulate the length of the work day, minimum wage laws, legislation to improve working conditions, the right of labor to organize, laws regarding industrial safety, and the legality of the strike and the boycott.

While at the University of Detroit, Siedenburg developed a special interest in labor relations; he was an excellent arbitrator and negotiator. An obituary written at the time of Siedenburg’s death speaks to this.

American labor has lost an able and understanding friend through the death this week of Rev. Father Frederic Siedenburg, so did American industry. Father Siedenburg was a disinterested champion of industrial justice and peace. He was especially valuable in his frequent role of conciliator. In industrial disputes both sides always trusted him implicitly

because they knew he didn't want a thing from either one of them (*Detroit Times*, February 23, 1939).

In an article on the importance of national labor boards, Siedenburg advocated the following:

At present industry has gone back to the old regime of *laissez-faire*, with its rank materialism and its human greed.... This brief but stern story of labor is the best argument for a workingman's board or court...an agency created to know the problems of labor and to adjust them in the common interest of labor, of industry, and of the public... we must have national labor boards, and if they cannot fit into the framework of our Constitution, we must make amendments to that august document in keeping with the spirit of our government.... Interstate commerce has been regulated for a hundred and fifty years, and now on account of new conditions we must regulate labor and finance and agriculture and interstate commerce for the public welfare (Siedenburg, 1936, p. 354-55).

Five years before the Social Security Act was passed in 1935, Siedenburg (1930), wrote an article "A Plea for Old Age Pensions," dealing with financial support for the aged. He argues, as he did repeatedly, that the root causes of poverty were not personal, but were economic, social, and political and that alms and poorhouses are not permanent solutions to the poverty of the aged. Rather, old age pensions are constructive solutions for the aged poor and actually a saving to the state. Siedenburg indicates, that based on available data, two or three persons can be supported by what it costs to maintain one person in an institution.

The state, which acts for us as a group, has made adjustments in many places by the fiat of the law, for the child, the widow, the workingman and the workingwoman...we should use every means at our command—money, persuasion, personal service, the ballot and legislation—to stop forever our inhumanity to the dependent aged...let us take up the challenge of our citizenship and to our religion and by constructive legislation give relief to the aged poor (p. 38).

Writing in 1930, Siedenburg called on social workers and unions to unite for better working conditions, improvement in the wages of working men and women, and community improvement. But Siedenburg was not only concerned about the material conditions of life for working people but also referred to Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, who called for "reasonable comfort, meaning not only sustenance but the joys of mind and

heart and those satisfactions that are eminently human and which lift man from nature to nature's God" (Benziger, 1911). Siedenburgh asserts that the contribution of the social worker is distinct to the life of the worker.

But the social worker aims in an organized way to realize the most for the laborer's wage and leisure in terms of more education, profitable recreation, and the obvious benefits from civic and cultural contacts, aiming ultimately to make a worker not a receiver but a giver by serving not only his own group, but the community...social workers and labor unions must keep their faces to the east and see in its sunrise a better future, not only for industry, rural and urban, but for all the world (1930, p. 51).

Siedenburgh (1930) was critical of capitalism producing so much, with great wealth concentrated in the hands of the wealthy; he appears to have yearned for at least a reformed capitalism when he said, "there is no reason to believe that our competitive capitalistic regime need be permanent" (p. 49). He advocated a more equitable distribution of money in society and that the excess be used to create more leisure and culture, thus making a more fulfilling community life which he felt social workers could help create.

In addition to his involvement in a range of social activities, Siedenburgh engaged in his role as a priest in Chicago. When he first came to Chicago, before his Loyola University of Chicago assignment, he served as a priest at the Sancta Maria Addodorata Church on Grand Avenue and North Peoria Streets; it still exists but has been re-located. Siedenburgh started a Sunday school with eight teachers and 200 students; there were both Italian and African-American children in the school. Within several years, under Siedenburgh's leadership and organization skills, the Sunday school grew to an enrollment of 800 students and seventy teachers. Siedenburgh acted as a general supervisor, but also was involved in teaching. The Sunday school grew to such an extent that additional rooms were rented in the nearby Montefiore public school. Once at Loyola, Siedenburgh preached regularly on Sundays at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in suburban Wilmette, Illinois. (Siedenburgh Collection, Loyola of University Chicago Archives)

### **The Man**

Robert C. Hartnett, SJ, a political science professor at Loyola, was a close friend of Siedenburgh for many years, both at Loyola and the University of Detroit. In an address to Loyola's Jesuit Community in 1964, twenty-five years after Siedenburgh's death, Hartnett commented extensively on the life of Siedenburgh, as indicated in the following (Hartnett, 1964, p. 11).



Siedenburg was gifted with extraordinary good health and vitality. He was one hundred per cent alive during all of his waking hours. He enjoyed being with people of all types, be they fellow Jesuits, Protestants, Jews, and those with no formal religious affiliation. He viewed sociology and social work as the carrying out of Christ's Gospel in the most effective, systematic way possible...this he said very plainly, before sophisticated secular audiences, who seemed to ask him to speak precisely to hear from him this religiously-motivated view of social work, and before inter-faith groups, as well as before fellow-Catholics. He was all of one piece (p. 11).

Siedie had the infused moral virtue of Christian prudence to a higher degree than anyone I have ever known. Intuitively, he knew when to 'charge,' when to live patiently with a problem, biding his time, and when to avoid squandering limited time and energy on bootless ventures (pp. 8-9).

Hartnett reports that Siedenburg once told him, "I think for a Jesuit the two most important qualities are charity and obedience. When he was ousted from Chicago in 1932, rather unceremoniously, he never whimpered. It had to hurt him deeply, but you never would know it, externally" (Hartnett, p. 9).

His own interests were very wide. He researched the relationship between the United States and Latin American countries and led tours there. He enjoyed movies and the theater; he played golf and bridge. He was a *born* sociologist. If he was waiting to be driven somewhere (Siedenburg did not drive a car), and a maintenance man was cutting the grass, he'd ask him where he lived, how many children he had, what schools they were in, maybe what rent he was paying. Such data and concerns were "the breath of his nostrils" (Hartnett, 1976).

Siedenburg's curiosity and his wanting to know are best illustrated in the details of his trip in 1938 to visit the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, specifically Russia. Siedenburg and other sociologists received an invitation to visit the USSR in 1937. He was interested to learn firsthand about socialism and communism. Daniel Lord, SJ, reported the details of Siedenburg's trip and interviewed him about his visit. Lord reported some of the details of this trip (1938).

So because a Roman collar and clerical garb would have been a handicap, if not an absolute obstacle, Father Siedenburg went to Russia as a professor of sociology. He entered the Soviet Union dressed in the gray suit and blue tie of a layman.

But the priest did not cease to be a priest, even in the

Russia that bans priests. Father Siedenburgh received from Rome a very special permission. While he was crossing the border he carried, concealed between the shirts in his valise, those pages of the missal which are used in the Mass of the Blessed Virgin and the Mass for the dead. No one paid any attention to the small bottle of wine, the thin wafers of bread, the small glass, and the folded sheets of linen that he carried in his suitcase.

Each morning in his hotel, Father Siedenburgh placed on a table the linen which enfolded the relic of a martyr, and the small glass, which he used as a chalice; and behind closed doors that were locked and curtains that were drawn, the priest stood at his improvised altar and, still dressed in his gray business suit, offered the Mass which brought Christ down into Red Russia.

Once again on the high seas, Father Siedenburgh dropped the glass, which had been his little chalice, into the ocean. That little glass would never again be used in Mass; it would never be used for any lesser purpose. The privileges of saying Mass without being vested is a rare one; and it was granted to Father Siedenburgh only because the Holy Father was eager to have Mass said in a Russia that has exiled God (pp. 3-4).

Throughout his career, Siedenburgh fought against some of the ills that capitalism had created—low wages for workers, lack of economic support for the aged poor, and poor working conditions. In traveling to Russia, he wanted to see firsthand if the Communist experiment had merit. In summing up his observations, he found that in Russia religion was for the most part systematically extinguished and that for most people there were low standards of living, except for members of the Communist party, who in contrast, lived in luxury. He found that propaganda “substituted for culture and dullness for joy” (Lord, p. 33).

In 1938, he returned to his position of executive dean at the University of Detroit and lectured widely on his experiences in Russia. From February 19-23, he participated in Brotherhood Week at Benton Harbor and St. Joseph Michigan. Representatives from three faiths were present—Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic (Siedenburgh). In addition to speaking to audiences in these two cities, he was scheduled to speak to the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis. But he became ill with the flu and consulted a physician who told him to return home to Detroit—a long drive. He arrived in Detroit, had difficulty in breathing and was taken to the hospital where his condition worsened. He was administered the last rites and died on February 20, 1939.

As one obituary remarked, “Father Siedenburgh’s dying had something

characteristic about it: he did everything with dispatch” (Woodstock Letters, 1939, p. 187). A noteworthy obituary came from the Attorney General of the United States (1939-1940) and former Governor of the State of Michigan (1937-1939), Frank Murphy, who had appointed Siedenburg to serve as Chairman of the State of Michigan Mediation board several years before his death.

In the passing of Father Siedenburg, a good and great Jesuit has gone to his reward. We were privileged to have him among us during a period of social upheaval and unrest. With steadfastness, simplicity and wisdom, he put into effect practical Christianity to an extent beyond the knowledge of most of our fellow citizens. The encyclicals of the beloved Leo XIII and Pius XI was [sic] very much alive in all his judgments on social and economic problems. He was a kindly and just priest who translated the encyclicals into action to the benefit of us all” (*Catholic New World*, p.3).

## Conclusion

Father Siedenburg’s contributions can be summarized in several areas. His legacy as a Catholic thinker and activist can be placed within the context of American Progressivism and the New Deal while he served at Loyola University of Chicago and the University of Detroit. He was motivated in part by the social thought contained in Pope Leo’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which articulated the need for social justice for the working class as it was affected by industrialization and capitalism. Working in the Progressive tradition, he believed in the power of legislation to improve the urban environment and to prevent social problems from developing in the first place through the creation of urban professions such as social work to improve people’s well being. As a proponent of the New Deal, he advocated for Social Security, the creation of labor relations boards, and the right of working people to organized unions. Siedenburg believed that the Church should serve as a catalyst for governmental intervention to remedy social and economic problems.

As a university administrator, Siedenburg founded the Loyola University of Chicago School of Social Work in 1914, the first Catholic-Jesuit school of social work in the country. He made it possible for women and non-Catholics to attend the University for the first time. In his work as an administrator, he sought justice but was also a pragmatist, believing that with the admission of different populations, the University would prosper and that as a result of their attending a Catholic university, some conversions might take place. He was an ecumenist in an era in Chicago where Cardinal Mundelein believed in the creation of distinctly Catholic institutions and

separate colleges for women. Siedenburg, while still championing Catholic doctrine, believed that much could be gained from church bodies being informed about one another and working together in the social services.

In his non-scholarly writings, a recurring theme was the need for legislation to tackle and remediate the social problems of the day, whether the rights of the working class to organize, the need for sanitary diaries, or the need for “wholesome” movies. He saw social work as alleviating individual and family problems but also focusing on the prevention of social problems and making communities more healthy places for people. He was constantly looking for social forms that would respond to the institutions that were being transformed by capitalism; he thought the settlement house offered great possibilities. Siedenburg was disenchanted by aggressive forms of capitalism and wrote in 1930 that there “is not reason to believe that our competitive capitalistic regime need be permanent.” (Siedenburg, 1930, p. 50)

Siedenburg was an ardent social activist at the community, Church, and national levels. Here he accomplished a great deal, but one of his biggest disappointments was his desire to create a labor school at Loyola that would, in turn, attract Catholics who would create parish labor schools to educate parishioners on labor issues. This effort failed due to ethnic infighting. During his tenure at the University of Detroit, Siedenburg was asked by the Archbishop of Detroit to start such a school but Siedenburg died before this took place.

The most prominent Catholic thinker and social reformer in America during the New Deal, Father John Ryan, commented on Siedenburg. Writing in 1941, he mentioned that since 1916 there had been only a handful of Catholic priests who were active in advocating Catholic social doctrine within the context of social action. He cited Siedenburg as one whose activity spanned both the Progressive Era and New Deal. Given his accomplishments, Siedenburg certainly belongs in this influential group. (Ryan, 1940)

Siedenburg often commented that the two most important things for him as a Jesuit were charity and obedience. He believed in charity for one’s fellow human beings at the individual level, at all times, but he felt he was called to change the social structures of society through educational, community, and legislative efforts. He also believed that social workers needed to address both individual problems and the social problems of society. Siedenburg kept the vow as a Jesuit that he was called to obey his superiors and God. When he was abruptly transferred from Chicago, where he accomplished much, one can surmise that as a Jesuit he tried to discern God’s will in this. He left without complaint and went to the University of Detroit, and undeterred, kept on doing what he believed in. ❖

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