

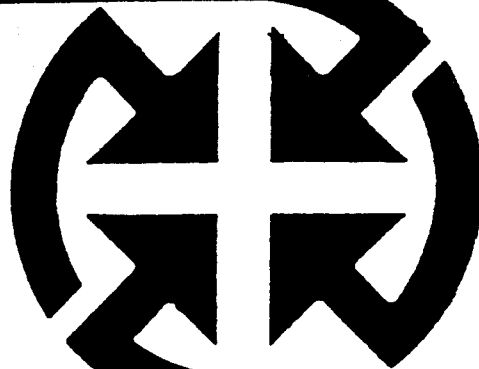
# **SUNDAY CLOSING LAWS REVISITED**

**A Biblical, Ethical, and Sociological Study**

**of a**

**Common Day of Rest**

**Including: Survey Results and Sample Letters on Sports Events and Sabbath  
Observances  
Legislative Analysis Leading to Action  
Study Guide**



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*"Like individual persons, societies need their own temporal rhythms -- hours and days that are different from other hours and days. This rhythm helps form our communal identity. The maxim that people should be able to do whatever they want whenever they want is not a good formula for social life."*

*Edward V. Vacek, S.J.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Debates about the need for a common day of rest are occurring with increasing frequency in the legislative and, to a lesser extent, public arenas. Churches have been traditional opponents to changes in what remains of the Sunday closing laws in Massachusetts, but the Massachusetts Council of Churches decided the time had come to step back from the press of particular policy disputes and reexamine the issue, using the best our scholars had to offer. So we organized a seminar, titled "Sunday Closing Laws Revisited: An Ethical, Sociological, and Legislative Analysis Leading to Action." The event was co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Catholic Conference and the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Boston, and drew resource leaders from all three Christian traditions. The text of this booklet is the fruit of that day's reflections.*

*One of the recommendations of the speakers was the need for more dialogue within religious communities, as well as beyond them, about values and assumptions at the heart of this debate. We hope that by sharing the enclosed ideas, religious communities, labor leaders, the public, the media, government officials, and legislators will be helped to gain greater clarity about some of the values at stake as we struggle to reach a consensus about a common day of rest. The speakers, themselves, did not agree on all issues, but some common themes emerged, especially about the social value of a societally agreed upon common day of rest.*

*To assist group discussion, a study guide has been included in the Appendix. We also have reprinted a statement issued by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches concerning Sunday morning public activities, and a sample letter released by one interfaith clergy association, addressing the problems of religious observances conflicting with scheduled sports events in their community. Other clergy associations may want to use a similar approach to prompt community discussion about this frequent and frustrating problem.*

*Funding for the conference and for the printing of this document was provided by a generous grant from the Lord's Day League of New England, an "ancient and honorable" organization dedicated to promoting respect for Sabbath day observances. We deeply appreciate their support and encouragement of this project.*

*This event would not have been possible without the careful, dedicated work of The Rev. Elinor Yeo, who served as conference coordinator. She worked tirelessly over several months to organize the seminar.*

*She was assisted by a representative Advisory Committee, which provided solid suggestions about human resources. Committee members were The Rev. Ernest Bergeson, The Rev. Edward Boyle, S.J., The Rev. Dr. Bruce Bueschel, Mr. Gerald D'Avolio, The Rev. James Grant, The Rev. Roger Kvam, The Rev. Msgr. William Murphy, Mr. John Phinney, The Rev. Canon Edward Rodman, The Rev. Janet Smith-Rushton, and the Rev. Gwen Sears. We give our hearty thanks for their counsel.*

*We have made every effort to accurately reproduce the texts as presented by the authors. Any errors are the fault of the editor, not of the writers, and we ask their indulgence. We hope that these papers will give fresh energy to public dialogue about a topic which affects our common good.*

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## A NOTE FROM THE CONFERENCE COORDINATOR

When I was asked to put together a conference entitled "Sunday Closing Laws Revisited: An Ethical, Sociological and Legislative Analysis Leading to Action", I must confess that I felt some skepticism. I knew that this wasn't exactly a "hot topic", but wondered if it was even an issue in which people would be interested, especially since closing laws have been eroding so rapidly that very few remain. But I was wrong in my doubt, and found that a lot of people with whom I talked cared deeply about Sabbath observance, about the great need in our society for common days of rest and re-creation, and about the justice issues involved when the lowest paid workers are those who have the fewest choices when asked to work on the Sabbath.

We decided to concentrate on three areas: the sociological, Biblical and ethical implications of Sabbath observance, and found some very special speakers to offer presentations. I think you will agree when you read their speeches that each is unique and interesting, and that the caliber of their offerings is very high. Bradley Googins, Director of the Center for Work and Family at Boston University School of Social Work, led off the conference with observations about how family time is being rapidly encroached upon by hours of work which greatly exceed those of twenty years ago. Maren Tirabassi and Paul Mankowski, both Biblical scholars and pastors, delved into the Biblical and theological roots of Sabbath. We then heard a panel of ethicists from varying traditions tackle the all-important question of Sabbath observance in a multi-cultural society. Barbara Darling-Smith from Boston University, David Barney from Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord, Edward Vacek, S.J. from Weston School of Theology, and Stanley Harakas, Greek Orthodox priest and Professor of Christian Ethics, all presented very scholarly yet personal material about the ethics of observing a day of rest. All of their presentations are included in this booklet.

At the end of the session, Dr. Ruy Costa of the MCC Staff, led us in a discussion about strategy and legislation.

We were joined on October 8 by the national Board of Directors of The Lord's Day Alliance, which met in Framingham that week, partly in order to be able to attend our conference. Their national office is in Atlanta, Georgia. Their new Executive Director, Dr. Jack Lowndes, was an especially welcome guest, as were Rev. Ernest Bergeson and Rev. Dr. Roger Kvam of the Lord's Day League of New England.

I would also like to thank members of the conference advisory committee, who agreed to be available for advice, support, and comfort (if needed). Fortunately, the latter was not needed!

They were: Rev. Ed Boyle, S.J., Rev. Ernest Bergeson, Rev. Dr. Bruce Bueschel, Mr. Gerald D'Avolio, Rev. James Grant, Rev. Roger Kvam, Rev. Monsignor William Murphy, Mr. John Phinney, Rev. Gwen Sears, and Rev. Janet Smith-Rushton.

I hope that you will read and enjoy this booklet. You may find it helpful not only for your own meditation about the meaning of sabbath, but also for excellent reference material when preaching or speaking about the issue. While it cannot bring to you the sense of personal sincerity and integrity which all of our speakers brought in person, it can give you a good overview of what the conference achieved.

Finally, my thanks to The Rev. Diane Kessler and her staff for convincing me that this was a worth-while project, and for their interest, support and encouragement. I made some new friends while exploring a very ancient subject, and had a wonderful time doing it.

The Rev. Elinor Yeo  
Conference Coordinator

## SOCIOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

### ***SUNDAY CLOSING LAWS REVISITED: A Sociological Perspective*** **BRADLEY GOOGINS, PhD**

*Director, Center on Work and Family, Boston University*

The recent controversy in Massachusetts over the opening of retail stores on Sundays and holidays has raised a number of issues which lie at the center of life in the '90s. While much of the controversy around Sunday openings has evolved from the long standing Christian tradition deeply embedded in American law and custom, the recent debate goes far beyond religious issues. It touches upon our basic values regarding the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities, and pits these values against powerful voices calling for increased commercialism.

By illuminating this underlying conflict, the Blue Laws controversy serves a valuable purpose: it gives us a challenge and an opportunity to examine our value system in the '90s, and the events which have occurred at such ground breaking speed that we've barely had time to realize, let alone reflect upon, their tremendous effect on almost every aspect of our lives.

#### **Changing Times, Shifting Values**

If anything has characterized the last few decades, it has been dramatic change - from the fall of the communist system to the growing awareness of massive environmental destruction. While every generation can look back on the previous one with a shake of the head at what seems to be change for the worse, these last few decades, by any yardstick, have resulted in a magnitude of change which my 9 year old son would term "awesome".

Some of the most profound changes have been those experienced by families and communities in the United States. Consider that in a single generation:

- . the family has been redefined and restructured to include a proliferation of divorced, blended families, single parents and latchkey children;
- . women's roles have shifted, particularly in the economic arena;
- . violence has escalated dramatically within families and communities;
- . AIDS has permeated every level of society on a scale not generally understood or accepted.

In the face of such upheaval, we might ask, how did we get to this point and where do we go from here? Regarding how we reached this point, we might consider the custom of men's wearing of hats. It was

not too long ago that American men, particularly at formal settings, wore hats as a routine rule of etiquette. In today's world, men's wearing of hats would seem odd and even ludicrous. Who first decided to shift such basic custom, and how did the rest of us follow? Like the general transformation of so many things in our lives, it is hard to identify the particular events or circumstances behind this change. And while I have generally concluded that most of us behave like sheep, exercising little independent leadership and "baaing" behind everyone else, I can't blame our herd like mentality for men's abandonment of hats.

More to the point of our discussion, we might ask whatever happened to Sunday dinner? Growing up in the '50s and early '60s, every house I knew had family dinner. The weekly ritual was as sacred as the church services which preceded it, and any attempt to be excused for outside events was unthinkable. In fact, I used to look forward to the roast and the sparring for "seconds" with my five brothers. It was a family time when the roots of the past were handed down to the next generation. Critical processes of socialization took place around that dinner table.

Today, however, Sunday dinner has all but disappeared. Even in those families that have managed to preserve some semblance of this custom, the rush to children's sporting events, televised football or a trip to the mall has greatly diminished the value of this family gathering.

I can't tell you with any precision how or why Sunday dinner (or men's wearing of hats, for that matter) has all but disappeared. But these examples are mere symbols of the larger transformations in our lives. In trying to understand these epic changes, it might be helpful to examine some of the driving forces behind them.

- . Inflation has ravaged the family to the extent that it now takes two adults to earn the equivalent of what one earned but two decades ago. It is only by the entrance of wives and mothers into the workforce that real family income has remained about even over the past twenty years.
- . The changing role of women has brought a major shift in family and community life. Not having the traditional caregiver at home and in the community has reordered care for children and for aging parents towards more formal and institutional structures.
- . A rapidly growing economy, dual earner households and sophisticated advertising and marketing techniques have contributed towards more formal and institutional structures.
- . The rise of global competition has given rise to the perception, and in some instances the reality, of a country in economic decline. We now have an image of the American worker fighting global competitors toe to toe, trying to squeeze more productivity out of every shift to catch up with the Japanese and the new Europeans.



## Consequences For Families and Communities

It is no wonder that many Americans today find themselves living in confusing and far less satisfying times. But what exactly are the ramifications of staying on our present course?

As the group "Chicago" aptly put it, the pace of life in the United States has continued along at breakneck speed over the past two decades. Juliet Schor's The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure (New York: Basic Books, 1991) speaks more clearly than any social commentary about the changing nature of time and leisure in our society. In the past two decades, the average employed American has seen his or her working hours increase by the equivalent of one month a year. U.S. manufacturing employees work 320 hours longer a year -- the equivalent of two months -- than their counterparts in Germany or France.

And despite their long work hours, Americans view vacation time with ambivalence. In most industrialized countries, citizens average four to five weeks of vacation as mandated by government policy. In the United States, the figure is closer to two weeks. In fact, in many circles there exists a culture that doesn't allow time for any vacation: workers believe they are "too busy" to vacation due to the perceived demands of the work place. Even during the harsh conditions of the middle ages, plentiful church holidays provided frequent relief from the misery experienced by most.

The increased time at work, along with the movement of women into the labor force, has left most Americans with little disposable time to accomplish the routine chores of living--from shopping to arranging deliveries to getting the plumber into the home for repairs. And, looking beyond just finishing our chores, what about time for reflection and nurturing our family ties? Imagine for a moment families in today's world spending even one evening per week playing board games or reading aloud together. Like those Sunday dinners, any possibility for regular "quality time" has all but disappeared.

Beyond this time famine, American families are suffering in other ways. Traditional supports, including churches, schools, social service organizations, community recreation programs, and extended family networks, can no longer be counted on for support. In today's world, the lonely child, the rebellious adolescent and the frail grandparent are frequently left to fend for themselves. It is no wonder that our families and communities are stretched to the breaking point.

### Sunday Closing Laws In Context

Clearly the need for family time is more dire than ever. Yet the battle over Blue Laws is a fierce one. At its most basic level, the attempt to repeal the laws is a manifestation of the dominance of the economic order and the perception that we have no choice but to follow the drumbeat of commercialism if we are to survive economically as a state or as a country.

Indeed a major aspect of this argument centers on the intense competition of retailers across borders. If retail stores are open on Sundays in New Hampshire, then retailers in Massachusetts are at a disadvantage. This economic one upmanship has fueled a growing wildfire across the country in which a move on one side of the border demands a response from the other side. The increased use of Sunday for commercial benefit has quickly become a given in most parts of our country, and it is not too great a stretch to see a move beyond 24 hour convenience stores to an L.L. Bean model for all retail stores, to be open around the clock for 365 days a year

A second argument in the larger Blue Laws controversy centers on the time famine. The quest for productivity has turned our society on its head. With all the hours spent working, so the argument goes, Sunday is the only available window left outside the work week for harried Americans to do all their errands.

### A Call For Action

Where then is all of this leading? In "Chicago's" lyrics, "Does anybody know what time it is?" is followed by "Does anybody really care?" From what I have seen, there is an increasing concern that the fabric of life is unraveling around us. What can we do about our deteriorating families and communities? How can we protect our children? These questions are being raised with growing frequency and urgency as we confront increasing violence, stress, addiction and other signs of community and family breakdown.

Up until now, groups in favor of repealing the Blue Laws have been very succesful in getting their agenda before the public and gaining a fair degree of acceptance. For the other side, however, there has been no strong voice or organized movement arguing for a time out to reflect on the problems afflicting our lives. Unless a broad constituency is formed to fight for this alternative, the L.L. Bean model will soon be here, resulting in an even more materialistic society and frenetic Sundays.

It seems to me that it is up to the clergy and others among us concerned with the quality of life to speak out strongly for a value system which is supportive of our families and communities. We must articulate a vision of life which values family time, reflective time and communities built on caring and mutual support. Only by framing the Sunday closing laws in this manner do we have a chance for insuring a basic quality of life for our families and communities.

## BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

### **GIVE IT A REST: A LOOK AT BIBLICAL IMAGES OF SABBATH**

**The Rev. Maren C. Tirabassi**

**Pastor, First Congregational Church in Somerville, MA**

I want to thank you for inviting me to participate in your conference and share some biblical and theological perspectives on sabbath. I am a pastor and a sometimes poet -- and I am glad that Paul is here to give a more academically rigorous view. I can, however, say that over the past thirteen years and three congregations I have had occasion to preach and write on dozens of biblical themes, yet never is there one which draws more heartfelt response from people than sabbath. In urban, suburban and rural contexts, from a business persons' luncheon to Church Women United, in liberal and conservative churches, among young and old, sabbath is precious, perhaps just because we so often cheat it, break it, or let others take it away from us.

My definition of sabbath is a simple one -- what I mean when I speak of sabbath is the biblical concept of a regular rhythmic day of reflection -- a time to quiet down the heart beat of life.

In the hope of letting you know just a little bit about myself, let me tell you a Christmas story. At Christmas time last year my best friend Diane and I exchanged gifts -- as we always do. I unwrapped her present which was obviously a book and it was .. MEDITATIONS FOR WOMEN WHO DO TOO MUCH (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) by Anne Wilson Schaefer. With no collusion, no discussion -- I had given her the same meditations in flip-up calendar form.

Now Diane and I are very different in categories that the external world would judge. I am employed for money as the pastor of an urban church; Diane is not paid to teach CCD, run a Boy Scout troop, direct her husband's campaign for Planning Board in Pepperell and coach Odyssey of the Mind. Diane has three children -- I have two; Diane lives in the country; I live in the city; Diane is Roman Catholic; I am Protestant; my parents and in-laws live near by; Diane's are distant. But Diane and I are both what they call "workaholics", "careaholics"-- we cannot ever be happy unless we are doing something, preferably something for someone else. It doesn't have anything to do with employed work -- it mostly has to do with feeling guilty when we rest.

Diane and I are products of the twentieth century when our culture itself is in the midst of a basic conflict -- on the one hand, we are very leisure conscious and devote much of our time, money and, curiously enough, effort to developing ways to use our free time -- but, on the other hand, we are a hectic society, where work and production seem to be the highest values and the buzz word of all those magazine articles is "stress". This conflict creates a climate in which we want -- but do not want -- to rest, in which we look forward to -- but are uneasy about -- vacations and retirement, in which "time" is a quantity to be "filled" or "spent" but not necessarily enjoyed or "lived." After all, we are in a society that sells hundreds of bumper stickers and t-shirts

that say desperately, "Are we having fun yet?"

The alternative to stress is reconstructing our spiritual and emotional health by taking those Sundays, those Sabbaths, out of the periphery and putting them in the center of life, as my ninth grade son Matthew would have it, "Give it a rest, Ma!" We can begin by investigating the scriptural tradition of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is one of the oldest of Israel's concepts and it is found throughout every strata of the Bible. Spanning centuries and styles of writing, it is central to stories of creation, liberation, renewal and resurrection. Sabbath is the seventh day -- when according to the creation narrative in Genesis God rested from creation. We are presented with a God who rested from the creation of earth and sea and sky and all that is within them. In fact, the rest is genuinely a part of the creation, not an appendix or a footnote. God's rest was self-determined and in this story there is no implication of weariness -- but rather of "rightness", of reverence.

I have been known to suggest to parishioners in the hospital after a heart attack, when their medical doctors have read them the riot act about overwork and stress -- that they simply read Genesis 1. Surely, none of our jobs, not even mine, is more demanding than this metaphor of the creation of the universe in six days. What kind of criticism are we leveling at God when we say that our professional or familial responsibilities are so significant that we cannot get time away? The good old heart muscle has too often a way of proving us wrong!

The word "sabbath" first appears in Exodus. As a commandment, Sabbath appears in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Each time it is the longest and the most detailed of the commandments perhaps because human beings have always had a hard time seeing its necessity and have always tried to cheat on it. Sabbath was a time -- both to cease from work and to make a holy day. The Hebrew people, who were an agricultural people, were enjoined to keep sabbath both in plowtimes and in harvest. Indeed, they could not even take up arms to defend themselves on the sabbath, an ethnic peculiarity in the ancient Near East which had dramatic negative consequences. Particular to the commandments which are, of course, always set in the context of liberation -- the freedom from bondage in Egypt -- is the exhausting and necessary listing out that all members of the household should rest on the sabbath -- husband and wife, children, menservants, maidservants, cattle, oxen, sojourner, alien -- and each time it is always stated that it is particularly significant that servants should rest -- because the people of Israel were servants in the land of Egypt and God brought them out with a mighty hand. Because of creation God must rest -- because of liberation the poorest must rest. Between God and the poor lie most of us.

Sabbath is a repeated and significant issue for the lawgivers of Israel -- the writers of the Pentateuch, reflecting Moses, the writers of Deuteronomy, and particularly the writer of Nehemiah who is so concerned with the preservation of the self-identity of the people returning from exile. The keeping of sabbath as a unique custom in the cultural context was of paramount importance in maintaining religious

integrity and resisting the social and polytheistic practices of surrounding peoples.

Not only the lawgivers, but the major prophets -- Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, focused repeatedly on sabbath. They do not question the existence of sabbath -- for them the issue is how sabbath is observed, and the contrast is sharply drawn between hallowing the sabbath and profaning or polluting the sabbath. The crisis for the prophets -- and I bring forward not to prove that I've been rummaging about in my concordance, but because I think the dichotomy has contemporary relevance -- is again not between the objective decision of having or not having the sabbath, but between the purely subjective judgment of hallowing or profaning the sabbath. That is much harder for us to face honestly, because it is not a matter of activities, but of attitudes.

The concerns of the prophets about attitude were even more heightened by the time of Jesus. We read in Scriptures of legalistic abuse of the sabbath -- the excessive interpretations of the sabbath law had become law themselves and were harsh and inflexible and weighed most heavily upon the poor. Jesus turned those laws around, claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath -- and he was clear that sabbath was a time of renewal. He bid his disciples pluck and eat, not starve because they were ill prepared, and he healed the man with the withered hand -- a chronic, not an acute condition. It could have been cured on the next day, his critics pointed out. But Jesus' point was that sabbath is a time to take away pain.

In fact, an argument could be made from scripture that Jesus made the sabbath particularly a healing day. On a sabbath day Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (that story is remembered in all four gospels as well as the ensuing controversy with the Pharisees). In addition the gospel of Mark remembers that Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit and a woman with a fever (Peter's mother-in-law). In Luke appears the story of the man with dropsy and the woman who had been bent over for eighteen years. In John, the two arguably most significant healings of Jesus' ministry both took place on the sabbath -- the man ill for thirty-eight years who lay by the pool of Bethesda with no one to put him in when the angel stirred the waters, and who was then charged with sabbath abuse by the Pharisees for carrying the pallet upon which he had been lying, and the man blind from birth whose eyes were restored when Jesus spat and made mud and placed it on them. So fearful of sabbath violation were this man's parents that they barely dared acknowledge the miracle when the authorities confronted them.

Jesus' critics cited his penchant for healing on the sabbath to judge Jesus a sinner -- "that man does not observe the sabbath and teaches others so!" We look across the centuries and realize that Jesus redefined sabbath -- he focused sabbath on renewal and healing -- he did not take away sabbath -- though that is sometimes the way we want to read it and that may be what the panel of ethicists will speak of. On the contrary, the verses in Matthew which immediately precede the story of the man with the withered hand, which is the central story always told with the disciples plucking in the grainfields and Jesus' claim that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, not Lord without Sabbath, contain the ultimate words of comfort for the weary, "Come unto me all

you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30)

And finally, resurrection. Because of the empty tomb, because of Easter, because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week -- sabbath for the majority of Christian people is moved, re-constituted around resurrection and new life. The last day becomes the first day, but it is still true that every seventh day we go to sabbath to find new life.

Creation and rest, liberation and prophecy, renewal and healing, resurrection and new life -- the most significant themes in all of scripture relate directly to sabbath. We desperately need sabbath. I do. Do you know what I did with the book I got for Christmas? I put it on a list of things to do! The senior deaconess of my church, Rebecca Hunter, called me up today and I told her where I was going and what I was going to speak on -- she said "Oh, this is one of those - 'do as I say, not as I do' speeches." I admit it. I'll take the first step for workaholism. "I am powerless over my own drive to do, to accomplish, to be busy in order to feel worthy". I am either not a good person to talk about sabbath seeking, or the very best person.

From biblical images of sabbath come a wealth of theological relevance -- I will share with you out of my own struggle only three brief points about sabbath-making in the twentieth century, or twenty-first century if we do not kill ourselves. Sabbath is rhythmic; sabbath is appreciative; sabbath is powerful.

Sabbath at its minimum is the setting aside of a time regularly for rest, repose and holiness. The Genesis story portrays sabbath as part of the natural rhythm of creation, and **rhythm brings peace only when its movement is followed.** That is why our contemporary expectation that a **summer vacation will make up for a lot of lost sabbaths ultimately does not work.** In fact, we betray ourselves by our words -- we Christians speak of **taking** a vacation while Jewish people speak of **making** Sabbath. Sabbath is not time set aside for leisure -- indeed, many leisure activities are filled with obligations. Retired people whom I know, who theoretically have more time for self-renewal, often find that there are more expectations than when they were employed. Sabbath is not "not-work"; it is not a host of worthwhile chores -- from the laundry to a week's worth of so called quality time with the children -- it is reflection, repose, space for holiness, which is, I think, what that old fashioned word "hallowing" implies. It is time to begin not to be tired, indeed, time when healing should be central even if it is work, but when other work which is reasonable on six days is profanity.

Sabbath is appreciative -- it is a time for becoming aware of one's place in the larger Creation. Yes, it's time to smell the flowers and listen to children's laughter, to touch a friend's hand, to taste blueberries. Rabbi Harold Kushner in his popular book When Everything You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough (New York: Summit Books, 1986) reports an interview with an 85 year old woman from Kentucky who was asked to reflect on what she had learned in her life. She responded this way:

"If I had my life to live over, I would dare to make more mistakes the next time. I would relax. I would be sillier. I would take fewer things seriously...I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would perhaps have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones. You see, I'm one of those people who live seriously and sanely hour after hour, day after day. I've been one of those persons who never went anyplace without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it again, I'd travel lighter." (p. 109)

More ice cream and less beans -- the simplest of pleasures are due rediscovery.

Sabbath is powerful. If we live a life with sabbath at the center we can begin to have sabbath as an attitude that informs our lives. The space and the time of sabbath gives the energy, the insight and the perspective through which the other days -- the good hard dawn-to-dusk work days, which I am not against -- can in fact be empowered.

You know, I'm not really against a "work-ethic". Work, hard work is wonderful -- work itself does not strangle the spirit. My father is seventy-eight years old and works a forty hour week. Their choice has earned them the criticism of many people who are retired, but they maintain that the alternation of work and rest has been healthier for them mentally than when they tried retirement and found themselves frantically filling it with activities.

Roy Minich, former pastor of First Church, Congregational, in Malden in his little book Bread for the Journey (St. Louis, MO: Eden Publishing House, 1970) tells the story of:

"...an explorer who was making a hurried journey through the jungles of South America. We would begin the day's march with first light and rush on until darkness made travel impossible. Finally one morning when he was ready to proceed the porters failed to appear. He called the man who employed them and demanded an explanation. Today the head man would probably have said that they were staging a sit-down strike, or were too ill to work, or were fed up with the job. But his reply was "We have traveled far and we have traveled fast, we must now wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies." (p. 11)

Monday I took the day off -- not Sunday, that is an unrealistic rhythm. I read a book of poetry. I climbed a hill, stumbling all the way, to the tower in the Middlesex Fells that sits above Route 93. I sewed all the yellow flowers in an embroidery sampler. I saw very bright stars in the cold black night sky with my son Matthew - BEFORE helping him with his high school Latin. I laughed on a long distance call with an old friend. I prayed about a new friend who had been diagnosed HIV positive. I rested from my own creations; and I healed some withered places in me.

Rhythmic, appreciative, powerful. I preach to a congregation every week in Somerville and I pretty well know their needs, fears, complacencies and hopes. I live there. I am a guest today and I do not really know why you've come here today -- whether you are angry at Pop

really know why you've come here today -- whether you are angry at Pop Warner football (I am) or are hungry for thirst-quenching spirit (I am that, too). But I think that my own personal failure keeping sabbath in a world that says -- do and do, and, when you're resting, go to Aruba, and you are what you can do, the committees you can add to your work, the projects and causes you initiate and support -- this is your personal worth, may...may just apply to some of you.

All our modern instincts go against sabbath -- probably only the scriptural witness and the electrocardiogram speak for it. I believe that keeping an attitude of sabbath central is not primarily a self-help strategy like the little book Diane and I got for one another, not a clever method to renew the psyche, but rather intrinsically an attitude that honors God and the neediest of our brothers and sisters.

The question of our lives should not be "are we having fun yet?" Perhaps it should be "Is my soul keeping pace with my body?" If we cannot answer that then all the prayer, almsgiving and fasting make no difference. Jesus was asked the question "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?" and he answered "Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden - my yoke is easy and my burden light." (Matt. 11:28-30) May God's grace be with you all in that hollow place in your lives where creation is completed in the stillness of love.



## **THE SABBATH, OBSERVED**

**The Rev. Paul J. Mankowski, S.J.**

**Fr. Mankowski is a Semitic language scholar**

In the midst of some bibliographical spadework regarding the biblical notion of the Sabbath, my eye was arrested by the following title: A Treatise of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day: distinguished in four parts. Wherein is declared both the Nature, Originall, and Observation, as well as the one under the Old, as of the other under the New Testament. It was written by a scholar named David Primerose, "Englished by his father G.P. D.D.," and published in 1636. Happily, Harvard has a copy in its rare book collection, and in gingerly prying apart the boards I was pleased to find the "State of the Question" laid out in five propositions:

1. All men are bound to serve God every day privately, in some measure, according to his word.
2. They are also bound to serve him publicly, and to have a day stinted for his public service.
3. There is among godly and learned Christians a great controversy about the Originall, Nature and Observation of that day,
4. Some hold the Sanctification and observation of one of the seven dayes of the weeks to be morall, and therefore of perpetual necessity, since the beginning unto the end of the world.
5. Others maintaine, that the strinting of a day for God's public service is a point of order, and of Ecclesiastical government, depending wholly on institution.

Thus we have, in the early 17th century, the present controversy already full-formed and articulated; is a day of rest a matter of Church discipline, and as such not binding on the unchurched, or is it a good of universal effect and so universally to be protected? Now it should be noted that appeal to biblical teaching is not in itself capable of resolving this dispute, since the cogency of such an appeal depends on a prior decision to accept that authority of the Bible. For all that, a summary of the biblical doctrine will not be amiss.

I had hoped to be able to provide a concise explanation of the origins of the notion and practice of the sabbath. However, every strategy of explanation--etymological, sociological, cultic, menological or astrological--is beset with uncertainties and obscurities.[1] Each promising path, it seems, peters out into the high grass of ambiguous evidence. Not even the Bible's derivation of the noun sabbat (meaning "to cease to do something") is linguistically satisfactory; and attempts to connect "sabbath" with the Hebrew number seven, seba, have

also proved futile.[2]

There does seem to be an emerging consensus that the institution of a time of rest, inactivity, rhythmic fallowness, etc. was originally distinct from the institution of a seventh day dedicated to the Lord, and that the two practices were merged only gradually in the history of Israel; when and how this merger took place is a matter of considerable dispute. It is curious that this uncertainty does not surround the actual dating of the sabbath; Old Testament scholar Rudolph Frieling has written, "[W]hat does stand assured is the fact that at least since the sixth century BC, the continuation of the seven day week has not suffered any interruption. Thus the sabbath today is irrefutably the exact octave of the sabbath of at least two and a half thousand years ago. With its innate tenacity Jewry has preserved its sabbath through all kinds of calendar situations obtaining among its host nations right up to the present day." [3]

Dr. John Levenson, List Professor of Jewish Studies at the Harvard Divinity School, tells me that, while there is a great deal of controversy about other issues of calendric correspondence in the rabbinic tradition, he is aware of none concerning the place of the sabbath day in the week; no one claims that a day was skipped somewhere along the line. [4]

The upshot is, while we should preserve some scholarly reticence about the original source and meaning of the sabbath, we have excellent reasons for the belief that next Saturday will be in complete synchrony with the sabbath of Jeremiah, the intervening days falling into a precise multiple of seven without remainder.

How did the sabbath come to be understood in the Old Testament? Here I shall not discuss the arguments pro and con, but simply present what I take to be uncontroversial conclusions. [5] The sabbath is an obligatory seventh day institution of rest. Its ultimate source is the Lord's act of creation itself, for on the seventh day he "desisted" (sabat) from his labor, as is remembered in the Book of Exodus: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." [Ex. 20:8,11]

The sabbath was given to the people of Israel by the Lord as a sign of his covenant with them; so Exodus 31:16: "The children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the Children of Israel for ever." It is to be observed by abstinence from all manual labor, that of the field as well as the house, occupational as well as domestic. It is not simply a day of idleness, but a day of worship [Lev. 248; Nu. 28:9f.]. The acceptance of sabbath discipline in and of itself entitles a foreigner to be a member of the Lord's household.

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord honorable; and shalt honor it, not doing

thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thy self in the LORD: and I will make to rise upon the high places of the earth; and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father. [Is 58:13ff]

It is particularly noteworthy, and of interest to the contemporary discussion of the Lord's Day, that the sabbath was understood as protective of the welfare of all the people, and especially of those people who had a marginal status in the community.

The seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. [Dt. 5:12-14; see also Ex. 20:11]

It is important to stress here that Israel, a nation continually conscious of its own forced labor in Egypt, is aware of the fragility of slaves and strangers (the gerim, resident aliens or guestworkers) in its midst, of their susceptibility to brutality, or exploitation, or simply vexation on the part of the powerful. The sabbath is not an occasion of leisure exacted at the expense of increased toil by the poor, but rather it provides a time of equality (however limited and temporary) in which the universal duty of man to God is recognized--or better, of creature to creator, for the protection and respite are extended even to draft animals. It should also be noted that it makes no difference in the Old Testament as to whether the slaves and aliens worship the God of Israel or not. The protection of the sabbath is not conditional upon the quality or object of one's religious observance; rather the sabbath is a mercy to which all creatures have a claim simply in virtue of their creaturehood.

The protest of unbelievers against the practice of the sabbath has a long pedigree. The Roman Seneca, a contemporary of St. Paul, maintained that the Jews forfeit a whole seventh of their lives through idleness. "In the meantime," he says, "the custom of this wretched people has become so prevalent as to be adopted in all countries, and this means that the vanquished are imposing their laws upon the victors...Let us put a stop to the lighting of sabbath lamps by all kinds of people." [6] This passage is instructive in a number of respects. It shows us that the institution of the sabbath found acceptance among gentiles as well as Jews, in a very diverse and religiously tolerant empire, before the end of the first century. It further shows that it was an ancient argument against the practice that it was an occasion of laziness and an interruption of business more important to the state. Finally it shows that anti-sabbath polemic early on took the form of a sneer at religious observance in general at that of the Jews in particular. The rhetoric that presents a minority of ill-bred religious enthusiasts "imposing their laws" upon a majority of people of quality has an oddly contemporary ring.

In the Christian Church, the day of rest and observation is, of course, the day after the sabbath, the day of the Resurrection. The

first Christians, being Jews, continued to keep the traditional sabbath simultaneously with their ritual remembrance of the first Easter. Gradually, as more non-Jewish converts were added to the Church, the question of the obligation of the sabbath upon non-Jews, and then upon Christians as Christian, became pointed. Frieling tells us:

About AD 107, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, the martyr, warns the Church of Magnesia (Chap.9) against back-sliding into the sabbath cult which he calls sabbatizein, "to sabbathize". He exhorts them rather to live kata kyriaken, according to the Lord's Day, "on which our life has arisen". Ignatius shows that he is filled with the knowledge that the Lord's Day is something quite new and distinct from the sabbath. It is not the "Christian Sabbath"; it has in fact nothing to do with the sabbath; it is quite different altogether.[7]

There is no question, however, that before the end of the second century the Old Testament obligation to "keep holy the day of the LORD" was understood by Christians to be met by their special observances that took place on Sunday. The obligation to refrain from toil, to worship, and to remove oneself from ordinary concerns of human commerce were transferred to this day--which did, in this sense, become the Christian sabbath. In the year 321 AD the emperor Constantine, that arch-pluralist, "promulgated a memorable law, raising the 'worshipful Day of the Sun' to a legally protected holy day. Coming as he did from an ancient sun-cult he sought to satisfy therewith both Christian and and heathen sun-worshippers." [8]

I conclude by skipping forward several centuries, with a reflection of the meaning of the sabbath that views it as intrinsic and fundamental to our common human dignity:

Here follows necessary cessation from toil and work on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. Let no one, however, understand this in the sense of greater indulgence of idle leisure, and much less in that kind of cessation from work, such as many desire, that encourages vice and promotes wasteful spending of money, but solely in the sense of a repose from labor made sacred by religion. Rest combined with religion calls man away from toil and the business of daily life to admonish him to pay his just and due homage to the Eternal Deity. This is especially the nature, and this is the cause of the rest to be taken on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and God has sanctioned the same in the Old Testament by a special law: "Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath Day," and He Himself taught it by His own action: namely the mystical rest taken immediately after He had created Man: "He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done."

The author is Pope Leo XIII, the passage from the encyclical Rerum Novarum. May I, finally, make my own the disclaimer of Dr. Primerose in the work with which we began:

If in this end...I have done anything amisse, I say with David [Ps. 141:5], Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a

kindnes, and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oile, which shall not breake mine head.

Footnotes:

1. For these categories and a discussion of the problem, see Gnana Robinson, The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath. Hamburg University dissertation, 1974, pp. 6-25.
2. See Wilhelm Lotz, Quaestionum de Historia Sabbati Libri Duo, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1883, pp. 24-38.
3. "Sunday: A Christian Fact" in Old Testament Studies. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1987, p. 144f.
4. Personal communication.
5. Here I follow Robinson, op. cit., pp. 2, 76, 220.
6. I have this quotation from Rudolph Frieling, op. cit., p.142f., himself quoting St. Augustine, De Civ. Dei 6. 11.
7. Frieling, op. cit., p. 147.
8. Frieling, op. cit., p. 150.

## ETHICAL ISSUES

### **RIGHT TO LEISURE AND THE DANGERS OF CONSUMERISM**

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There are at least two important concerns addressed by Sunday closing laws. The first is the human need for rest, and the second is a concern that business and commerce not dominate human life.

The need for rest is not questioned. The United Nations declares it a basic human right. [1] The protection of this and similar rights is, at least in the Roman Catholic view, one of the "essential duties of government." [2]

The problem, rather, is that Americans tend to work too much. In fact, they have less time for rest than they did twenty years ago. Apart from those whose "leisure" is forced by unemployment, Americans now work 160 hours a year longer than they did 20 years ago. [3] U.S. manufacturing employees work the equivalent of over two months more a year than their counterparts in France or Germany. [4] Put simply, we have chosen over the last two decades to earn more money rather than to work less. [5] We own and consume more than twice as much as we did in 1948, but we have done so at the cost of working more. [6] One consequence is that parents spend ten to twelve hours less per week with their children than they did twenty-five years ago. [7]

The second concern addressed by contemporary Sunday closing laws is consumerism. These laws restrict not only working but also shopping. We spend three to four more hours shopping than people in Western Europe. "Once a purely utilitarian chore, shopping has been elevated to the status of a national passion." [8]

In all this working and shopping, are we getting what we really want? The answer can be put in a paraphrase from St. Paul: we do not do the good we approve (Rom 7:19). Eighty percent of us claim that we would sacrifice career advancement in order to spend more time with our families. [9] And faced with a list of nine important values, we rank the materialist option last. [10] But our actions don't follow our preferences. Rather, our actions tend to follow a socially mandated, ever expanding cycle of working-and-spending. The fundamental problem with a consumerist society, as John Paul II noted, is that it tends to exclude or make peripheral other valuable human concerns. Put simply, people get what their consumerist culture teaches them to want, but they do not get what they really need. [11]

#### Human Time versus Economic Time

Currently, in our collective psyche, Sunday is still a time for relaxing and reduced demands; it is a time for worship and enjoyment; it

is a time for family life.[12] The worry is that the mighty tides of the economic ocean will eventually erode away this island of time. For many, Sunday is beginning to be a day to catch up, not a day to rest. For others, it is the day to prepare for Monday's work.

The structuring of time is a political act.[13] It helps define what we count as meaningful or valuable. If we structure our collective time so that working and shopping go on at all times, we suggest to ourselves that nothing is important enough to displace these activities.

American collective time seems increasingly to be not human time, but rather machine-time or free-market time.[14] We say that "time is money." We then have to "make time" or "find time" to do what in a more human rhythm of time would be taken for granted, e.g. friendship or prayer. Since these other activities are not economically valuable, they tend to become secondary in our market-driven time.

American society still functions with a background pattern of a five-day work week. However, as the economic values of efficiency and convenience become the only or chief values of our culture, this background pattern has tended to disappear. If this process continues, any day will be the same as any other day. All will be determined by the interests of individuals; and, since individuals vary, there will be no societal difference between day and night, between Sunday and Tuesday. There are no special days on the Starship Enterprise.

Something essential is missing from this picture. Like individual persons, societies need their own temporal rhythms--hours and days that are different from other hours and days. This rhythm helps form our communal identity. The maxim that people should be able to do whatever they want whenever they want is not a good formula for social life. If two or two thousand people prefer to celebrate Independence Day in January, that would not be good for our communal identity.[15] There is, I think, a communal need for communal leisure, a leisure that is not the same as each individual taking the time that she or he needs. If so, then society should publicly support and encourage special times for communal leisure.

### Law and Constraint:

What sorts of laws, if any, should we establish? American government should not promote specific religious practices. But this does not mean that government and religious groups cannot together promote certain social practices since both should be concerned for the common good of their members.

Governments have the power to impose restraints on and offer inducements to people in various areas of their lives.[17] The question before us is the appropriateness of restraints or inducements on economic activity. Most of us would agree that the economic right to buy or sell should be constrained, e.g. slavery, minimum wages, bait-and-switch advertising, etc. The question before us is whether the State should limit economic activity on Sunday.

Supreme Court cases indicate that state legislatures have authority to regulate Sunday business as long as this regulation is meant to foster public well-being.[18] What needs to be demonstrated is that Sunday closing laws do in fact foster that well-being. We could not live in society without a set of restraints and inducements that hem in or steer our freedom. Such constraints and inducements are justified to the degree that they contribute to individual and social flourishing.

Legal constraints on individual freedom can be difficult to justify even in regard to some actions that many consider immoral, e.g. pornography or abortion. Justifying constraints is much more difficult if they limit activities that almost all consider to be wholesome and necessary, namely, work and commerce. These activities embody deep religious, moral, intellectual and emotional values. As a consequence, we have to ask whether Sunday rest is so important, either in itself or as part of the social fabric, that society should constrain economic freedom in order to promote it. If so, we must ask which social institutions can best do so. Should we employ the public institutions of government and law, or should we rely on voluntary associations?[19]

There is no simple formula that will solve the proper balance between economic freedom and other communal goods. However we must together try to develop the general orientation we wish to give to our communal life.[20] As I have already indicated, I believe that our nation needs a communal background time; we need a calendar that, in addition to holidays, includes at least one day each week set aside for common rest, leisure activities, reflection and the like. We already have that day in Sunday.[21] I recognize the religious bias in the choice of that day. However, no other day, if arbitrarily selected, would command communal assent. An arbitrarily selected day would seem just too arbitrary. Hence, I think that governments should provide an appropriate set of inducements and restraints to keep Sunday, if not a holy day in the sense of a day of worship, at least holy in the sense of a day set apart.

Nevertheless, I do not think that Sunday rest should be legislated. Sufficient public consensus is not available. For many good and not so good reasons, the majority of people want blue laws eliminated.[22] Laws that violate the will of the majority, in absence of a clear moral or social evil, are suspect. Hence I do not think that this is the time for such laws.

### Church Contributions

In recent weeks, I have spoken with nearly a hundred Church people about Sunday observance, and I have found that few people give much thought to it. Moreover, when they are prodded to reflect on this issue, most of the theology, law, or economics they put forth is at least questionable. I draw from these observations that the Churches have much work to do to get their own house in order before they lobby the state to change its laws. Churches even have difficulty getting a majority of their own people to treat Sunday as a holy day.

Churches need to develop a theology of rest; they need to encourage



a human rhythm that includes communal leisure as well as prayer and play.[23] Christians must help create a culture in which rest from work and shopping is positively valued. If people want this kind of rest, then the laws can follow. Otherwise, legislation itself will be ignored or resisted. Until people see some value in taking a day to rest, with all the humanizing possibilities that only a day of rest can give, not much can be hoped for.

Contemporary religion faces the mighty task of reversing the tendency of citizens in an economically prosperous democracy to privatize their lives by immersing themselves exclusively in commercial pursuits.[24] Churches must find a way to encourage people to effectively desire leisure and a simpler life. When that happens, the deep structure of a weekly rhythm including Sunday rest again becomes a vital part of our culture, to the benefit of all.

#### Footnotes

1. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments of the United Nations (New York; United Nations 1973). Article 24 reads: "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." See also John Paul II's "Laborem exercens" #25.
2. "Declaration on Religious Freedom," #6-7, and "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," #40-42, Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter Abbott, S.J. (New York; America Press, 1966); see also John Paul II, "CENTESIMUS ANNUS," #35.
3. Juliet Schor, The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure (New York: BasicBooks, 1991), 1,29.
4. Schor, Op. Cit., 2.
5. Schor, Op. Cit., 9-10, 107-38
6. Schor, Op. Cit., 2
7. Schor, Op. Cit., 11-13
8. Schor, Op. Cit., 107, also 3.
9. Schor, Op. Cit., 132-33.
10. Schor, Op. Cit., 126
11. John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987) #28. See also Schor, Op. Cit., 136.
12. William McCready, "The Role of Sunday in American Society," Sunday Morning, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 100-10
13. John Baldovin, S.J., "Sabbath Liturgy," The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Tamara Eskenazi et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 198.
14. Schor, Op. Cit., 140
15. In talking about American public time, it is no objection that some will inevitably have to work during public days of rest. There will be nurses in emergency wards and there will be hot dog vendors on the Esplanade during the July Fourth celebrations. But the background time marks these exceptions, not as normal.

16. "Church in the Modern World," 376, Op. Cit.
17. John Courtney Murray, S.J., We Hold These Truths (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 159.
18. David Laband and Deborah Hendry Heinbuch, Blue Laws (Lexington Books, 1987) 43.
19. Murray, Op. Cit., 160-161; Christopher Mooney, S.J., Public Virtue: Law and the Social Character Of Religion (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 56.
20. Murray, Op. Cit., 164
21. There is no guarantee that the values that Sunday used to make possible will occur if Sunday is set aside as a day of rest. But they are more likely. No one can make two people sitting in the same room talk with one another. But if they cannot even be in the same room because one is working, then such conversations are less likely. Many a modern day husband and wife complain that they never have time to be with one another.
22. Laband and Heinbuch, Op. Cit., 141
23. "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," #106. Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter Abbott, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1966), says that Sunday celebration should be taught to the people "in such a way that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work." The Roman Catholic Code of Cannon Law #1247 lists Sundays under the title of "Feast Days"; and after saying that the faithful should participate in the Mass, it says "they are also to abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy which is proper to the Lord's Day, or the proper relaxation of mind and body."
24. Mooney, Op. Cit., x.

## **THE MEANING OF SABBATH REST IN THE WORLD OF COMMERCE**

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My father was raised by a rigid and pious Christian mother who believed strongly in "keeping the Sabbath Day holy". Until her dying day at the age of 98 Grandma Darling never bought or even read a Sunday newspaper. My father remembered his childhood Sundays as bleak and, most of all, boring. He was required to attend church morning and evening, and in the afternoon he could take a nap or sing hymns. He was not even allowed to play outside with friends.

My parents attempted to remain committed to the spirit of the Fourth Commandment while interpreting it with their usual progressive brand of evangelism. Permissible actions during the Sundays of my youth were figured by my parents according to a complicated and mysterious calculus: eating out on Sunday was OK, while buying groceries was not. Buying a candy bar at the restaurant while eating out might seem to be a gray area, but that too was ruled out. Going to the park on Sunday was permissible; going to a movie was not. Playing outside with friends was permitted; buying a ticket to go to a professional sports event was not.

As I grew up, I came to view these legalistic attempts--both the rigid and the progressive varieties--with displeasure, and by the time of my own adulthood I had pretty well decided to jettison the burdensome demands of Sabbath observance.

Despite these unpromising beginnings, however, I have since grown to cherish the Sabbath. As a harried and always too busy graduate student, I tried an experiment: I kept Sundays free for myself to worship, enjoy my husband, and play! I gave myself a whole day off every week from any studying or writing papers. And I discovered the joy that Sabbath is, I believe, supposed to bring.

This is the personal history I bring to any consideration of the question of a common day of rest. I will focus most on the question of Sabbath itself, but I will conclude with a brief discussion of what that means for the question of legally mandating a common day of rest, both weekly and for special events, that is, holidays. (Let me explain here that I am using the term Sabbath to denote a weekly day of worship, rest, and celebration, but I realize our indebtedness to the ancient Hebrews for this concept, and I realize that in that context Sabbath referred specifically to the seventh day of the week, beginning at sundown and ending at sundown.)

The legalism about which I spoke earlier, though well-meaning, seems to me totally to miss the point of Sabbath rest. After all, Jesus told his disciples that the Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath. Not only does that important maxim from Jesus strike a fatal blow to legalistic understanding, however, it also makes the

positive affirmation that Sabbath benefits us.

I see the Sabbath as enriching our lives in four ways: it enhances our relationship to God, to other humans, to ourselves, and to creation around us.

Perhaps most obvious and most frequently mentioned in religious discussions of the need for "Sabbath observance" is the importance of a special day for the worship of God. I have heard and read accounts by Jews of the extraordinary significance to them of the special Sabbath meal with its traditional prayers and meaningful rituals. And in Christian communities there is often a parallel excitement about the special day, Sunday, which one devotes to God. For the most part, even the Protestants who have most militantly affirmed "the priesthood of all believers" and insisted on the ability of any Christian to communicate with God at any time and any place, by himself or herself, have recognized the value of setting a day aside for communal worship.

And at this point the sustenance of our relationship to God goes hand and hand with the sustenance of our relationship with other people. Gathering together in religious communities for worship--communities of support and accountability--focuses us and grounds us in our faith commitment.

Furthermore, Sunday can be seen as a day for making connections with others quite outside the religious context. A common day of rest in our society guarantees people (religious or nonreligious) the chance to spend time with family and/or friends in an intentional way. I mentioned earlier the delight I experienced as a graduate student when I committed myself to spending Sundays having fun outings with my husband and other friends! Last Sunday my next-door neighbors--Mom and Dad and four-year-old Jonathan--had a great time together picking apples.

Less frequently mentioned in discussions of the human need for Sabbath is the benefit to oneself. According to Roman Catholic ethicist Daniel Maguire, the Sabbath was not only a day of worship and rest but, more importantly, it was intended as a day of delight. (Daniel Maguire, The Moral Choice [Garden City, N.Y., p. 451]. Thus, observing the Sabbath is not a command but a privilege. At a recent discussion with friends in my church about what Sabbath meant to us, we realized that allowing ourselves every week a day for worship, for enjoying God and those we love and the beautiful world of nature could be an exciting and life-changing experience!

When we compare our lives to those of the agricultural Israelites, or even to the early Puritan founders of this Commonwealth, it is probably true that most of us do not spend the other six days of the week in back-breaking physical labor, as did many of our forebears. But we know--from countless lifestyle articles in the newspaper, as well as from our own experience--that our stress level is certainly high nonetheless! And allowing oneself the luxury of a day intentionally set aside from the workaday grind can lower that stress level.

Let's look at the words of the fourth commandment in Exodus 10,

which instructs the Israelites to "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." The passage goes on to recall for them in almost identical language the first Genesis story of Creation: "In six days God made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore God blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

Environmental theologian Richard Cartwright Austin draws from this passage the implication that by allowing ourselves time for rest from our creating we are emulating our Creator, who also took time after creating for satisfaction, reflection, and celebration of the fruits of that creation. Taking time to stop our work--however creative and important--gives us a chance to reflect on what we have created and to feel gratified (Richard Cartwright Austin, Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988], pp. 78-80). This emphasis resonates with my earlier discussion of the benefits to ourselves of the Sabbath as a day of rest and delight.

But perhaps the most intriguing exploration I have seen of the importance of the Sabbath is the connection Austin goes on to make between the idea of a common day of rest for humans and his ecological affirmation. After all, Exodus 20:10 not only forbids me to work and my son and daughter--it also forbids the livestock to work! And the time for rest and renewal which the Sabbath provides for humans is mirrored in the parallel time of rest for the land--fallow and jubilee years for the field. The covenant community in which Sabbath and Jubilee were observed included, argues Austin, not only the humans and their God but also the rest of God's creation (Austin, pp. 87-88).

For all these reasons--for the enhancement of our communion with God and our relationships with one another, for our own personal fulfillment, and for a responsible pattern of interaction with other-than-human nature, Sabbath should be an essential part of life.

But what about the legal question? Is it desirable to legislate a common day of rest? This raises the question both of Sunday closing laws and of holiday closing laws.

A moral problem arises, for me, with legislating the closing of all nonessential establishments on Sunday--because of the enormous religious diversity in our country. Simply because Protestants and Catholics and Orthodox Christians worship on Sunday, to close retail stores and other establishments on that day alone is yet another example of the thoughtless Christian-centrism we have long been guilty of. Sunday is not the day of worship, for example, for Jews and Muslims.

Having said that, however, I find myself also persuaded, in reverse, by arguments against Sunday closing laws on the basis of economic necessity. A recent Boston Globe editorial argues that the Blue Laws are a product "of another time....We'd like to think we've advanced as a society beyond the point where our lives need to be governed by the spiritual heirs of Cotton Mather....Remaining tied to its past will cause (Massachusetts) economic woe....(Blue Laws) deprive residents of the right to earn a living."

Without benefit of the Globe editorial, a number of my first-year

undergraduate students in a class discussion recently argued that it was up to any employer whether to give his/her employees a day off on Sunday. "If the employees don't like it," opined my students, "they can go work somewhere else."

To these arguments I wish to respond with a resounding "No!" The benefits of Sabbath for humans and our environment are too precious to be left to the vagaries of the marketplace, to the luck of where one finds employment, or to the good intentions of one's employer. Like the question of family leave, a basic human need of this sort needs legislative support; otherwise workers will be exploited.

So I accept the argument from religious pluralism, but I am convinced that the argument about economic necessity misses an important point: as Daniel Maguire asserts: "the institution of the Sabbath struck a major and early blow against drudgery and the natural obsessions of the work ethic in a tough world....God's...purposes were not best perceived amid the tumult and draining busyness of the working day" (Maguire, p. 450).

The debate over holiday closings raises the same issues. I am struck by the timeliness of our discussion here; as I'm sure you have heard, Governor Weld just this week confirmed that retail businesses could remain open this coming Monday--Columbus Day--if permitted by local police chiefs.

I have just argued that humans and nature need periodic days of rest, and that need is more important than the need for commerce to continue.

But the question of which holidays we celebrate is also troubling in our pluralistic context. Columbus Day is a prime example. This year marks the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Western Hemisphere; but that exploration of his and its aftermath brought genocide to the peoples already living here as well as enormous destruction to the land and the nonhuman creatures here.

And questions of justice are raised when we make legal holidays of Christmas and Easter, but not of Passover and Yom Kippur.

I am afraid that I have raised more questions than I have answered about the ethical rightness of legislatively mandated common closing days. I'll hope that our ongoing discussion can address these questions more fully. I continue to affirm, however, that despite misguided legalism and rigidity, the idea of Sabbath rest is a divine gift which, if ignored, impoverishes us, and, if accepted, enriches our lives.

**Sunday Closing Laws Revisited**  
**The Rev. Dr. Stanley Harakas**  
**Professor of Christian Ethics, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of**  
**Theology**

Ethics as a discipline concerns itself with how things "ought to be" and how people "ought to behave". Everyone who thinks about ethical questions does so, either consciously or unconsciously, out of presuppositions that inform those "oughts". In one way or another, according to numerous theological and ethical presuppositions, Christians attempt to deal with ethical questions. Usually, the purpose is to provide guidance for believers in the practical aspects of life. In this sense, ethics seeks to be "normative".

Issues are often addressed when received practices and traditions are attacked or vitiated, usually by opposing interests, but sometimes by increasing laxity and indifference on the part of Christians themselves, when the rationale, significance or purpose of certain norms lose cogency or persuasiveness.

"Revisiting Sunday Closing Laws" becomes a need when it becomes clear that the rationale and purpose of these laws, their cogency and applicability in terms of dominant public values cause them to be questioned.

An historical survey of such laws finds its precedents in a very extensive context, i.e. the practices of the three great monotheistic religions of the broadly understood Western world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each has a different day of special religious significance in the seven day week. But each requires special observances and the honoring of a day, separating it from the other six. The Sabbath tradition in Judaism honored the seventh day of the week and became a source of severe limitations on work and ordinary activity for Jews. The Christian tradition very early transferred this approach to the first day of the week, which is perhaps witnessed to in the New Testament Book of Revelation with its reference to "kyriake hemera" - the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10.)

While some contemporary Americans tend to see these "Sunday legislation laws" as the imposition of puritanical attitudes on society, encapsulated in the term "blue laws", going back perhaps to Samuel Peter's "Sabbath Regulations of New Haven" in 1781, the tradition in Christian societies to legally limit activities, and particularly work, on the Lord's day goes back to Constantine the Great's legislation in 321. History shows that the intensity and enforcement of this legislation varied over the centuries, so that rigorist views were sometimes dominant and sometimes more relaxed views held sway.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, it is possible, nevertheless, to articulate an approach to Lord's Day observance that is thought of as normative for Orthodox Christians and might provide some light for contemporary discussion of the issue.

The source of Christian teaching about work on the Lord's day is found in the teaching of the Old Testament about work on the Sabbath, but there are significant differences. The source of the Old Testament teaching is in the Ten Commandments: "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.....".(Exodus 20:8-11).

According to the Gospel accounts, the Pharisees frequently criticized Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath, such as healing people (for example in John 5:9-10). As a result, Jesus was accused of "breaking the Sabbath". In response Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working". (John 5:17-18).

The message conveyed was that current religious practice had become in many ways a formality, with little of the inner spirit which was important in the teaching of Jesus. He pointed to the intents and the motives of the heart as the most important part of any act or religious practice. Though the external aspects of Sabbath observance had significance, the message was that the commandment was to be honored first and primarily, but not exclusively, in its spiritual dimensions.

Out of this teaching there came the traditional Church attitude toward the honoring of the Church's Sabbath, the Kyriake hemera, i.e. the "Lord's Day" which focused the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week.

Ethically, it has several dimensions. First, it is the day of the week when Christians are expected to worship as the Body of Christ, the "people of God". At the center of this worship is the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Orthodox Church conducts this sacrament by means of the Divine Liturgy, and for most of the Sundays of the year, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The Divine Liturgy is a spiritual work (the word "liturgy" in the original Greek means "the work of the people").

Secondly, the day is designated as a day of rest, when ordinary work is usually not performed. For the Church, Sunday should be a day of prayer, spiritual meditation, reading the scriptures or other spiritually nurturing reading. It is a day for good works, following the example of Christ. It can be a day of fellowship, visiting the sick, the lonely, bereaved or house-bound, assisting disabled persons or helping others. It can also be a family day or a day of sharing time with friends.

Thirdly, the spirit of the day also recognizes that some people may have to work some of the Lord's days of the month in order to make it possible for others to observe the day. The first of these, of course, are the clergy. Others may be public safety workers, people who make public transportation possible, restaurant workers, etc.

But there is a limit to this. For the Church, this should not become a continuous practice that effectively prohibits a person from attending Church. Thus, one of the ancient canons of the Church puts a limit on absence from Church of three weeks in a row. There might be some justification for some absence from Church attendance some times, but when it becomes a way of life, then it is an abandonment of the



Christian responsibility to honor the Lord's Day and, by extension, to honor God.

The recent practice of opening retail stores on Sunday for commercial interests at the expense of Church services may be an effect of secularization, and is a public abandonment of the responsibility to honor God. This puts Christians in a difficult position sometimes. Their jobs may be lost if they insist on attending worship. Christian employers, especially, should be sensitive to this conflict and do all they can to avoid creating situations that challenge the responsibility of Church attendance.

Without question the Lord's Day should be honored by Christians, honoring the Resurrection of Christ, not legalistically but in the spirit of Jesus Christ. We should make it a day of rest for the purpose of honoring God.

In the United States, efforts to legislate practices similar to these, commonly referred to as "Sunday closing laws," have been common. In a pluralistic society, however, challenges come to restrictions on work and other activities on the Lord's Day because it can be perceived as being an imposition of one religion over the practices of persons belonging to other religious traditions or to none at all.

American case law has tended to support the Lord's Day legislation, not on the basis of religious argument but for its social and communal utility. Formal and informal challenges have come from sabbatarian Christians, Jews, Muslims and non-believers who see "Sunday closing laws" as impositions of alien religious traditions. Supreme Court decisions, reflecting the inherent contradictions between the establishment and free exercise clauses of the first amendment to the United States constitution, have until the present tended sometimes toward a more strict and at other times to a more relaxed approach. Thus, in the 1961 cases of McGowan v. Maryland and Two Guys from Harrison v. Allentown, the impact of more or less forcing observant Jews to close stores two days a week was not considered sufficient to overturn Sunday observance laws. On the other hand, other cases prohibited employers from infringing on employee rights to exercise their religious rights. (Sherbert v. Verner [1963] and Thomas v. Review Board [1981]). The Supreme Court seems to vacillate between shoring up the observance of Sunday observance laws and weakening them on the basis of shifts in emphasis between what is perceived to be the public good and the right to the free exercise of religion, while seeking to escape from the appearance of establishing religious practice.

In the Eastern Orthodox canonical tradition there is a principle called "economia" that recognizes that sometimes it is in the spiritual interest of all not to enforce a canon rigorously, allowing for particular exemptions. Nevertheless, such exemptions do not create precedents. In the present times, I would hold as an Orthodox ethicist that the maintenance of Sunday closing laws serves too many interests for the well-being of society to be abolished. Sometimes, however, some exceptions may be justified.

**A View From A Parish**  
**The Rev. David M. Barney**  
**Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Concord, Massachusetts**

I should declare my interest at the outset, as we consider the Sunday Closing Laws. I work on Sundays. Indeed, there are those, even in my own community, who insist that I work only on Sundays, but I claim that is only vile rumor.

My work on Sundays involves my vocation as priest and rector in an Episcopal parish. Our normative time of education and worship is Sunday morning, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. So our interest in this question is obvious.

In considering the question of Sunday Closing Laws it helps me put things in perspective when I remember that there are more Muslims in the United States than there are Episcopalians. Still, the vast majority of Americans identify themselves as Christians. We live in a pluralist society, in which the needs of the minorities must be especially regarded because the minorities are especially vulnerable to being treated unjustly. One question is whether it is prejudicial to others-- Muslims, Jews, other religious groups, and those who choose to disregard all religion--for the state to enforce closing laws which are tailored to suit the special needs of Christians?

The writers of the Bible spoke often about the sabbath, a day of rest which is firmly associated with Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Among the Christian majority of this country, I believe that only the Seventh Day Adventists still maintain Saturday as their special holy day. You should have heard earlier today about the dark and tangled questions involved in tracing the change from Saturday to Sunday to Lord's Day as the characteristically Christian day of rest and worship.

In the face of these two considerations, the rights of the minorities and the commandment to keep the sabbath, what grounds have we for supporting Sunday closing laws? That's the question I wish to address briefly from my vantage as a parish priest.

The first consideration is the sabbath itself. Its establishment was clearly intended to be world-wide and humanitarian. The decalogue in the book of Exodus associates the sabbath with creation (Exodus 20:8-11) which is obviously universal; and the decalogue in Deuteronomy connects the sabbath with redemption from slavery in Egypt: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). In both accounts the establishment of the sabbath is for the benefit of all humankind, for servants and aliens as well as owners and rulers. This was the interpretation that Jesus made of the sabbath according to Mark's Gospel: "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). My point is that the origins of the notion of sabbath-time are considerations of the welfare of all humankind. The purpose of sabbath-time, a time of holy rest and

recreation, can be fulfilled any time of the week, of course, if the social arrangements allow for a time of rest.

There is need for some time of rest and recreation away from the drudgery of continuous work for the worker's own sake. Life is more than getting and spending; love, play, learning, worship, art, citizenship and other good human enterprises each must have a rest from labor in order to be developed. Friendships and family ties need the attention and care which only time can afford. The wider community needs political conversation among individuals and joint public action for the health of the whole social fabric. All these goods take time and leisure to pursue.

In America, Sunday remains our common day of rest for want of any practical alternative. Naturally it suits the Christian majority, but other religious and non-religious communities have adapted to it more or less happily. I cannot foresee having two or more days in which closing laws would be enforced. Since we have to choose one day in order for the whole community to enjoy it together, I see no alternative to Sunday.

Several years ago I was opposed to all blue laws on the ground that they discriminated against non-Christians. Then the subject of Sunday morning athletics came up at one of our interfaith group's meetings in Concord. My hunch had been that I was going to side with our Jewish members in opposition to our criticising Sunday morning sports. To my surprise the Jewish delegation was unanimously and adamantly against Sunday morning sports for Concord youth.

"Look, we're not naive," they said. "We know that there's no chance that sports will be banned on a sabbath (Saturday). And for the good of our families and the good of the community there should be one day a week when we are free to be together in unscheduled ways. So we support the petition from the inter-faith community that Sunday mornings be kept free." Their position began my conversion about Sunday closing laws.

I support the Sunday morning closing laws that are on the books in Massachusetts. In the interest of religious freedom, I also support making it mandatory that employers allow all non-Christian employees reasonable time to practice their religion. I do not believe that the broadening of Massachusetts's Sunday closing laws is advisable.

My impression is that the owners of businesses and employers generally oppose Sunday closing laws while the workers generally support closing laws. I always sleep better at night when I take the side of workers against owners!

The strongest argument against the closing laws is that they reduce the amount of profit which a business might make. This is not a good argument. There is in principle no limit to the profit motive, but the human good of a fully developed life in community supersedes the demand for profit. There are many bad ways in which more money might be made, but which we are agreed as a society are impermissible. For example, it might be more profitable to be unconcerned about polluting the

environment or being cavalier about workers' safety, yet hard won law and custom say that the health and welfare of the community and the workers count for more than the profits of the enterprise.

The benefits of the workers' and community's time of rest also outweigh the benefits of increased profits. As a matter of justice, let our Commonwealth set some limit to the demands made on working people. Let us keep the Sunday closing laws.

## LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS

### LEGISLATIVE UPDATE AND STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS

**DR. RUY COSTA**

*Associate Director for Public Policy, Massachusetts Council of Churches*

The Weld administration and its allies in the private sector -- mostly the larger retail chains -- have developed a strategy that can be countered only by an enormous concentration of time and attention. Their strategy is to attack the remaining blue laws little by little. It presumes that people opposed to Sunday openings will be less able to respond to changes in the law when those changes are so small that most people either (a) do not notice them, or (b) if they notice the changes they do not care.

One concrete way they pursue this strategy is by sponsoring legislation that would allow only a few towns on the borders with other states to open commerce before noon on Sundays. The "border argument" is that those communities are losing money because their neighbors across the border are open and residents of those towns go shopping across the state line. It should not take much to realize that once those border communities have permission to open their stores neighboring communities within the Commonwealth will claim that they also need to be able to open because their residents are shopping on Sunday morning in neighboring towns.

Another variation of the administration's "little by little" strategy is to support legislation that would allow the opening of stores all over the state on Labor Day, for example, but only for the current year. And so on. This way it is harder to get people organized against their actions. At the same time, the population grows used to the idea of commerce on those days as the normal thing to do, preparing the way for future, bolder changes.

How can we respond?

What follows is a suggested twofold strategy.

In the first place, advocates of a common day of rest need to reclaim the strength of the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath within the churches. The studies compiled in this volume open a floodgate of scriptural and theological resources for study and reflection on the profound -- almost mysterious -- and transcendent significance of the Judeo-Christian Sabbath. The common day of rest is sacred because it is commanded by God; it is sacred because it points to the presence of grace in life, i.e., it is a day to celebrate/enjoy creation without having to work on it; the common day of rest is sacred also because it includes nature in a cycle of rest and renewal; and so on. To neglect a common day of rest is to neglect a fundamental component of our confession. Churches need to re-visit the issue. Sunday school

classes, adult forums and other discussion groups are settings where such issues can be examined. Perhaps even our liturgies should include reminders of the contradiction between the proclamation of the imago dei in our neighbor and the enslavement of our neighbor by the political power of Mammon. It shouldn't be difficult to include in our Sunday morning confessions of sins a line or two acknowledging our collective complicity in the present state of affairs: "dear Lord we confess... we have not kept a day of rest."

Without this spiritual vision of the importance of the day of the Lord, our efforts will become increasingly powerless against the passionate drive which moves the opponents of Sunday closing laws.

Passion, however, is not the only strength of the opponents of Sunday closing laws. They are also well organized. To counter the well-funded anti-blue laws lobby, advocates of Sunday closings need to be willing to respond each time the administration or the legislature is faced with one of these "chip away" bills. It is crucial that pastors and lay leaders contact their legislators every time they vote on such matters -- even when the proposed laws do not affect their communities immediately.

Only with a renewed vision, with a state-wide grassroots effort, and, with the will to be political in defense of the Sunday laws, will common day of rest advocates in this Commonwealth be able to persevere against the tremendous odds faced in defense of the current Sunday Closing laws.

## APPENDIX

### PRE-CONFERENCE SURVEY RESULTS

In preparation for the "Sunday Closing Laws Revisited" conference, the Massachusetts Council of Churches distributed a survey to local churches asking about Sunday closing practices in their communities and how their members were affected by open shopping centers and Sunday morning sporting events. There were forty-five responses to the survey, with results as follows:

1. Are Sunday morning sports events/practices common in your community? **90% yes.** What sports in particular? **soccer, baseball, hockey.**
2. Have these affected adult church attendance? **yes 88%** youth church attendance? **yes 92%** youth group attendance? **yes 92%.**
3. Are Sunday morning sports events a problem in your church families? **yes 90%.**
4. Are grocery stores open Sunday mornings? **yes 50% no 50%.**
5. Are department stores open Sunday mornings? **yes 20% no 80%**
6. Has there been public discussion of these openings? **no 80% yes 20%**
7. Do you know of people pressured into working? **yes 70%**  
**no 30%**
8. Has your congregation recently discussed the issue of Sunday closing laws? **no 70% yes 30%.**
9. Is a common day of rest one which concerns you? **yes 90%.**

Along with the survey results, came some moving letters from people who had resisted real pressure to work on Sunday mornings during their normal worship hours, as large chain stores began to open early Sunday morning. We also found that some communities had resisted the increasing practice of scheduling sporting events during Sabbath hours by organizing among the various churches and synagogues. In Cranston, Rhode Island, more than 30 religious leaders joined together to express their concern over the need of many young people to choose between religious observance and being a member of a sports team. (See their letter among suggested texts in the Appendix.)

**SAMPLE LETTERS ON SUNDAY MORNING PUBLIC ACTIVITIES**  
**From Religious and Lay Leaders to Local Officials, Organizers, Etc.**

**The following text on public hindrance to and descriptions of Sunday worship services was approved unanimously and vigorously by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches on December 7, 1983. It may be helpful for local congregations to distribute this statement to local officials, organizational leaders, and newspapers as a possible deterrent to scheduling insensitivity.**

As pastors and leaders of various churches, we are increasingly concerned with the growing number of public activities, particularly sports events, that are scheduled for Sunday mornings in our community in conflict with the traditional time of worship for our congregation(s). This trend places an unfair burden on some of our members, specially the youth, who are confronted with a difficult choice between participating in worship or recreational activities. Moreover, in some cases, certain Sunday morning activities -- such as races and parades -- have hindered people from attending worship or disrupted worship services.

We are concerned that a pattern of public insensitivity to the religious traditions of our churches may be emerging and hardening in this community.

We, therefore, appeal to you, our public officials and private planners of public events, to avoid the imposition of impediments to religious worship. We urge you to remember that the Sunday morning service is not only a centuries-old tradition for our churches, but also a time of special religious significance. To be told to re-schedule our worship, as has occurred sometimes, is perceived by many of our people as insulting.

We understand the difficulties of public scheduling in a pluralistic society. We are convinced, however, that these problems are surmountable with sensitivity. If the various religious traditions in a community are treated with respect and fairness, the benefits of good will, mutual trust, and cooperation will far outweigh any scheduling liabilities.

**The following is an example of a real, and successful effort by an interfaith clergy association in Rhode Island, to address the problem of scheduled sports events conflicting with religious observance in their community. The open letter was published by a local newspaper.**

Dear Residents of Cranston:

Every day during the schoolweek the young people of Cranston say these words:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America  
 And to the republic for which it stands,  
 One nation, under God, indivisible



With liberty and justice for all.  
However, what we teach our children on the weekends and religious holidays is "justice for some".

It is unjust and unfair to ask a young person to choose between recreational activities and religious services on the Sabbath or on religious holidays.

As it stands now, recreational activities are scheduled in conflict with the time-honored hours of worship for religious traditions in our city, including Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and Sunday mornings. For the child or family whose religious convictions prohibit them from participating in Sabbath activities, this is a painful and unnecessary dilemma.

You might say, "there is not enough time to schedule all the practices and games on a weekend without encroaching on these Sabbath hours." However, current schedules are often a matter of convenience rather than consideration. More times for activities are not what is needed; rescheduling is.

You might say, "those who want to go to worship services can go at another time". For some, this is a possibility, but for many congregations there is only one Sabbath worship service.

If the spiritual nurture of your children is important to you, and you want to give all our children equal opportunity in recreational activities in the city, then let your school and/or recreational league know about your concern. We support the recreational activities of our community and appreciate their benefits, but not at the expense of the religious nurture of our families. Things will change only if you feel that they are important enough to speak up about. We hope that you will decide to do so!

Sincerely,

The Clergy of Cranston  
April 12, 1991

## STUDY GUIDE

The preceding pages offer a whole spectrum of issues and perspectives on the significance of a common day of rest: from the biblical commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, to the contemporary sociological concept of "time starvation," to possible implications of the unwillingness to set a day apart for rest, worship and recreation on family life, individual stress and even the environment. The questions that follow are intended to help study groups reflect on and to integrate the various aspects of these issues.

1. List at least three good reasons why it could be important for the whole society to keep a weekly common day of rest.

2. Christians find in Scripture a commandment to keep the Sabbath holy; does that mean that advocating a common day of rest would impose a Christian tradition on everybody? What common grounds do Christians have with people of other theological and/or ideological orientations on this issue?

3. From a Christian point of view, to make the day of rest a working day like all others is to violate God's will. However, we live in a pluralistic society. How do we argue for a common day of rest without implying moral laxity on those who oppose that idea?

4. What is the theological/religious importance of the Sabbath?

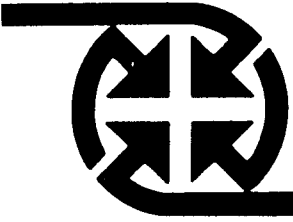
5. What is the political importance of the Sabbath?

6. What is the social importance of the Sabbath?

7. Proponents of regular commerce on Sundays argue from the perspective of profits and increased revenues for state government. Are other values also relevant? Do we have a different approach to the issue?

8. Do you think that the idea of a common day of rest has anything to do with social justice? With labor justice? With sexism? Racism? The environment?





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