

Toward Integrating Catholic Social Teaching into Graduate Social Work Education

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Abstract

Social work programs are one mechanism within Catholic institutions of higher education for advancing the social mission of the Church. The social work profession seeks the achievement of a just society that promotes the dignity of the human person in the context of community and social relationships. This article describes beginning efforts to integrate Catholic Social Teaching (CST) into an integrative seminar on social justice and social change in a graduate social work program. It also identifies existing models and organizations that universities can look to for support if they endeavor to bring CST into their course content in a meaningful way.

Introduction

In the past several years, there has been refocused attention on the mission and identity of Catholic higher education. Among other things, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* identifies the Catholic University's role in society. It is to be "an effective instrument of cultural progress"¹ giving thoughtful attention through research and education to "the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level."² The Church's social doctrine, referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (CST), is a tremendous resource that offers

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¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), 32.

² *Ibid.*

fundamental values and principles in which to ground a set of solutions for contemporary problems.

Catholic schools of social work are vital to preparing students for careers that fulfill the Church's mission of charity and justice for poor and oppressed persons and communities. As articulated in the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics, the mission, values, and principles of the social work profession are congruent with those articulated in *Gaudium et spes*³ and other Church documents that speak to the life and dignity of the person, the importance of family and community, the proper role of government, and the right to freedom and self-expression.

This article sets the context for social work as a natural ally in advancing the mission and identity of Catholic institutions of higher education. Because most of the higher education literature focuses on undergraduate education, this article explores the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating CST into a professional school, specifically a master's level social work program. It describes beginning efforts and a conceptual framework for integrating CST into a graduate integrative seminar on Social Justice and Social Change (SJSC). The SJSC seminar offers a unique opportunity to engage graduate students and faculty in critical reflection and dialogue about social work practice that is grounded in the principles of CST. The article concludes with recommendations to universities to help faculty make better use of CST to enrich course content.

Social Work: Putting Catholic Social Teaching Into Practice

In 2008, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for schools of social work, identified that there were 59 undergraduate and 13 graduate accredited social work programs in Catholic colleges and universities in the United States.⁴ Among these early Catholic social work programs was the National Catholic School of Social Service. It was founded in 1918, responding to the social problems of that era, particularly the social welfare needs associated with World War I. As social work programs began to grow in mostly secular environments, the founders of NCSSS expressed concern that Catholic students desiring to integrate faith and service would have no alternative to a

³ Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1965).

⁴ L. Weidekamp, Counsel of Social Work Education, personal communication, 2008.

secular education “where Catholic philosophical and ethical principles . . . would not only be lacking, but regarded with hostility or contempt.”⁵ Consequently, a case was made to found a social work program at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. Ninety years later, Catholic schools of social work remain a vital presence in preparing students for careers that fulfill the Church’s dual mission of providing charity and justice for vulnerable populations. However, schools continue to struggle with how, systematically and comprehensively, to apply the rich resource of CST as part of that professional education.

The School of Social Work at the College of St. Catherine and the University of St. Thomas has made significant progress in demonstrating the congruency of the social work profession’s mission and values with those articulated in CST. Barbara Shank, the Dean of the social work program writes:

Catholic Social Teaching, as presented in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Catholic university, and social work education [are] complementary and compatible. Each has a rich heritage that places people before things, recognizes the dignity of the human person and the interdependence of humanity, challenges the oppression of racism and bigotry, and works for social and economic justice. Each calls upon its members to defend human rights, to participate in society at all levels, and to take action to serve the poor and vulnerable. Each requires that its members act out a developed sense of value, ethics, and moral conscience for social justice.⁶

Shank and her colleague Mary Ann Brenden outline the many and profound points of intersection between social work and CST, particularly the notion of social justice.

Social Justice: An Organizing Principle for the Social Work Profession and the Church’s Social Mission

For both the Church and the social work profession, the journey toward a socially and economically just society (i.e., social justice) is one that begins with the life and dignity of the human person. Here this inherent dignity is honored, affirmed, and given meaning through human relationships, and promoted through the common good. Firer Hinze states that for Pope Pius XI, “social justice refers to the central and

⁵ L. Lawler, *Full Circle: The Story of the National Catholic School of Social Service 1918–1947* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), 23.

⁶ B. Shank, “The Call to Justice: Social Work in Catholic Higher Education,” *Social Work & Christianity*, 34 (1), (2007): 15.

necessary set of conditions wherein each member is contributing, and thus enjoying, all that is needed for the common good.”⁷ Through the various documents that comprise CST,⁸ the Church crafts a vision for a just society. This can be summarized by basic principles of CST⁹ which may be used to add depth to the social work profession’s understanding and interpretation of social justice. Like the social work profession’s dual commitment to service and social justice, CST draws clear links between charity and justice. In *Justitia in mundo*, the bishops write, “Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbor.”¹⁰ Himes explains that in *Justitia in mundo*, the bishops see “the Church’s social mission on behalf of justice is ultimately grounded in the nature of God as disclosed in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the actions and teaching of Jesus as recounted in the Christian Scriptures.”¹¹ This shared dual commitment to charity and justice gives further evidence of the power of Catholic schools of social work to promote the social mission of Catholic institutions of higher education. The next section describes initial efforts by the author to integrate CST into a graduate field seminar in Social Justice and Social Change.

Integration of Catholic Social Teaching with a Graduate Field Seminar Course

Graduate social work programs prepare students for advanced professional practice in a selected concentration. Most people think of

⁷ C. Firer Hinze, “Commentary on *Quadragesimo Anno* (After Forty Years),” *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, K. Himes, ed., (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 167.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2004).

⁹ In *Sharing Catholic Social Teachings: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), the US bishops identify the following basic principles of CST: the life and dignity of the human person; human equality; the rights and responsibilities of the human person; the call to family; the call to community and participation; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; the option for the poor and vulnerable; solidarity; subsidiarity; the common good; the universal destination of goods, the right to private property, and the integrity of creation; economic initiative; charity and justice.

¹⁰ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Justitia in mundo* (*Justice in the World*) (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1971), 34.

¹¹ K. Himes, K. “Commentary on *Justitia in mundo* (Justice in the World)” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, ed. K. Himes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 345.

graduate social work professionals as clinicians who engage in therapy, counseling, or some other therapeutic practice with a particular population. However, advanced professional practice includes preparation for careers in policy analysis, policy advocacy, community practice, social development, and social administration. The concentration associated with this type of preparation is often referred to as “macro.”

At the National Catholic School of Social Service, the advanced macro concentration is called *Social Justice and Social Change*. This gives intentional focus to the deep roots of social reform found in the social work profession and CST, the intellectual traditions that undergird the SJSC concentration at NCSSS. Graduate social work education includes a field practicum in which advanced year students spend 20-24 hours per week at an agency anchoring their coursework with practicum experience under the supervision of an experienced professional social worker. Concurrent with their practicum, students participate in a weekly Integrative Seminar that offers a forum for students to discuss and apply course content to experiences they are having in their field practicum.

In addition to their integrative function, field seminars have been used to (1) supplement content not sufficiently covered in other courses, (2) further socialize students to the profession, e.g., values clarification, working out ethical dilemmas, (3) discuss the use of self and self awareness, (4) develop knowledge of the community and its resources, (5) discuss current organizational or policy issues, and/or (6) monitor the effectiveness of the field practicum experience.¹² Within certain parameters, seminar instructors have the freedom to choose how they achieve the integrative function of the course in the context of the concentration. Consequently, the SJSC integrative seminar was selected as a good course to begin a fuller integration of CST to deepen the preparation of students entering professional careers seeking social justice.

The SJSC Integrative Seminar

The SJSC integrative seminar is designed to prepare our graduates for professional practice that authentically seeks to bring about a just and inclusive society. In clinical practice, authenticity typically refers to the degree to which practitioners share themselves with openness, honesty, and empathy to enhance the therapeutic dimension of the helping

¹² J. Birkenmaier et al., “MSW Integrative Seminars: Toward Integrating Course and Field Work,” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 23 (2003): 167-182.

process.¹³ For graduates in our SJSC concentration who are likely to be policy advocates, social administrators, or community practitioners, authentic practice includes (1) developing a clear understanding of what social justice means, (2) exploring the value dimensions and elements of a just society, (3) struggling with how those values and elements of a just society can be made present at the macro policy (international, federal, state, and local policy) levels, agency policy level, and the interpersonal level, where they are challenged to “live their values.” The integrative seminar enables students to think about and discuss with intentionality these dimensions of social justice in light of their coursework and experience in their practicum. CST provides language, depth, and meaning to these conversations about social justice and its various dimensions. Some of the core elements included in this integration are described below.

Dignity and Worth of the Person as the Grounding Value for SJSC Practice

Most religious, philosophical, and historical traditions believe that human beings have intrinsic dignity and worth. This view of the human person is a foundational point of congruence between social work and CST, from which all other values and principles flow. For example, the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) draws on the core values, dignity and worth of the person, and social justice, to urge social work activism for human rights. IFSW views the term *human rights* as one that “condenses into two words the struggle for dignity and fundamental freedoms which allow the full development of human potential.”¹⁴ Similarly, grounded in Judeo-Christian scripture, CST states,

the dignity of the human person . . . is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured. All human beings, therefore, are ends to be served by the institutions that make up the economy, not means to be exploited for more narrowly defined goals. Human personhood must be respected with a reverence that is religious. When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of something holy and sacred. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:27).¹⁵

¹³ D.H. Hepworth et al., *Direct Social Work Practice: Theory and Skill*, 7th edition (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2006).

¹⁴ International Federation of Social Workers, *International Policy on Human Rights*, ¶8. Available at: <http://www.ifsw.org/en/p38000212.html>

¹⁵ U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986), no. 28.

Due to the central belief in the inherent dignity and worth of the human person, the integrative seminar begins in Class 1 with a discussion of human dignity, including what it means, where it comes from, what respect for human dignity means for SJSC (macro) practice, the challenges to upholding this value in social work practice, and strategies for overcoming these challenges. Students reflect upon, individually and collectively, statements on human dignity taken from social work, CST, humanism, and other sources. Beginning the semester with class activities examining the centrality of the dignity and worth of the person is an important anchor for future discussions that link the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in coursework and in the field practicum back to the SJSC outcomes we are striving to achieve. In such discussions, the class returns to the questions about how certain field activities or practice models promote the dignity and worth of the person.

Defining Social Justice and the Elements of a Just Society

Reflecting on the various dimensions of the dignity of the worth of the person offers an important grounding for the discussion in Classes 2 and 3, where we focus on the term “social justice,” explore the evolution of its meaning, select frameworks, and practice principles. We begin with this statement from the profession’s code of ethics: “Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients.”¹⁶ The students often link this back to creating a world where people can live in a manner that reflects their human dignity and provides opportunities where they can fully flourish. Working in small groups, students draw on the knowledge and experience they have gained in courses. For example, they consider models and theories of human and social development and social work practice, experience in the field, and in their own lives, to identify twelve things that all human beings need to live a rich and fully human life, consistent with their dignity and worth. In the large group sharing, students identify instrumental needs such as food, shelter, water, and clothing. They also identify intrinsic needs like relationships, sense of belonging, protection, education, freedom to participate in society, leisure time, meaningful work, and connection to spirit. During this sharing, these items are linked to social work values and CST.

For example, the intrinsic needs for “relationships” or “sense of belonging” link to the importance of human relationships and the CST

¹⁶ National Association of Social Workers, *Code of Ethics* (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 1999).

principles: Call to Family, Community, and Participation. Because the majority of students in the class are non-Catholic, the instructor makes an effort to invite students to share the values and principles from their own traditions and heritages that inform their thinking about the elements of a just society. Throughout the semester, we discuss these shared values and what it means for our collective work in creating a just society. These value and principal-based themes are drawn upon when exploring (both formally and informally) the justice implications of the field supervisory and collegial relationships; field agency work and decision-making structures; policy and community change strategies; rationale to inform budgeting decisions; and other aspects of SJSC (macro) social work practice.

Vehicles for Self Reflection and Spiritual Renewal

The social work profession greatly values the integration of the personal and professional self through reflective social work practice.¹⁷ Reflective social work practice is an important tool for enhancing self-awareness and self-understanding, developing greater awareness of local and global communities, avoiding burnout, and developing one's professional identity.

The notion of reflection and contemplation as sources of renewal is prevalent in most faith and secular traditions. Many faith and workplace communities offer opportunities for retreat for their members, staff, and volunteers. Retreats typically include time for solitude and self-reflection with reference to the topic at hand. Taking time alone to reflect, pray, and renew is a common activity for prophets and others seeking social justice. Jesus Christ Himself did so to connect with the Source of wisdom for strength to continue His work.

Aside from class discussions, the SJSC integrative seminar provides two vehicles through which students are invited to reflect and/or connect to the source of their wisdom. The *SJSC self-assessment* and the *weekly meditation* are described below.

SJSC Self-Assessment

Mid-way through the semester, students are invited to reflect carefully about their role as emerging SJSC practitioners and to write out a

¹⁷ R. Rothman, *The Self Awareness Workbook for Social Workers* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon Press, 1999).

self-assessment based on the following questions: (1) What is your vision of a just society? (2) Identify and describe the values and principles you think will serve as the core guideposts in your social work career seeking social justice. (3) What do you see as your greatest strengths in helping you work toward a more just society? and (4) What do you think would help you most in achieving your role toward bringing about a more just society?

In the large group discussion, students are invited to share their answers to these questions. The class identifies and discusses common themes of a just society, shared values and strengths, and strategies for supporting one another to attain additional skills needed to be most effective in the area of justice work to which each feels called.

Weekly Meditation

In his encyclical letter, *Fides et ratio*, Pope John II calls attention to the irreducible unity between faith and reason.¹⁸ “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”¹⁹

Thomas Merton wrote, “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. . . . It is vivid realization of the fact that life and being proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. It is above all an awareness of the reality of that Source.”²⁰ Merton, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, Catherine of Siena, and other Christian mystics describe contemplation as the ultimate union of the individual with God. Meditation is a step toward contemplation and is central to many spiritual traditions, including the Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition of Catholics. Meditation helps to enhance one’s awareness of the *one truth* in an effort to discern one’s path, renew one’s spirit, or gain enlightenment. Meditating on a reading “is a way of meeting the God-within through the doorway of one’s mind,”²¹ where

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason: Fides et ratio* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ E. Sherman and M. Siporin, “Contemplative Theory and Practice for Social Work,” *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 27(3) (2008): 262.

²¹ F. Vanderwall, *Water in the Wilderness: Paths of Prayer, Springs for Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 35.

one reads and reflects on a reading and gives attention to how the reading engages one's heart, where the "Godseed"²² is planted and nurtured through prayer and reflection. One way for students to come "to the fullness of truth about themselves," is a weekly meditation on a reading.

Students are introduced to meditation, a contemplative practice that can clear one's mind, making room for the "inner wisdom" that gives clarity to one's role and purpose in bringing about a more just and inclusive society. Although still controversial in scientific arenas, the use of meditation and other spiritual practices in physical and psychological treatment settings is growing.²³ One review of meditation literature found hundreds of empirical studies examining the effects of meditation on reducing stress and depression, and assisting physical relaxation.²⁴ One study explored the personal practice of Zen Buddhist meditation on 10 clinical social workers and found that meditation helped practitioners be (1) more aware and present to their clients; (2) more accepting, less judgmental and reactionary to clients and colleagues; and (3) "better able to perceive connections between themselves and their clients and between their clients and the larger world."²⁵ However, few empirical studies exist examining the link between meditation and the cultivation of love, empathy, and compassion.

In the absence of empirical studies examining the effect of meditation on compassion and love, one can look to the abundance of books on spirituality and prayer, and anecdotal reports. In her personal account, *Meditation as a Tool that Links the Personal and the Professional*, Sadye Leib Logan credits her practice of meditation with ridding herself of self-deprecating or self-limiting thoughts, maintaining an "inner

²² M. Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999), 22.

²³ E.F. Canda and L.D. Furman, eds., *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice* (New York: Free Press, 1999); M. Van Hook et al., *Spirituality with Religious Traditions in Social Work Practice* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2001); H.F. de Wit, *The Spiritual Path: An Introduction to the Psychology of the Spiritual Traditions* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999); R.A. Baer, ed., *Mindfulness-based Treatment Approaches: Clinicians Guide to Evidence Base and Applications* (London: Academic Press, 2006).

²⁴ J. Kristeller and T. J. Johnson, "Cultivating Loving-Kindness: A Two-Stage Model for the Effects of Meditation on Compassion, Altruism and Spirituality," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 40 (2005): 391.

²⁵ M. Brenner and E. Homonoff, "Zen and Clinical Social Work: A Spiritual Approach to Practice," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 85(2) (2004): 264.

place of calmness and clarity,”²⁶ and treating others with greater compassion and care.²⁷ Researchers report that “the traditional literature associating meditative practice with spiritual growth suggests that meditation . . . can provide a . . . powerful means to actively cultivate universal capacities for love and connectedness.”²⁸

However, many factors contribute to one’s openness and ability to grow spiritually. Meditation alone is not sufficient to live a life that reflects one’s deeply held values. For the SJSC seminar, the meditative reading is introduced as a tool that *may* improve students’ ability to:

- Live the values to which they aspire on a more consistent basis, including responding more compassionately to others;
- Listen better to others;
- Approach conflicts or disagreements with more openness, thoughtfulness, and readiness to engage in respectful and creative problem-solving;
- Manage stress and its impact on the body, mind, and spirit; and
- Increase global awareness and the perception of life’s interconnectedness.

Students take turns selecting a meditative reading and distributing it to one another via e-mail at least 2 days prior to class. The reading may come from a variety of sources, including poetry, songs, quotes, stories, and Scripture. Before class, all students and the instructor are expected to spend at least 10-15 minutes meditating on the reading, and jotting down any thoughts, feelings, words, or ideas prompted in the heart during this experience. Students are given guidelines on how to settle themselves and approach the reading in a meditative fashion. Prior to the first meditative session, the instructor models how to settle oneself and also takes the first turn in the rotating schedule. The majority of classes throughout the semester begin with the meditation followed by a brief discussion of how the reading engaged the hearts of the participants.

Challenges Of Integrating Catholic Social Teaching In Graduate Social Work Programs

Despite the great congruency in values and vision of a just society between social work education and CST, challenges remain to the

²⁶ S. L. Abels, *Spirituality in Social Work Practice: Narratives for Professional Helping* (Denver: Love Publication Company, 2000), 108.

²⁷ Abels, *Spirituality in Social Work Practice*, 402.

²⁸ J. Kristeller and T. J. Johnson, “Cultivating Loving-Kindness,” 12.

successful application of CST in the classroom. The complexity of these challenges is heightened in graduate programs due to the greater diversity among graduate students as compared to undergraduates, particularly in terms of religion and life experience. For example, Table 1 demonstrates religious preference among graduate versus undergraduate students in the CUA social work program.

In the social work program, Catholic undergraduate students represent an average of 84% of enrolled students over three years as compared to the MSW program, where Catholic students represent an average of 30% of enrolled students. Educators in the graduate program will likely encounter a broader diversity in backgrounds and perspectives.

Perceptions About What it Means to be Catholic

Faculty in Catholic institutions (as in most educational institutions) value diversity in the classroom. Having a range of backgrounds represented in the class can deepen discussions and help make abstract concepts more clear and concrete through the sharing of varied interpretations based on life experiences. However, non-Catholic students may come to Catholic-sponsored institutions with some question about whether or not they will be fully welcome in the classroom. For example, the most commonly asked question by prospective students at NCSS's MSW Information Seminars is whether or not students will be isolated, muzzled, or marginalized due to personal views contrary to Church dogma, particularly regarding the role of women, issues affecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) people, and reproductive rights.

Table 1. Catholic University of America Student Demographics
(Catholic v. Non-Catholic)

Category	Fall 2005		Fall 2006		Fall 2007	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total Undergraduate Students	3053	100	3123	100	3326	100
Catholic Undergraduates	2256	73.89	2302	73.71	2037	61.24
Total BA Social Work Majors	33	100	35	100	39	100
Catholic BA Social Work Majors	27	81.82	31	88.57	32	82.05
Total MSW Students	188	100	196	100	157	100
Catholic MSW Students	73	38.83	51	26.02	35	22.29

Brendon (2008) identified the differentiation between Church dogma and CST as an important step in gaining greater openness to CST among students and faculty.²⁹

Furthermore, non-Catholic students may hold some suspicion about the underlying motivations for integrating CST into course content. They may wonder if CST is introduced to bring about religious conversion rather than to stimulate intellectual discourse. Given this perception, it is critical for faculty to take intentional and explicit steps to ensure that classrooms are safe environments for people with a range of perspectives to engage in respectful dialogue. Francis Clooney notes that good Catholic education provides for thoughtful dialogue that makes Christians better Christians, Buddhists better Buddhists, and Muslims better Muslims, for Catholics do not have a monopoly on “religious inspiration for lives of virtue.”³⁰

Including contemplative practice into course content is gaining traction.³¹ However, no empirical study of whether meditation in the classroom yields positive benefits has been conducted. Furthermore, introducing such a practice within a Catholic-sponsored program presents unique challenges, particularly as it relates to one’s experience of God or the Source of divine wisdom. Faculty should make students aware of the wide application of contemplative practice across disciplines and faith traditions. Moreover, faculty should model inclusiveness in the language used in describing the purpose and the directions for the assignment. For example, religiously neutral terms like “inner wisdom” may have broad appeal to people who come from both religious and secular traditions. Furthermore, when preparing their meditative readings, students should be guided to readings from a range of religious and secular traditions. Finally, the instructor should make explicit statements in writing and orally to assure students that the underlying purpose of the activity is not religious conversion.

²⁹ M. Brenden, “Social Work Through Social Justice: Strengthening Social Work Practice Through the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching,” in *Christianity and Social Work: Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice*, Hugen and Scales, eds., (Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 2008).

³⁰ F. Clooney, “Goddess in the Classroom: Is the Promotion of Religious Diversity a Dangerous Idea?” *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 16 (1999): 34.

³¹ R.C. Brown, “The Teacher as Contemplative Observer,” *Educational Leadership* 56 (4) (1999): 70-73.

Challenges for Faculty and Administrators

Outside of the classroom dynamic, individual faculty face a number of challenges in trying to integrate CST into the courses they teach. First, educational accrediting bodies, such as the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) or the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, issue new guidelines on specific content areas they would like to see infused, integrated, or otherwise included into a core curriculum. For example, CSWE requires social work programs to integrate content about values and ethics; diversity; populations-at-risk; and social and economic justice, among other areas of concern. Faculty are regularly asked to make adjustments to syllabi to meet such demands, with no additional instructional time provided, leaving less time to discuss and apply concepts to case examples.

Second, university professors are expected to be experts in the content areas and disciplines in which they teach. Consequently, without proper preparation or development, faculty who teach outside of the schools of theology and religion may feel ill-prepared to talk beyond superficial interpretations about the texts that comprise CST. This has particular relevance for social work educators, whose core values include *competence*, i.e., practicing (or teaching) only in areas of expertise. Moreover, some faculty members do not see the importance or relevance of integrating CST into academic disciplines other than religion and theology. When responding to a question about the extent to which Catholic values should be integrated into a curriculum, one faculty member stated, “Religion’s place is ONLY in a religion class that is optional for the student.”³²

Third, in addition to competing demands for content covered during instructional time, demands on faculty outside of the classroom are enormous, including research, writing, advising, departmental committees, university committees, grant writing, administrative tasks, and so on. The consequences of asking faculty to spend time gaining competence in an area that may hold little to no value in their academic discipline should be considered, particularly for faculty members who have not yet achieved tenure.

³² J. Dwyer and C. Zech, “American Catholic higher education: An ACCU study on mission and identity, faculty development, and curricular revision,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 19 (1-2): 24.

Supporting Faculty In The Integration Of Catholic Social Teaching

In 1995, the US Catholic Bishops formed a *Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education* to assess the degree to which Catholic institutions understand and fully integrate the social teachings of the Church in their work. The Higher Education Subgroup of this task force found that “while there is clear interest in and support for Catholic Social Teaching among institutions of higher education, it is generally not offered in a systematic way.”³³ To that end, the bishops have encouraged Catholic institutions of higher education to develop new initiatives to support this effort, and have offered a number of recommendations through their task force. In addition to these general recommendations, models exist to help universities and departments support the thoughtful integration of CST into course curricula.

- ***Social Work for Social Justice Project at CST/UST:***

Brenden³⁴ gives a detailed description of their efforts to address the systematic and comprehensive integration of CST in the social work program at the College of St. Catherine and University of St. Thomas. The project included faculty development, student engagement, and curriculum development, with faculty development as the core of the effort. Fruits of their efforts included: better integration of CST into their own undergraduate and graduate programs; hosting a conference to enable faculty from Catholic-sponsored programs to share learning modules, lessons, challenges around the integration of CST and social work education; a resource guide made available to faculty participants in the conference; and ongoing dialogue about how to continue to strengthen these individual and collective efforts for justice-oriented education.

- ***Teaching Catholic Social Teaching Project:***

In his white paper on the Teaching Catholic Social Teaching Project, Whitmore³⁵ reported on the preliminary results of 12 Catholic

³³ U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, 15.

³⁴ M. Brenden, “Social Work Through Social Justice”.

³⁵ T. Whitmore, “In the Mission or on the Margins: A White Paper on the ‘Teaching Catholic Social Teaching’ Project,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 22 (2) (2002): 73-86.

colleges and universities that developed courses and programs on CST for their undergraduates. Some schools created discrete programs on CST while others made an effort to infuse content across the curriculum. One key lesson learned, regardless of approach, is the importance of attending to a strong faculty development component. This includes summer institutes on CST with a stipend for participation and faculty curricula workgroups to share syllabi and discuss successes and challenges. Some schools, Villanova among them, support faculty efforts to integrate CST through their Offices of Mission Effectiveness or Mission Identity.

In addition to existing models for integrating CST into course curricula, there are organizations and initiatives that can offer support to all Catholic institutions of higher education in this effort.

- *The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) exists to help strengthen the Catholic character and identity of Catholic institutions of higher education.*

To that end, they convene meetings of faculty to discuss these issues, offer conferences, and publish a journal where academics can make a contribution to the scholarly literature on Catholic higher education.

- *Collegium is an annual program sponsored by the ACCU that gives faculty who teach in Catholic colleges and universities an opportunity to explore the integration of faith and intellectual life with colleagues who come from diverse religious backgrounds and academic disciplines.*

In addition to giving faculty an opportunity to share concrete ideas, Collegium also provides an opportunity for spiritual renewal.

- *The Catholic Justice Educator's Network (CJEN) and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops publish documents, lesson plans, statements, and other tools to spark ideas among educators for integrating CST into course content.*

In addition to providing materials, they provide advice and technical assistance to faculty and administrators undertaking such an initiative.

The extent to which faculty members know about or take advantage of the resources available through these organizations is unclear.

Institutions should work with these organizations to think strategically about how to use their services most effectively.

Conclusion

Despite its centrality to the Catholic mission and its richness for intellectual discourse, Catholic Social Teaching is an underutilized resource in Catholic institutions of higher education. Among disciplines represented at Catholic universities and colleges, social work programs are natural allies in promoting the Catholic social mission. Social work and CST share a common set of values, a special commitment to the poor, and a vision of a just society based on the dignity of the human person and social relationships. In addition, the presence of emerging and existing models for integrating CST into academic programs combined with the potential support received from national groups like ACCU, the CJEN, and the USCCB, show a clear pathway for universities and departments who make this initiative a priority.

Universities and departments who want to undertake this effort in a systematic and comprehensive fashion must invest in the institutional resources to do so. This includes hiring position(s) to oversee, advance, and support the initiative, offering summer institutes and other mechanisms to develop faculty competence in these areas, and making workload adjustments as needed. In addition, universities must be willing to invest in a process that includes faculty, student, and other stakeholder voices to build a program that fits each department's needs and abilities. It is only through institutional and departmental leadership, made manifest by an investment in resources, that educators in Catholic institutions can unlock and thoughtfully disseminate one of its "best kept secrets" within university communities.

