

Catholic Social Teaching and Civic Engagement: Grounding Civic Praxis in Catholic Theory

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Abstract

In the United States, there are approximately 244 Catholic colleges and universities that together form an “incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity.”¹ These societies of scholars and learners are not cloisters removed from civic life; they are apostolic in nature, called to “an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family.”² They are active in civic engagement because of the set of values and meanings that define them as essentially Catholic and that are explicitly expressed in the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Thus, Catholic colleges and universities can animate their service and teaching missions by developing initiatives that ground the service commitment to their communities in the teaching of their shared values.

Bernard Lonergan, in *Method and Theology*, asserted that “community is the achievement of common meaning.”³ In the United States approximately 244 Catholic colleges and universities—communities of common meaning—form an “incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity.”⁴ However, these societies of scholars and learners are not cloisters removed from the cities and towns of which they are constitutive parts. Rather, they are

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

² *Ibid.*, ¶13.

³ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, ¶1.

apostolic in nature, called to “an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family.”⁵ This is why “every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works.”⁶ These institutions strive to reflect the values and traditions of Catholic Social Teaching (CST).

Catholic colleges and universities can animate their service and teaching missions by developing initiatives that ground the service commitment to their communities (i.e., civic engagement) in the teaching of shared values (i.e., CST). This article briefly reviews particular aspects of the Catholic social justice tradition that lead to civic engagement, and then presents two curricular examples of how a Catholic college can “contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works.”⁷

Foundational Catholic Social Teachings from Papal and Episcopal Sources

Throughout the last century, the Catholic Church has fashioned a unique and well-developed perspective on social justice that encourages Catholics, and all people of good will, to practice civic engagement. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII initiated the formation of this perspective with his encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891); it has since been refined by other major papal encyclicals, including Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), John XXIII’s *Mater et magistra* (1961), and John Paul II’s *Centesimus annus* (1991). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has contributed to this refinement by applying the global context of CST to the more local context of American dioceses and Catholic institutions. In particular, the Bishops have created a comprehensive body of literature on the rights and responsibilities of Catholics in the political process in the United States.

Four Key Papal Encyclicals

*Rerum novarum*⁸ (also known as “*On the Condition of Workers*”) emerged from Pope Leo XIII’s assessment of the signs of his times. He

⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ¶33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum: On Capital and Labor* (1891) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html.

saw the rift between the rich and the poor in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, and urged for religion to mend that rift: “There is no intermediary more powerful than religion (whereof the Church is the interpreter and guardian) in drawing the rich and the working class together, by reminding each of its duties to the other, and especially of the obligations of justice.”⁹ Believing it was necessary for the common good that workers be treated with dignity, Leo XIII declared: “As regards protection of this world’s good, the first task is to save the wretched workers from the brutality of those who make use of human beings as mere instruments for the unrestrained acquisition of wealth.”¹⁰

Despite his acknowledgment of the sufferings of the working class, Leo XIII still continued to defend the rights of private ownership and objected to the theories and proposed solutions of the emerging Socialist movement.¹¹ He envisioned the Church and its faithful as essential to healing the destructive rift between owners and workers.¹² With the articulation of this desire of Catholics-as-civic-change-agents, Leo XIII established a basis for Catholic social thought.

In the four decades following the promulgation of *Rerum novarum* it became increasingly clear how difficult it was for individuals to affect social justice. Pope Pius XI recognized this reality in his 1931 commentary on social justice, *Quadragesimo anno*¹³ (*On Reconstruction of the Social Order*). In this document, Pius XI expanded *Rerum novarum*’s examination of the condition of the working poor to the social and political structures that oppress them. While writing in response to the economic disaster of the Great Depression and its ensuing political changes,¹⁴ Pius XI argued not only for the rights of the poor, but also for the principle of subsidiarity. He contended that subsidiarity, a social organizing method in which needs are addressed at the level of organizations closest to the problem, was a positive way to deconstruct oppressive social and political structures. He asserted that “it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to

⁹ *Ibid.*, ¶19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ¶43.

¹¹ Christian A. Janson, S.M., *Service Learning Center, 1994-2004* (San Antonio: St. Mary’s University, 2004), 20.

¹² Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, ¶43.

¹³ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno: On the Reconstruction of Social Order*, (1931) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimoanno_en.html.

¹⁴ Christian A. Janson, S.M., *Service Learning Center, 1994-2004* (San Antonio: St. Mary’s University, 2004), 21.

assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.”¹⁵ Such a method respects the dignity of the individual, emphasized by Leo XIII, while empowering those most involved in a social problem to engage in civic association and action.

Following Pius XI’s example, Pope John XXIII contributed to the developing body of CST through his commentary on social justice, *Mater et magistra*¹⁶ (*Christianity and Social Progress*). Published in 1961 to mark the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, John XXIII not only reinforced previous teachings such as subsidiarity; he also concluded that the *raison d’être* of the State is the realization of the common good in the temporal order, and that Catholics must work to realize this common good.¹⁷

Pope John Paul II marked the centennial of *Rerum novarum* in his 1991 encyclical letter on social justice titled *Centesimus annus*.¹⁸ John Paul II asserted that the economy must be understood in light of the whole person: “It is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone.”¹⁹ Echoing his predecessors, this vision of the whole person included the social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions of the person. While acknowledging that capitalism recognizes the freedom of the human person, he warns about the dangers of “unbridled” capitalism:

It would appear that, on the level of individual nations and international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to need. But this is true only for those needs which are “solvent”, insofar as they are endowed with purchasing power, and for those resources which are “marketable,” insofar as they are capable of obtaining a satisfactory price. But there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish.²⁰

The American Bishops and the Tradition of Catholic Social Teaching

Like the papal tradition of providing written guidance on social issues, the Catholic bishops in the United States have developed a

¹⁵ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* ¶ 79.

¹⁶ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et magistra: On Christianity and Social Progress* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1961).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ¶ 20.

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum novarum*, (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1991).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ¶ 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, ¶ 34.

way of addressing these issues. In their work *American Catholic Social Teaching*, Massaro and Shannon date this episcopal practice back to the Pastoral Letter of John Carroll, May 28, 1792.²¹ They also analyze some of the key contributions the American bishops have made to a developing body of social justice works, including: *Statement on Church and Social Order*,²² *Discrimination and Christian Conscience*,²³ *Human Life in Our Day*,²⁴ *The Economy: Human Dimensions*,²⁵ *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*,²⁶ *Economic Justice for All*,²⁷ *One in Christ Jesus: Toward a Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society*,²⁸ *Moral Principles and Policy Priorities on Welfare Reform*,²⁹ *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*,³⁰ and *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*.³¹

Faithful Citizenship was updated and republished for the 2004 presidential election year with a reminder to American Catholics that “in the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”³² In response to Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*³³ (2005), the USCCB again refined and republished the guidance in 2008 as *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*.

This new version echoed Benedict XVI's call that “it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice

²¹ Thomas Massaro and Thomas Shannon, *American Catholic Social Teaching* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

²² National Catholic Welfare Conference, February 7, 1940.

²³ National Catholic Welfare Conference, November 14, 1958.

²⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 15, 1968.

²⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 20, 1975.

²⁶ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983.

²⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986.

²⁸ National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee, 1992.

²⁹ United States Catholic Conference, March 19, 1995.

³⁰ USCC Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education, 1998.

³¹ United States Catholic Conference Administrative Board, 1999.

³² U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2004).

³³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est: God is Love* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 2005).

as well as greater readiness to act accordingly.”³⁴ This active role in education and formation is critical, because “the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.”³⁵ In addition to materials on social justice available through their main website,³⁶ the USCCB has a dedicated website for the social and political issues dealt with in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.³⁷ The back-and-forth development of concepts between the popes and the USCCB demonstrates the dynamic and rapid growth of CST.

Summarizing the Tradition

From Leo XIII’s foundation in *Rerum novarum*, CST has been a tradition in progress. Papal, conciliar, synodal, and episcopal documents have helped to enrich this tradition including: *Pacem in terris* (1963); *Gaudium et spes* (1965); *Dignitatis humanae* (1965); *Populorum progressio* (1967); *Justice in the World* (1972); *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987); and *Deus caritas est* (2005). The power and authority of these pieces rest not only upon the source of the documents, but also upon the force of their arguments. Addressed to all humanity, not only to Catholics, the statements bring to bear the wisdom of the ages to the issues of the day. While these documents can be educational and persuasive at times, for Catholics they are even more important: “Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus.”³⁸

Drawing upon this wisdom, William J. Byron, S.J., composed an excellent summary of the major principles of the tradition called Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching.³⁹ They are:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Human Person | 5. Human Life | 8. Association |
| 2. Participation | 6. Solidarity | 9. Preference for the Poor |
| 3. Stewardship | 7. Subsidiarity | 10. Equality ⁴⁰ |
| 4. The Common Good | | |

³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, ¶ 28.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/>.

³⁷ See <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/>.

³⁸ *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, May 3, 1983 (¶ 333). For the full text, see: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/TheChallengeofPeace.pdf>.

³⁹ William J. Byron, S.J., “Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching,” *America: The National Catholic Weekly* (New York: America Press Inc., 31 Oct 1998).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

He wrote this 1998 summary to provide a concrete way for Catholics to internalize the major principles of CST that led to social action.⁴¹

By including CST among the essentials of the faith, the bishops are affirming the existence of credenda (things to be believed) that become, in the believer, a basis for the agenda (things to be done) the believer must follow. Thus Catholic social action flows from Catholic social doctrine. How to bring the social portion of the doctrine of the faith to the attention of believers is the challenge the bishops have now put once again before Catholic pastors and educators at every level.⁴²

Grounding Civic Practice in Catholic Social Teaching in Our Classrooms

Higher education professionals at Catholic institutions, in both academic and student affairs, continuously work to deepen our understanding of how students might best internalize principles of Catholic Social Teaching—as well as the missions of their respective institutions—while engaged in classroom learning. Two recent studies, *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*⁴³ (2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*⁴⁴ (2006), demonstrate the effectiveness of approaching student learning and development as an integrated whole. They also support the proposition that this “integrated-learning-and-development” flourishes when students are engaged in learning experiences in and out of the classroom that reinforce each other. These studies support John XXIII’s statement, in *Mater et magistra*, that experience is a necessary element for the learning of social justice: “In our view, therefore, formal instruction, to be successful, must be supplemented by the students’ active co-operation in their own training. They must gain an experimental knowledge of the subject, and that by their own positive action.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Learning Reconsidered*. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA), 2004.

⁴⁴ *Learning Reconsidered 2*. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA), 2006.

⁴⁵ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, ¶ 231.

Students as Active Learners

This model of interconnectedness between the traditional pedagogical activities of the classroom and experiential learning relies on a fundamental shift in the role of the student. Students are challenged to be active learners who constantly integrate their academic classes into larger life experiences, rather than passive listeners at lectures. This approach has historical roots in Alexander Astin's development theory of "Student Involvement," which helped reshape university pedagogical approaches over the last two decades.⁴⁶ The change shifted attention to student motivation, behavior, and learning. "The theory of student involvement argues that a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development."⁴⁷ Astin defines involvement as "the amount of energy that the student devotes to the academic experience."⁴⁸ His research has indicated that the more time and energy students devote to learning—inside and outside the classroom—"the greater the achievement, satisfaction with educational experiences, and persistence in college."⁴⁹ The more involved and satisfied the student, the more likely he or she will graduate. Incorporating CST into the classroom experience can heighten the inculcation of the mission of a Catholic university for active, involved students. Such interiorization is a benefit of the intentional integration of course content that includes CST with the university mission.

Identifying CST Resources and Allies while Developing a Plan for Integration

For students to benefit from such an integration, faculty must decide which aspects of CST to incorporate into coursework. Different course content lends itself to connection with various CST documents or concepts. Advanced efforts across a number of academic disciplines provide resources for instructors seeking to integrate CST into their courses. For example, the John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought at the University of St. Thomas (MN) has helped to develop the Catholic

⁴⁶ A.W. Astin, "Student Involvement: A developmental theory for higher education," *Journal of College Student Personnel* 25 (1984).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-308.

⁴⁹ Anne Colby, et al., eds., *Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibilities* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

Business Education Project. This project consists of a consortium that provides resources to those teaching business classes, and sponsors an International Conference on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education.⁵⁰ In addition, it is helpful to look beyond one's own discipline, and connect with those knowledgeable in CST on campus, whether they are located in the departments of Theology or Philosophy, or the campus ministry office. Faculty should also consult experts in the wider community, in the local diocesan peace and justice office, and through Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services. In addition to providing instructors with the needed resources, this outreach creates a prime opportunity to nurture collegiality across campus and in the community.

After gaining a sense of applicable CST documents or concepts to incorporate into a course, faculty would do well to revisit the university or college's mission statement, and begin by integrating the CST concepts and the mission statement into the discipline specific course goals. With these goals in mind, instructors can then develop course objectives that are designed to accomplish these goals. Ideally, these course objectives can take the form of Civic Engagement (CE) assignments that provide an intentional integration of course content, including CST, with the university mission, and the lives of students. Clear and tangible articulation of these connections can greatly assist students in making the leap between theory and praxis throughout the semester. The university's mission statement should be required reading with the appropriate CST texts, and they should be explicitly referenced in the structured reflection upon the CE activities.

In the courses described below, many students wrote in essays that they greatly appreciated exploring how their university's mission is at play in a particular course. It allowed them to consider how a particular class is part of the larger campus community, and helped them to see themselves as future alumni belonging to a meaning-based collegiate family.

The next suggested level of integration involves making intellectual connections among other courses, especially those in the core

⁵⁰ The Catholic Business Education Project involves 18 partner schools and sponsored the Seventh International Conference on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education, "Business Education at Catholic Universities: The Role of Mission-Driven Catholic Business Schools," June 11-13, 2008, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. See: <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/default.html>.

curriculum. How can the course relate to courses where CST concepts—such as the dignity of the human person—are fundamental? Such foundational courses are often designed as pathways for students to examine the interrelatedness of their entire education, and this level of integration can be nurtured and sustained through class discussions simply by consistently asking: “How does this material or assignment relate to your previous class experiences at the university or other aspects of your lives?”

Such questions provide opportunities for students to connect CST both with other courses and with other aspects of their lives. While keeping in mind Astin’s insights regarding the need to elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development, a professor also must have a realistic idea of competing demands for student time to produce a successful civic engagement course. Designated discussion and writing opportunities allow students to apply what they are learning about CST and civic engagement to their daily lives. Ideally, these activities will help students make connections among other courses and see how formal education fits into the context of their lives. In a world permeated by fragmentation, the goal is the development of the whole person, so valued in a liberal arts Catholic education.

With the development of the whole person as an underlying goal, the following examples offer two ways of creating and implementing a CST-CE course. The first example is based upon a core course, open to all majors, in which students explored various socio-political issues. The second example is grounded in an upper division interdisciplinary course, open only to students who had participated in an interview process (due to the unusual time demands of the class), in which all of the students focused on electoral activities during the presidential campaign year of 2004. Both of these courses were taught at St. Mary’s University of San Antonio, TX.

Advanced Composition: The Civic Struggle

This first example concerns a revamped core curriculum advanced writing course. This course was reconfigured after it was observed that many students were passionate about various social issues, but were uncertain about their knowledge base, and hesitant to speak publicly about their issues of concern. Discussions revealed that (1) many did not feel they knew enough about the subject to speak out, and (2) they wanted to understand the issue in relation to their emerging faith lives.

The course, entitled “Advanced Composition: The Civic Struggle,” was developed as an opportunity for them to learn and write effectively about their subject of passion within the framework of CST and the mission of their university.

The professor, who had never taught a course that incorporated CST, contacted campus experts to assist her in choosing materials and to provide guest lectures on CST throughout the semester. Because the students had the opportunity to choose from a wide range of social issues, she chose, ultimately, to draw heavily upon the broad-based “Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching” instead of documents focused on more specific social issues. Along with the “building blocks” she incorporated the University’s mission statement into the reading list, as well as the *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*,^{50a} a foundational educational document of the University’s sponsoring order, the Society of Mary. The class and professor also worked closely with the university’s librarians as well as the Service Learning Center. The overall goal of the course was for students to become campus experts on, and advocates for, a particular social issue as an extension of the University’s concern for the common good. The objectives were to research thoroughly a particular issue, determine a position on the issue, and advocate publicly for such position.

The course began with students reading the CST material along with the mission and identity pieces. After students chose their issues, the class met with University librarians to match student-issue interests with librarian research specialties. This student-professional teamwork resulted in more sophisticated research being conducted by students in a shorter amount of time, while providing students and librarians the chance to get to know each other through a shared interest. The students also worked with the Service Learning staff to identify local, state, national, and international agencies and offices that were connected with their issues. This identification was critical for successful completion of the initial research paper, which required students to interview (face-to-face, over the phone or fax, or through e-mail) at least two professionals who were actively engaged in the issue. This requirement provided students with the most up-to-date information regarding the issue as well as a unique networking opportunity.

^{50a} *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, published by Chaminade University, St. Mary’s University, and the University of Dayton in 1999. See: <http://www.chaminade.edu/marianists/documents/cmu.pdf>.

To meet the course goal of becoming campus experts on, and advocates for, a particular social issue as an extension of the University's concern for the common good, the students completed a series of writing assignments. These included: a research paper that identified the main arguments surrounding the issue (ten page absolute limit); a position paper in which the student outlined his/her position on the issue (five page absolute limit); an editorial advocating that position (two page absolute limit); and a formal letter lobbying an elected official or body that affects that issue (one page absolute limit). In each of these assignments, students connected their position with CST principles and the University's or sponsoring order's documents. The absolute page limits were rigidly enforced so that students had to manage their best information efficiently. The increasingly shorter page limits also required the students to refine their arguments. By the time they submitted their editorials to the student and local newspapers and wrote their lobbying letters, most of the students were quite confident in the solidity of their arguments, and were keenly aware of the need for each word to connect with the intended audience.

Class discussions provided students with an ongoing opportunity to articulate and refine their positions on the various issues in light of CST principles and the University's mission. Whenever the class got to a "sticking point," one of the CST campus experts helped out through e-mail or personal appearance. Also, as students grew more comfortable with their issue positions, they were encouraged to speak publicly about them to student groups. This initial "speaking out" culminated with sidewalk chalk in the University quadrangle after the students had refined their thesis statements for their editorials. During class, students wrote their thesis statements on the concrete spaces in the quadrangle and then spoke with other students, faculty, and staff who came by during the class exchange and afterward. These thesis statements included many positions clearly supported by the tenets of CST, such as positions against child abuse, the death penalty, and hunger. However, they also included many positions through which the students wrestled with some of the tenets of CST, such as abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage. The controversial nature of many of these statements contributed to the following results: eliciting tremendous student effort to present the basis of their arguments cogently through a clear thesis, given their grounding in CST; engaging a wide range of people who agreed and disagreed with students on their issues in a safe campus environment; a police report being issued for the production of graffiti in a public space; and an animated, across-campus conversation about what had been written, colorfully, in the quad. It also

prepared the University community for the student editorials that later appeared in the student and local city newspapers.

Submitting the editorials provided many of these students with their first opportunities to take a public position through the written word. Because taking public positions can be an intimidating experience, the editorials and lobbying letters were mailed collectively by the class. At the last class meeting the students read their letters aloud, an act that allowed them to share their “final” positions and name the civic response they hoped to receive. In subsequent semesters, students either shared the responses they had received or the opportunities they had had to talk publicly about or work with their issue because of initial connections made through the course. However, based upon student evaluations and on follow-up conversations, the most rewarding part of the course for the students consistently seemed to be the opportunity to integrate their emerging spiritual and moral identities with their thoughts about themselves and these issues as they became civic actors on campus and in the larger community.

Political Communication

While the initial example looked at how to reconfigure a core curriculum course, this second example examines how to reshape an upper division interdisciplinary class. The course, “Political Communication,” was team-taught by an English professor and the director of the Service Learning Center, who was an expert in CST. This course was offered jointly through the undergraduate Communication Arts and Political Science programs as well as the graduate Communications program. The course was rooted in the national Debate Watch program sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD). Debate Watch provides opportunities for communities to gather to watch the televised debates, discuss what they have learned, and then share this information with the CPD. The goal of this particular course was to engage the community in the electoral enterprise as an extension of the Catholic concern for the common good. The objectives of the course were to offer opportunities for the class to organize Debate Watch events for the larger community, to articulate and demonstrate the relationship between civil discourse and democracy in practical ways, and to hone public communication skills.⁵¹

⁵¹ See “Ductus Exemplo: Student Leadership by Example in Civic Engagement” in *The Journal of Civic Commitment*. Issue 10. <http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/other/engagement/Journal/>.

For the Society of Mary, the University's sponsoring order, "higher education . . . is deeply committed to the common good. The intellectual life is undertaken as a form of service in the interest of justice and peace, and the university curriculum is designed to connect the classroom with the wider world."⁵² With this as a foundational charge, the professors chose the CST documents to be studied during the semester. For a general foundation, they chose Byron's Ten Building Blocks, and more specifically (due to the political nature of the course), *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (FC) by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2004). The Bishops, through *Faithful Citizenship* and now its follow-up document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2008), have clearly communicated the Church's commitment to building the proverbial city on the hill:

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. All believers are called to faithful citizenship, to become informed, active, and responsible participants in the political process. As we have said, "We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate [more fully] *in building the culture of life*."⁵³

Throughout the semester, the tenets of FC and the ten building blocks were integrated in all aspects of the course, but particularly in (1) the planning and facilitating of the three Debate Watch programs, and (2) the research and writing of a voter's guide. These documents, along with the University's mission statement, strategic plan, and the foundational educational document of the sponsoring order, were the initial readings of the course. The students discussed these pieces vigorously. This energy was initially surprising until it became clear that the students had been hungry for a vocabulary and a frame through and in which they could talk about politics and the spiritual-religious-moral dimensions of their lives.

Based on this level of desire-for-integration, the professors invited a campus minister to guide the class through a series of exercises to articulate the class's mission statement. After personal reflection and

⁵² *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*, published by Chaminade University, St. Mary's University, and the University of Dayton in 1999. See: <http://www.chaminade.edu/marianists/documents/cmu.pdf>.

⁵³ U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, 5. (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2004).

animated discussions, the class composed the following mission statement: “*Through education and involvement, we strive to empower our human family to embrace civic responsibility.*” This statement reflected: (1) the Bishops’ mandate for all citizens meaningfully to participate in the civic life of their communities; (2) the University’s commitment to be an extension of service to society; and (3) the sponsoring order’s focus on education and involvement in and out of the classroom as a means to empower the community. Writing this statement provided students with the opportunity to integrate ideals that shaped their daily lives on campus into a meaningful statement that they could animate through their assignments. In doing so, they reinforced the belief of Rev. William Joseph Chaminade, the founder of the Society of Mary, that the most effective leadership is leadership by “contagion.”^{53a}

With this integrative groundwork in place, the students then had two prime ways to communicate what they were learning about faith and politics. The first venue of the Debate Watch experiences allowed for the practice and refinement of oral communication skills, while the second venue of researching, writing, and producing the *Voter’s Guide 2004*, allowed for the practice and enhancement of written communication skills.

Debate Watch

The “Political Communication” class planned and implemented three outstanding Debate Watch events on three dates: September 30 (DW1), October 8 (DW2), and October 13, 2004 (DW3). Beginning with a communal prayer at each of these programs, participants watched the debates together and then discussed what they had learned in small groups. Each group, under the guidance of a facilitator, completed a survey for the CPD, which was electronically transmitted to them.

For DW1, the class invited faculty and staff of the University, including the members of the sponsoring order and the University president, to serve as speakers and facilitators for the postdebate discussions. Each facilitator, for all three of the DW events, had copies of *Faithful Citizenship* as well as a handout on key CST themes⁵⁴ to use as touchstones throughout the post-debate discussions. With the en-

^{53a} “William Joseph Chaminade: Founder of the Marianists,” by Joseph Simler, S.M., translated by Joseph Roy, S.M. (Marianist Resources Commission: Dayton, Ohio, 1986) page 129.

⁵⁴ See <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>.

couragement of the class, the SGA, and other student leaders, 268 community members participated in this first event, nearly nine times that of the national average of approximately 30 people per program. For DW2, the class invited an alumnus to emcee the event. Local alumni also served as facilitators for the post-debate discussion groups. As facilitators, the alumni enjoyed being back on campus and engaging students in meaningful discussions. All of the alumni facilitators stated they would gladly do it again. The students were energized by these alumni who had come home to their alma mater to struggle over questions of faith and politics with them. It also provided a tremendous networking opportunity for all involved. Over the course of the evening, 160 participants watched and discussed the debate, sixteen times the national average of ten.

Less than a week later, the “Political Communication” class coordinated the final *Debate Watch 2004* program. This event differed from its predecessors in that the emcee and discussion facilitators were all current University students. The President of the SGA emceed the event while the “Political Communication” students themselves facilitated the discussion groups. This provided an opportunity for the class to shape the discussions at their tables with regard to CST. Overall, they discovered that many of their colleagues were also struggling with integrating faith and politics in their voting preparation and in their lives. A highlight of this final Debate Watch was the “presence” of Fr. Chaminate, the founder of the Society of Mary who died in 1850. Early in the evening students extracted a bust of the founder from the foyer of the University Center which they dressed in the class t-shirt and button, and had him join one of the discussion groups. The bust served as a humorous visual reminder that the civic conversation in the room was grounded in the University’s mission as well as a Catholic perspective. Although most Debate Watch groups nationwide averaged thirteen people for this final event, 214 concerned citizens gathered at the University to listen to the candidates.

Local media coverage of these events was intense, with local newspaper and television exposure in Spanish and English for each one. The students managed this media interaction, with the guidance of a member of the University’s public relations staff, cognizant that they were representing a Catholic university. Their ongoing inculcation of CST ideas and concepts, through their readings and discussions, had prepared them to do this, and they did so quite well. From encouraging community participation to writing press releases, members of the “Political Communication” class relied on each other and the University

community to fulfill the class's mission statement throughout the Debate Watch experience. This was, at times, a daunting task and fraught with challenges. Some of these were logistical ones, such as a change of venue at the last minute and learning to coordinate data collection in such large groups of people. Some were informational and intellectual, such as answering questions about voter registration and articulating one's position on various issues. Others were more social, as students learned how positively to manage contentious conversations and interactions surrounding a plethora of issues. However, incorporating themes of CST—such as the call to family, community, and participation—into these interactions helped the students manage these challenges in positive, life-giving ways.

Voter's Guide 2004

While the Debate Watch programs offered a chance to hone oral communication skills, the creation of a bipartisan voting guide rooted in CST offered a chance to sharpen the students' written communication skills. To determine which issues concerned the student body of their University, the class created a survey that listed twenty-three issues to rank in order of importance. They had generated the list of issues through discussion as well as a review of several national opinion polls (e.g., *Time* poll conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas [SRBI] Public Affairs, September 21-23, 2004).^{54a} The students administered this instrument in various settings including classes, the cafeteria, and the residence halls. Five major areas of concern emerged from these nonrandom surveys: the economy, national security, education, health care, and civil rights. The class then revisited FC with these issues in mind and identified key sections concerning each issue to include in the text of the guide. They then researched the positions of the Republican and Democratic presidential nominees (President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, respectively) and reported their findings.

During this part of the process, several students who were not even enrolled in "Political Communication" started attending the class to help with research, writing, and planning for the Debate Watch programs. Their participation in the class, as in the Debate Watch discussions, offered more evidence of student hunger for an understanding of contemporary issues within a meaningful framework.

^{54a} "Race Tightens Again," by Mark A. Schulman. Abt SRBI, 275 Seventh Avenue, Suite 2700, New York, NY 10001, Phone: (212) 779-7700, Fax: (212) 779-7785, email: info@srbi.com. Details: http://www.srbi.com/time_poll_arc6.html

With the research and writing of the guide completed, the “Political Communication” students handed off the material to their publication partner, the “Desktop Publishing” class. This class had generously agreed to use their emerging expertise to produce a text of professional quality. The guide presented the issue in general, each candidate’s positions on the issues, and excerpts from CST applicable to each issue. It also provided a list of web addresses—including several that offered CST materials—to help readers further understand the issues in light of CST.

Once *Voter’s Guide 2004* had been produced, the “Political Communication” students collaborated with the University’s President’s Peace Commission (PPC), a twenty-year-old university-wide forum for discussing peace and justice issues, to distribute the guide and CST materials. After the president of the University presented the guide at the PPC opening, the class proceeded to distribute 750 copies of the text. Class members also distributed *Voter’s Guide 2004* at the individual sessions of the PPC, as well as at their Civic Engagement Fair. At the fair, the students managed a table where they also handed out buttons, copies of *Faithful Citizenship*, and other CST materials. The President’s Office, the Service Learning Center, the Student Life Office, and the Student Government Association provided the financial support for the guide’s printing. The students had to solicit these monies from the various offices on campus. In doing so, they always emphasized the goal of maximum civic participation of the Church, the University, and the Society of Mary.

Conclusions

Classes such as these expand the students’ sense of community by expanding and reinforcing their base of common meaning rooted in the university’s mission and Catholic heritage. Active, engaged students who are learning about their academic disciplines through civic engagement are the embodiment of the set of values of the Catholic Church that are explicitly expressed in the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Due to the apostolic and experiential nature of such courses, student learning is enhanced because student effort is intensified in the movement from theory to praxis in a way that animates the internalization of principles, such as subsidiarity, for the betterment of our society. One student summarized it thus:

The best thing about our *Political Communication* class was our work in moving from theory to practice. Most courses I've taken have focused on the theory of our studies, writing papers, and working on projects that might never see the light of day. Our *Political Communication* course moved past theory, enacting our learning experience to the betterment of our community.

Learning experiences that result in the betterment of our community are certainly acts of hope in response to the Church's call for civic engagement in the creation of a more just world. By adopting the "best practices" found in the examples described herein, other Catholic colleges and universities may animate their service and teaching missions by developing initiatives that ground their Civic Engagement in Catholic Social Teaching. In doing so, they may also fulfill the responsibility of each Catholic college or university "to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, ¶ 33.

