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**SOCIAL WORK AND JESUIT EDUCATION: TRACING OUR HISTORIES  
OF ACTION FOR JUSTICE AND WELDING OUR FUTURE**

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## Abstract

*Tracing the parallel histories of social work education and Jesuit education as well as our shared commitment to social justice can enable us to weld a partnership that catapults both into the future. This article examines the historical development of social justice as a central value and a call for action in social work education and Jesuit schools, the challenge of coupling efforts to combat injustice, and the response of one institution. It concludes with concrete examples of ways in which social work educators and others engaged in the formation of “men and women for others” are infusing principles of social justice into research projects, educational programs, and concrete practices for the 21st century*

Key words: social justice, Jesuit education, social work education, justice-oriented practice and research

Social Work and Jesuit Education:

Tracing Our Histories of Action for Justice and Welding Our Future

Given the reality of injustice in the world, both the social work profession and Jesuit schools are challenged to create educational communities that prepare all members to participate in the promotion of social justice and the liberation of the oppressed. This paper examines the nature of that challenge, its historical development, and the response of one institution. Herein, the authors trace the commitment to social justice, which has evolved over decades as a core value inherent in the mission of social work (Finn & Jacobson, 2008) and a constitutive element in Jesuit education (Arrupe, 1973). Retracing relevant history helps us all to move beyond a parochial understanding of this evolution as well as to capitalize/collaborate on opportunities for forging ahead. It also illuminates commonalities, points of convergence, and pathways into a shared future.

#### Early History of Jesuit Education and Social Work

The Society of Jesuits, founded in 1540, has always been dedicated to education and work on behalf of the oppressed. Jesuit universities are characteristically devoted to “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity...” as exemplified in the mission statement of Saint Louis University. This pursuit is motivated by the inspiration and values of the Judeo-Christian tradition and guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus. Not so very differently, social work in North America has its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century efforts of private societies and individuals engaged in organization of the charities as well as in the training and education of persons to serve the poor, ameliorate poverty, and address resultant problems. In several accounts of the history of social work, social workers’ motivation to serve the poor is often linked to the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of the profession’s

founders (Barker, 1998; Day, 2009; Leighninger, 2008; and Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Moreover, it is not uncommon for social work students to quote Micha 6:8: “To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God” as their inspiration for choosing to become social workers or their calling to social work.

The history of social justice in social work is relatively recent. At the 1909 National Conference on Charities and Corrections social workers were challenged with the words, “dare to repeat the creed of the Hebrew prophet – justice, justice shalt thou pursue... We have had the age of chivalry, the age of generosity, the age of mercy, and now we need the age of justice” (Wise, 1909, p. 29 as cited in McGrath Morris, 2002, p. 365). Then in 1917, Mary Richmond published *Social Diagnosis*, in which she advocated for a method of inquiry and intervention that involves analysis of human relationships as well as social and economic conditions. She asserted “mass betterment and individual betterment are interdependent” and joined traditional casework methodology with social justice work to bring about social reforms.

The Settlement House Movement, which flourished during the 1920s, has generally served as a starting point for authors identifying the roots of social justice in social work history. Finn and Jacobson (2008) noted that “through the movement, social workers were developing a critical consciousness about dramatically changing social, economic, and political conditions and their differential impacts in the lives of poor and vulnerable groups, particularly immigrants. Settlement house workers located their work in contrast to the “charity” approach to social work gaining prominence in the late 19th century. They began to make the connections between individual misery and societal arrangements and to address both the logic and the impacts of structural

inequalities... While invoking the language of social reform and democracy, they modeled a philosophy and a practice of social justice..." (p. 47).

Continuing the work begun in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jesuits focused on expanding their educational efforts. In so doing, they emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge and using that knowledge in the service of God and humanity.

#### 1930-1990: Call to Social Justice

For social workers and Jesuits, the 1930s were times of significant strides toward social justice in education and practice. In the midst of the depression of the 1930s, the Rank and File Movement arose with Bertha Capen Reynolds as its leader and her work to is described as "a justice-oriented social work practice" (Reisch, 2002, p. 348).

It was also during this time that Fr. Joseph Husslein, SJ founded Saint Louis University's School of Social Service in 1930. In addition to founding the School of Social Service, Fr. Husslein produced the largest body of American Catholic social writings in his time. He urged the use of Catholic Bishops social justice teachings and the Papal encyclicals to confront unemployment and the lack of health care, education, and housing. Also during the 1930s, Pope Pius XI stated in *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), "Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account...Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice." In so doing, he clarified that social justice involves a) works of mercy or charity and b) works of social action to bring about systemic change. And as Jesuits and other Catholics were articulating the need to walk with "two feet of social justice," social workers were struggling to bring together the dual mission of social work – helping individuals and working to effect systemic change for a more just world.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the profession's concern for social justice and participatory democracy, which were central in its group work practice, waxed and waned as many activities engaged in by social workers were attacked by anti-Communists and group work's narrower focus on therapeutic aid became more dominant (Andrews, 2001; Finn & Jacobson, 2008). In 1955, a merger of seven major social work organizations founded the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). At the first delegate assembly in 1956, 18 policy statements were amended and adopted on such topics as civil rights and liberties, economic and labor conditions, immigration, peace, and public welfare (Clark, 2008). In 1960, the NASW Delegate Assembly adopted a *Code of Ethics*, for the profession, which has been amended five times. Social justice, however, did not surface as a core value within this document until years later. The most recent revision of this code clearly identifies social justice as one of the core values of the profession and explicates the ethical principle that "social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice" (NASW, 1999).

Father Pedro Arrupe's 1973 address to a gathering of alumni from European Jesuit schools marked the beginning of a renewed focus on the promotion of justice as a critical element in Jesuit education. Father Arrupe began his address by noting that "participation in the promotion of justice and liberation of the oppressed is a constitutive element of the mission of the Church" (Arrupe, 1973). Given the centrality of justice, Father Arrupe emphasized the role of Jesuit education in the formation of "men-and-

women-for-others.” These men and women would clearly understand the intimate link between love of God and the pursuit of justice for others.

During this address Father Arrupe also issued a challenge to Jesuit educators “to make sure that in the future the education imparted in Jesuit schools will be equal to the demands of justice in the world.” This education must include preparation for action for justice and liberation from oppression. Men-and-women-for-others must engage in personal conversion and structural reform. Father Arrupe concluded his address by noting that the “paramount objective of Jesuit education-basic, advanced, and continuing-must be to form such men and women” (Arrupe, 1973). In that same year, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) published *Social Work Practice and Social Justice* (1973) that grappled with stark examples of racism and inequality as manifest in correctional, health, education, and welfare systems. This book discussed the complicity of social work and social workers in perpetuating systemic injustices; and the responsibility of the profession to advocate for justice-oriented social change.

Table 1. Key decades in the history of social justice in Jesuit and social work education

Decade	<u>Social Justice in Jesuit Education</u>	<u>Social Justice in Social Work Education</u>
<b>1970s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In <b>1973</b>, Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe coined the term “Men and Women for Others,” which has become the foundational element of Jesuit education worldwide.</li> <li>The 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in Rome in <b>1975</b> decreed that the Jesuit mission is “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Association of Social Workers published <u>Social Work Practice and Social Justice</u> (Ross &amp; Shiremen, <b>1973</b>), which grappled with stark examples of racism and inequality as manifest in correctional, health, education, and welfare systems; the complicity of social work and social workers in perpetuating systemic injustices; and the responsibility of the profession to advocate for justice-oriented social change.</li> </ul>
<b>1980s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In <b>1982</b>, Father Ignacio Ellacuria described Jesuit educational institutions as “social forces called to take conscious responsibility for being a force of faith and justice.”</li> <li>In <b>1986</b>, Father General, RP Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ presented a document that explicated “The Characteristics of Jesuit Education” and discussed the contemporary Jesuit focus on “social justice”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Diversity and Social Justice: The Role of Social Work &amp; Social Work Education</u> (Arnold &amp; Roberts, 1979) was the title of the published Proceedings of the International Federation of Social Workers and Asian Regional Association for Social Work Education: Seminar held in Melbourne, Australia, in August <b>1979</b>,</li> </ul>
<b>1990s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In <b>1995</b>, “Our Mission Justice” Decree Three was published as a document of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. It reaffirmed the need to “pursue and intensify the work of formation in every sphere of education” in order to “help prepare both young adults to live and labor for and with others to build a more just world.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing the mandate to prepare men and women of the Saint Louis University community for action for justice the Doerr Center for Social Justice Education &amp; Research was established in <b>1996</b>, within the university’s School of Social Work.</li> <li>In <b>1997</b>, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) revised its ethics code to reflect the ruling that all social workers must promote social justice “from local to global level.”</li> </ul>
<b>2000s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In October of <b>2000</b>, delegates from the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the US convened to discuss the pursuit of social justice as a central theme for Jesuit higher education. Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. gave the address, “The Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education,” which emphasized the importance of “educating the whole person for solidarity in the real world.”</li> <li>In <b>2009</b>, Fr. Kolvenbach called Jesuit universities to explore ways diverse religious communities can live together to continue its tradition of making significant contributions to social justice (Kolvenbach, 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council on Social Work Education published its <b>2004</b> Educational Policy &amp; Accreditation Standards with objectives for all social work educational programs. These included the foundation program objective that graduates demonstrate the ability to “understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and apply strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social and economic justice” (CSWE, 2004, p. 7).</li> </ul>
<b>2010▶</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In his new role as Secretary of Jesuit Higher Education, Fr. Paul L. Locatelli, JS continued to bring his vision for a more just world to the forefront of his activities. He was the organizing force behind an international gathering of Jesuits in higher education that met in April of <b>2010</b> in Mexico City. The conference theme, “Networking Jesuit Education for the Globalizing World: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, and Sustainable Globe,” focused on frontier challenges such as poverty, sustainability, and human rights as related to the work of Jesuit universities worldwide (AJCU, 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Todd (<b>2010</b>) identifies the need to dismantle Christian privilege in social justice circles.</li> <li>Epple (<b>2010</b>) calls educators and students reflect on the parallels between the experiences, ideas, and writing of St. Frances and Christian social workers in order to strengthen students’ commitment to social justice.</li> <li>To enhance learning for social justice, social work educators advocate for and use transformative experiential learning in diversity, research, and policy courses as well as engagement in activities outside the classroom such as field practicums, study abroad immersion experiences, and on-campus organizing for civil liberties (Birkenmaier et al., <b>2011</b>).</li> </ul>

The 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus continued the focus on the relationship between service of faith and the promotion of justice. The participants in the Congregation highlighted the reality of “millions of men and women in the world ...who are suffering from poverty and hunger, from the unjust distribution of wealth and resources and from the consequences of racial, social, and political discrimination” (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995). Faced with this reality, the Congregation called for a “deeper involvement with others in the world.” This deeper involvement requires a commitment to “walk with the poor.” Such a walk heightens awareness of the problems and struggles and informs decisions about needed actions to promote justice. Engagement is an inseparable element in the apostolate of the Society. The Congregation reaffirmed the need to “pursue and intensify the work of formation in every sphere of education” in order to “help prepare both young adults to live and labor for and with others to build a more just world” (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995). Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach in his 2000 address at Santa Clara University expanded on the role of American Jesuit higher education in preparing men and women for service to faith and the promotion of justice. He focused on two specific areas: the formation of students and the role of faculty as researchers and teachers. In speaking of the formation of students, Father Kolvenbach emphasized the importance of “educating the whole person of solidarity for the real world” (Kolvenbach, 2000). Achieving this goal requires direct involvement with innocent people suffering as the result of injustice. This contact with the “gritty reality of this world” helps students to better understand the circumstances of the poor and oppressed and to respond constructively. Only through such personal experience and reflection can students become adults of solidarity.

In speaking of the role of faculty as researchers and teachers, Father Kolvenbach again focused on the need to embrace human reality. Regardless of discipline, each faculty member must in his/her research and teaching “engage with human society, human life, and the environment in appropriate ways, cultivating moral concern about how people ought to live together” (Kolvenbach, 2000). Research and teaching must address the real concerns of the marginalized and oppressed. This requires that faculty collaborate with others who work among the poor and actively seek justice. Such collaboration and socially engaged research allows faculty members to remain rooted in the human reality of an unjustly suffering world and to develop well-planned strategies to promote needed change. In the same vein, Father Ignacio Ellacuria describes Jesuit educational institutions as “social forces called to take conscious responsibility for being a force for faith and justice.” To do so, these institutions must “live in a social reality, live for that reality, and shed university intelligence upon it and use their influence to transform it” (Ellacuria, 1982).

#### 1990 – Present: Responding to the Call to Social Justice

General Congregation 34 acknowledged the strides made by the Society in the integration of the promotion of social justice in response to General Congregations 32 and 33. At the same time, the Congregation recognized the ongoing challenge of fully embracing the mission of faith seeking justice. Faced with this challenge, the Congregation expressed a renewed commitment to the promotion of justice in the company of the poor.

In the most recent gathering of the Society of Jesus, the delegates affirmed that “service of faith and promotion of justice, indissolubly united, remain at the heart of our

mission” (Decrees of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, 2008). The Congregation again emphasized the role of Jesuit education in preparation for such service. Later, Father David Hollenbacj (2009) noted that deep inequality and poverty as well as a gulf of religious and cultural differences challenge Jesuits and all humankind in our globalizing world to respond not simply with charity, service, or tolerance but with justice. He added that it is very important for Jesuit universities “to explore ways diverse religious communities can live together” (p. 21).

Recognizing the mandate to prepare men-and-women of the Saint Louis University community for action for justice, the Emmet J. and Mary Martha Doerr Center for Social Justice Education and Research opened in 1996. This center, which is commonly referred to as the Center for Social Justice (CSJ) on campus, is an endowed, nonprofit entity housed within the School of Social Work. The CSJ is founded on a definition of social justice as “the creation of just relationships, structures and resources for equality of opportunity, access to needed information, service resources and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.” The CSJ seeks to promote a broader understanding of social justice issues at the local, national and global levels; to encourage dialogue about what social justice is, its role in the Jesuit mission and opportunities to work for justice; to connect students to other learning and action opportunities; to provide resources for research on a variety of social justice issues; and to offer a welcoming environment in which to discuss thoughts and ideas about injustice in the world and how to become agents of change.

Drawing on the social work profession’s tradition of addressing structural issues at the root of the problems of human, community, and international relations, the CSJ

offers students and faculty opportunities to work for systemic change. Through educational forums and events, practicum scholarships, scholarships for international coursework, collaborative research grants, and social justice research assistantships the CSJ advances knowledge, critical thinking and open dialogue about the process of working for social justice.

Through its sponsorship and co-sponsorship of educational forums and events, the CSJ brings together diverse audiences from both the University and the larger community to reflect on significant social justice issues. These events also provide opportunities for collaborative efforts between University faculty and community practitioners involved in social justice activities. Such collaboration contributes to coordinated efforts to concretely deal with specific needs of the community.

In keeping with the challenge of General Congregation 32, the educational forums and events deal directly with the plight of those who are marginalized and oppressed and invite participants into a “deeper involvement with others in the world.” The topics addressed cover a broad range of local and global issues including: health care reform at both the state and local level; the death penalty; peace in the Middle East; addressing the needs of the growing local immigrant community; reconciliation as a means of rebuilding community; and addressing the needs in post-genocide countries.

Each year since 2000, the CSJ celebrates the Jesuit social justice mission with Social Justice Night. This event includes a keynote presentation on a selected social justice topic. Sarah Anderson, Director of the Global Economy Project at the Institute for Policy Studies spoke at the most recent Social Justice Night. In her presentation, Ms. Anderson examined the connection between global economic developments and

the health and welfare of the marginalized populations. Ms. Anderson invited the audience to consider the practical social justice implications associated with these developments. At an earlier Social Justice Night gathering, Barbara Martinez Jitner, a Latina film maker who works with Amnesty International to advocate for justice for the victims of the more than 400 murders and disappearances of women in the border town of Ciudad Juarez discussed femicide at the United States border. Ms. Martinez challenged the audience to consider actions necessary to deal with this issue. Other past keynote speakers included Jim Wallis and Father John Dear. Each of these speakers addressed what Father Kolvenbach described as the “gritty reality of this world” and emphasized the importance of direct involvement with innocent people suffering as the result of injustice.

The practicum scholarships and scholarships for international coursework provided by the Center contribute to the Jesuit goal of forming “men-and-women-for-others.” The merit-based practicum scholarships challenge Master of Social Work students to incorporate social change activities which impact the lives of marginalized people into one of their practica. Students must select a practicum site that deals directly with individuals who regularly struggle with the reality of injustice and its impact. The selected site must also provide students with the opportunity to actively participate in the process of designing and implementing strategies to bring about needed systemic change. These practicum scholarships prepare students “to live and labor for and with others to build a more just world.”

Implicit in the Society's call to justice is the reality of the global context in which we live. Preparation for action for justice and liberation from oppression begins with exposure to the lived reality of those suffering unjustly around the world. Partial scholarships funded by the Center help defray the costs for social work students enrolling in international courses. Social work courses currently offered in Mexico and Ghana (West Africa) introduce students to the global reality of poverty and oppression. Beginning in January 2011 students will have the opportunity to explore this reality in India through a third international course offering. These courses also challenge students to identify socially appropriate means of pursuing required change. Students participating in these courses frequently describe their experience as "transformative." In particular, they speak of their heightened awareness of the nature and extent of global oppression and injustice. This awareness is accompanied by a sense of urgency to seek justice.

In addition to the practicum and international scholarships, the Center also provides scholarship assistance to social work students wishing to participate in other advocacy experiences. Students attending the Ignatian Family Teach-In and the vigil to close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning, Georgia receive scholarship assistance. Participating in the Teach-In gives students the opportunity to join students, faculty and staff from Jesuit colleges and universities around the nation. Students report this event heightens their awareness of the need for action to pursue justice. The Center also supports students' participation in the Advocacy Day trip to the State Capitol to attend a session of the Missouri State Legislature and meet with legislators. This experience enhances students' knowledge

of the policy making process and allows them to gain experience in advocating for social justice.

Creating an innovative model of social justice research is a primary goal of the Center. The Center uses research to promote social change and accomplishes this goal by funding interdisciplinary research projects that address the root causes of injustice and oppression and advance systemic change. Research proposals are evaluated for funding based on the project's potential to either lead to the development of policies that combat discrimination and oppression or produce strategic approaches to promote needed social action. This practical orientation is congruent with Father Kolvenbach's emphasis on the importance of research addressing real concerns of the marginalized and oppressed.

Center funded research proposals require university-community partnerships. Projects must involve a social work faculty member, faculty from other University departments, a representative from a community human service or social change organization, and a student research assistant. Central to this collaborative model is the requirement that faculty work directly with service providers. This requirement builds on the respective strengths of each. Working with community based agencies and organizations also insures that the research conducted will "remain rooted in the human reality of an unjustly suffering world." The research projects also provide an opportunity for all participants to develop concrete strategies to address injustice and improve the quality of life of the marginalized and oppressed.

Research projects funded by the Center cover a wide range of social justice issues impacting on diverse vulnerable populations. Projects address issues related to

a broad range of topics including racial justice, peace and reconciliation, aging, housing and asset building, health and mental health, gender issues, economic and workforces development, children and youth.

The collaborative research partnership benefits all parties involved. The funded projects allow faculty to remain rooted in the reality of an unjust world and to use their skills to develop well-planned strategies to promote needed change. Student research assistants develop an understanding of the connection between research and “real world” social justice issues. As active participants in the research activities, students also have the opportunity to learn and apply relevant research skills. The research projects provide community partners with information that enhances their capacity to deal with the practical social justice issues their clients encounter.

Recent CSJ developments include the establishment of a Student Advisory Board. This Board gives students the opportunity to provide feedback concerning the efforts of the CSJ to provide meaningful social justice education and training. Membership on the Board broadens outreach to members of the student body. Concrete actions resulting from feedback include a plan for a series of skill based workshops designed to enhance students’ ability to organize and facilitate social justice activities.

Given the growing interest in social justice campus wide, the Center will sponsor a University colloquium focusing on this topic. Through this colloquium all members of the University community will have the opportunity to discuss the meaning of social justice and explore cooperative ways of working to address relevant issues on multiple levels.

## Conclusion: Into the Future

Jesuit educational institutions continue to be called to address the reality of injustice in today's world. Responding to this call requires continued emphasis on preparing "men-and-women for others." The challenge is to find effective means of accomplishing this preparation. The Doerr Center for Social Justice Education and Research continues to provide opportunities for University faculty and students to work collaboratively with community members in an effort to create a just world.

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