The Promotion of Justice in the Universities of the Society

Forward by Michael J. Garanzini, S.J.

Ever since the proclamation of "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," by St. John Paul II, 25 years ago, those of us who work in Catholic universities have been reminded that our institutions possess an important vocation within the Church. We are called to critically reflect upon the Gospel message of peace and reconciliation, and thus help make the world a more humane place for all our brothers and sister. We exist, then, within the Church and for society. Both orientations--religious and secular--define the parameters or worlds within which we operate and suggest that there are both unique challenges as well as opportunities for us as universities to advance knowledge and promote human development.

At the same time, and in synch with the Church's hopes, the Society of Jesus, and especially its recent Superiors General, Arrupe, Kolvenbach and Nicolas, have urged our institutions to be instruments for the promotion of faith, of which justice is an essential element. The Society's documents and leadership speak eloquently and often about using our resources as academic institutions and communities to attend to the problems and challenges of the marginalized and the poor. They also point out that to do so will require contact and collaboration with the poor and under-served.

This document invites the reader to reflect upon the rich background and understanding of justice and its role in the Jesuit university, especially as it has become the pivotal value and aim of Jesuit institutions since first articulated in 1975 at General Congregation XXXII. What follows here addresses such fundamental questions as the very purpose and identity of Jesuit higher education, why justice is the critical element in our student formation goals, why our research efforts ought to focus on the conditions that produce inequality and thwart sustainability, and how each of us--students, faculty and administration--are important contributors to what is called the "social project" of a Jesuit university. Fr. Kolvenback said it most succinctly, perhaps, when he wrote: "Every Jesuit academy of higher learning is called to live in a social reality...and to live for that social reality, to shed university intelligence upon it and to use university influence to transform it."

How best to use this document? It might be best to read it in segments, that is, to reflect on each of the five sections discretely since each raises a different set of questions and challenges. Group discussion might be the most fruitful way to absorb the document. A set of questions is provided to help guide and encourage sharing of views and to stimulate further reflection and action.

Finally, we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who helped write the document, especially Fr. Patxi Alvarez, the Society's Secretary for Justice and the Environment, and those listed in the concluding pages of the document who worked diligently to organize and distill into these 40 pages a great deal of what has been said and written about the promotion of Justice in our institutions over more than 40 years. Their work will bear fruit, we pray, in that it will make our universities more deliberate and more focused, better instruments for creating a more humane world, and thus, become better universities.

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Suggested Questions for Reflection and Discussion.

A. Jesuit institutions are called to be instruments of Justice.

1. How has our university responded to this call? Has it sufficiently oriented, or re-oriented, itself to address the unique patterns and challenges of injustice faced in our local community and also our wider society?  Have we articulated a vision of the kind of society we wish to create?

2. How successful have we been in stressing the faith dimension that undergirds and shapes our response to injustice? Where is this commitment to the "faith that does justice" show itself?

3. Are there places within our university that we can point to where we are contributing to the transformation of unjust social, economic and cultural structures?

4. Where are we truly in touch with the poor and marginalized? Where do we include them in our community, our research and our service?

5. Is the "Ignatian pedagogical style" promoted and practiced across our classrooms and in our program?

B. The aims and goals of student formation in a Jesuit University.

1. Have we articulated what we want our students to become? Where do we state that our objectives are to form them into "men and women for others," that is, citizens characterized by their compassion, their commitment, their conscientiousness, their competence?

2. Do we know what our students do when they complete their university studies, what kinds of men and women they become? Do we know how and whether they work for justice and how they view their formation at the university in this regard?

3. Do we provide ample opportunities for students to serve the poor and marginalized? Do we help them reflect on their experience and help them connect this experience with their faith commitment? How do our programs compare with best practices in the promotion of service learning?

4. Are their academic programs which we do not currently offer which would enhance this effort to promote justice and service to the poor?

5. Are we making progress in connecting the challenges of sustainability and the proper use of the environment with matters of justice and fair distribution of our resources?

C. Research that promotes and builds a more just world.

1. Do we have programs (or centers, or institutes) that are specifically aimed at doing research for and with the poor?

2. Are there sufficient resources and rewards for research specifically aimed at improving the plight of the poor and alleviating unjust social and economic conditions?

3. Have we made efforts to work collaboratively with initiatives and groups outside the university which promote the Society's social justice agenda?

4. Have we made sufficient progress forging interdisciplinary collaborations within and across the institution to address more systematically and holistically the problems of the poor and challenges presented by unjust social structures?

5. Are we comfortable with research that can lead to social justice advocacy and the tensions and resistances this may bring to the university?

D. The Jesuit university as "social project."

1. Have we, as an institution, discerned how we contribute to building of a more just and humane society, that is, to transforming our culture in ways that will make it more sensitive to the plight of those who are victimized by unjust social, economic and political forces?

2. How effective have we been in making our institution more accessible to the poor? In motivating our graduates to work on behalf of the poor? In helping other institutions that benefit the poor? And, in promoting social entrepreneurship?

3. How effective have we been in promoting public discussion and reflection on the causes of injustice and in promoting solutions? Do we have, on a regular basis, speakers and fora that discuss these issues?

4. Do we/should we take public positions when we see injustice or when issues arise that call for advocacy on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged who cannot speak for themselves? What process of deliberation and consultation is necessary if we desire to do so?

5. Is our campus a green campus? Are we promoting responsible use of resources like energy and food such that our students are given examples of sustainability? Do our plans for infrastructure improvements and new facilities show consideration and a sincere effort to be more environmentally sensitive?

E. The University community, its people and their development.

1. Is the university's leadership sufficiently aware and informed of the Jesuit tradition and commitment to social justice?

2. Are their on-going orientation programs for faculty and staff that share and promote the social justice mission of the institution and invite participation in that mission?

3. Are students invited to participate in the shaping of university policy and program in a way that enables them to appreciate more fully the complexities and challenges of promoting justice  in the surrounding community and world?

4. Are faculty, staff and students able to participate in the shaping of university policy, especially with regard to justice within the institution, thus becoming agents of change?

5. Have the promotion of both faith and justice which are inextricably linked to one another been sufficiently embedded in the institutions strategic plan, and considered in all its planning efforts?