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Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

Andrés Peregalli
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Mariola Kozubek
Fr. Arkadiusz Wuwer
Xavier Alphonse, SJ

Sahaya G. Selvam, SDB
Brenda Kiema
Michelle Sterk Barrett
Italo Fiorin
Ellen Van Stichel
Yolanda Ruiz
Mariano García

Actualizing mission and holistic education
through Service-learning

2.6

Texts extracted from Volume 2 of the Uniservitate Collection:
Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

Uniservitate Collection

Director: María Nieves Tapia

Coordination of Uniservitate Program: María Rosa Tapia

Editorial Coordination: Jorge A. Blanco

Coordinator of this volume: M. Beatriz Isola y Andrés Peregalli

Proofreading and editing of texts in Spanish: Licy Miranda

Translation and editing of texts in English: Karina Marconi and Cecilia Mata

Design of the collection and of this volume: Adrián Goldfrid

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Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church / Andres Peregalli... [et al.] ; coordinación general de María Nieves Tapia.- 1a ed.- Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires : CLAYSS, 2021.
Libro digital, PDF - (Uniservitate ; 2)

Archivo Digital: descarga y online

Traducción de: Karina Marconi ; Cecilia Mata.

ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3

1. Trabajo Solidario. 2. Pedagogía. 3. Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. I. Peregalli, Andres. II. Tapia, María Nieves, coord. III. Marconi, Karina, trad. IV. Mata, Cecilia, trad.

CDD 261.51

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College of the Holy Cross. USA





Michelle Sterk Barrett

*She has been engaged with Catholic higher education for nearly 30 years. The majority of this time has been spent directing the Donelan Office of Community-Based Learning (CBL) at Holy Cross and serving as the Assistant Director of the PULSE Program for Service-Learning at Boston College. She currently serves as director of the J.D. Power Center for Liberal Arts in the World at Holy Cross. Michelle earned her B.A. in psychology at Villanova University and her M.A. in higher education administration at Boston College. She completed her Ph.D. in higher education at the University of Massachusetts-Boston where her award-winning dissertation focused on the spiritual growth of undergraduates through service-learning. Dissertation-related articles were subsequently published in the International Journal for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IJRSLCE) as well as the Journal of Catholic Education. Michelle also co-authored the book, *The State of Developmental Education: Higher Education and Public Policy Priorities*; wrote an article for the IJRSLCE entitled, *Service-Learning: A Powerful Pedagogy for Promoting Academic Success Among Students of Color*. Michelle teaches courses that integrate the topics of community engagement, social responsibility, vocational discernment, social justice, and the mission of Catholic higher education. She has been highly involved in the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) network by participating in the Ignatian Colleges Program and serving as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the AJCU Service-Learning Professionals.*

6. ACTUALIZING MISSION AND HOLISTIC EDUCATION THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

Michelle Sterk Barrett

College of the Holy Cross, USA

One important aspect of holistic student development is spiritual development, and studies have demonstrated that service-learning can be an avenue towards fostering spiritual growth among undergraduates.

Pope Francis' call to speak the language of the head, heart, and hands in the educational process becomes actualized through the pedagogical method of service-learning. The vision of education offered by Pope Francis

parallels long-standing educational theory as well as the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm of integrating experience, reflection, and action. Service-Learning similarly actualizes the mission statements of Catholic higher education institutions across the United States that speak of a commitment to educating students to serve the common good, a commitment to diversity, and a commitment to education of the whole student. One important aspect of holistic student development is spiritual development, and studies have demonstrated that service-learning can be an avenue towards fostering spiritual growth among undergraduates. Studies have also demonstrated how service-learning can lead to additional developmental and prosocial outcomes that support our mission as Catholic higher education institutions.

Introduction

In September of 2018, Pope Francis visited Lithuania and shared his perspectives on education with a gathering of 28 Jesuits from different countries. He stated,

“Education engages the whole person, not only the head. I’ve said this many times and I’ll repeat it: there is a language of the head, but there is also the language of the heart, of sentiment. You need to educate the heart...And there is also the language of the hands. These are three languages that go together. The young people are called on to think about what they feel and do, and to feel what they think and do, and to do what they feel and think. Ours is a human unit, and everything is found therein, including concern for others, engagement. Let us not forget feeling and sentiments...this has to be the road of education.”

Pope Francis' call to speak the language of the heart, mind, and hands in the educational process parallels the pedagogical method used within Jesuit education for nearly 475 years.

St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, provided a model of education (referred to as the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm) that integrates experience, reflection, and action in a dynamic interplay that ultimately shapes the habits, values, and thinking of students and propels them from knowledge to action in service to the common good (DeFeo, 2009; O'Malley 2015). Excerpts from a 2000 speech given by Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Jesuits, help articulate what the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm means in concrete terms. During this speech to American Jesuit higher education leaders, Fr. Kolvenbach explained how Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of “*teaching solidarity to the younger generation*” and how solidarity is learned through “*contact rather than concepts.*” Fr. Kolvenbach built upon Pope John Paul II's words by explaining, “*When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection*” (Kolvenbach, 2000, p. 10).

Though Pope Francis, Pope John Paul II, Fr. Kolvenbach, and St. Ignatius do not explicitly name service-learning, their ideas implicitly endorse this pedagogical method and are consistent with thinkers who are often cited to explain why service-learning (or experiential learning more broadly) is so valuable. John Dewey's extensive writings on education from the late 1800s to mid-1900s spoke of the value of integrating experience into the educational process. In his 1938 book, *Experience and Education*, Dewey described learning as “*a continuous process of reconstruction of experience*” (p. 87). Dewey spoke of the importance of integrating the head and the heart in the educational process. David Kolb (1981) argues that learning is most powerful when it follows a continual cycle of concrete experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and experimentation—which is clearly quite similar to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm's focus on experience, reflection, and action. Longer standing than the ideas of Dewey or Kolb are the words of Aristotle (1999) from *Nicomachean Ethics* articulating the central role experience plays in education, “*For the things which we have to learn...we learn by doing them*” (1103a30).

This chapter will explore how the pedagogical method of service-learning can enable the educational vision of Pope Francis as well as the mission of Catholic higher educational institutions to be realized. The discussion begins with a review of common themes found within the mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of how service-learning enables these themes to be put into action. Finally, the chapter concludes with my personal reflections on the transformative power of service-learning.

Themes in Catholic Higher Education Mission Statements

My interest in the mission of Catholic higher education first developed when I attended Villanova University as an undergraduate. Prior to that time, I had not attended a mission-driven educational institution—or at least not one with a mission noticeable to students. This lack of mission or vision left a vacuum that was quickly and adeptly filled by a student culture resembling what Dean Brackley, S.J. (1988) described as the way of the world. Within my high school, there was a clear social hierarchy determined by physical attractiveness combined with material signs of wealth such as a new car, an expensive house, and an abundance of brand-name clothing. Because one's personal worth depended upon where they were seen to be on that ladder, there was continual competition among peers to move up the ladder—which led to an environment of little trust. In my Southern California high school, it was superficial appearances and material goods that determined one's worth. In other high schools around the United States, one's position on the ladder might be determined by achievements such as grades, SAT scores, and college acceptances rather than clothes, cars, and houses.

When I first began at Villanova, I entered a different world from what I had known in high school—one with a mission that was more closely aligned with what Fr. Brackley (1988) described as the way of Christ than the way of the world. Being a part of this mission-driven educational institution changed my life as I saw that the purpose of my existence could be more significant and meaningful than individualistic, self-centered interests of moving up a social hierarchy.

In those years since Villanova, my continued interest in mission-drive education led me to notice consistencies in mission statements across Catholic educational institutions. These mission statements often mention a commitment to the development of the whole student—not just their intellectual development, but also their personal, emotional, and spiritual development. They typically mention an appreciation for diversity of ideas and people. Finally, there is usually a phrase about educating students to serve the common good and/or work towards building a more just society. Below are excerpts from the mission statements of three prominent Catholic universities in the United States that illustrate these themes.

Georgetown University's mission states:

“The university was founded on the principle that serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical and spiritual understanding. We embody this principle in the diversity of our students, faculty and staff, our commitment to justice and the common

good...Georgetown educates men and women to be responsible and active participants in civic life and to live generously in service to others.” (Georgetown University, n.d.).

Boston College:

“remains committed to leading its students on a comprehensive journey of discovery—one that integrates their intellectual, personal, ethical, and religious formation...As a Jesuit, Catholic University, Boston College is rooted in a world view that calls us to learn, to search for truth, and to live in service to others. To fulfill that mission, we welcome and embrace the contributions of a diverse student body from many faith traditions.” (Boston College, n.d.).

The University of Notre Dame proposes that, *“The intellectual interchange essential to a university requires, and is enriched by, the presence and voices of diverse scholars and students” (University of Notre Dame, n.d.).* Notre Dame’s mission further states, *“The University prides itself on being an environment of teaching and learning that fosters the development in its students of those disciplined habits of mind, body, and spirit” (University of Notre Dame, n.d.).* Finally, the mission statement ends by speaking of how the University of Notre Dame

“seeks to cultivate in its students...a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice, and oppression that burden the lives of so many. The aim is to create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice.” (University of Notre Dame, n.d.).

It is not surprising that these mission statements have consistencies among them as their aims are intimately connected to principles within Catholic social teaching. They focus on the common good rather than individual self-interest. They demonstrate a respect for the dignity of all people by embracing diversity and pursuing efforts to overcome conditions such as poverty that demean human dignity. Their focus on holistic student development is intertwined with human dignity by valuing and caring for the full of who our students are—not just their minds. Finally, whether it is stated explicitly or not, the mission statements aim to educate students who will be in solidarity with most vulnerable among us as advocated by the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education. The Congregation’s 2017 document, *Educating to Humanism in Solidarity*, emphasizes the importance of humanizing education that “pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents” and extends the classroom to “social experience where education can generate solidarity, communion, and sharing” (10).

Spiritual Development as Crucial to Holistic Student Development

As described in the mission statements of Georgetown, Boston College, and Notre Dame, Catholic higher educational institutions typically include spiritual development of students among their aims. Spiritual development can be one of the more challenging aspects of holistic student development to fully integrate across an institution as such efforts are often compartmentalized within campus ministry or a wellness center. It is particularly difficult to find ways to integrate spiritual development into the main area of focus within colleges and universities: academics.

Despite this challenge, it is crucial that higher education institutions find avenues through which spiritual growth can be more deeply integrated into educational experiences--especially given the decline in mental health indicators among young adults. A recent analysis by the United States Center for Disease Control reported that suicide rates among people ages 10 to 24 climbed dramatically between 2007 and 2017 from 6.8 per 100,000 to 10.6 per 100,000 people. Among those aged 20-24, the suicide rate in 2017 was 17 per 100,000 compared to 12.5 per 100,000 in 2000 (Curtin & Heron, 2019; Miron et al., 2019). The Pew Research Center analyzed data from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health and found that the percentage of teenagers who recently experienced depression jumped 59% between 2007 and 2017 (Geiger & Davis, 2019).

Jean Twenge, a researcher at San Diego State University offers her perspectives on why this might be. In her 2017 book, *iGen*, she analyzed studies investigating the relationship between the mental health of young adults and technology use and concluded that increased time on screens is correlated with unhappiness, loneliness, depressive symptoms, and suicide (Twenge, 2017a). Sherry Turkle similarly discussed the harmfulness of screen time in her 2015 book, *Reclaiming Conversation*. Turkle explains that psychology and neuroscience point towards the importance of solitude and how the habit of turning to our screens prevents needed time for self-reflection to “*construct a stable sense of self*” (p. 61).

Not only are today's young adults living in a digital world that has been designed to capture their constant attention, but they are also living in a time where there is an unhealthy emphasis on achievement. Through their annual survey of incoming first-year students, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California Los Angeles, tracks longitudinal changes in behaviors and attitudes among undergraduates. Their analysis of 50-year trends found that students in recent years care more about a school's academic reputation, have an increased desire to get a good job, an increased interest in being well off financially, and an increased desire to

obtain recognition. They are also less likely to rate themselves as spiritual and have less of a desire to develop a meaningful philosophy of life than prior generations (Eagan, et al., 2016).

Other studies have found that young adults are increasingly disinterested or turned off by religion. A 2012 survey of 18-to-24 year-olds conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs found the majority of young adults believed Christianity to be antigay (64%), judgmental (62%), and hypocritical (58%) (Jones et al., 2012). The National Study of Youth and Religion conducted from 2002-2008 found that only 7% of 18-23 year-olds who were raised in active Catholic families are practicing Catholics themselves. 27% are completely disengaged with religion (Smith et al., 2014).

This decreasing level of interest in spirituality and religiosity is particularly noteworthy because research studies have found a positive relationship between psychological well-being and increased levels of spirituality among young adults (Astin et al., 2011b; Hayman, et al., 2007; Park & Millora, 2010; VonDras, et al., 2007; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watt, 2003). Twenge (2017b) similarly shares that research has found a correlation between regular attendance at religious services and lower levels of unhappiness, loneliness, and depression among adolescents.

It is apparent from the disturbing mental health trends we are seeing that young adults need avenues through which they can grow spiritually. They need space to reflect upon the big spiritual questions of life: who they are, what they believe, and how they want to align their beliefs with their actions to build a meaningful life. Given the decreasing interest and involvement in religious institutions, colleges and universities cannot assume that traditional approaches to religion will provide opportunities for holistic student development in the way they once might have. As will be discussed in the next section, service-learning shows potential as one avenue through which higher education institutions can engage undergraduates in holistic student development—including spiritual development—within the academic heart of the institution.

Promoting Spiritual Development through Service-Learning

Defined by Bringle and Hatcher (1996), service learning is a

“credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course

content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 222).

Numerous studies provide evidence that the pedagogical approach of service-learning can foster spiritual growth within an academic context (Astin, et al., 2011 b; Cherry, et al., 2001; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Helm-Stevens et al., 2018; Kuh & Gonyea, 2006; Lovik, 2011; Radecke, 2007; Sterk Barrett, 2016a; Sterk Barrett 2016b; Yeh, 2010). The largest and most influential of these studies along with my research will be further explored below.

Eyler and Giles’ (1999) seminal book, *Where’s the Learning in Service-Learning?* laid the foundation for the field to blossom by demonstrating the powerful learning potential inherent in service-learning. They surveyed 1,136 students from 30 colleges and universities who participated in service-learning. Students were asked to report the importance of various aspects of learning and growth that occurred from their service-learning experience. Findings indicated that service-learning participation had positive outcomes in the areas of personal and interpersonal development; understanding and applying knowledge; critical thinking; perspective transformation (pertaining to one’s assumptions about societal and political structures); and citizenship. The measure of personal development included four aspects related to spirituality including: spiritual growth, appreciating different cultures, understanding myself/personal growth, and belief that the “*people I served are like me*” (p.243). Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported that knowing themselves better was either

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a very important outcome or the most important outcome of their service-learning experience. Sixty-eight percent of respondents indicated that appreciation of other cultures was a very important or the most important outcome. Fifty-two percent said that learning that the “*people I served are like me*” was a very important or most important outcome. Nearly half (46%) of the student participants selected spiritual growth as a very important or the most important outcome of their service-learning experience.

Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011a; 2011b) conducted the most comprehensive study of spirituality among undergraduates and shared results in their book, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*. To measure spirituality and religiosity among undergraduates they developed the College Student Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV) that was integrated into the annual survey of first-year students conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). The CSBV was first administered to 112,232 first-year students in 2004 and was then administered again to a sub-sample of 14,527 students during their junior year. Results demonstrated that service-learning participation had powerful impacts on the spiritual quest, ethic of caring, and ecumenical worldview scales within the CSBV. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm believe that this strong relationship between service-learning and spiritual growth relates to how service-learning offers opportunities for self-reflection, how it enables students to interact with people from diverse backgrounds, and how it can move students from dualistic ways of viewing the world and develops their capacity for critical thinking. They state, "service-learning appears to work because it enables students to identify and direct their personal goals through an exploration of moral and ethical positions about themselves and their communities, and to relate larger social issues to their own lives" (2011b, p. 146).

Data from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) were analyzed in the studies of Kuh and Gonyea (2006) as well as Lovik (2011) to investigate spiritual growth among undergraduates. Kuh and Gonyea reviewed NSSE data from 149,801 first-year students and seniors attending 461 different four-year colleges and universities. They found that self-reported participation in spiritual practices and a deepened sense of spirituality had a significant relationship to whether students participated in service-learning. Utilizing NSSE data from 7,172 first year students attending 442 colleges and universities, Lovik analyzed which student experiences and institutional features related to a self-reported deepened sense of spirituality. Findings indicated that participation in a community-based learning (a term commonly used to describe service-learning) course was the strongest predictor of a deepened sense of spirituality among all curricular experiences. Another variable that related to a deepened sense of spirituality was whether students had exposure to diverse perspectives in classroom discussions and assignments—which would be inherent in service-learning classes.

My own mixed methods research not only explored whether there was a relationship between service-learning participation and spiritual growth, but also sought to further understand what conditions might foster this growth (Sterk Barrett 2016a; 2016b). Data collection was conducted in conjunction with the Boston College PULSE Program for Service-Learning's annual assessment process. The PULSE Program is a year-long program where students take an interdisciplinary philosophy and theology class at the same time they engage in service for 10-12 hours a week.

For the purposes of my study, spirituality was conceptualized in the following manner based upon literature reviews of Astin et al. (2011b) and Love and Talbot (1999): 1) Engagement in a process of reflection to understand oneself and one's purpose; 2) Living one's philosophy of life with integrity; 3) Seeking a connection with a higher power; and 4) Belief in the interconnectedness of humanity. While there is overlap between the concepts of religion and spirituality for some individuals, this is not always the case and the two can be seen as distinct, but related (Astin, et al., 2011b; Chickering et al. 2006; Roehlkepatain, et al., 2008; Smith & Lundquist, 2005; Zabriskie, 2005).

Spiritual growth was measured in two different ways quantitatively. First, there was one question asking student agreement with the statement that they grew spiritually as a result of PULSE. Second, I utilized 54 spirituality variables from the *College Student Beliefs and Values Survey* (CSBV) developed by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011a). Data were collected from 272 students when they began their experience with PULSE in September of 2012 and when they completed it in May 2013. Findings indicated that a large majority of students grew spiritually in both measures. In the self-report of spiritual growth, 79.1% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they grew spiritually because of their PULSE experience. The pre-test/post-test comparison of CSBV variables indicated that 77.6% of students grew spiritually during their time in PULSE.

Looking at the response to individual CSBV indicators, the overall mean scores for all students changed in the positive direction for all variables. This change was statistically significant for 43 of 54 indicators. Because the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) asked these same questions to a national sample, it is possible to see how the change in mean scores after one year in the PULSE Program compares to the change in means for a national sample of students after 3 years of college. My analysis found that there was a larger effect size among PULSE students than the HERI national sample for 42 of the 54 variables. It is noteworthy that many of the mean scores among the HERI national sample did not change at all or changed in a negative direction during their undergraduate years—which makes the results among PULSE students even more remarkable.

Not only did this study seek to document that spiritual growth occurred, but it also sought to understand how this growth might be occurring. To analyze this, qualitative data was collected through interviews with 11 students. Approximately half of these students were among those whose CSBV results indicated they grew significantly during the PULSE experience. Approximately half of these interviews were conducted with those whose quantitative results indicated that they had no change or negative change during the PULSE experience.

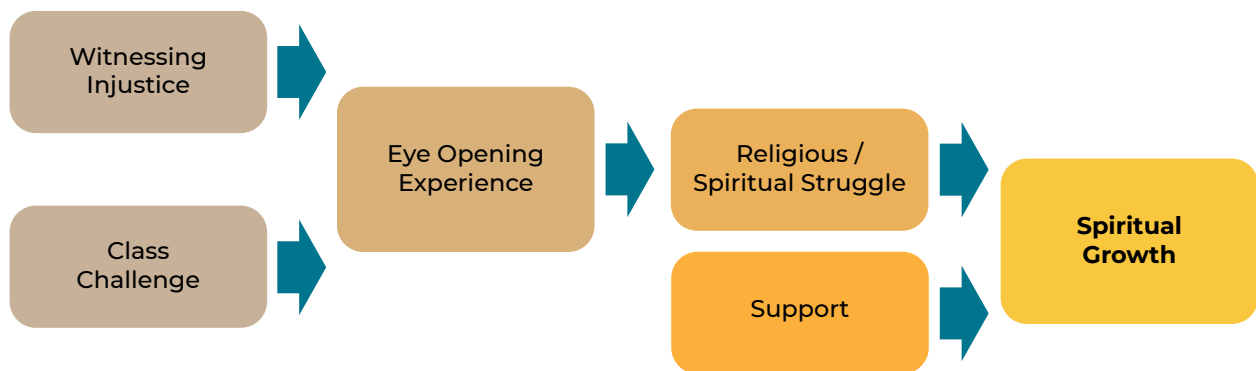
Theories and empirical research on spiritual development describe how young adult spiritual growth typically involves a process of moving from beliefs inherited from authorities and the cultural norms of one's background to beliefs that are arrived at independently through critical thinking (Fowler, 1981; Daloz Parks, 1986; 2000). In other words, young adults need to determine what they believe for themselves in the process of journeying towards adulthood. This process is often initiated through exposure to diverse perspectives that cannot be reconciled with one's previously held assumptions and related cognitive dissonance that challenges one to grow into new ways of thinking and believing. The experience of letting go of one's prior beliefs can be painful and, therefore, requires much support to ensure that students move through it in a healthy manner. Therefore, the interview questions sought to learn more about the challenges students faced during their PULSE experience as well as the support that was available to them from professors, peers, class content, and their supervisors in the community-based organizations where they served.

The qualitative data obtained during interviews pointed towards several aspects of the service-learning experience that were more likely to exist among those who grew spiritually than those who did not. First and foremost, the existence of strong relationships and consistent interaction with people at their service sites were among the key differences between those who grew spiritually and those who did not. These relationships led students to hear stories that presented perspectives they otherwise would not have heard. Students who grew spiritually consistently described the experience as eye opening in the way it contradicted their preconceived notions of people facing poverty, addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and lack of educational success. The students who grew spiritually also grew to care about the people they met at their service sites and subsequently cared about the injustice and suffering they faced. Students described this as emotionally overwhelming, and this led them to deep reflection as they tried to make sense of complex questions without easy answers. Students who grew spiritually also spoke of how their service-learning class exposed them to new perspectives. The class readings, challenging class discussions, and hearing about the service-learning experiences of other students also pushed students towards inner reflection.

Students were generally well supported as they processed the challenges presented in class and their service experiences. Class not only provided supportive relationships, but also provided a theoretical framework through which students could try to make sense of their confusion. Some interviewees even described how their PULSE faculty members reached out to follow up on difficult conversations that had occurred in class.

Integrating the quantitative and qualitative results with spiritual development theories led to this conceptual model (Figure 1) describing how growth may be occurring through service-learning.

Figure 1 *Process of Spiritual Growth through Service-Learning* (Sterk Barrett, 2015, p. 209).



The process of growth begins when students witness how people they have gotten to know and care about at their service sites are impacted by injustice. At the same time students are being challenged by personally witnessing injustice, they are similarly being challenged by class content that asks them to reflect upon ethical and moral questions related to injustice and social responsibility. Students' eyes are opened to the idea that their prior beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions were not entirely accurate. Despite what they might have believed about our meritocratic society throughout their childhood, life is not always fair, and people can suffer because of this unfairness. Stereotypes breakdown as students realize that people in poverty are not there solely because they did something to deserve it. Students simultaneously come to see the relationship as reciprocal and recognize that they are not doing service FOR a deficient other, but that the people they intended to serve have much to teach the PULSE student about life. This experience of having one's eyes opened can be overwhelming emotionally and spiritually and can lead a student to struggle with questioning which of their other fundamental beliefs and perspectives might not be as certain as they once thought. What else might be hidden from their view or seen inaccurately? (It should be noted that this was equally true among students of color as white students). Throughout this struggle, the class framework and supportive relationships are available to help struggling students to make sense of what they are experiencing and move through this process of growth in a healthy manner.

I think another very important thing happens in the relationships and connections built through service-learning experiences—especially among young adults at a school like Bos-

ton College. It is unusual for a student to attend a high achieving school like Boston College without having mastered skills that make life feel somewhat controllable and predictable. Mastering these skills is what enabled students to earn high grades while balancing the rigorous course load and extracurricular involvement expected of students admitted to Boston College. At their service sites, students often witness people living lives that are exactly the opposite in this regard. They do not have predictably, control, stability, or comfort in the same way that most students are used to experiencing. To live in that manner of unpredictability, requires a certain level of faith in an unknown future. In this way, students witness that it is not only possible to let go of trying to control one's life, but that the process of doing so can potentially lead one to a deeper level of faith. As described by one of the interviewees, seeing faith in people facing difficult situations has "*been completely inspiring*" (Sterk Barrett, 2015). She relatedly asserted, "*PULSE has really strengthened my faith.*"

Additional Service-Learning Outcomes that Support Mission

Along with fostering holistic student development, research has demonstrated there are many other positive outcomes associated with service-learning that can support the mission of Catholic higher education institutions. In 2001, researchers at Vanderbilt University (Eyler, et al., 2001) conducted a literature review to summarize the findings from all service-learning research conducted up to that point in time. They reported that studies consistently found service-learning has a positive relationship to: academic outcomes such as complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development; Personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, moral development, sense of social responsibility, and citizenship skills; Interpersonal development and communication skills; Stronger relationships with faculty and satisfaction with the college/university.

More recent studies have also demonstrated a relationship between service-learning participation and retention (Bingle, et al., 2010; Cress, Burack, et al., 2010; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Keup, 2005; Reed, et al., 2015; Song, et al., 2017; Yue & Hart, 2017). Some studies have found that this relationship also exists when data is dis-aggregated by low income, first generation status or ethnicity (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Mungo, 2017; Song et al., 2017; York, 2016). For example, Lockeman and Pelco (2013) reported a statistically significant difference in graduation rates among students who did not take service-learning classes and those who had. This difference was even more pronounced among students of color as 71% of racially minoritized students who had taken service-learning courses graduated in six years while only 29% who had not taken service-learning courses did. Studies also point towards greater interest in service-learning among students of color (Christensen, et al., 2015; Lockeman and

Pelco, 2013; Kuh, 2008). For example, Kuh (2008) discovered that students of color participate in service-learning by senior year at a higher rate than white students (which is not true of the other high impact practices analyzed by Kuh). Relatedly, research has demonstrated that racially minoritized faculty and female faculty have higher rates of participation in community engaged scholarship and teaching (O'Meara, et al., 2011; Vogelgesang, et al., 2010).

At the College of the Holy Cross, Isabelle Jenkins and I conducted research to explore the experiences of racially minoritized students in our community-based learning (CBL) classes. We had observed that our semester-end assessment data consistently demonstrated higher mean responses from BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) students than white students and designed a study to further analyze these differences. In the process, we reviewed the results of 1,845 surveys from 59 different community-based learning classes between 2012-2017. We also interviewed 13 students in the spring of 2016 to learn more about their experiences with community-based learning.

Of the 1,845 surveys analyzed, 1,521 included a response that indicate the student's ethnic background. The ethnic breakdown of the respondents paralleled the overall Holy Cross student body with the majority being White/Caucasian (77.1%), followed by Latinx (10.2%), Asian/Asian-American (5.5%), and Black/African-American (5.2%). As we reviewed quantitative assessment results, we discovered statistically significant higher responses among BIPOC students than white students in the following three variables: 1) *Including CBL in This Course Enabled Me to Learn More Deeply than I Otherwise Would Have.* 2) *I Learn Better When I Apply Class Material to Real Experience.* 3) *I Could Have Benefited from Additional Opportunities to Discuss My CBL Experience in Class.* It is also noteworthy that the last two of these three variables point towards a statistically significant difference between male and female responses.

Interviews were then conducted with 13 students from racially minoritized backgrounds (Three of these students identified as African American, three as Asian, six as Latinx, one as White/Latina. Nine of the 13 identified as first-generation college students). Every one of the interviewees referred to a community-based learning class being among their most memorable and valuable learning experiences in high school or college. Consistent themes from the interviews explained why the students felt so positively about community-based learning including: parallels between learning preferences and CBL; characteristics and actions of professors; a desire to serve; an ability to relate; empowerment; and being valued for their assets. To elaborate, students described seeking courses where they could apply course concepts to experience and learn through discussions where they heard a diversity of perspectives. Interviewees also placed a strong emphasis on relationships in the learning process and described how a supportive, caring relationship with their professor was integral

to their ability to learn. A sense of social responsibility was so central to student's identities that they greatly valued how the integration of service with course content enabled them to bring their full self to the academic experience. Relatedly, they appreciated the opportunity to help mentor and support people who they could relate to in the community. This ability to identify with those they met at community-based organizations meant that their CBL sites sometimes felt more like home than the predominantly white Holy Cross student body and that being in the community could help ground them when they felt dissonance between their former life and their current life at Holy Cross. Finally, students spoke about the ways in which CBL was empowering by building their confidence in the classroom, initiating desired classroom conversations, enabling them to see how much value they brought to their community partners because of their ability to relate, and by helping them to better understand societal injustices that had negatively impacted their families and their communities. Consistent throughout these themes was the concept of students being seen through an asset-based lens that saw the gifts they had to offer rather than the deficit-based perspective that had framed many of their prior educational experiences.

Our mission statements at Catholic higher education institutions not only focus on fostering holistic student development and a commitment to service and justice, but they also consistently focus on a commitment to diversity. While many of our schools have been successful in diversifying our student bodies, this does not always translate to a feeling of inclusion for people from racially minoritized backgrounds. Study findings like those outlined above demonstrate how service-learning may be a potential avenue for fostering greater inclusivity on our campuses and may enable us to better live the diversity-related values we aspire towards in our mission statements. At the same time, it is important that service-learning classes be led with intentionality and care to avoid further marginalizing racially minoritized students by centering and normalizing the experiences of white students in class discussions and reflections (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Concluding Reflections

As previously discussed, my personal appreciation of Catholic higher education began when I was introduced to a new way of thinking about the purpose of life during my undergraduate years at Villanova University. After graduating from Villanova, I followed a path that was "normal" among my friends from college and completely unknown to my friends from home: doing a postgraduate year of service. It was during this year of service that I truly, deeply began to understand what it meant to live my faith and follow what Brackley (1988) describes as the way of Christ. Brackley states,

“Instead of measuring personal worth by where one falls in a hierarchy, the way of Christ finds self-worth from the unconditional love of God and the love of God that flows through human beings towards one another—a love that exists regardless of one’s ‘success’ in the way of the world.”

Similar to what I heard from students when conducting research on service-learning and spiritual growth, my life was permanently altered because of the life-changing conversations and moments I had during the year of service. In Pope Francis’ words, it was an education that spoke to heart, head, and hands. As the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm points towards, it was a year focused on experience, reflection, and action that enabled young adults like me to discern how they might live their faith by using their gifts to serve the common good of society.

I spent the year with the Chi Rho service program in the Archdiocese of Hartford and was assigned to work with the Archdiocesan Office for Catholic Social Ministry—an office that strives to live and embody the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Chi Rho was modeled on the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and included community living, full-time service in low-income neighborhoods, and structured opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and personal growth. The cognitive dissonance I experienced in this work challenged me to the core on a daily basis. This challenge began almost immediately as my new supervisor was dismayed and disheartened to discover how little I had learned about Catholic Social Teaching or social justice in my Catholic upbringing. I was disheartened to disappoint my new boss on my first day of work. As the year went on, I had regular conversations with racially minoritized, lower-income individuals who expressed dismay at the way in which “wealthy” people like me were indifferent to the plight they faced and the injustices they experienced. I certainly did not feel wealthy in earning \$80 a month, but the experience challenged me to face how much wealth I did have because of my education, my social capital, and the unlimited opportunities before me. I worked with children whom I grew to love dearly but was broken-hearted to realize that the innocent joy I witnessed in them as a six or seven-year-old would unlikely remain once they became aware of the unfairness into which they had been born.

At the same time the experience challenged my mind, heart, and soul, the program provided numerous structures to support us through such challenges. Living in community meant there were always peers available with whom we could process difficult experiences and attempt to make sense of what they might mean in the bigger picture. We had a live-in staff member who planned excellent opportunities to reflect, learn, and grow spiritually. We had access to graduate courses that provided an intellectual framework to better understand the injustices we were seeing. There were host families and mentors who helped us to transition more smoothly into adulthood and plan for our future. I have been blessed to remain close with my host family to this day.

I recently had the chance to reunite with the eight other people who participated in this post-graduate year of service and lived in community with me. Though we had not seen each other in 27 years, the slower pace of life during the pandemic enabled us this precious opportunity to reflect with one another about how the Chi Rho program impacted our lives in the long-term. During the reunion, we reminisced and laughed about the many fun memories we shared, but also spoke seriously about the moments we will never forget because of the dissonance between the life we had previously known and our eye-opening experiences during the year of service. Many spoke about being a racial minority when going to work that year and the deep understanding this provided of systemic injustice and racism. More than one person spoke of utilizing this understanding many times over in their professional and personal lives in the years since. Many spoke of the gratitude they feel to have had these experiences deeply imprinted within them in a manner that can never be forgotten.

While I did not have the opportunity to do service-learning as an undergraduate because the field was still in its infancy, this postgraduate year of service included the same components that we aim towards in the field of service-learning. This experience became the foundation for my future personal and professional life. It shaped the values I strive to live by and provided me a new perspective on what it means to live my Catholic faith. I have since devoted my professional life to trying to replicate the Chi Rho experience for undergraduates through the field of service-learning/community-based learning. My original ignorance about Catholic Social teaching, social justice, and structural racism has driven me to learn all that I can about these topics and led them to be a central focus of my teaching, scholarship, and administrative career. The words of Fr. Kolvenbach (2000) ring true in my own life, *“Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.”*

The powerful transformation that I experienced through my “service-learning” experience is similar to what I have heard hundreds of students say throughout my years of working in this field and what was documented in my research on service learning and spiritual growth. Ultimately, I think the power in service-learning (and service more broadly) is described succinctly in the following quotes from Saint Teresa of Calcutta and Greg Boyle, S.J. In speaking of how we might find peace in our world, Saint Teresa of Calcutta (n.d.) wrote, *“we have forgotten that we belong to each other”* and described how we are all part of the same human family. Fr. Greg Boyle added to the words of Mother Teresa in stating, *“Radical kinship is the only thing that mattered to Jesus...We are one, and we belong to each other.”* (Long-García, 2019). It is in the process of building relationships of solidarity with people facing injustice that our students can tangibly see and understand what it means to be fully human and be reminded

It is in the process of building relationships of solidarity with people facing injustice that our students can tangibly see and understand what it means to be fully human and be reminded of the value in following what Brackley described as the way of Christ rather than the way of the world.

of the value in following what Brackley (1998) described as the way of Christ rather than the way of the world. It is in combining these experiences with classroom content that the heart, head, and hands can be in harmony with one another and achieve the type of integrated education Pope

Francis calls us to aim towards. It is in providing these service-learning opportunities that we can more fully live our mission as Catholic higher education institutions.

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**“We will not change the world,
if we do not change education”**

Pope Francis

2 Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Uniservitate is an initiative led by Porticus, with the general coordination of the Latin American Center for Service-learning (CLAYSS)

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ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3



9 789874 4487223

Published in October 2021
ISBN 978-987-4487-22-3

UNISERVITATE COLLECTION