

Civic Engagement in Catholic and Marianist Universities: A Continuing Conversation

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Introduction

Civic Engagement has been an important focus for the three Universities that are members of the Association of Marianist Universities (AMU). While all three campuses have strong traditions of civic engagement, under a variety of names, such as service learning, community based service learning, social concern, working for justice, etc., each campus has developed a slightly different language to describe civic engagement and how civic engagement is integrate in to the curriculum and life of the campus.

In June 2007 the Board of the AMU decided to embark on a project that would engage the three campuses in a conversation on civic engagement and its importance for our Catholic and Marianist mission of our Universities. The purposes of this project are:

- to recognize and affirm that civic engagement is an important learning outcome for each of the three Marianist universities;
- to develop across the three Marianist universities a common understanding of the learning outcomes related to civic engagement in the Catholic and Marianist traditions of education; and,
- to develop a method of assessing three to six learning outcomes related to civic engagement in the Catholic and Marianist educational tradition.

This paper provides an introduction to this conversation on civic engagement and is organized in three sections. The first section provides a working definition of civic engagement and briefly outlines the importance of civic engagement in American higher education. The second section provides background ideas on how the Catholic and Marianist traditions of education can be valuable resources in civic engagement. These ideas can be the basis for extended campus conversations on how learning through civic engagement can develop a distinctive Catholic and Marianist character. The final section outlines five learning outcomes for civic engagement that are important to the Catholic and Marianist traditions of higher education.

I. Civic Engagement in American Higher Education

The difficulties in defining civic engagement in a University setting have been well documented¹. Each University has developed a specialized language depending on who has been champion of the cause on the campus. For the purposes of our conversation on our Marianist university campuses we have chosen a very broad definition of civic engagement. For our conversations civic engagement is defined as the “active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and

¹ For example Chapter One in *Civic Engagement in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* by Barbara Jacoby and Associates provides an excellent summary of these challenges and perspectives on the definition of civic engagement.

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constructive manner, with a focus on the public good.”² This definition allows for a variety of individual and collective actions that are designed to identify and address issues of public concern so that public good is realized. Using this broad definition, civic engagement can take many forms: (1) volunteering in a soup kitchen; doing immersions in Mexico and Zambia; (2) engagement in election issues and voting; (3) advocacy with institutions of representative democracy; and (4) working as part of a community group or association to bring about justice. The engaged citizen has the ability, agency, and opportunities to move with thoughtfulness and skill among these different types of public acts. Civic engagement can be focused on local issues such as homelessness in the community and/or global issues such as sustainability of the earth.³

Civic engagement, as broadly defined, can be viewed as a continuum which is illustrated in Table 1. At the left hand of the continuum is service. Service is action addressing immediate civic problems that are occurring in the community, such as feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, etc. At the right hand of the continuum is social change. Social change is action that addresses systemic change of community structures that provides long term solutions to civic problems. Table 2 (c.f. next page) applies the continuum to addressing the problem of homelessness in a local community.

Table 1: Continuum of Civic Engagement

<i>Service</i>	<i>Social Change</i>
Focuses on the needs of individuals and families	Focuses on rights of individuals and families
Looks at individual situations	Analyzes social structures
Meets an immediate need	Works for long term change
Address painful symptoms	Address underlying social causes
Depends on the generosity of donors	Depends on just laws and fair social structures

Throughout this narrative we use two phrases: 1) learning for civic engagement and 2) learning through civic engagement. Learning for civic engagement means that civic engagement is an important learning outcome of a Marianist university. This narrative outlines the results of a conversation on the knowledge, dispositions, and competencies needed for civic engagement. Civic engagement requires learning the fundamentals of civic and public life. Students need to know how social, public, and international systems work. The need to know what problems are commonly encountered in these systems and how are they recognized and addressed. In addition,

² As cited in Prentice, 2005, p136

³ Based on Michael Delli Carpini, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, former Director of the Public Policy, Pew Charitable Trusts.

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we would like the definition of these learning outcomes to be enriched by Catholic social tradition and our Marianist educational tradition. The results of this conversation are given in Section III.

Table 2: Continuum Applied to Homelessness

<i>Service</i>	<i>Social Change</i>
Shelter homeless persons	Reduce housing costs through tax credits or low-income housing
Find jobs for homeless persons	Increase wages of working poor to make housing affordable
Provide emergency assistance to prevent evictions	Reform laws to protect tenants' rights and enforce building codes

The phrase learning through civic engagement emphasizes the importance of experiential learning. One of the important ways that students learn the skills of civic engagement is by being civically engaged and then reflecting on that experience often with the guidance of a mentor. Reflection allows the learner to discern what they have learned, to integrate this learning with learning through course work and other experiences, and to imagine how they might improve their civic engagement in the future.

The continuum of Table 1 is also helpful in understanding the developmental pathways of learning through civic engagement. Learning through civic engagement always requires reflection on the experience of civic engagement. Education for civic engagement is a dynamic process in that a person or group usually becomes civically engaged by doing service. During a service experience in a homeless shelter, for example, a learner begins to appreciate the situation of those suffering from homelessness, begins to understand their stories, and begins a friendship. Reflection allows the learner to integrate what they have learned through the experience of service with what they have learned in the classroom.

Engaging in social change to address a problem like homelessness requires involving a group of people or organizations in a process of social inquiry about problems in the community. In broadest terms social inquiry involves four phases⁴:

- **Naming problems and issues:** What are the barriers to human flourishing and what are the underlying causes of these barriers?
- **Discerning a direction for social change:** What shared vision do we have for a better and more hopeful future and how can we design strategies so that we will realize our vision?
- **Implementing the social change:** What groups must be organized and what resources mobilized to implement our strategy to realize our vision?

⁴ There are many ways to name the phases or steps in social inquiry. This naming attempts to capture the important dimension of social inquiry.

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- **Reflecting on the change processes:** What have we learned through the process of change and how will we act differently in the future?

Educating students for social change requires that we engage them in meaningful ways in each of these phases of social inquiry. Real world experiences with social inquiry will help students realize how difficult and often chaotic the process of social change really is.

Every civic community needs engaged citizens that are addressing all aspects of the civic engagement continuum. History and experience tells us that our communities will always have problems to address and we need generous persons who will organize to meet these needs through service. Yet, our communities cannot make progress unless it also has generous citizens who are working to bring about systematic change for the public good.

II. Catholic and Marianist Resources for Civic Engagement

In our conversations on civic engagement, it is important to develop an appreciation of how our Catholic and Marianist mission and identity of our universities can provide a rich resource for learning for and through civic engagement. In this section some the objections that faculty have to mixing religious traditions with civic engagement are examined. Next the Catholic social tradition and the Marianist educational tradition are examined to demonstrate their relevance to learning for and through civic engagement. One does not have to be of the Catholic faith to appreciate how these traditions can be an enriching resource for civic engagement

Some Objections: Mixing Religion and Civic Engagement

Some faculty has objected that introducing ideas of religion and faith into conversations on civic engagement is fraught with difficulties and may interfere with good intellectual arguments. The first objection is that religion can be very disruptive to civic conversations. Members of our campuses and our civic partners are very diverse and have very different perspectives that they bring to civic conversations. Introducing religion just brings more conflict to already contentious conversations. Clearly the role of religion in civic conversations has been greatly debated. It is a strong conviction of the Catholic social tradition that faith and religion can be very productive resources for civic conversations. A number of scholars defend the claim that religious beliefs can be introduced into civic conversations in ways that enriches and widens that scope of rationality of these conversations⁵. This requires that the person introduce these religious claims and arguments in a way that promotes public accessibility, mutual respect, and moral integrity. Clearly these are the virtues that we wish to promote on our campuses.

Second objection is that introducing ideas of faith and religion into civic engagement conversations leaves our campuses open to inappropriate interference by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. While this may happen on rare occasions it is possible for a Catholic university to protect the academic freedom of its faculty and its own institutional autonomy. Civic engagement of our universities can enrich the

⁵ This point is well developed in Chapter 2 of Kristen Heyer, *Prophetic and Public: The Social Witness of US Catholicism*.

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Catholic Church. Bishops in the Catholic Church, as both teachers and learners, are always welcome to enter into the conversations of our campuses. The Catholic University is one of the places where the Church does its thinking. As leaders within global ecclesial community Bishops can greatly enrich our campus conversations. Bishops also have the right and duty, after thoughtful conversation and due deliberation with the parties involved, to declare what is authentic teaching within the Catholic tradition. Yet they are able to exercise these responsibilities in a way that does not infringe upon the academic freedom of our faculty and students and the institutional autonomy of our Universities. This is because the well written governing statutes of our Marianist Universities places the primary responsibility for the quality of the academic conversations on our campuses with the faculty, the administration, and ultimately with the Board of Trustees. Involving the wider Church in our conversations of civic engagement, when carried out with civility and respect, can greatly enrich our campus conversations and also provide a much needed resource for the Church.

The Catholic Social Tradition and Civic Engagement

The Catholic social tradition can be a very rich resource for learning for and through civic engagement on our Marianist university campuses. In order to explore this richness a working definition of Catholic social teaching is developed and then several reflections on how Catholic social teaching can enrich the learning for and through civic engagement.

A Working Definition: The Catholic social tradition can be viewed as having two complementary dimensions 1) an on-going *practice of social inquiry* by the Catholic community and 2) the *themes* or practical knowledge that results from this social inquiry. As a *practice*, the Catholic social tradition can be seen as the on-going social inquiry⁶ by the Catholic community, in dialogue with others, on important social questions, such as the conditions of labor, international relations, or war and peace. In conducting each phase of its social inquiry the Catholic community engages in a critical and reciprocal dialogue between the best of the contemporary knowledge on the social question and the resources of the Catholic Christian faith. In this dialogue the contemporary knowledge on the social question both enriches our understanding of the resources of the Catholic Christian faith (scripture and tradition) and raises important questions to be addressed by these resources. In the same manner, the resources of Catholic Christian faith both enriches our understanding of contemporary knowledge and raises important questions to be addressed in the use of this knowledge.

Over time this *practice* of social inquiry yields a set of *themes* or practical ideas and knowledge, i.e. principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directions for action that can guide social inquiry on current and future social questions⁷. These themes or practical knowledge are expanded, refined, and critiqued as participants in the tradition apply social inquiry to new situations and questions and to new understandings of previous situations and questions.

⁶ A definition of social inquiry was provided in Section II: Civic Engagement in American Higher Education.

⁷ Pope Paul VI, Octogesima adveniens, no. 4.

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Catholic Social Tradition and Learning for and through Civic Engagement: The Catholic social tradition can be helpful for civic engagement in two important ways: 1) in thinking about the process for learning through civic engagement and 2) as a resource for ideas or practical knowledge to be utilized in social inquiry.

The Catholic social tradition of social inquiry is captured in the simple phrases coming out European and American Catholic social action movement -- *See, Judge, and Act*. To which we add the important component from experiential learning and service learning theory – *Reflect*. *See, Judge, Act, and Reflect* captures the important phases in the practice of social inquiry. Clearly each of these steps or phases of social inquiry must be carried out by using both the resources of the best contemporary knowledge and the resources of our Catholic Christian faith.

In helping students conduct social inquiry in the Catholic tradition, it is helpful to explain the phases of social inquiry as follows:

- **See is about naming patterns of injustice.** It important to be able to appreciate the institutional or structural elements of the patterns of injustice. What institutions or structures are presenting barriers to human flourishing of the people suffering injustice? Whose interests are being served by the current institutional arrangements? What ideas provide a rationale for the current institutional arrangement -- the current patterns of injustice? Who promotes these ideas? How can these ideas be changed?
- **Judge is about discerning a vision of justice for this situation and strategies to realize this vision.** Is there a common ground among the stakeholders for a shared vision of justice for the situation we are addressing? Is this vision shared by the least advantaged? Whose thinking must change and how must it change if we want to realize this shared vision? What leverage (assets and resources) do we have to realize this shared vision and how can we use this leverage to develop a strategy for realizing our shared vision?
- **Act is about organizing for transformation.** How do we mobilize people in order to implement our strategy? How can we mobilize resources needed to support our strategy? How we adjust our plans as we encounter surprises? How do we keep people motivated and focused on the vision of justice?
- **Reflect is about learning what advancing justice has taught us.** What surprises did we encounter during the change process? What did these surprises tell us about our assumptions about the situation and our vision of change? How do we need to change in order to advance justice? How were the least advantaged affected by the change?

This four phase process and variations of it help learners organize the learning through their civic engagement experience.

The themes of the Catholic social tradition are another important resource for learning through civic engagement. These themes are a good working summary of the practical knowledge that has been accumulated through the many centuries of the

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Church's work of social inquiry into important social questions. Appendix A provides a summary description of the themes of the Catholic social tradition that have been developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

These themes of the Catholic social tradition can provide helpful guidelines and good questions as our students learn through civic engagement. For example, when exploring the issues of poverty in a distressed urban neighborhood, the themes of Dignity of the Human Person, the Call to Family, Community and Participation, and the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable can provide good question for the work of civic engagement. Some examples might be:

- “What opportunities do people in this neighborhood have to realize their basic human dignity?”
- Do children and families have the basic necessities of life, .e.g. food, housing, care and nurturance?
- How are families supported in raising and educating their children? How do schools and families interact?
- What opportunities do people in this neighborhood have to shape the future of their neighborhood?

The major point here is that the themes of the Catholic social tradition can be a rich resource for many more questions and insights on how our students and faculty can address the problems of poverty in a distressed neighborhood.

The themes of the Catholic social tradition can also offer good insights and questions when investigating the responsibilities of corporations to their workers and to the larger society. The themes of Participation, Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, and Caring for God's Creation can provide good guidance and good questions. Some examples might be:

- How does the corporate culture promote human dignity, the dignity of work, and participation in shaping the future of the corporation?
- What are the contributions that a corporation makes to the common good of society?
- What are the responsibilities of the corporation for stewardship of creation when we consider the type of products that it makes and its use of resources.

Again these questions are just some of the questions and guidelines that can come from the themes of Catholic social tradition and can aid the social inquiry of our students and faculty into business corporations.

Faculty in many Catholic universities are utilizing the Catholic social tradition as a rich resource for enhancing the process of learning for and through civic engagement⁸. The *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* and the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* provide several examples of how the Catholic social tradition can enhance the quality of learning and scholarship around civic engagement.

⁸ See for example Kathleen Mass Weigert and Alex K. Kelly, eds. *Living the Catholic Social Tradition: Cases and Commentary*.

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The Marianist Educational Tradition and Civic Engagement

The lay and religious communities which comprise the Marianist Family have their origins as an adaptive response to the French Revolution. The courageous founders of this movement within the Church, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, Venerable Adèle de Tranquelléon, and Venerable Marie Thérèse de Lamourous incorporated into their communities many of the insights that animated the French revolution (liberty, fraternity, equality) while at the same time rejecting the religious indifference and secularism of the French Enlightenment by striving to live their Christian faith with the same intensity as the first community of Jesus' disciples. These communities took up the mission of Mary – to bring Christ and the reign of God into the world. These communities incorporate a commitment to the human dignity of persons, fraternity, and a deep faith life which manifested itself in an apostolic mission to rebuild the Church of France and to advance justice in the French society.

Each of the founders contributed a dimension to the Marianist approach to bringing faith to the life of the community. Chaminade had a deep insight into the spiritual, communitarian and institutional dimension of social transformation needed for the French Church and society. Adele had an orientation to education and hospitality for the poor. Marie Therese, in her work with the Miséricorde, was committed to providing human dignity for some of the least in society. Each learned from the experience and insights of the other founders.

Because schools provided a fertile ground for this apostolic mission many members began to engage in the ministry of education. Over time this effort expanded into a worldwide network of educational institutions, including the three Marianist universities of the United States, and the charism of the founding communities was expressed in a living educational tradition. One way to express the key beliefs of the tradition is in the characteristics of Marianist education. In our Marianist tradition of education we endeavor to:

- educate for formation in faith
- provide an integral, quality education
- educate in family spirit
- educate for service, justice, and peace
- educate for adaptation and change

In the *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* these characteristics are developed for context of higher education in the United States. In that document the last two characteristics were summarized as follows:

- **Marianist Universities Educate for Service, Justice, and Peace:** The Marianist approach to higher education is deeply committed to the common good. The intellectual life itself 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. In addition, Marianist universities extend a special concern for the poor and marginalized and promote the dignity, rights and responsibilities of all peoples (CMU p 27).

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- **Marianist Universities Educate for Adaptation and Change:** In the midst of rapid social and technological change, Marianist universities readily adapt and change their methods and structures so that the wisdom of their educational philosophy and spirituality may be transmitted even more fully (CMU p 31).

These two characteristics illustrate the importance of learning for and through civic engagement for our Marianist universities.

The Marianist educational tradition provides us with a number of important insights on how we might view learning for and through civic engagement⁹:

1. **Community building:** In the Marianist tradition, when people and groups face an unjust situation, people are engaged, especially those affected by the injustice, to solve problems and build relationships which allow them to create and work to realize a shared vision of the future. Some elements of the Marianist community building approach are:
 - a. **A Gift Orientation:** Recognizing and calling forth gifts and assets from members of the community; the foundational act of community building is giving gifts.
 - b. **Importance of relationships:** Relationships help us link and support gifts; relationship help us call forth gifts and build trust needed to work toward common goals.
 - c. **Hospitality:** Creating a space where all people are welcomed; working to create unity across differences.
 - d. **Space for Constructive Conversations:** Creating conversation places and spaces where persons listen to one another and can respectfully inquire into what is said and where persons can freely express the ideas and invite others to inquire into them.
2. **Social Transformation:** Reshaping institutions so that they are a better realization of the common good¹⁰. Some elements of an Marianist approach to social transformation include:
 - a. **Focusing on the common good:** Creating social conditions that allow persons to exercise their human capabilities and meet their basic needs.
 - b. **Changing institutions:** Current institutional arrangements benefit some and disadvantage others; changing institutions so that they are a better realization of the common good.

⁹ Another thoughtful way of capturing some of the insights of the Marianist tradition of civic engagement is Jim Vogt. "How Do Marianists Do Social Justice?" *Things Marianist: A publication of the North American Center for Marianist Studies*. 2008

¹⁰ Fr. William Ferree, S.M. made a link between Fr. Chaminade's insights at the beginning of the Marianist Movement and the work of advancing justice. Introduction to Fr. Ferree's work on Social Justice is contained in the monograph *Introduction to Social Justice*. His influence on Marianist thought is very thoughtfully summarized in *A Ferree Resource Collection*, compiled and edited by Benjamin Dougherty, North American Center for Marianist Studies, 2008.

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- c. **Challenging the structures of power:** Unjust institutional patterns are maintained through the exercise of power; changing institution means challenging and changes in the structures of power.
 - d. **Option for the Poor:** In working for social change we are concerned about how the social change promotes the least of society -- the marginalized and the oppressed.
3. **Spirituality of Mission:** Developing a personal and communal spirituality that is integral to the work of community building and social transformation and will sustain these over time.
- a. **Growing as a disciple of Jesus:** We grow as disciples of Jesus through community support, personal and communal prayer, and liturgical worship; Mary is the model of discipleship and with the Holy Spirit forms us in it.
 - b. **Conversion:** Seeing the world in a new way; sharing Mary's mission of bringing Christ and God's reign into the world; developing a special concern for the marginalized and oppressed.
 - c. **Communion:** Develop relationships of fraternity love for others based on the unconditional love of God as expressed through Jesus Christ.
 - d. **Solidarity:** Working to transform institution to be a better realization of the common good.

The Marianist tradition of bringing faith to the concerns of community and public life is a part of the greater Catholic social tradition and has been enriched by that tradition. It has been shaped by its founding experience coming out of the French Revolution and by the experience of Marianist lay and religious communities that have endeavored to live for more than 200 years. Today Marianist universities are endeavoring to raise up a generation of leaders capable of civic engagement that advances justice in our local communities and across the world.

III. Learning Outcomes

Because each of our campuses believes civic engagement is an important learning outcome related to our mission, we are all engaged in developing learning outcomes related to civic engagement as well as a method for assessing these learning outcomes. This section provides a statement of learning outcomes related to civic engagement in the Catholic and Marianist tradition of education. These learning outcomes have been the subject of conversations on each of our campuses. As stated here, they reflect feedback gleaned from these conversations.

A. Practical Wisdom

Practical Wisdom is the ability to reason well about the goods to be realized by the participants in a social entity, (e.g. a neighborhood, a school system, an international economic system) and to choose thoughtfully and critically the means needed to accomplish these goods.

In exhibiting Practical Wisdom, students will be able to:

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1. Articulate, in a variety of settings, a conception of human flourishing based on cross-cultural appreciations and interdisciplinary knowledge including Catholic social tradition.
2. Use this concept of human flourishing to:
 - a. clearly and intelligently define and diagnose social relationships to identify symptoms and underlying causal problems;
 - b. construct and evaluate possible solutions and thoughtfully select from among them;
 - c. organize to implement the chosen solution(s); and
 - d. critically reflect on the process in light of the actual consequences of the implementation.

B. Community Building

Community Building is the ability to establish and sustain right and positive relationships within a community that supports human flourishing and the pursuit of common good.

In exhibiting Community Building, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate the convictions, beliefs, and skills needed to build communities including collaboration and peacemaking.
 - a. Collaboration--productive, discerning, creative, and respectful collaboration with persons from diverse background and perspectives for the common purpose of learning, leading, and serving to bring about a greater realization of the common good.
 - b. Peacemaking--accepting differences, creatively bridging differences, innovative transcending of differences, and promoting reconciliation.
2. Demonstrate these community building convictions, beliefs, and skills on campus, in their local community, and if possible in a cross cultural immersion as part of their preparation for global citizenship.

C. Respectfully Engaging Diversity

Respectfully Engaging Diversity is the ability to engage in authentic, faith-informed dialogue about goods which transcend or unite our various differences. It requires deep knowledge of diversity in its various forms.

In exhibiting Respectfully Engaging Diversity, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate intellectually informed, appreciative and critical understanding of the cultures, histories, times, and places of multiple others, as marked by class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion or faith, nationality, sexual orientation and other manifestations of difference;

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2. practice scholarly inquiry, experiential immersion, and disciplined reflection in the examination of their own faith commitments and their understanding of diversity;
3. demonstrate familiarity with the basic texts and ideological understandings that shape Catholic beliefs and teaching, practices and spirituality while respecting diverse faith traditions; and
4. develop the skills, including those central to their own faith, to enter into respectful dialogue about the goods which transcend or unite our differences.

D. Engagement in the Public Square

Engagement in the Public Square is the ability to engage in public discourse that influences public decisions and policy.

In exhibiting Engagement in the Public Square, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate advanced habits of inquiry and creativity in the development and delivery of arguments in a variety of public forums;
2. develop public arguments that integrate interdisciplinary knowledge including knowledge from faith traditions; and
3. balance listening respectfully to the arguments of others with the ability to advocate their own principled arguments.

E. Vocation for Justice

Vocation for Justice is the ability to integrate perspectives of praxis for care and equity with one's professional career and work.

In exhibiting Vocation for Justice, students will be able to:

1. develop a passion for human flourishing, especially for the poor and the marginalized; and
2. see their future jobs and careers in the context of a vocation for the common good of society – a deep passion to bring justice for all.

IV. Conclusion

This paper reflects the current understanding of the meaning of civic engagement in the Catholic and Marianist traditions of education on the three campuses of our Marianist universities. As such it provides a foundation for the next phase of this project: the development of the means to assess civic engagement on those campuses.

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Appendix A

The Themes of the Catholic Social Tradition

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The Themes of Catholic Social Tradition¹: The themes of Catholic social tradition are the fundamental practical arguments that come from the exercise of social inquiry of the Catholic, i.e., principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directions for action

The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person

Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition. In our society, human life is especially under direct attack from abortion. Other direct threats to the sanctity of human life include euthanasia, human cloning, and the destruction of human embryos for research.

Catholic teaching about the dignity of life calls us to oppose torture,² unjust war, and the use of the death penalty; to prevent genocide and attacks against noncombatants; to oppose racism; and to overcome poverty and suffering. Nations are called to protect the right to life by seeking effective ways to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts except as a last resort, always seeking first to resolve disputes by peaceful means. We revere the lives of children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings as children of God.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred but also social. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The family—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined or undermined by permitting same-sex unions or other distortions of marriage. Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program. It is important to uphold parents' rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to choose their children's education.

How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects the common good and the capacity of individuals to develop their full potential. Every person and association has a right and a duty to participate actively in shaping society and to promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

¹ This listing of themes is taken from *Forming of Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, Copyright ©2007, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.. These themes and are drawn from a rich tradition of principles and ideas that are more fully described in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2297.

The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions, yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good.

Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions along with freedom of conscience need to be constantly defended. In a fundamental way, the right to free expression of religious beliefs protects all other rights. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Rights should be understood and exercised in a moral framework rooted in the dignity of the human person.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for our society is how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst. In a society marred by deepening disparities between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (see Mt 25:31-46) and reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the “least among us.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (no. 2448)

Pope Benedict XVI has taught that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 22). This preferential option for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond—unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers—to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the

common good. Workers, employers, and unions should not only advance their own interests, but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all.

Solidarity

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world. Solidarity also includes the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families. In light of the Gospel's invitation to be peacemakers, our commitment to solidarity with our neighbors—at home and abroad—also demands that we promote peace and pursue justice in a world marred by terrible violence and conflict. Decisions on the use of force should be guided by traditional moral criteria and undertaken only as a last resort. As Pope Paul VI taught: "If you want peace, work for justice" (World Day of Peace Message, January 1, 1972).

Caring for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of God's creation. Care for the earth is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people. We should strive to live simply to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. We have a moral obligation to protect the planet on which we live—to respect God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for human beings, especially children at their most vulnerable stages of development. As stewards called by God to share the responsibility for the future of the earth, we should work for a world in which people respect and protect all of creation and seek to live simply in harmony with it for the sake of future generations.