Fashioning a More Humane and Just World
Five Questions Every SCU Student Should Ask About Social Justice

1) What do you think the common understanding of “social justice” is at SCU? (NOTE: Not what should be the common understanding but rather, as a matter of your experience, what is this understanding?)

2) What experiences have shaped your personal understanding of social justice? How have these experiences influenced, if at all, how you view the social good(s) you think are most important to a just society (e.g. membership in a community, power, knowledge, love, wealth, food, shelter, etc.)?

3) Often conflict over the meaning of “social justice” arises because of the question whether social justice applies to institutions, to individuals, or to both. For instance, theologian David Hollenbach, S.J., has defined social justice as a principle which orders institutional activities “in a way which is suitable for the production and protection of the common good.” Catholic philosopher Michael Novak has said social justice is not a principle applying to institutions, but rather a habit of justice applying to individuals: “Social justice is a virtue, an attribute of individuals, or it is a fraud.” How do you understand social justice as a moral concept relevant to institutions? How as a moral concept relevant to individuals?

4) In 2000, during a conference on the Commitment to Justice in Catholic Higher Education, Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, then Superior General of the Jesuits, spoke of the “promotion of justice” as a specifically faith-based notion. Do you identify with the idea of justice as deeply intertwined with faith? If so, how do you understand the two as relating? If not, in what do you root your work for social justice?

5) What have been your most profound experiences of compassion and what does compassion mean to you? What is the role of sympathy and compassion in how social justice is understood at SCU and by you personally? In what ways do you see sympathy and compassion as either motivating or replacing work for social justice?

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1 Santa Clara University mission statement.
2 David Hollenbach, S.J., Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition, (New York: Paulist), 152.