

JUSTICE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS DISCUSS WAYS TO INTEGRATE JUSTICE INTO RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION

Fifty-seven delegates from Jesuit colleges and universities in the US gathered at Loyola University Chicago October 11-13, 2002 to discuss ways to integrate faith and justice into the academic life of the university. In her opening address to the conference Dr. Catharyn Baird, Professor of Business at Regis University, pointed to one of the major challenges to talking about justice in the classroom. She noted, “Intentionally engaging in conversations about justice in venues other than Peace and Justice classes can be a daunting task. (Faculty) are often reluctant to open the door without help in developing strategies to overcome barriers and ask hard questions while respecting academic disciplines and diversity of approaches.”



Catharyn Baird, Professor of Business, Regis University, delivers keynote address



Mary Ellen Carroll and Byron Plumley of Regis University caucus during a break

This gathering was the follow-up to the three-year national process to integrate justice into curriculum and research, the main functions of the university. Each school presented a case study in which they reported on new justice initiatives that have taken place. On the last day of the conference the delegates put in place a structure to facilitate continuing the momentum into the future.

The idea for a national reflection on justice originally arose in a series of conversations among three presidents, Paul Locateli, S.J. of Santa Clara, William Leahy, S.J. of Boston College, and Maureen Fay, O.P. of Detroit Mercy. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the historic commitment of the Society of Jesus to emphasize faith and justice was approaching. What had American Jesuit colleges and universities done to respond to this new world and the faith and justice challenge of the Jesuit’s 32nd General Congregation? How could the concern for justice become a distinctive focus of their efforts? Unfortunately, it seemed that those programs that did work on justice were often peripheral to the intellectual life of the university, dependent on charismatic founders or relegated to campus ministry and student services.

In his keynote speech at the October 2000 national conference held at Santa Clara University Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus, set the dominant tone for the event. Fr. Kolvenbach, a distinguished scholar of linguistics, endorsed in his keynote the integrity of research while placing it in a larger moral framework.

I want to affirm that university knowledge is valuable for its own sake and at the same time is knowledge that must ask itself, “For whom? For what?”... In some disciplines, such as the life sciences, the social sciences, law, business, or medicine, the connections with “our time and place” may seem more obvious...but every field or branch of knowledge has values to defend, with repercussions on the ethical level. Every discipline, beyond its necessary

specialization, must engage with human society, human life, and the environment in appropriate ways, cultivating moral concern about how people ought to live together.

The Jesuit commitment to higher education as a moral enterprise that transforms students took on a whole new meaning at the national conference. Seattle University President, Steven Sundborg, S.J. captured the new context when he said, “The traditional Jesuit commitment to ethics today has to become a commitment to justice.” The focus can no longer be simply on the individual and on personal moral fulfillment, given the moral challenges posed by the complex systems that shape this world.



Juniper Ellis (Loyola MD), Pam Rector (Loyola Marymount) and “Missy” Gugerty, SSND (Loyola MD)

Delegates at the 2000 national justice conference committed themselves to report back in six months the progress that had been made and to convene a follow-up gathering in 18 months. The six-months reports were published on the AJCU web site. The national justice conference planning team scheduled the “18-month” follow-up gathering for Chicago near the two-year anniversary of the Santa Clara justice conference.

Preparation for the follow-up conference consisted of four parts. Each school submitted a case study of a new justice initiative, prepared a brief report on obstacles to implementing justice on their campus, and identified interest/action groups to develop follow-up strategies. Finally, a small writing group submitted a draft self-assessment tool.



Jeff Guhin (JUSTICE) presents case study

Case studies described various initiatives which: conducted conferences on poverty, struggled to get Sodexo food service removed from campus, conducted a campus social justice audit, established justice oriented residential learning communities, created a justice education position on campus, set up a center for justice initiatives, developed faculty immersion experiences, or developed courses that integrate principles of justice, among others.

Among the obstacles identified in implementing justice initiatives were: a lack of institutional commitment, a faculty rewards system that does not give credit for justice related research, lack of understanding of Jesuit identity and mission among faculty, staff, and students, lack of funds to initiate new programs, the perception that justice is “already taken care of,” faculty resistance to “add another layer” to their course content, and a lack of consensus among faculty on a definition of “faith and justice.”

In preparation for the conference a small team led by Patrick Howell, S.J. at Seattle University and Robert J. Egan, S.J. at Gonzaga University submitted a draft of an *Assessment Tool*, which focused on “criteria to be used in assessing a school’s commitment to pursuing justice.” It was designed to assist the



John Coleman, S.J. (Loyola Marymount) and Kathleen Maas Weigert (Georgetown) chat during break

28 Jesuit universities and colleges in a process of self-assessment, ongoing reflection, analysis, and action in the light of the Jesuit commitment to the faith that does justice. Conference delegates read and discussed this instrument with an eye to recommending revisions to improve it as a useful tool.

Five interest/action groups had been identified by the delegates prior to the conference: 1) advancing a justice group within AJCU, 2) developing collaborative immersion programs for faculty, staff and students, 3) integrating justice perspectives into the internal administrative structures of the academy, 4) promoting ethics and justice in the curriculum across disciplines, to include professional schools, and 5) networking service learning and community service projects of AJCU schools.



Raymond Reyes - L (Gonzaga) with Catharyn Baird (Regis) and husband Bob Russell (center)

To maintain the momentum of the conference action agenda an eight-member steering committee was established on the last day of the conference with the following mission: “To facilitate the building of an infrastructure to coordinate, convene, communicate and connect our members in support of the integration and development of the faith, knowledge, and justice mission of the 28 Jesuit Colleges and Universities.” Their first meeting will be within six months.

Steering committee members will be: Juniper Ellis (Loyola College in Maryland), Harry O’Rourke, S.J. (Saint Louis University), Kathleen Maas Weigert (Georgetown University), Irene Hodgson (Xavier University), Paul Woolley (Santa Clara University), David McMenamin (Boston College), Kathleen Orange (Spring Hill College), Mark Falbo (John Carroll University), and Jeff Guhin (JUSTICE).

The following tasks were recommended for the steering committee:

- 1) *Coordinating* the work of the various sub-groups to avoid conflicts in the scheduling of events and activities; circulate and promote the use of the assessment tool once it is revised;
- 2) *Convening* this group in two years.
- 3) *Communicating* among our members by setting up a list serve, developing a web page that will establish links to all the various sites doing justice stuff on campus, offering web based courses in specialty areas of interest, e.g. corporate responsibility. They also recommended setting up an advisory board to consist of two University Presidents, two Jesuit Provincials and two outside resource persons.
- 4) *Connecting* persons among our membership who have concerns in specific areas of research and pedagogy.

In response to the conference Kathleen Maas Weigert of Georgetown University said, “I loved it! The very thought of cross-institution collaboration makes me salivate. I think of what a difference it can make if 28 Jesuit colleges and



Dan Hartnett, S.J. (Loyola Chicago), Bill Reiser, S.J. (Holy Cross), Frederick Glennon (LeMoynes), and Bill Spohn (Santa Clara) discuss panel presentation.

universities did at least some things together on faith, knowledge and justice. It's pretty amazing." Mark Falbo of John Carroll University said, "... It was a remarkable meeting with considerable momentum for the future.... I for one found it energizing."

In his closing remarks, Bill Spohn, chairperson of the conference planning committee, reiterated the challenges that surfaced at the October 2000 justice conference. First, we must continue to guarantee that justice initiatives on our campuses are moved beyond the margins and integrated into the core of what it means to be a university, into our research and teaching. Secondly, we need to develop our understanding of the faith(s) that undergird or impede our discussions of justice.

(The first several paragraphs of this article were excerpted from an article by William C. Spohn, "The University that Does Justice," published in the Spring 2001 issue of *Conversations Magazine*.)