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Social Work for Social Justice: Extending Our Professional Commitment to Justice

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Introduction

During the past decade, there has been a trend in higher education to reflect on and articulate the primary commitments to institutional mission. At the College of St. Catherine and University of St. Thomas (CSC/UST) School of Social Work (St. Paul, Minnesota), this has provided an opportunity to consider how our social work programs respond to and reflect the Catholic identity and mission of our sponsoring institutions. While some faculty recognize Catholic Social Teaching as a valuable resource and incorporate it into their courses, many do not. Some faculty believe that ‘religion does not belong in the classroom.’ This belief in secularism is reinforced by key ‘flash point issues’ which readily emerge when one simultaneously considers social work values and Catholic doctrine. Tensions related to important issues such as gender equality, reproductive and gay rights emerge immediately.

This article outlines how the CSC/UST School Social Work has embraced this ‘opportunity-challenge.’ Recognizing Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as rich resource of social justice, the School has committed to strengthening the social justice content of our programs through the integration of Catholic Social Teaching justice principles. The project described addresses faculty and curriculum development. As more than a set of tasks, the process has been a transformative journey focused on our School’s and our profession’s commitment to social justice and our identity as a program sponsored by Catholic institutions.

What is Catholic Social Teaching?

“...Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world...”
Synod of Catholic Bishops, Rome, 1971

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) represents a comprehensive tradition of social ethics derived from multiple sources within Catholic Church tradition. CST addressing the challenges of economic/political life and global harmony, defines standards that universally apply to all human

beings and provides guidance as to how people should interact and treat one another within the economic and political spheres of our communities and world. These social teachings provide direction on how to live out the Christian mandate to ‘love one another.’ Twelve key documents are commonly recognized as the primary sources of Catholic Social Teaching (Massaro, 2000). The concerns addressed in these documents correspond to the time of publication and include world peace, progress, poverty, equality, the environment and global justice. These timely social concerns are not addressed to or intended for Catholics alone. Rather, the teachings are issued with a global perspective and address universal human needs of our global community. While there are numerous interpretations of Catholic Social Teaching, each typically identifying some number of emergent themes, there is consistency across the various articulations that speak to the principles listed below.

1. **Human Dignity:** “...human life is sacred and ... the dignity of the person is the foundation of a moral vision of society...”
2. **Community and the Common Good:** “... how we organize society – economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity for individuals to grow in community.....the role of government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good.”
3. **Rights and Responsibilities:** “...every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.”
4. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** “... a basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring... our traditions...instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.”
5. **Participation:** “All people have a right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation...”
6. **Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers:** “...the economy must serve people, not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative.’
7. **Stewardship of Creation:** “...We are called to protect the people and the planet.”

8. **Solidarity:** "...we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family... Solidarity means that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.'
9. **Role of Government:** "... the state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good....According to the principle of subsidiarity, the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible..."
10. **Promotion of Peace:** "...There is a close relationship between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings." (Office of Social Justice of the St. Paul/Minneapolis Archdiocese (www.osjspm.org/cst)).
Catholic Social Teaching is all about social justice.

Human dignity and *the common good* emerge as the two most fundamental cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching and are consistently evident in each principle/theme. Social justice however, is the resilient and unifying message. This two-pronged vision of social justice (human dignity and the common good) is relevant to all social settings (family, workplace, economy, and government) and all levels of human relationship (community, nation, world). As a comprehensive framework of social ethics, CST provides a solid foundation for social work education and practice.

Rationale from the Social Work Perspective: The NASW Code of Ethics

Social work is a regulated profession in the United States. In addition to state laws that establish boards of social work that set policies for social work practice, the primary authority on social work practice is the National Association of Social Work (NASW).

Perhaps the most important leadership function provided by NASW is the provision of a code of ethics. The *NASW Code of Ethics* is "...a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers" (NASW, 1999). The *Code of Ethics* identifies six core values of social work practice: service, justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence. Frequently, the overarching commitments of the profession are identified as the first two of these core values: service and justice. In relation to justice, the *Code* states that "social workers challenge social injustice" as follows:

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change

efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, service and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision-making for all people.

(NASW Code of Ethics, 1999, p. 5)

The *NASW Code of Ethics*, twenty-seven pages in length, devotes approximately one and a half pages to “social workers’ ethical responsibilities to the broader society” i.e. to the social justice function of the profession. The following responsibilities are specified in relation to social justice (*NASW Code of Ethics*, pp. 26 – 27):

- **General Welfare:** Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments...
- **Participation:** Social workers should facilitate informed **participation** by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.
- **Public Emergencies:** Social workers should provide appropriate professional services in public emergencies to the greatest extent possible.
- **Social and Political Action:** Social workers should engage in **social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access** to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully....
 - Social workers should act to **expand choice and opportunity for all** people with special regard for the vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.
 - Social workers should promote conditions that **encourage respect for cultural and social diversity....**
 - Social workers should act to **prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination** against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability.

The remaining twenty-five plus pages of the *Code* are dedicated to social workers’ responsibility to clients, colleagues, practice settings and the profession, the service function of the profession. While the ethical principles set forth on these pages support the profession’s commitment to human dignity, they do not specifically address social justice and the common good. Although the *Code* specifically

identifies detailed standards of ethical practice relative to service, ethical standards related to the social justice are limited and general.

It is important to examine the profession's historical track record relative to its two overarching purposes, service and justice. While we have shining moments relative to our justice functions, such as the Settlement Movement, Progressive Era reforms, extensive contributions to the New Deal and the War on Poverty, our preferential focus has consistently been that of service (Specht & Courtney, 1994; Reisch & Andrews, 2001). The social work profession would benefit from specific direction on how to pursue our responsibilities for advancing social justice. Catholic Social Teaching is a rich resource that lends itself to this use. It introduces a clearly articulated framework to pursue and support justice within the political and economic structures of society thus expanding the social justice scope of the social work profession.

Rationale from Catholic Social Teaching: Complementary Principles

Catholic Social Teaching is relevant to all people. While all faith traditions make a contribution to social justice, the comprehensive timeless quality of Catholic Social Teaching, make it an especially valuable resource. The Minnesota Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC), an interfaith advocacy organization representing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, looks to CST to guide its policy analysis and advocacy activities. In the words of Brian Rusche, JRLC Executive Director:

Catholic Social Teaching is the most systematic and thorough attempt by a religious faith to articulate its positions on social policy. For JRLC's interfaith work, it provides a first lens to look at nearly every social justice issue and seriously influences all our position statements. Catholic Social Teaching is a gift to the world and people of all faiths.

The Catholic Church's tradition and expectation in relation to the pursuit of justice is three-fold: seeing, the study of social problems; judging, the use of ethics to discern alternatives to the problem and action, addressing problems utilizing the insights gained through study and judgment (Krammer, 2004). This cyclical model interfaces effectively with social work's planned change process of engagement, assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation/ termination (Kirst-Ashman, 2003). CST provides a framework of social justice principles that enables social workers to fulfill their professional responsibilities and equips social work education programs with a means to address the profession's commitment to social justice.

Conceptual Framework: Project Components

This project focused on the integration of Catholic Social Teaching into BSW and MSW curricula with the following goals:

- Enhance social work faculty understanding of commitment to institutional religious identity and mission, particularly of Catholic Social Teaching.
- Increase faculty and student understanding of the congruence between Catholic Social Teaching and values and ethics of the social work profession.
- Strengthen the social justice component of the social work curricula to prepare and empower students to effectively pursue justice in their social work practice.
- Increase students understanding of the difference between faith-based and secular social work education and practice and provide an environment which encourages them to clarify and incorporate their personal values, including faith-based values, into their lives and social work practice.
- Enhance faculty and student understanding of social work as a call to service/vocation.

Faculty development and curriculum development are two of the critical components of this project. The third component student engagement is not discussed in this article. The activities in each of these two components generated insights and findings and the convergence of these insights and findings, in conjunction with insights gained from student feedback and an advisory committee, inform the outcomes of this project.

Faculty Development

Faculty development has been the centerpiece of this work. This component engaged faculty in becoming familiar with the themes of Catholic Social Teaching, discovering the congruence between CST and social work ethics and recognizing Catholic Social Teaching as a rich resource for curriculum development.

Social work faculty spent considerable time exploring the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic Social Teaching and how our social work program articulates and serves the institutional missions of its Catholic sponsors. This experience was instrumental in helping faculty to recognize attributes of our institutional culture (such as emphasis on teaching, liberal arts, values/ethics and service) as distinctive characteristics related to the institutions' Catholic identity.

While this project focused on utilizing the long and rich tradition of CST, it has been important in our faculty development efforts to acknowledge that all faith traditions espouse beliefs and teachings addressing love for others and social justice. To recognize and celebrate the diversity of faith-inspired justice teachings, faculty participated in a series of seminars featuring various traditions and their social teaching including the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Protestant perspectives. The executive director of the Minnesota Joint Religious Legislative Coalition spoke about his agency's practice of utilizing principles of Catholic Social Teaching to evaluate proposed social policy legislation and determine lobbying priorities and strategies. A Rabbi spoke about Jewish traditions that emphasize justice as did Islamic and protestant scholars. These experiences enhanced faculty understanding of diverse religious perspectives about social justice and reinforced the universality of the themes of Catholic Social Teaching. Development of course activities to provide students opportunities to learn about social justice perspectives of diverse faith traditions emerged.

To focus on the integration of CST into the curriculum, faculty read *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* by Thomas Massaro S.J. This primer provided an overview of the sources, methods and themes of Catholic Social Teaching as well as an articulate discussion of its application to contemporary times. Faculty considered potential contributions of CST by identifying barriers and obstacles, which might be encountered when integrating CST into the BSW and MSW curricula, brainstormed ways for integrating Catholic Social Teaching into the BSW and MSW content areas and shared stories about individuals who inspired their own passion for justice. While faculty launched this project and garnered understanding, momentum and commitment for the work ahead, they also acknowledge that the work included struggle. As a faculty, we represent religious diversity, including Catholics, Protestants (numerous denominations), Jews and Buddhists, as well as diversity across other dimensions including race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and practice expertise. Some aspects of the dialogue are challenging and difficult especially in relation to Church practices that are inconsistent with social work values (such as those related to inequality of women and discrimination against GLBT persons) and perceived as incongruent with the social justice principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

Faculty focused on a comparative analysis of the NASW Code of Ethics and CST. They divided into 10 subgroups with each subgroup working with one of the Catholic Social Teaching themes. Each group was asked to examine their principle in relation to the *NASW Code of Ethics* and to identify convergence and divergence between the two, with 'flashpoint' issues emerging. A greater number of

points of convergence were found leading to the realization that there is much common ground between social work professional ethics and CST. The primary ‘flashpoint’ issues were equality of women, reproductive policy and gay rights. The emergence of these issues surprised no one; tension related to their existence had been lurking since very early in the project. Naming the issues was important, for this acknowledged the reality that there are instances when social work values and Church teachings collide and diverge, particularly in relation to the Church’s Social Teaching relating to human dignity and the Church’s practice of less than equal treatment of women and lack of full affirmation of GLBT persons. There was surprise, however, when it became clear that the social work profession also has a record of disparity between its ethics and its practices as evident in its historical role in relation to social control and its stronger commitment to service over justice. This parallel insight relating to the institutional church and the social work profession and ways in which the ‘walk’ falls short of the ‘talk’ in both, provided food for thought.

The examination of the convergence and divergence between social work ethics and Catholic Social Teaching led to a synthesis and the formulation of a statement entitled *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles*. This amalgamation of social work ethics with Catholic Social Teaching became the focus of our integration project. It represents the convergence of both our identity, as a social work program sponsored by Catholic institutions, and the social justice commitments of the Church and the profession. Faculty felt strongly about distinguishing between the parts informed by CST and those representing the social work perspective so that both the convergence and divergence between the two are explicit. This statement evolved naturally out of continuous faculty dialogue and without premeditation i.e. we did not set out to develop such a statement. *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles* represents, however, a milestone in our project, as it has become the heart of our work and the defining focus of our project. Now, when we talk of the integration of Catholic Social Teaching into the curriculum, we speak of the integration of these principles. The *Ten Principles* define our program’s ‘brand’ of social justice -- one that is informed both by social work ethics and Catholic social ethics. Formulation of the justice principles created a component useful for curriculum development. As faculty development continued, considerable progress was apparent. Faculty discussed social justice in new and deeper ways and developed an appreciation for the Catholic heritage of our sponsor institutions. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the process is complex and that, at times, the dialogue is difficult and tense. It is clear that oppressive practices of the Church in relation to women and gay persons has resulted, for some, in a reluctance and a resistance to

integrate Catholic social ethics for fear that this would simultaneously engender the incorporation of attitudes of oppression and/or discriminatory practices. Sometimes it is difficult to know how to dialogue about these difficult topics and maintain forward momentum. In order to address these challenges, the *Catholic Common Ground Initiative Principles of Dialogue* outlined in *Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril* were adapted to the purposes of this project to guide faculty interaction and set norms of communication for the challenging discussions a (National Pastoral Life Center, 1996). While our *Finding Common Ground Guidelines* have been described by some ‘as inspired’, we have learned that introducing the *Guidelines* is the easy task. Remaining ‘true’ to new habits of dialogue and interaction that depart substantially from conduct typical within academe constitutes the real challenge with which we continue to struggle.

Curriculum Development

Formulation of our *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles* and faculty development laid the groundwork necessary for the curriculum development component of this project that included two phases: curriculum review/analysis and integration.

Curriculum Review and Analysis

Consistent with the social work dictum of ‘starting where the client is’, curriculum development began with an assessment of present practices. This process focused on the question, “How are we presently teaching social justice content in the BSW and MSW curriculum?” Standing committees within the BSW and MSW program are responsible for curriculum in each of the following content areas: policy, human behavior and the social environment, research, practice and fieldwork. Each of the ten content committees (5 BSW and 5 MSW) reviewed our present curricula and identified ways social justice/injustice content was already addressed through readings, class activities, assignments, etc. Every course in the curriculum was reviewed and an inventory was completed outlining present content and activities related to justice.

This process resulted in a litany of strengths detailing ways social justice was already addressed in the classroom and through assignments. Current examples were shared, awareness was raised and more content than initially anticipated was identified. This discussion ‘got the juices flowing’ in that it generated ideas and creativity for new opportunities to incorporate content on social justice.

Each committee considered the *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles*, the goals and objectives of the content area, and selected the *Justice Principles* that related to each specific content

area. This exercise was framed as an opportunity to build upon present strengths of the curriculum. A grid summarizing the *Justice Principles* relating most pertinently to each content area was compiled. The grids have been instrumental in guiding faculty as they began to integrate the *Justice Principles* into the curriculum.

Integration of Social Justice Content

Once faculty completed the assessment of current practices, compiled an inventory of current inclusion of social justice content and identified the *Justice Principles* pertinent to each curricular content area, the process for phased integration of social justice content began.

The integration process began with asking curriculum content committees to creatively brainstorm in response to the following question: “Considering the *Justice Principles* identified as relevant for the content area, what are logical points of intersection where the *Justice Principles* could be integrated into a current activity or assignment to enhance how ‘justice’ is taught in this content area?” While the emphasis of the exercise was to integrate our *Justice Principles* into existent course activities, faculty also generated innovative ideas of ways to broaden and deepen the integration of justice content related to the identified *Justice Principles*. Brainstorming sessions were creative discussions that encouraged faculty to think about transforming the curriculum to balance and reflect both the service and justice functions of the social work profession. This exercise resulted in lists of ideas about how to enhance and integrate justice content in course syllabi through integration in existent activities as well as adding new activities. These lists served as a ‘resource menu’ for the next phase of integration, revision of course syllabi.

Courses were identified in the BSW and the MSW programs as starting points for phased integration of social justice content. A series of instructional modules were developed to serve as resources for faculty as they integrate the *Justice Principles* into course syllabi. Instructional modules developed serve as models or for actual use or adaptation, according to faculty preference.

Concluding Reflections

Stepping back and taking stock of the progress of our efforts to strengthen the social justice content of our program through the integration of Catholic Social Teaching, it is clear that much has been accomplished and that much work remains. While many tasks of integration lie ahead, it is important to note, and to celebrate, our progress. The faculty, student and curriculum activities have resulted in a renewed commitment to social justice, a keener sense of understanding of our host

institutions' Catholic identity, an appreciation for Catholic Social Teaching, as well as humility (in response to the struggles endured through difficult dialogues that have compelled us to embrace complexity) and resolve as we commit to the tasks which lay ahead.

What was initially seen as primarily a task and curriculum project has been recognized as a transformative process with a profound impact on our faculty and our programs. The effect on faculty has been at both the personal and collective level. Each individual faculty member has been called upon to consider at a newer, deeper level, what it means to be a faculty member at a Catholic institution and heightened faculty awareness of and commitment to the social justice mission of social work. We have had the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the extent to which we were already 'teaching justice' and we have responded to a call to strengthen our program and more effectively prepare students to 'practice justice.' We have developed a keen sense of appreciation for our Catholic heritage and the rich resource of social justice found in Catholic Social Teaching.

The curriculum has just begun to reflect the outcomes of this project. As faculty move forward, there is a sense of both accomplishment and anticipation. Our work has generated many outcomes, some tangible such as discussion guidelines, *Justice Principles*, a national conference, and others intangible, such as a deeper sense of our Catholic mission and renewed commitment to social justice. These accomplishments are accompanied by a sense of anticipation and the knowledge that the next steps are likely to be as transformative, satisfying and challenging as those already accomplished.

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⌘ Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles ⌘

<p>Human Dignity</p> <p><i>Dignity of the human person is the ethical foundation of a moral society. The measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.</i> Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals. Social workers treat each person in a caring, respectful manner mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities and social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems. Social workers act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person or group on any basis.</p>	<p>Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers</p> <p><i>In a marketplace where profit often takes precedence over the dignity and rights of workers, it is important to recognize that the economy must serve the people, not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, the basic rights of workers must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative.</i> Social workers challenge injustice related to unemployment, workers' right and inhumane labor practices. Social workers engage in organized action, including the formation of and participation in labor unions, to improve services to clients and working conditions.</p>
<p>Community and the Common Good</p> <p>All individuals by virtue of their human nature have social needs. Human relationships enable people to meet their needs and provide an important vehicle for change. <i>The family, in all its diverse forms, is the central social institution that must be supported and strengthened. The way in which society is organized -- in education, economics, politics, government -- directly affects human dignity and the common good.</i> Social workers promote the general welfare and development of individuals, families and communities. Social Workers seek to strengthen relationships among people at all levels to promote the well being of all.</p>	<p>Solidarity</p> <p><i>We are our brother's and sister's keeper. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences.</i> An ethic of care acknowledging our interdependence belongs in every dimension of human experience -- including the family, community, society and global dimension. Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process and seek to strengthen relationships among people to promote well being at all levels.</p>
<p>Rights and Responsibilities</p> <p>People have a right and a responsibility to participate in society and to work together toward the common good. <i>Human dignity is protected and healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.</i> Accordingly, every person has a fundamental right to things necessary for human decency. <i>Corresponding to these rights are responsibilities – to family, community and society.</i> Social workers, mindful of individual differences and diversity, respect and promote the right of all individuals to self-determination and personal growth and development. Social workers provide education and advocacy to protect human rights, and to end oppression. Social workers empower individuals/groups to function as effectively as possible.</p>	<p>Stewardship</p> <p><i>It is incumbent upon us to recognize and protect the value of all people and all resources on our planet. While rights to personal property are recognized, these rights are not unconditional and are secondary to the best interest of the common good especially in relation to the right of all individuals to meet their basic needs.</i></p> <p>Stewardship of resources is important at all levels/settings: family, community, agency, community and society. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation for all people. Social workers promote the general welfare of people and their environments.</p>
<p>Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable</p> <p><i>A basic moral test of any community or society is the way in which the most vulnerable members are faring. In a society characterized by deepening divisions between rich and poor, the needs of those most at risk should be considered a priority.</i> Social workers advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and to promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice. Social workers pursue change with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups to: address poverty, unemployment, discrimination and other forms of social injustice; and to expand choice and opportunity.</p>	<p>Governance/Principle of Subsidiarity</p> <p><i>Governance structures in all levels/settings have an imperative to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good. While the principle of subsidiarity calls for the functions of government to be performed at the lowest level possible in order to insure for self-determination and empowerment, higher levels of government have the responsibility to provide leadership and set policy in the best interest of the common good.</i> Social workers engage in social and political action in order to promote equality, challenge injustice, expand opportunity and empower individuals, families and groups to participate in governance structures at all levels.</p>
<p>Participation</p> <p><i>All people have a right to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society. Social justice and human dignity require that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. It is the ultimate injustice for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly.</i> Social workers strive to ensure access to equal opportunity and meaningful participation for all. Social workers empower individuals and groups to influence social policies and institutions and promote social justice. Social workers advocate for change to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources and opportunities required to meet basic needs and develop fully.</p>	<p>Promotion of Peace</p> <p>In light of the human dignity and worth of all and the ethical imperatives of solidarity and stewardship, we are called to promote peace and non-violence at all levels -within families, communities, society and globally. <i>Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon the respect and cooperation between peoples and nations.</i> Social workers promote the general welfare of society from local to global levels.</p>

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Finding Common Ground...

as we work together to build a program and a profession which more strongly articulate a commitment to social justice ...

1. We will recognize that no single voice/view has a monopoly on the truth. We will remind ourselves that solutions to our challenges will emerge from dialogue that embraces diverse perspectives.
2. We will not envision ourselves or anyone as 'having all the answers.' No one person/group will judge itself alone to be possessed of enlightenment or spurn others as wrong or misguided.
3. We will test all ideas/proposals for their truth, value and potential impact on our program, on our students and on the clients they will serve. This is our responsibility as ethical social work educators.
4. We will presume that those with whom we disagree are acting with good intentions. We will extend civility, courtesy and genuine effort to understand their concerns. We will not diminish nor trivialize their ideas or concerns with labels, abstractions or blanket terms (such as she/he 'just doesn't get it', 'is a sellout', 'has been led astray', 'is misguided', etc). Instead, we will embrace the complexity of the realities we face and examine their various and multiple dimensions.
5. We will put the best possible construction on differing positions, addressing their strongest points rather than seizing upon the most vulnerable aspect in order to discredit them. We will detect the valid insights and legitimate worries that may underlie even questionable arguments.
6. We will be cautious in ascribing motives. We will not impugn another's motives, loyalties, opinions or comprehension. We will not rush to interpret disagreements as conflicts of starkly opposing principles rather than as differences in degree or in prudential judgment about the relevant facts.
7. We will embrace the realities of our institutional cultures, not by simple defiance nor by naïve acquiescence, but acknowledging both their valid achievement and real dangers.

Adapted from *Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril*. Published by the National Pastoral Life Center, New York, NY.

