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# Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Social Work Education through the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching

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# Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Social Work Education through the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching

Mary Ann Brenden & Barbara Shank

*Catholic Social Teaching (CST), by virtue of its convergence with social work values and ethics, is a valuable resource for strengthening the social justice content of social work education. This paper describes how CST is complementary to the NASW Code of Ethics, foundational to the Integrative Framework (a generalist practice model), provides substance to the Core Competencies as defined by the Council on Social Work Education, and operationalizes justice in the classroom.*

**D**URING THE PAST DECADE, THERE HAS BEEN A TREND IN HIGHER EDUCATION to reflect on and articulate commitment to institutional mission. At the St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas (SCU/UST) School of Social Work (St. Paul, Minnesota), this has provided an opportunity to consider how a social work program responds to and reflects the mission and identity of both the social work profession and the sponsor institutions—in this case Catholic universities. This examination has revealed that there is substantial common ground between the mission and goals of social work and Catholic higher education. Both are committed to making positive contributions to society in the present times as well as the future.

The social work profession, according to the NASW Code of Ethics, exists to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (NASW, 2008, p. 1). The Code also asserts that “social workers promote social justice and social change.” Six core values are identified by the Code with service and justice

being the first two, followed by dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

In relation to the mission of Catholic higher education, Pope John Paul II regarded Catholic colleges/universities as primary players in his vision of world transformation as articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (*From the Heart of the Church*), the Apostolic Constitution issued in 1990. Social justice and service to those who are vulnerable are just two of the compelling calls put forth to Catholic higher education in this document (Trainor, 2006). Examination of our sponsor institutions' mission, vision, and Catholic identity statements readily reveal mission and values that are complementary to those of social work. St. Catherine University's mission speaks to "challenging students to be transformational leaders" and "developing ethical, reflective, and socially responsible leaders" within the tradition of Catholic social teaching with its "commitment to the poor and outcast... and those marginalized by society" ([http://www.stkate.edu/pages/aboutstkates/mission\\_vision.php](http://www.stkate.edu/pages/aboutstkates/mission_vision.php)). The University of St. Thomas looks to the inspiration of the Catholic intellectual tradition to "educate morally responsible leaders... [who act] wisely and work skillfully to advance the common good" preparing them for "responsible engagement with the local community as well as the national and global communities" ([www.stthomas.edu](http://www.stthomas.edu)). Both institutions manifest their Catholic identity very intentionally through extensive faculty development programs focused on both the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic Social Teaching. The Catholic intellectual tradition is characterized by recurring themes that reflect an emphasis on faith and reason, critical inquiry, sacramental worldview, community and social responsibility, and a spirit of hope, among others. Catholic Social Teaching consistently refers to the cornerstone values of human dignity of all persons and community and the common good. Additional themes include priority for the poor, solidarity, stewardship, and peace, among others. Faculty of both institutions are encouraged to reflect Catholic identity through demonstration of the intellectual tradition and integration of principles of social teaching in the curriculum.

The mission of our School of Social Work reflects its sponsors' missions in its pledge to educate social workers to "...promote social justice and human rights." The School's strategic plan further explicates this with a commitment to "...make explicit the central components of the SSW [School of Social Work] identity—Catholic, joint, liberal arts, generalist and clinical" through the "integration of Catholic Social Teaching into all aspects of the School of Social Work." There is a high level of connectedness and complementarity between the mission, vision, and strategic goals of the program's host institutions and those of the School.

The mission and values of the social work profession and these two Catholic universities (and likely all Catholic and other Christian universities) share a lot in common. Because of the complementary values, it could

be argued that a social work education program is, in fact, a potentially vital component of a Catholic university if it is to fully realize its responsibility to Catholic identity (particularly the principles of Catholic Social Teaching) as well as the commitment of the Church to minister in response to the ills of society and towards the betterment of human well-being.

Beyond the friendly and natural fit between the missions and values of Catholic colleges and universities and social work education, there is another compelling rationale for the partnership. Catholic Social Teaching offers an articulate and well-developed system of social ethics that provides description and definition for social justice. This vision of social justice presented by Catholic Social Teaching offers a way to fill a serious and compelling void in the social work profession and provides something heretofore ambiguously defined: principles that guide social work in pursuit of social justice.

This article outlines how the SCU/UST School Social Work has articulated and embodied the social justice mission of the profession and its sponsoring institutions. Using Catholic Social Teaching as a resource, the School has strengthened the social justice content of its programs through the articulation and integration of *Social Work for Social Justice* principles. This process has been a transformative journey focused on the universities' and profession's commitment to social justice—one that both demonstrates what a valuable resource Catholic Social Teaching is for the social work profession and also provides a model other social work education programs may look to as they strive to fulfill the profession's social justice mission.

The process of thoughtfully and systematically integrating Catholic Social Teaching into the social work curriculum involves a series of considerations. Faculty and students must become familiar with Catholic Social Teaching and explore the congruence between social teaching and social work values and ethics in order to recognize Catholic Social Teaching as a rich resource for curriculum development related to social justice content. It also requires consideration of how this enriched social justice content relates to the generalist practice model and the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education (EPAS), both of which are foundational to social work curriculum design.

### **What Is Catholic Social Teaching?**

*"...Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world..."* (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 addresses the challenges of economic and 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, labor, inclusion, equality, the environment, and global justice. These timely social concerns are not addressed to or intended for Catholics alone. Rather, the teachings address universal human needs and reflect a global perspective. As such, they speak to how people care for and treat one another as citizens of a community or country and also across national, cultural, ethnic boundaries. 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. (Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles, p. 3)

While there are numerous interpretations of Catholic Social Teaching, there is much consistency regarding the emergent themes. The Office of Social Justice of the St. Paul/Minneapolis Archdiocese has summarized these themes as follows: ([www.osjspm.org/cst](http://www.osjspm.org/cst)):

1. **Human Dignity:** Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic Social Teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society...
2. **Community and the Common Good:** The human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. Human beings grow and achieve fulfillment in community... How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity for individuals to grow in community...
3. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation... The option for the poor is an essential part of society’s effort to achieve the common good...

4. **Rights and Responsibilities:** Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency—starting with food, shelter, and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Corresponding with these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.
5. **Role of Government and Subsidiarity:** The state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good... The principle of subsidiarity, the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately...
6. **Economic Justice:** The economy must serve the people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions...
7. **Stewardship of God's Creation:** The goods of the earth are a gift from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. There is a "social mortgage" that guides our use of the world's goods, and we have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users...
8. **Promotion of Peace and Disarmament:** Catholic teaching promotes peace as a positive, action-oriented concept... It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements. There is a close relationship between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.
9. **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 in the community. It is wrong for a person to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.
10. **Global Solidarity and Development:** We are one human family. Our responsibilities for each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice...

Upon examining the numerous source documents as well as the various analyses and summaries of CST, an over-arching theme of social justice is readily apparent. In a nutshell, CST is about social justice. *Human*

*dignity and the common good* emerge as the two fundamental cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching and are consistently evident in each theme/principle resulting in a resounding and resilient message of social justice. This dual vision of social justice—human dignity and community/common good—is considered pertinent to all social settings including family, workplace, economy, government, and environment. All levels of human relationship, including individual, family, group, community, nation, global, are likewise relevant. Examination of Catholic Social Teaching reveals two things: it is a comprehensive framework of social ethics; and, the universal manner in which it addresses human dignity and community/common good aligns very nicely with the mission and values of social work. It provides a solid foundation for social work education and practice.

There is yet another point of congruence that reflects a strategic common ground between Catholic teaching and social work method. 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 (Kammer, 2004). This cyclical model interfaces effectively with social work's planned change process of engagement, assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation/ termination (Kirst-Ashman, 2010).

Hence, in both content and method, Catholic Social Teaching 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.

### **The Complementary and Unifying Intersection between Catholic Social Teaching, Social Work and Social Justice**

#### **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, 2008). 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 of Ethics* 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* (2008, 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 (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. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.
- **Public 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... should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.
  - 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 within the United States and globally...
  - 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, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability.

The remaining twenty-five plus pages of the *Code* are dedicated to social workers' service function in relation to their responsibilities to clients, colleagues, practice settings and 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 in nature.

It is important to examine the profession's historical track record relative to its two overarching purposes, service and justice. While over the past 100 years there are shining moments relative to our justice function, 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). There is a compelling need for the social work profession to demonstrate parity between its two functions of service and justice. While the *Code of Ethics* specifically addresses standards for service, it lacks specificity beyond that cited above regarding justice. Unless this gap and imbalance is addressed, the profession will continue the 'service over justice trend' evident to date and continue to fail to fulfill its social justice mission.

Catholic Social Teaching is a rich resource for social work education and practice. Its principles and themes provide a vision and specific insights about what is entailed in social justice. It introduces a clearly articulated framework to support the pursuit of justice within the political and economic structures of society that essentially fleshes out the general social justice directives provided by the *Code of Ethics*.

### **Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles**

After our faculty had completed extensive faculty development focused on Catholic Social Teaching, we began the task of comparing its themes and principles with social work values and ethics by completing a comparative content analysis of the NASW *Code of Ethics*. This analysis disclosed considerable overlap between the two and resulted in the development of *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles* (Appendix I). These principles reflect the extensive congruence between CST and the Code of Ethics and serve as an extension or supplement to the Code of Ethics—one which addresses with greater specificity the social justice mission of social work. These principles have become an important part of our program and our

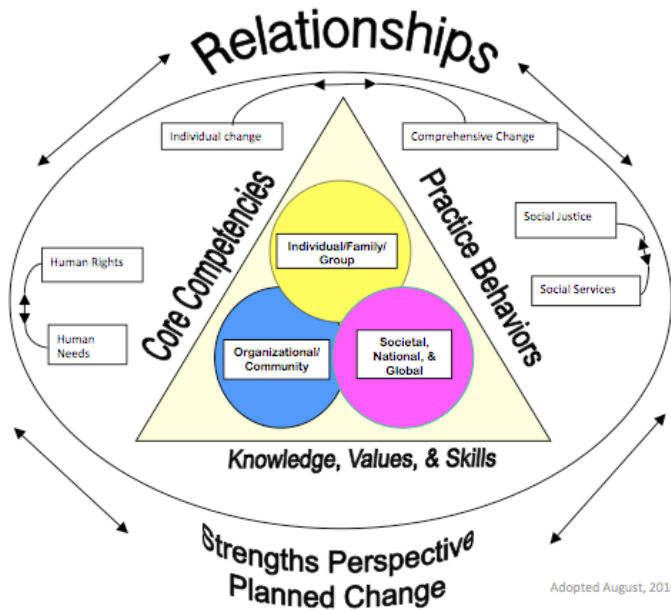
School and serve as a blueprint for further defining social justice and providing direction for how social work practice can articulate and reflect a commitment to justice.

### **Generalist Model of Social Work Practice and Social Justice: An Integrative Framework**

According to the Council on Social Work Education and Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS 2008), the purpose of undergraduate social work education is to prepare students for generalist practice. Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois (2009) state that "generalist practitioners acknowledge the interplay of personal and collective issues, prompting them to work with a variety of human systems... to create changes that maximize human system functioning. Furthermore, generalist social workers (among other things) "work directly with client systems of all levels" and "advocate for just social policies" (p. 10). Morales, Schaeffer, & Scott (2007) observe that the generalist perspective "incorporates ideologies that include democracy, humanism and empowerment" (p. 46, 2007). Kirst-Ashman (2010) contends that generalist social work requires "competence in a wide variety of areas" and focuses on the evidence-based practice, which promotes client empowerment and using critical thinking to advance the planned change process. (p. 93)

While each of these descriptions of generalist practice refers to the importance of social justice (i.e., just policies, democracy, empowerment, planned change), none place explicit emphasis on social justice. Likewise, although the NASW Code of Ethics clearly declares the social worker's responsibility to 'promote social justice' and identifies social justice as one of the six core values, it fails to emphasize a justice-oriented perspective in many of its ethical principles and standards. Instead, it focuses on a service perspective. This phenomenon, evident in both descriptions of generalist practice and in the profession's ethical code, reflects a historic and continuing trend of the social work profession to emphasize its mission related to service and to place our responsibilities to work for social justice as secondary in both education and practice (Brenden, 1985).

The Integrative Framework of Generalist Social Work Practice (See Table 1) is an example of a generalist model that, by design, lifts up the social justice mission and recognizes its importance to be equal to service. It underscores the professional social worker's responsibility in terms of two goals: to restore and enhance the social functioning of systems of all sizes (individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities); and to work to promote a more just society (SCU/UST SSW, 2010).

**Table 1: Integrative Framework of Generalist Practice**

As illustrated above, the Integrative Framework defines effective, ethical social work practice as a comprehensive set of professional competencies characterized by the following:

- An understanding of human behavior in the context of the total environment within which people live. **Relationships** between and among individuals and groups and between people and social structures define this social environment. Social workers recognize the importance of all types of relationships in a context of diverse cultures, particularly as they occur in relation to major social institutions: family, economy, politics/government, education, and religion/spirituality.
- A focus on the **planned change process** that makes use of the **strengths perspective** and that identifies and directs resources to strategically:
  - Engage, assess, intervene, evaluate, and end with client systems of all sizes (**planned change process**).
  - Build on the clients' strengths and assets.
  - Alleviate problems and remove barriers existent in the social environment.
  - Strengthen and empower systems promoting resilience and strategies for prevention.

- A recognized set of **Core Competencies** and **Practice Behaviors** as established by the Council on Social Education that is based upon a body of professional **knowledge, values and skills** used to assess needs and pursue change. (Discussed further below.)
- **Three dimensions of intervention are simultaneously emphasized:**
  - The lives of individuals, families & groups are strengthened with services in the **micro** dimension.
  - The capacity of organizations and communities is enhanced with resources and program development in the **meso** dimension.
  - Advocacy for systemic social change and reform is implemented in the **macro** dimension: on a societal, national, and global level.

The Integrative Framework asserts that the most effective and ethical social work practice is that which examines and embraces all three dimensions and incorporates concurrent attention to individual/family need, organizational/community development, and social change/reform. This conceptualization of effective, ethical social work practice achieves both of the goals of the social work profession named in the framework (the improvement of social functioning and social justice). It also fully addresses the primary mission of the profession as defined in our Code of Ethics ('enhance human well-being' and 'promote social justice' (NASW 2008) and addresses and fulfills CSWE's expectations that the purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being and incorporates the values of the profession identified as service and social justice. Through this both/and emphasis on service and justice, the Integrative Framework stipulates the equal importance of human need *and* human rights, social service *and* social justice, as well as individual (small systems) change *and* comprehensive change (large systems). For example, it is equally important to provide immediate shelter and related services to a homeless family *and* to be working, on an ongoing basis, for policy reform, which makes affordable housing and livable wages more readily available to families. Failure to do one or the other, or to place priority on one over the other, results in a betrayal to our professional commitment to both service and justice.

Though the Integrative Framework does the important work of placing equal emphasis on service and justice, it does not accomplish the critical task of describing social justice—of telling social workers what justice looks like, what it is we should be striving for as we carry out our profession's mission to "promote social justice." As discussed above, the NASW Code of Ethics also falls short in this regard in that it provides detailed description and definition of ethical service but not social justice. This leads us to recognize the strategic and vital importance of *Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles* (Appendix I). The *Ten Principles* provide, as does Catholic Social Teaching from which the principles derive, ethical standards de-

scribing social justice. In doing so, the *Ten Principles* enable us to envision a society that addresses human needs *and* human rights, provides social service as it works toward social justice, and values change in both small systems (individual/family responsibility and empowerment) and large systems (housing policy and livable wages policy reform).

### **Core Competencies of Social Work Practice**

In 2008, the Council on Social Work Education established a revised set of Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). EPAS 2008 supports the purpose of the social work profession to promote human and community well-being and it incorporates the values of the profession identified as service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competency, human rights, and scientific inquiry (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008, p. 5; EPAS, 2008, p. 2). EPAS describes four features of an integrated curriculum: program mission and goals, explicit curriculum, implicit curriculum, and assessment. Within program mission and goals, program context encompassing the mission of the program's sponsoring institution is central. This focus on program mission within institutional and professional mission and identity supports the integration of Catholic Social Teaching as a solid foundation for program and curriculum development for social work programs within faith-based institutions.

EPAS 2008 identifies the BSW curriculum as preparing graduates for generalist practice, the MSW foundation curriculum as preparing students with a generalist perspective and the MSW concentration as preparing its graduate for advanced practice. This is accomplished through mastery of a set of core competencies operationalized by practice behaviors. The ten core competencies (EP 2.1.1–EP 2.1.10 (d)) are comprised of the knowledge, values, and skills requisite for social work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Review of these competencies and the identified practice behaviors makes it clear that the purpose, values, and ethics of the profession are integrated throughout and are complementary with The NASW Code of Ethics and Catholic Social Teaching. Table 2 identifies the CSWE core competencies and outlines how they are grounded by CST.

**Table 2: CSWE Core Competencies and Catholic Social Teaching**

EP 2.1.1: Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.	This competency clearly states that social workers serve as representative of the profession, its mission, and its core values (EPAS, 2008, p. 3). CST provides a framework of social justice principles that support the core values of the profession.
EP 2.1.2: Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.	This competency acknowledges the importance of recognizing and managing personal values and applying standards of the NASW Code of Ethics (EPAS 2008, p. 4). The Code outlines our professional social justice responsibilities as does CST, both supporting the application of social work ethical principles in practice.
EP 2.1.3: Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.	Inherent in this competency is the mandate as professionals to carefully analyze, exercise prudential judgment and embrace the complexity of living. CST and the Code of Ethics set forth our responsibilities as 'seekers of justice' and social workers to act, advocate, empower, engage, promote, and strive to improve services to clients and strengthen relationships among people for the well being of all at all levels.
EP 2.1.4: Engage diversity and difference in practice.	This competency calls out our need to understand the intersectionality of multiple factors, including religion (EPAS 2008, p. 4-5). CST provides a framework for understanding the universality of justice principles across numerous faith traditions, affirming similarities—not differences, and supporting the social worker's need to recognize how factors such as one's culture, ethnicity, gender, political ideology, and religion, influence our values in working with diverse groups. Through the CST principle of solidarity, we are called to accept an ethic of care that acknowledges our interdependence, and strengthens relationships among people to promote well-being at all levels.
EP 2.1. 5: Advance human rights and social and economic justice.	This is the core competency that addresses the centrality of justice in our educational programs and to our profession. This core competency recognizes the importance of attention to basic human rights, the global interconnections of oppression and theories of justice, and the strategies required to promote human and civil rights (EPAS 2008, p. 5). This competency directly affirms the integration of social justice principles, CST, across the curriculum.
EP 2.1.6: Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.	This competency brings together the 'art and science' of social work practice. Each justice principle (CST) serves as foundational and supportive to these two components and contributes to our professional striving toward social justice, informed by evidence and informing practice.

<p>EP 2.1.7: Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.</p>	<p>This is the core competency that addresses the need to use conceptual frameworks about community systems and the ways these systems promote or deter health and well-being (EPAS, 2008, p. 6). Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients and seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems. Both the NASW Code of Ethics and CST affirm the importance of this core competency through their focus on the principles of human dignity, community and the Common Good, rights and responsibilities, participation, subsidiarity and the promotion of peace.</p>
<p>EP 2.1.8: Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.</p>	<p>This competency connects policy practice with advocating for advancing social well-being and participation in effective policy action (EPAS, 2008, p. 6). Participation, dignity of work and the rights of workers, and governance/ solidarity are justice principles addressed by both the NASW Code of Ethics and CST. Social workers engage in organized action, including advocating for effective policies to improve services to clients and working conditions, as well as empowering individuals and groups to influence social policies and institutions and promote social justice. Some contend that CST is the most systematic and thorough attempt by a religious faith to articulate its positions on social policy.</p>
<p>EP 2.1.9: Respond to contexts that shape practice.</p>	<p>This competency acknowledges the interaction between social workers and all aspects of the environment. The Code of Ethics and CST both focus on human dignity as the ethical foundation of a moral society where social workers promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities and social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems.</p>
<p>EP 2.1.10(a)–(d): Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.</p>	<p>This competency is built on the CST principle of solidarity in which social workers engage people as partners in the helping process and seek to strengthen relationships among people to promote well being at all levels. Principles of human dignity, rights and responsibilities, participation, dignity of work, solidarity and subsidiarity also inform this competency.</p>

As one carefully reviews and works with the core competencies as identified in EPAS 2008 to develop a social work curriculum addressing the key principles of service and justice, the synergy and compatibility between the core competencies, the NASW Code of Ethics, and Catholic Social Teaching are undeniable and transparent. As discussed above, CST addresses the challenges of economic and 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. Hence, it articulates specifics of social justice and strategically informs social work practice.



### **Operationalizing Justice in the Classroom: The Code of Ethics, CST Principles, Integrative Framework and Core Competencies**

As the discussion thus far suggests, the Code of Ethics, CST Principles, Integrative Framework, and Core Competencies are valuable resources in social work education. Their value, however, is limited unless a curriculum is designed to incorporate them and link them effectively and cohesively. Thus, we now turn the discussion to some strategies and examples used in the BSW program at the School of Social Work at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. These illustrations reflect a holistic blending that produces a solid curriculum that ensures integrity and consistent balance between the profession's service and justice commitments.

All four critical elements, the Core Competencies, the Code, the Justice Principles, and the Integrative Framework are introduced in the program's introductory course and integrated throughout all the curriculum areas and in each course as follows:

**Core Competencies.** Every syllabus identifies course objectives. These course objectives are directly linked to specific Core Competencies in a very explicit way that enables the instructor to identify the competency and clearly outline how it will be addressed in the course.

**NASW Code of Ethics and CST Principles.** Students learn about and work with the Code and the Principles from the beginning of the introductory course. They are presented both as discreet documents—the Code emanating from the NASW and the CST Principles as a product of our program's mission and strong commitment to practice which balances service and justice. The complementarity of the two documents is also emphasized. Students learn that each is critically important and that effective social work practice requires allegiance to both. This message is repeatedly discussed in hopes of ensuring that students go forth with this dual allegiance (both Code and Principles) as a core component of their social work identity. The Code and the Principles are subsequently integrated into the other courses of the curriculum, including fieldwork. Other documents emphasizing ethics and justice (e.g., U. N. Declaration of Human Rights and Millennium Development Goals) are also utilized to fortify students' commitment to justice.

**Integrative Framework of Social Work Practice.** The framework is also introduced in the first course of the program and utilized in each course in the curriculum. Learning about the Integrative Framework inevitably corrects some students' presumptions about social work as a helping profession that focuses on only individuals and families. Becoming familiar with the framework also reinforces students' appreciation for the Justice Principles and enables them to begin to deepen their understanding of the importance of service and justice, both human need and human rights, and individual as well as comprehensive social change. This understanding and

appreciation of an integrative approach to practice that includes micro, meso, and macro intervention is subsequently cultivated and deepened in each course enabling students to appreciate the critical need for multi-level practice methodologies and across fields of practice.

The holistic design not only introduces and integrates the four elements—Core Competencies, Code, Principles, and Integrative Framework—across the curriculum but also throughout each course syllabus. Class activities and assignments continuously provide students opportunities to integrate their learning and deepen their understanding of each element and their critical connectedness which is essential to effective social work practice.

Appendix II provides a more detailed illustration of how the Core Competencies, Code of Ethics, Justice Principles, and Integrative Framework link together and inform class activities and assignments.

### **Why Integrate Catholic Social Teaching into the Social Work Curriculum?**

Having worked with CST for the past five years and having completed a comprehensive curriculum review and analysis in preparation for reaffirmation of our BSW and MSW programs, we have identified a number of advantages to integrating CST into the social work curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Supporting this integration, five primary themes have emerged. These themes include the congruence between CST and social work values and ethics and core competencies, the faith-based identity and mission of institutions, the need for greater emphasis on social justice in curricula, the importance of integrating spirituality in social work education and practice, and an increased attractiveness of programs to prospective students.

***Congruence between CST and Social Work Values and Ethics.*** Overall, a high degree of congruence between CST and social work values and ethics is evident. CST principles are ‘universal to all people’ and able to ‘provide a universal base/common frame of reference for ethical/moral considerations for social workers.’ Related to observations regarding the universality of CST and connecting CST to the NASW Code of Ethics, we recognize that CST supports the Code of Ethics with ‘more depth, specificity and richness.’

***Faith-Based Identity of Schools.*** The faith-based identity of many sponsoring institutions makes Catholic Social Teaching a desirable addition to the social work curriculum. We know that many students come to a faith-based institution specifically for a values-based education in which spirituality and faith are considered both legitimate and important. Given the Catholic identity of St. Catherine University (SCU) and the University of St. Thomas (UST), marketing the integration of CST in our social work curriculum enhances the attractiveness of our programs for many students

seeking 'to integrate the richness of spirituality and faith traditions into their practice of social work.' The inclusion of CST serves to differentiate our programs from other social work programs.

**Emphasis on Social Justice.** The importance of social workers participating in efforts for justice is clearly identified through the NASW Code of Ethics, the generalist model (and the Integrative Framework in particular), and the Core Competencies. CST serves as a means to enhance this awareness and effort. Use of these principles in the curriculum prepares students to work more effectively with diverse populations and at-risk groups with the focus on the needs of the poor and most vulnerable.

**The Importance of Integrating Spirituality into Social Work Education and Practice.** Although the focus is on Catholic Social Teaching, the integration of CST is a means to increase the inclusion of spirituality in general in the social work curriculum and in social work practice. The principles are recognized as a 'bridge' to the discussion of religious/spiritual beliefs in the classroom and practice setting that can help students become more comfortable talking about religious beliefs/spirituality, which is important because many clients have religious/spiritual beliefs that need to be considered. It is clear that spirituality is gaining recognition as an important part of social work practice and that the inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching would better prepare graduates to see their clients as whole persons and meet their needs—body, mind, soul, spirit.

In addition to advantages of integrating CST in the curriculum, three primary concerns are identified by faculty and students in regard to integration: the importance of distinguishing between CST and other aspects of Catholic doctrine, the potential risk of alienating or excluding non-Catholic and/or non-Christian students, and the importance of faculty 'buy-in' for consistency. Addressing feelings of alienation or exclusion by non-Catholic and/or non-Christian students is critical for successful integration. The following student insights about the inclusion of values are offered, "Any place you go to school there will be a values set. I prefer to know them up front. The CST principles help identify our values/philosophy." "The principles are universal. They are not about conversion." "At a Muslim university, I would expect to discuss Islam content in my classes. One doesn't have to believe everything that is said. CST gives you something to respond to."

The integration of CST is identified as an attraction for students, particularly undergraduates and their parents and assists in marketability of one's programs. Clarity about the distinctions between Catholic Social Teaching and other aspects of Catholic doctrine is crucial and faculty commitment to integration is critical. Integration of the principles consistently throughout the curriculum is essential for its effectiveness in strengthening the program. Faculty need to be comfortable with facilitating the emotions and variety of opinions that are likely to come up in discussion.

### Conclusion

Our School of Social Work has strengthened the social justice content of our programs through the integration of Catholic Social Teaching. While integration continues, it is significant to recognize the importance of this curriculum transformation in the education of our students. This focus has resulted in a renewed commitment to social justice, a keener sense of understanding of our sponsoring institutions' Catholic identity and missions, an appreciation for the universality of Catholic Social Teaching, as well as humility in responding to difficult dialogues that have compelled us to embrace complexity and resolve as we prepare culturally relevant social work practitioners.

What was initially seen as primarily curriculum integration work has been recognized as a transformative process with a profound impact on faculty and 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. The process has also heightened faculty awareness of and commitment to the social justice mission of social work. We have taken the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the extent to which we are 'teaching justice' and we have responded to a call to strengthen our programs 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.

Integration of CST in our curricula 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 faith-based mission and identity and renewed commitment to social justice.

We have learned that Catholic Social Teaching, the faith-based university, and social work education are complementary and compatible. Each has a rich heritage that places people before things, recognizes the dignity of the human person and the interdependence of humanity, challenges the oppression of racism and bigotry, and works for social and economic justice. Each calls upon its members to defend human rights, to participate in society at all levels, and to take action to serve the poor and vulnerable. Each requires that its members act out of a developed sense of values, ethics, and moral conscience for social justice. Social work education, in many respects, represents the actualization of Catholic Social Teaching and represents the faith-based universities' commitment to liberal education, preparation for career competency, and public service. ❖

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**Appendix I:**  
**Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles\***

<p><b>Human Dignity</b></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. 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.</i></p>	<p><b>Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers</b></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. Social workers challenge injustice related to unemployment, workers' rights 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.</i></p>
<p><b>Community and the Common Good</b></p> <p><i>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. 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. 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.</i></p>	<p><b>Solidarity</b></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. An ethic of care acknowledging our interdependence belongs in every aspect of human experience including the family, community, society and global dimensions. 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.</i></p>

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<p><b>Rights and Responsibilities</b></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. Corresponding to these rights are responsibilities to family, community and society. 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 end oppression. Social workers empower individuals/groups to function as effectively as possible.</p>	<p><b>Stewardship</b></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> 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><b>Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable</b></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; expand choice and opportunity; and promote social justice.</p>	<p><b>Governance/Principle of Subsidiarity</b></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><b>Participation</b></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><b>Promotion of Peace</b></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 peace and the general welfare of society from local to global levels.</p>

**Appendix II:  
Operationalizing Justice in the Classroom:  
The Core Competencies, Code of Ethics, Justice Principles,  
and Integrative Framework of Social Work Practice**

	Introductory Course	Policy Course	Practice Course
Core Competency And Related Course Objective	<p><b>E.P. 2.1.1 Identify as a social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.</b></p> <p><b>Course Objective:</b> Develop knowledge of the identity of professional social work and how to conduct oneself accordingly.</p>	<p><b>E.P.2.1.4 Engage diversity and difference in practice.</b> <b>E.P. 2.1.8 Engage in Policy Practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.</b></p> <p><b>Course Objective:</b> Recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values create policies that may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.</p>	<p><b>E.P. 2.1.5 Advance human rights and social economic justice</b> <b>E.P. 2.1.10 Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.</b></p> <p><b>Course Objective:</b> Engage large client systems in planned change utilizing data from organizations and communities to assess strengths and challenges and working collaboratively with groups, organizations, and communities in order to create positive change.</p>
Code of Ethics	<p>6 Core Values are introduced (service, justice, dignity/worth, human relationships, integrity, competence)</p> <p><b>Ethical Standard 1.07</b> Social Workers' Responsibilities to Clients/Privacy and Confidentiality</p>	<p><b>Ethical Standard 1.05</b> Social Workers' Responsibilities to Clients/Cultural Competence and Social Diversity <b>Ethical Standard 6.01</b> Ethical Responsibilities to Broader Society/Social Welfare. <b>Ethical Standard 6.02</b> Ethical Responsibilities to broader society/Public Participation</p>	<p><b>Ethical Standard 2.03</b> Social Workers' Responsibilities to Colleagues/Interdisciplinary Collaboration <b>Ethical Standard 6.04</b> Ethical Responsibilities to Broader Society/Social and Political Action</p>
Justice Principles	<p>Human Dignity, Community and the Common Good, Rights and Responsibilities</p>	<p>Human Dignity, Community and the Common Good, Rights and Responsibilities, Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable, Participation, Governance/Subsidiarity</p>	<p>Human Dignity, Community and the Common Good, Participation, Dignity of Work/ Rights of Workers, Governance/Subsidiarity, Solidarity, Stewardship, Promotion of Peace</p>



	<b>Introductory Course</b>	<b>Policy Course</b>	<b>Practice Course</b>
<b>Integrative Framework</b>	The framework is introduced. Profession is defined as: emphasizing the importance of human relationships; being equally committed to service and justice; and responsible for strengths-based planned change with systems of all sizes.	The framework provides the context for appreciating that social problems and policy issues have implications for both human needs and human rights, gradual and comprehensive planned change, and the critical link between services and justice.	The framework provides context for integrating planned change at all three levels, emphasizing the important link between knowledge/values/skills (i.e. core competencies and practice behaviors) and strengths-based planned change efforts.
<b>Example of Assignment</b>	Students explore an area of social work practice: distinguishing the role of social worker from other professional helpers in relation to core values; applying justice principles particularly pertinent to that area of practice; and identifying examples of roles, skills and methods commonly used at the micro, meso and macro level.	Students select a social problem and examine its impacts/dynamics (discrimination, oppression, power/privilege imbalance, etc.) and strategies for intervention/planned change at three levels: individuals and families (micro), groups and organizations (meso), legislative and political structures (macro).	Students complete a community involvement project which provides the opportunity to plan and carry out the steps of the planned change process toward a goal committed to justice. The experience includes collaboration with individuals, groups and organizations impacted by/involved in the issue and a community event designed to engage, educate and advocate.

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