



Working for Peace:

Two Feet of Love in Action

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In high school, I was smitten by the concept of *peace* as an antidote for my personal adolescent angst and nothing short of a vision for our entire world—one that unraveled via ABC's *World News Tonight* on the small television set in our rural Pennsylvania kitchen, and beset by genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda, the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, and a night sky lit up by airstrikes during the first Gulf War. This seed of and for peace was first nurtured in my idealistic 14-year-old self at the former Samantha Smith World Peace Camp. It became a passion stoked by weeks of volunteering at our county's Quaker-influenced Peace Center, and further fueled on my first excursion outside of US borders under the flag of "youth for understanding." As an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, I found an academic home in International Peace Studies. As the student employee at its famed Kroc Institute, I made an extra photocopy of every textbook chapter or article a professor asked me to photocopy (this was pre-PDF), and built my own mini peace library that retires—yellowed and coffee-stained—in my Georgetown University office today. I earned a Master's degree focused on Peace Education, with professors including Betty Reardon, Alicia Cabezudo, Loretta Castro, and Dale Snauwaert, scholars who modeled pedagogies for peace learning in their every interaction, from the classroom to the conference symposium. I further deepened my post-graduate studies overseas at the former European Peace University. Peace was very clearly *my* thing.



It was when I arrived to Georgetown University in 2008—as a professor for its Justice and Peace Studies program—that I was formally introduced to social justice, a relationship that quickly grew from a casual acquaintance to a deep commitment. Within my first semester of teaching the undergraduate course “Introduction to Justice and Peace,” conceptual frameworks for social justice felt like long lost friends, without whom I could not imagine life—particularly one, as I knew it, so focused on peace. Pope Paul XI’s imperative—“if you want peace, work for justice”—unfolded before me, through the head, hearts, and hands of the Hoyas sitting in a circle in a basement, windowless classroom.

Georgetown is the country’s oldest Catholic University, started by the Jesuits, members of the Society of Jesus, an international religious community founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. The Jesuit tradition undergirds the University’s commitment to spiritual inquiry, civic engagement, and religious and cultural pluralism, and fosters an environment where whole student formation includes reflection and service, alongside traditional academic challenge. All students, across diverse backgrounds, faiths, and cultures, are invited and challenged to become #HoyasForOthers, to engage in what Jesuits refer to as society’s margins—the “gritty reality of this

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Social justice is a term coined by a Jesuit, a mid-19th century Sicilian priest, Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, who was concerned by the rising social unrest provoked by the industrial revolution.² Social justice entered official Catholic Church documents as early as the 1891 *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor) and is a cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching, a body of doctrine developed about social justice issues, such as poverty, wealth, and social stratification, and rests on cornerstones of human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity.³ Now, as Executive Director of the Georgetown’s Center for Social

1. Kolvenbach S.J., Peter Hans. (2000). “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education.” Speech delivered at University of Santa Clara, CA. <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-tradition-offerings/stories/the-service-of-faith-and-the-promotion-of-justice-in-american-jesuit-higher-education.html>

2. Zajda, J., Majhanovich, S., Rust, V., and E. Martin Sabina (eds.) (2006). *Education and Social Justice*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands; Springer.

3. Two resources on Catholic Social Teaching are United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/ and Georgetown University’s Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/.

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Justice Research, Teaching, and Service, I utilize the metaphor of the two feet of social justice, also commonly referred to as the *Two Feet of Love in Action*. We must simultaneously respond to immediate needs and specific situations with charitable acts and address systemic, root causes of social, political, and economic injustice that institutionalize marginalization and disenfranchisement of particular groups of people.

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And by “we,” I do mean all of us, every single one of us. There are countless instances when I circle the “we” in a student’s assignment and write “*False Universal!*” or “*Who is ‘we’? Unclear!*” in the paper’s margins; in this case, the universal *is* precise. If I have understood any truth about social justice in my eight years at Georgetown, it is that merely teaching *about* social justice perpetuates a society in which responsibility lies with the next nameless somebody or an inhuman structure. We must teach *for* a more just and humane world, one in which every single

person understands how they are implicated in social justice *and* injustice. So, how do we teach *for* social justice? Here, I give thanks to my years of peace education, and my dependence on peace pedagogy, which serve as a guide.

First, I urge faculty and staff to model use of the term social justice. Colleagues from peer institutions (without a Jesuit tradition) regularly bemoan the vocabulary list that edit, if not censor, their context’s work for the common good—namely, terms such as civic engagement, volunteerism, or community service. These are incredibly meaningful terms in their own right; yet, my colleagues envy what I can say and, therefore, the discussions that I can and do have with students and that students have with each other—conversations in which social justice is a value and a vision and not merely an objective, codified framework. While commenters suggest the term social justice is “too political,” I implore students to recognize that it is *as political* of an act *not* to name something for what it is. Paulo Freire (1970) reminded us that “to speak a true word is to name the world” and that the authentic process of naming allows for reflection and action that together transform realities.⁴

At the same time, I push my team, colleagues, and students to—in equal measure—name what is social *injustice*. While the creation of a just society is the dream for many empowering educators, “it will remain

4. Freire, P. (1970, 2010). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum. p. 87.



a mere hollow rhetoric, or magic words in policy, unless we debate more vigorously social inequality in the global culture.”⁵ Our University President is modeling that this semester by teaching an Ignatius seminar for first-year students named *Contributing to (in) Justice* with the opening question: “How do we—as individuals, as members of communities, as participants in societies and in the institutions they have established and the structures they enable—contribute to Justice, but also, wittingly or not, how do we contribute to Injustice?”

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Second, peace pedagogy requires us to ensure that learning is indeed occurring in programs that have been popularly labeled “experiential learning.” Experience is a significant feature for social justice education.⁶ A different way of knowing is fostered when a student meets an individual experiencing homelessness and when a student investigates statistics around low-income housing shortages, or when a student tutors an illiterate young adult and when a student hears a lecture on the achievement gap. Both are necessary, but student experience curated on the lives of people who are surviving structural inequality only contributes to injustice. The student must learn how they are implicated in both the injustice and its transformation, and not merely walk away with an “interesting” moment or “good” story.

Further, students must allow themselves to learn from diverse community members and partners, and we must allow those voices to teach our students. This is expressed in Georgetown’s commitment to diverse forms of community-based learning,⁷ which includes

5. Zajda et al (2006). p. 6.

6. Burton, M. (2010). “*Experiential Education and Social Justice: Philosophical and Methodological Considerations for Integrating Experiential Learning in Educational Leadership.*” Dissertation. University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Available at: https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Burton_uncg_0154D_10340.pdf.

7. At Georgetown, community-based learning (CBL) is an academic course-based pedagogy that involves student work with disadvantaged and underserved individuals or groups, or organizations working with and for disadvantaged and underserved individuals or groups, that is structured to meet community-defined needs. Students’ experiences in community-based work heightens their engagement with central academic themes and material in a course. The academic course content facilitates students’ abilities to reflect in deep ways on their experiences working with and in the community. See CSJ’s resource guide for community-based learning, accessible through the Georgetown University Lauinger Library at guides.library.georgetown.edu/community-based-learning.

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practices such as solidarity, accompaniment, witness, allyship, immersion,⁸ or one-to-one active listening. These are not passive forms of “sitting back”—they are springboards for learning and into lifelong, ever-deepening engagement. As Mr. Muslim Amin, a notable community partner, said to a few hundred first-year Hoyas at our annual September service day: “Today, you embodied the ‘we will not forget you message.’” Direct, human-facing service is social justice made visible. We must relieve students’ self-centered urge to “do something” or to “fix problems” and prioritize direct human relationships as a first step when possible and, if not, an explicit intention to grasp the structures that impact relations among human beings.

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Third: reflection is a peace pedagogy that the Center for Social Justice prioritizes and for which it employs significant resources in order to infuse across its own programs and Georgetown’s campus. With its given

Jesuit name “contemplation in action,” reflection is a practice for which we intentionally program so that it may grow into a habit of students’ lives. It draws on five centuries of Jesuit scholarship as well as a century of American education research, beginning with Dewey (1916) who described reflection as a dynamic, active, and conscious process. As information transfers into knowledge, reflection is what sustains learning and its application to our present and futures lives.⁹ We acknowledge that it can and should be individual, communal, between peers, and within mentored relationships. While the traditional journal entry remains a mainstay, we have experimented successfully with reflection via online tools through a summer online course called *Intersections of Social Justice* that wraps around students’ deep community and social justice based work—whether in their home town or a new place they come to call home.¹⁰ This course was initiated after witnessing students suffer a unique version of the dreaded summer slide, in which three months of an intense social justice commitment was brushed off with a response of “I was abroad” or “I was volunteering” upon return to our Hilltop campus in late August. We now utilize web-based tools, including social media, to support students in reflective practices that accompany the learning at their site-based

8. A recommended new resource on immersion is: Shoshanna, S., Porter, M.C., and J. Piacitelli. (2015). *Working Side by Side: Creating Alternative Breaks as Catalysts for Global Learning, Student Leadership, and Social Change*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Press.

9. Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: The Free Press.

10. For more on *Intersections*, visit: csj.georgetown.edu/intersections and itel.georgetown.edu/projects/wisler/.



work around the world. We refute suspicion that the online environment prohibits this meaning-making and community-building among the millennial generation; our experience and research shows that it can serve as the replacement for walks and talks out of class to the dining hall, shared van rides to service sites, and unexpected chats in the quad.¹¹ Social justice work is hard, and reflection and community decrease the potential of burnout, a phenomenon I do not want my students to experience at a young age.

Finally, and perhaps the most compelling pedagogical practice for social justice education, is the humble admission that we can always learn to do it more deeply and explicitly. As an example of how these peace pedagogies for a most just and human world are enlivening campus, right now, we at Georgetown are contending with our school's participation with America's "original sin" of slavery—the very specific sale of 272 individuals in order to pay off debts of the institution. President John DeGioia recently shared remarks at the publication of

a report with recommendations for reconciliation: "This community participated in the institution of slavery. This original evil that shaped the early years of the republic was present here. Our moral agency must be channeled to undo this damage."¹² Social justice—and injustice—is something that happens on the margins, and at home. Every person at Georgetown has been called on to participate in the University's reconciliation in the way most appropriate to their position and skills—through dance, through theater, through community-based research, and beyond.

An education steeped in social justice through peace pedagogy—at a Jesuit University and beyond—has the potential to transform students (and yes, faculty and staff too!) and prepare them for work that promotes the common good. Accompanied by reflection, this experience opens the doors to discernment about one's vocation in life—that is, where the world's most pressing needs meet the desire of one's heart to serve—and to their flourishing as a human being. ●

11. For more research and pedagogical tools related to reflection through web-based tools, see: Guthrie, K.L. & McCracken, H. (2010c). "Teaching and learning social justice through online service-learning courses." *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 11(3): 78-94.

12. Visit slavery.georgetown.edu to read the report.

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