

## Justice for the Communities We Serve

### Preamble

#### The Call

As American universities grapple with issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion, universities accredited by SACSOC have been urged to develop their own "strategies and definitions" in this area in a manner that "reflect(s) and meet(s) unique institutional needs and missions." As a Catholic and Franciscan University, we inherit an intellectual tradition that has been addressing many of these issues for centuries, allowing us the opportunity to elaborate upon the fundamental assumptions behind our approach.

In fact, the Catholic Church calls specifically upon Catholic Universities to address many of these issues in its apostolic constitution regarding Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*:

The Christian spirit of service to others for the *promotion of social justice* is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women. The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote 'the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment'. Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make University education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it. (ECE 34)

#### Principles

"The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice." (Psalm 37:30)

At the root of any Catholic approach to these issues is a commitment that every one of our students, staff, and faculty is made in the image and likeness of a loving God (Gen 1:26-27). This image, even when diminished by sin, abides in all humans as an intrinsic part of being human. As such, to look at any student, staff, or member of the faculty is to encounter the face of God, which provides an inherent dignity that must always be kept in mind. The idea that humans are made in the image and likeness of God and thus possess intrinsic dignity is extended in an encounter with Jesus Christ, who assumed human flesh for the salvation of the entire human race. This universal and sacrificial love for all humans modelled by Christ takes a special interest in those who are oppressed, neglected, and living at the margins of society (Matt 25:31-46, Luke 4:16-19) and so a Catholic University is required to pay special attention to those members, and potential members, of the University community who come to us from

these difficult situations. This Christian care for those who have been marginalized was especially modeled in the life of St. Francis of Assisi in his service to the lepers and outreach to people of other religious backgrounds.

A second principle in a specifically Franciscan approach is the concept of "haeccitas" ("thisness") developed by the fourteenth century Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus. Scotus developed this idea in response to the challenging philosophical problem of how universal concepts, such as 'humanity', exist in particular persons, such as 'Adam' or 'Eve'. He posited that there is a 'thisness' given to each person that makes them a uniquely unrepeatable individual expression of humanity. A Franciscan approach to these issues, then, will treat each person as an individual whose 'thisness' is particular to that person, rather than reducing that person down to a particular group, race, etc. Each member of our community brings an irreducibly distinct personality and vocation that must be respected as such.

At the same time, the Catholic church is clear that problems such as racism and other forms of unjust discrimination exist through individual sins that contribute to what it calls structures of sin (CCC 1869). If those inspired by a Franciscan vision of the individual are supposed to treat persons as such, forms of sin and oppression often work to deny both the full humanity and individuality of persons in marginalized groups; they are social sins "against the dignity and honor of one's neighbor" (RP16). As a consequence of these human sins, individual members of our University community come to our University with experiences of individual and societal sin that have diminished their full flourishing as children of God, often making it difficult for them to meet their full academic or professional potential. Given this context, Catholic Universities contribute to the work of the Church by providing resources, healing, and reconciliation to individuals who have been harmed by aggregate effects of sin.

Furthermore, in addressing the needs of individuals, while welcoming all in a spirit of Christian hospitality (Hebrews 13:2), the Catholic University must accompany all members of its community on their journey toward holiness (LG, V). Thus, as an extension of the Church, the University can at all times affirm the dignity of its members while also challenging them to pursue more holy lives. Given this, a Catholic University's positions must always be in alignment with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Finally, the commitment to justice in the Catholic and Franciscan tradition must be always accompanied by equal commitments to love and mercy. Christianity is a religion of both conversion and forgiveness, so a commitment to justice alone, without love and mercy, can become inhuman and self-righteous. St. Francis warns us that we should "be careful not to be disturbed or angered at another's sin or evil because the devil wishes to destroy many because of another's fault." (ER, V) It must be love which motivates and forms our commitment to justice.

With those principles in mind, Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University affirms the following commitments of justice to the communities we serve. Each commitment is followed by references to official teachings of the Catholic Church and texts by and about St. Francis that provide a proper motivation and interpretation for our commitments.

## **“Justice for the Communities We Serve” (JCS)**

- 1. (JCS & Diversity)** The richness of the diversity of God's people in the communities we serve and the richness of the University's mission should be manifested in our endeavors for the benefit of forming our students and colleagues.

Nostra Aetate, 5: “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.”

Gravissimum Educationis, 1: “All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.

Caritas in Veritate, 7: "To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is the good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of 'all of us', made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. ... To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity."

The Church and Racism, 28: “The Magisterium of the Church has always highlighted the importance of an education that stresses what is common to all. It is also important to show that others, precisely because they are different, can enrich our experience.”

The Church and Racism, 20: “Revelation, indeed, insists just as much on the unity of the human family: all persons created in God have the same origin. Whatever throughout history may have been their dispersion or the accentuation of their differences, they are destined to form one sole family according to God's plan established "in the beginning."

St. Francis of Assisi, Earlier Rule VII: "Whoever comes to them, friend or foe, thief or robber, let him be received with kindness."

St. Francis of Assisi, Earlier Rule IX: "They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside."

The Life of St. Francis, Book 1, Chapter XII: "At that time Saint Francis and his brothers felt great *gladness and unique joy* whenever one of the faithful, *led by the Spirit of God*, came and accepted the habit of holy religion, whoever the person might be: rich or poor, noble or insignificant, wise or simple, cleric or illiterate, a layman of the Christian people. This was a great wonder to those of the world and an example of humility."

2. **(JCS & Equity)** The University's Catholic, Franciscan, and Christian identity compels it to enact justice in ways that align with its identity and mission and to especially serve those most in need in our communities.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 34: "The Christian spirit of service to others for the *promotion of social justice* is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women. The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote "the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment". Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it."

Gaudium et Spes, 29: "Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition."

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.

Therefore, although rightful differences exist between men, the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.”

Caritas in Veritate, 6: “First of all, justice. *Ubi societas, ibi ius*: every society draws up its own system of justice. Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his”, what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI’s words, “the minimum measure” of it, an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.”

St. Francis of Assisi, Earlier Rule VI: “Let no one be called “prior,” but let everyone in general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other.”

The Life of St. Francis, Book 1, Chapter XXVIII: “The father of the poor, the poor Francis, conforming himself to the poor in all things, was distressed to see anyone poorer than himself, not out of any desire for empty glory, but from a feeling of simple compassion. Though he was content with a ragged and rough tunic, he often wished to divide it with some poor person.”

3. **(JCS & Inclusion)** The dignity of all people created in God’s image compels the University to ensure its community is inclusive such that all people are allowed to genuinely participate in the life of the community and are given opportunities to use their gifts for the sake of the University’s mission.

Evangelium Vitae, 101: “A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.”

Evangelii Gaudium, 179: "God's word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: 'As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: 'The measure you give will be the measure you get' (Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back' (Lk 6:36-38). What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of 'going forth from ourselves toward our brothers and sisters' as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God's completely free gift."

Populorum Progressio, 23: "'He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?' (1 Jn 3:17) Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: 'You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.'"

St Francis, Earlier Rule, II: "If anyone, wishing by divine inspiration to accept this life, comes to our brothers, let him be received with kindness."

St. Francis, Admonition XVIII: "Blessed is the person who supports his neighbor in his weaknesses as he would want to be supported were he in a similar situation."

The Life of St. Francis, Book 1, Chapter VII: "While staying in the world and following its ways, he was also a helper of the poor. He extended a hand of mercy to those who had nothing and he poured out compassion for the afflicted."

The Life of St. Francis, Book 2, Chapter VI: "He saw many rushing for positions of authority. Despising their arrogance, he strove by his own example to call them back from such sickness. Indeed, he used to say that it was a good and acceptable thing in God's sight to take care of others."