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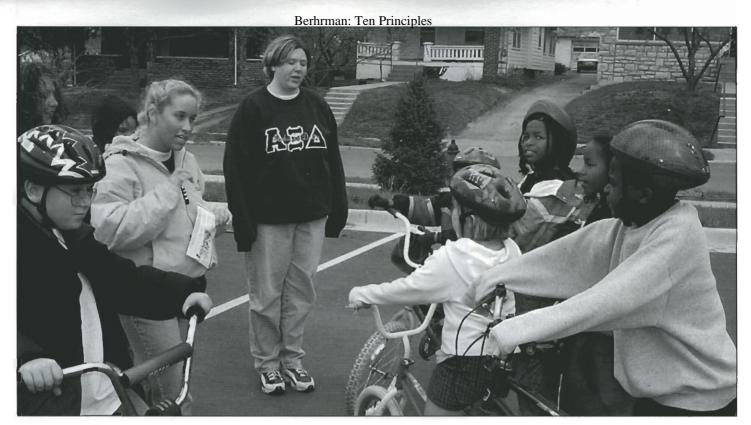
Ten Principles

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Students from Rockhurst interact with local youngsters.

Ten Principles

The School of Social Work and the Jesuit Mission

By Gary U. Berhrman

ne of the criteria for a group of people claiming to be a profession is to have a grounded theory of how they approach providing services. Social work grew into a profession as the result of men and women who saw basic needs that were painfully evident in the burgeoning immigrant population in the late 19th and early 20th century American cities. Responding with compassion and services, these early "workers" carved out a theoretical framework for the social work profession. Namely, problems people experience are often the result of environmental factors, not character flaws.

Social workers identify strengths that are present in a person's life and build upon these rather than only assess for pathologies. When creating services and resources, social workers understand that they are entering a system of relationships, that any intervention with an individual will affect that person's family, school, workplace and neighborhood. This theoretical framework is essential for understanding the social work profession and how and why our profession reflects, embodies and promotes Jesuit education's mission.

Joseph Husslein, S.J., who founded Saint Louis University's School of Social Work in 1930, during the heart of the Great Depression, produced the

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With 57 required hours, this makes the social work degree one of the most expensive degrees on campus

largest body of American Catholic social writings in his time. He urged the use of Catholic bishops social justice teachings and the Papal encyclicals to confront unemployment and the lack of health care, education, and housing.

Reflective of Fr. Husslein's work, last year the faculty of the College of St. Catherine/St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, MN, invited all Catholic social work programs in the U.S. for a conference to dialogue about the responsibilities and challenges of integrating Catholic social justice teaching in the formation of social workers.

Here are the Ten

Together, we found convergence between Catholic social teachings and the social work profession. This gathering created **Ten Principles for Social Justice** based upon our Catholic and social work traditions of service, community organizing, advocacy, policy development, education and research. Namely, affirming the dignity of every person, supporting the common good, protecting human rights, advocating for the right of every citizen to participate in the economic, political and cultural life of society, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers, solidarity among all nationalities, races and cultures, stewardship of the planet, promoting peace and urging that government functions take place at the local level when possible.

Incorporating these principles into our social work curriculum creates a beautiful tapestry aided by the diversity of our faculty and student body. Based upon these principles, Catholic schools of social work, which include Chicago Loyola, Fordham, Boston, Creighton, Seattle, Detroit-Mercy and Xavier, agree that our mission is "to prepare leaders who are committed to social justice, research and the empowerment of vulnerable and oppressed populations, whereby together we pursue a shared set of values, skills, and knowledge that are required to transform society in the spirit of the Gospels."

Today we continue to build upon social work and Catholic social teaching's tradition of addressing structural issues at the root of many of society's problems. Jesuit education provides an environment in which students, faculty and alumni reflect upon and engage in dialogue about the underlying causes of poverty, disease, unemployment and war. These two characteristics, reflection and engagement, are at the heart of Jesuit education and social work professional formation.

Today the social work profession is needed in soci-

eties where "blaming the victim" for his or her poverty, drug addiction or unemployment is a constant echo behind the disdain some citizens have for helping those marginalized in society because of their income, age, gender or disease. At SLU we engage students through the profession's theoretical framework to be of service and make a difference in the lives of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Our curriculum and field education thrusts students into the lives of aging populations who are forced into poverty by illness and collapsing retirement funds; with adolescents who are truant, experimenting with drugs and jeopardizing their hopes of graduating; and with community organizers who are providing the leadership to churches wanting to pool their neighborhood resources. Students are given the tools and values to reflect upon these experiences of what justice means within the context of our professional and Jesuit values.

critical issues are glaring at us when faced with the challenge to continue our Jesuit tradition of educating social workers. Escalating tuition costs have surpassed \$800 a credit hour in SLU's MSW program. With 57 required hours, this makes the social work degree one of the most expensive degrees on campus when measured against normative salaries for other professions. SLU offsets these student costs with scholarships, but the price tag remains ominous. Accompanying this, I frequently hear from parents that they are concerned about their daughter or son taking on so much debt with glass ceiling incomes that will make it extremely difficult to repay loans. This reinforces the popular paradigm that our profession lacks the prestige and salaries of other professions on Jesuit campuses. Many students want to be steeped in Jesuit values, but tuition costs often create insurmountable roadblocks for

midst these exciting developments, some

When teaching Introduction to Social Work to college freshmen, I tell students about my career first as a priest then as a social worker in geriatric adult day care centers; also working in an intensive care unit for persons with cancer, and then moving into a white collar job downtown where I provided mental health and substance abuse EAP services for organizations and corporations. By embracing the values of Jesuit education I have experienced a rewarding career as a social worker and I have created a life I cherish, not only for myself but for others as well.

those who want to be social workers.