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Applying *Rerum Novarum* towards the Academic Service-Learning (ASL) Reflection Process for Promoting Ethical Leadership in Post-Secondary Students

Henry J. Davis, Ph.D.¹

Abstract: Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* is considered one of the first major works to introduce Catholic social thought on a global level. A key message undergirding *Rerum* is the concept of supporting the needs of others, leading to empowerment and self-sufficiency. The purpose of this study was to create a list of reflection prompts informed by *Rerum* for post-secondary students to consider and apply towards their academic service-learning experiences. Through qualitative analysis, three main themes related to *Rerum*'s key message were identified: (a) opportunity to obtain resources; (b) intrinsic right to continual resources; and, (c) communal support of families and dependents. These themes were then used to develop eight distinct reflection prompts for each stage of the service-learning experience; here, the goal is to provide post-secondary students with a foundation for processing their thoughts and developing their leadership styles in an ethically-informed manner, grounded in Catholic social thought.

Keywords: *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII, Catholic social thought, high impact practices, civic engagement, ethical leadership development, servant leadership, encyclical, academic service-leadership

Hailed as a major step forward for working class laborers, Pope Leo XIII's (1891) encyclical *Rerum Novarum* championed the act of manual labor as a necessary and spiritually-uplifting act benefiting the worker and society alike. *Rerum* extolled the intrinsic

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goodness and value associated with honest labor as deserving of respect from all—especially those in leadership positions who are called to care for workers, safeguarding them from unjust practices that encumber their sacred purpose. Part of this obligation was to ensure that workers received those resources needed to live a fully human existence, free from despair and neglect. By affording a worker the means to support themselves and their dependents, the former cycle of injustice gives way to a new process in which the individual can build upon their accomplishments to achieve greater self-sufficiency; however, this new process can only begin when an open dialogue is initiated by leadership and employees (Leo XIII, 1891).

Rerum's slant on ethical leadership is not unlike the civic values attached to the high-impact practice known as academic service-learning (ASL). This pedagogical approach is intimately aligned with civic-related activities that aim to support the specific needs found in local and global communities. Though numerous understandings of ASL exist in academic literature, a widely accepted definition comes from Bringle and Hatcher (1995), who explain service-learning as:

A course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

Similar in its understanding of ASL is nationally-recognized, service-learning advocate Campus Compact (2018), whose stated purpose is to support the formation of civic-minded students via service projects that directly affect community organizations. Relatedly, the Association of American Colleges & Universities has also weighed in on the purpose of ASL, publishing reports advocating for ASL as a revitalizing tool for democratic engagement (e.g., National Taskforce on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

Objective

The purpose of this paper is to present a list of reflection prompts developed for post-secondary students to consider and apply towards their ASL experiences; this list was inspired by *Rerum Novarum*'s message of supporting the needs of others, leading to empowerment and self-sufficiency. Qualitative inquiry supported the formation of these reflective prompts by applying multiple coding cycles to *Rerum Novarum*. In turn, the aim of this list of prompts is to: (a) provide direction for students during the ASL reflection process that places those being served at the forefront, and (b) offer a framework grounded in social thought to inform and guide ASL community interactions in a formalized manner.

Background

***Rerum Novarum*: Pope Leo XIII's Opus on Labor Relations**

Before *Rerum* union activity in the United States consisted of a few prominent organizations, such as the Knights of Labor (KOL), which represented worker interests at the bargaining table. A significant faction of the membership served by the KOL were Roman Catholics, who often faced discrimination in Protestant America (Hennesey, 1983). Terrence Powderly, the Irish Catholic leader of the KOL, understood that the union's ability to continue fighting for worker rights and wage equality would require official recognition from the Vatican to further fortify its Catholic constituency (Phelan, 2000). This highly sought-after validation from the Roman Catholic Church was viewed as a method to leverage the KOL against corporate structures known for acquiring political power via influencing elections (Hild, 2012).

Though admittedly supportive of the working class, Pope Leo XIII and other Vatican leaders remained cautious of endorsing the KOL, due to the perceived chance that anti-religious sentiments were operating within the institution (Phelan, 2000). Staunch labor supporters James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, along with his English counterpart, Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, both advocated for Pope Leo XIII to endorse the KOL; they cited that labor unions along with worker rights would be imperiled without institutional backing from the Vatican (Burton, 1962). The Cardinals' collective correspondences on the character of the KOL, accompanied by the organization's bylaws produced by Powderly, led to a formal acknowledgment by Pope Leo in 1888 (Burton, 1962; Ellis, 1974; T'Serclaes, 1903).

To address the treatment of workers in a structured and lasting fashion, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*Of New Things*) on May 15, 1891 to the global Christian community. In *Rerum*, Pope Leo XIII (1891) delineates the responsibility of employers to honor the inherent dignity of their employees while urging laborers to take delight in their hard work, as it spiritually uplifts them and those benefiting from the end results of their labor. In *Rerum*, owning property and pursuing wealth is not considered an iniquitous undertaking. Conversely, hoarding assets at the expense of an employer's workforce is seen as a violation of their divine right to obtain the life-sustaining resources meant to aid workers in realizing their fullest potential as human beings (Leo XIII, 1891).

Underpinning this concept of universal human dignity is God's natural law. Pope Leo XIII (1891) affirms that all human beings are made in God's image—an integral part of this image being intelligence and reason which drives us towards loftier ideals beyond self-preservation. The need for autonomy, including the ability to make personal decisions in line with one's innate spiritual beliefs, must not be debased or interfered with by manmade practices and laws; indeed, a state of sufficiency must be secured by the individual in the form of material resources before one can move

forward to experience this unobtrusive, autonomous, and transcendent state (Leo XIII, 1891). These resources translate to suitable wages for workers to practice self/family care, and have satisfactory working conditions, union representation, the opportunity for socioeconomic advancement, and personal time for religious worship (Henriot et al., 1989). Sufficiency can only occur, however, when employers fairly compensate workers for their efforts with the means to acquire life-sustaining resources to live in a meaningful way. Therefore, providing “a share in the land” and/or profits in an equitable method such that “the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought near to one another” (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 47) takes on metaphysical importance, as human development is achieved through the allocation of goods.

Government and Church involvement are similarly outlined in *Rerum*, as both are designated conduits for protecting human dignity and the rights needed to support this noble state of being. The government should only involve itself in matters when unjust practices and abusive measures are being inflicted upon laborers who are powerless against their employers. Moreover, the government is called to respect the sacred bond of family life, not intruding upon it unless the family unit is destitute and requires public assistance (Leo XIII, 1891). In *Rerum*, it is emphasized that observing and offering counsel to all earthly parties is the Church, who—by God’s grace—is His ordained steward.

Educational Impact of ASL

Rerum’s message concerning becoming a steward who honors human dignity within the workplace and community at large shows alignment with the civic engagement goals connected to ASL. The emphasis on *Rerum*’s theme of empowering others by ensuring that their physical and emotional needs are met can shape a participant’s service-learning experience, offering a framework for reflection during and after interactions within the community. In turn, *Rerum*’s rationale of providing resources to those needing assistance may act as an internal compass which directs and informs students in the reflection process, cultivating a greater compassion and understanding towards those community collaborators being served.

Whereas *Rerum* provides a faith-based approach for honoring laborers, ASL has similarly afforded students an educational platform for addressing the needs of others in a real-world context. Service-learning has been shown to be an effective pedagogical approach for improving student graduation numbers, with one study demonstrating that service-learning students generally achieved higher GPAs and held more course credits than their non-service-learning counterparts (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). In addition, students expressed a greater sense of satisfaction in helping others through their service, experiencing firsthand the value of community service and being civic-minded (Ngai et al., 2018).

The perceived impact of service-learning on underrepresented students has contributed to its

overall interest in higher education. Minority students reported favorably on their service-learning experiences, describing project activities as beneficial towards learning course content and instilling confidence that may carry over into other facets of their scholastic and personal lives (Barrett & Jenkins, 2018). Furthermore, service-learning was shown to highly engage minority students and increase meaningful interactions, including relationship building between class participants and the community partner (Sweat et al., 2013). These factors might contribute to findings showing that minority students actively seek service-learning-based courses as the preferred method of instruction (Pearl & Christensen, 2017).

Reflection in ASL

The desire to deepen social awareness and civic-mindedness through experience and reflection is a crucial aspect of ASL. This act of reflecting upon one's service-learning experience helps influence the individual's mindset for dealing with future actions. As defined by Jacoby (2015), "Critical reflection is the process of analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning one's experience within a broad context of issues and content knowledge" (p. 26). Reflection brings previously acquired knowledge together with emerging knowledge obtained through the service-learning experience, combining both knowledge sets to make sense of the multiple levels undergirding the experience. Reflecting on an encounter with academic knowledge creates a host of new questions about the experience, granting the student numerous opportunities to comprehend who they are and who they may want to become moving forward (Collier & Williams, 2005).

The conceptual foundation on reflection in ASL has mainly been influenced by the works of American philosopher and education advocate John Dewey. In Dewey's (1910) *How We Think*, he defines reflection as the "[a]ctive, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 6). When one reflects, they are pondering on the visceral exchanges that happened in a specific moment, connecting sensory cues internalized during the experience to inform budding beliefs. Previous experiences have the power to inform these beliefs, as firsthand knowledge that has been analyzed and corroborated may be built upon for further meaning. Ultimately, then, reflection comes from our logical desire to remedy a situation by examining the conditions of a situation and searching for the method that will direct us to the preferred outcome (Dewey, 1910).

Another resource often used when discussing reflection in ASL is educational philosopher David Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Influenced by Dewey's insights on reflection and the significant role experience plays in the learning process, Kolb (2014) interprets being reflective in the middle of and after an experience as essential for gaining knowledge and applying it to similar scenarios—starting the cycle over again so as to refine those lessons revealed through previous reflections. Applying Kolb's (2014) theoretical perspective on experiential reflection to ASL, reflection "provides

the bridge between the community service activities and the educational content of the course,” wherein students scrutinize using varying perspectives and information acquired in the classroom to broaden their understanding and appreciation of the experience (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999).

Shifting from the theoretical to evidence-based practice, reflecting on one’s community service experience has been shown to produce positive results in select case studies. A constant observed by Eylar and Giles (1999) was that “the quantity and quality of reflection” in ASL was linked to deep-learning attributes, including: (a) the aptitude to apply acquired knowledge towards real-world problem-solving, and (b) being receptive of new concepts with an eye towards promoting social justice (p. 173). In a meta-analysis of service-learning research projects, positive correlations were discovered between ASL and its impact on student attitudes regarding civic engagement, education, and academic achievement, with reflection-based projects yielding notable returns (Celio et al., 2011).

Theoretical Framework for *Rerum* -Inspired Reflection Prompts

Along with ASL’s conceptual understanding of reflection, the other theoretical framework undergirding the formation of the reflection prompts with *Rerum*’s message of sufficiency is Robert K. Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory on listening and awareness. In his well-known work, *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf (1977) states that “the servant leader is servant first ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 13). From this mindset, a servant leader is one who sees in themselves the genuine desire to serve a greater cause over their own ambitions. In recognizing something greater than one’s own ego, the responsible course of action becomes the use of influence to enable others, ensuring that their needs are being fully met (Blanchard, 2003). Part of this giving of oneself to others is being an active listener. The act of listening is often considered a passive approach opposing our natural impulse to be heard. However, servant leaders are urged to listen to multiple narratives, which may bring to light an aspect originally overlooked in the problem-solving phase (Crippen, 2006). This can be accomplished through a conscious effort on the part of leadership to take the necessary time, inviting colleagues to weigh in on the matter being observed. To control distracting thoughts or the desire to speak over another during discussions, Greenleaf (1977) advises the leader to internally ask questions, such as “Are we really listening?... Is our basic attitude as we approach confrontation, one of wanting to understand?,” and “In saying what I have in mind will I really improve on the silence?” (p. 17). Listening improves a leader’s understanding of group expectations (Spears, 2002), better preparing them to enact thoughtful and inclusive solutions.

Developing awareness through daily experiences is an essential component found in servant leadership. Though somewhat different than physically listening to another, enhancing one’s own awareness to situations does requires a similar consciousness as that used in the listening process.

As described by Greenleaf (1996), our environment is rife with encounters that continually invite us to be present in the moment, responding to occurrences with sincere openness. Exercising vigilance and being mindful of these learning opportunities increases awareness, which over time will allow the servant leader to react in an informed and empathic manner. Questions such as “What would I do if I were in the action spots within my view ... What is going on here ... [and] What is likely to happen?” work in tandem with this attentiveness to cultivating awareness (Greenleaf, 1996, p. 38). In listening and being aware, the servant leader may begin to comprehend forthcoming events with an astuteness that helps them decipher what their next steps will resemble and how they must utilize this knowledge to fulfill personal and organizational needs (Jaworski, 1998).

Methodology

To ensure a thorough, systematic approach towards creating reflective questions, two cycles of qualitative coding were employed to further outline *Rerum*'s take on sufficiency, analyzing emergent themes relating to this message. The first cycle in the codification process was open coding, which calls for a thorough reading of the work in which one checks for latent themes aligned with the study's purpose. During this coding stage, it is vital “to find meanings that are present in the text or supported by it” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 365) to determine its relevance for the intended purpose. Here, segments of the work were broken down into clusters and grouped according to their shared attributes as data sets, following Saldana (2009).

The second and final cycle of codification was pattern coding, in which the data sets formed during the open coding stage were further refined for analysis. In this form of meta-analysis, one specifically looks for “themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and [detailing] theoretical constructs” appearing within the data sets (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 70). The resulting themes formed during pattern coding directed the development of questions and prompts for the final list.

The aforementioned content analysis process was interpretive, describing the essence of the major themes via a systematic investigation and reduction of the data (Schreier, 2014). Questions used to analyze *Rerum*'s text to acquire thematic meaning included, “what is the text about? ... who takes part, plays a role? ... what reasons are given in the text or can be deduced from the text? ... what is the purpose, intent? ... and what does this [page] tell us?” (Kuckartz, 2013, 27–28). Care was taken to ensure that the analysis was thorough and that the themes interpreted were directly supported by the text (Gibbs, 2007).

The reflection prompts embody an open approach that allows the ASL student to think and explore various ways to address the questions without necessarily finding a definitive answer. Open questions (from a qualitative interviewing methodology) provide “broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning specific topics specified

Table 1*Sample Coding Table*

Major theme	Subtheme	Paragraph
Intrinsic right to continual resources	Constancy	(I)t must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession; he must have not only things that perish in the use, but those also which, though they have been reduced into use, continue for further use in after time. (para. 6)
	Survival	Man's needs do not die out, but forever recur; although satisfied today, they demand fresh supplies for tomorrow. Nature accordingly must have given to man a source that is stable and remaining always with him, from which he might look to draw continual supplies. (para. 7)
	Lawfully acquiring resources	[W]orking for gain is creditable, not shameful, to a man, since it enables him to earn an honorable livelihood; but to misuse men as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers—that is truly shameful and inhuman. (para. 20)

by the interviewer” (Roulston, 2010, p. 12). In this case, the ASL student will be both interviewer and interviewee, using the list to guide their reflections. Likewise, the student may find additional questions that come to mind while using the prompts, encouraging deeper reflections.

***Rerum*-Related Themes Leading to Sufficiency**

The coding cycles applied to *Rerum* resulted in the following themes related to the overarching premise of supporting the needs of others, leading to empowerment and self-sufficiency: (a) opportunity to obtain resources; (b) intrinsic right to continual resources; and (c) communal support of families & dependents.

The first theme, opportunity to obtain resources, speaks to the notion that an individual should expect and receive an equitable share from their output. *Rerum* (1891) affirms that laborers utilize their skills to make raw materials into readily used goods that sustain society and contribute to the common good. For everyone to benefit from the selfsame goods at the exclusion of those who had a direct hand in the production is morally unjust. In Pope Leo XIII's (1891) words, “As effects follow their cause, so is it just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have

bestowed their labor” (para. 10). Therefore, the propitious treatment of workers occurs when those in power distribute resources that benefit their employees’ wellbeing, akin to how the employee has contributed to their employer’s advantage. This mutually beneficial act aligns with a justice-based standpoint of giving an individual their due, honoring a deeper, biological, and spiritual need for survival. As such, acquiring resources extends beyond the individual, branching off to their dependents who might not have the means of supporting themselves financially. This ties into a non-negotiable tenet—“a most sacred law of nature”—that a person be allotted the means to care for their household (Leo XIII, 1891. para. 13).

The intrinsic right to continual resources was another prevalent theme identified in *Rerum*’s text. Offering resources to sustain oneself is not a provisional act that has an expiration date. Instead, natural resources are to be cultivated and used for maintaining quality of life, since

[m]an’s needs do not die out, but forever recur; although satisfied today, they demand fresh supplies for tomorrow. Nature accordingly must have given to man a source that is stable and remaining always with him, from which he might look to draw continual supplies. (para. 7)

Throughout *Rerum*, Pope Leo XIII emphasizes that God has bestowed natural resources from which all of humanity can prosper, no matter what stake an individual has in a venture. Owning property or being wealthy is not considered a violation of this law, as everyone has a right to secure a comfortable future for themselves and their dependents. Additionally, *Rerum* (1891) acknowledges that everyone has different skills, which naturally lends itself to inequities in earning potential. What goes against this law is “the pursuit of gain” that causes ownership to treat their employees badly, including the hoarding of recurring resources and/or the majority of assets needed to live reasonably (Leo XIII, para. 20). To safeguard continual resources, *Rerum* (1891) stresses the importance of unions and their role as stewards for the welfare of employees. For that reason, unions are expected “to try to arrange [for employees] a continuous supply of work at all times and seasons; as well as to create a fund out of which members may be helped with their needs (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 58).” This expectation of ensuring the physical and spiritual health of individuals is attributed to and supported by divine law. In sum, “The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime” (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 44).

Whereas the union is called to protect the worker’s interests, the surrounding community is also asked to support their fellow human beings. In the final theme, communal support of families & dependents, *Rerum* (1891) contends that the family unit possesses the innate right to run their household as they see fit as long as each individual is taken care of with dignity and respect. In turn, “[i]f a family finds itself in exceeding distress, utterly deprived of the counsel of friends, and without any prospect of extricating itself, it is right that extreme necessity be met by public aid” (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 14). The family is elevated in the eyes of the Church, as it is seen as the foundation where individuals are nurtured both physically and spiritually, being in communion with God’s natural law

(Leo XIII, 1891).

Expectations of the community to support families translates to a constant vigilance to ensure that families are not being taken advantage of, even within those associations that are expected to assist them in securing a better life. Achieving this state of sufficiency for a family and all of its members requires that when the family “is threatened with harm, which can in no other way be met or prevented,” the community must be ready to lend a helping hand using public resources and programs designed to alleviate hardships (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 36). Similarly, if wages are being withheld, this hinders an individual’s ability to support themselves and their dependents, and thus “the public authority should intervene” to make certain justice is obtained (Leo XIII, 1891, para. 43). In each instance, protecting and providing for the survival of the family unit should be at the heart of all decision-making activities.

List of ASL Reflection Prompts

The themes that emerged from coding *Rerum*’s text indicate that being supportive towards the needs of others can be achieved when one recognizes that every human being should be given the opportunity to obtain resources without having obstacles needlessly imposed on them. Moreover, this God-given right to acquire resources is a continual process, demanding that stakeholders conceive of potential solutions for fulfilling this need. Supporting the needs of others is not a solitary task, but one that should be taken up by the entire community, especially in the case of families that lack resources for their daily subsistence.

Drawing on the identified themes in *Rerum* of being supportive towards others, ASL’s understanding of student reflection, and servant leadership’s core value of putting others’ needs first, the following *Rerum*-related reflection prompts were created to direct students in their ASL experiences towards becoming ethical leaders:

- How has supporting the needs of your community partner informed your ideas on resource allocation for those populations and non-profit organizations making up the community? (Theme #1: opportunity to obtain resources)
- While participating in your service-learning project, describe the community partner’s reaction to having their mutually agreed upon needs met. Based on the observed reaction, reflect on the impact of this project on the community partner and how you might use this experience to advocate for other groups to have the opportunity to obtain much-needed resources and/or services. (Theme #1: opportunity to obtain resources).
- Did any of the community partner’s needs change based on circumstances that required the service or resources to be altered to match their most recent needs? If so, how did the challenge to obtain the new resources or services impact you and your community partner? If the community

partner's needs remained the same, what challenges occurred during the delivery of the agreed-upon resources? (Theme #1: opportunity to obtain resources).

- Think back to a specific moment from your service-learning experience that had a profound effect on you and the community partner with whom you were interacting at that time. Would that moment have been possible without the service or resources you helped to contribute to the community partner? Is it possible for this moment to grow into something lasting without such resources and services? (Theme #1: opportunity to obtain resources; and Theme #2: intrinsic right to continual resources).

- Why do you think that a continual stream of resources or services is vital for sustaining a community partner and their vision for those they serve? (Theme #2: intrinsic right to continual resources)

- Now that the service-learning project is near or at the completion stage, consider how the services you supplied the community partner might be missed. Is there a way in which a plan can be set in place with the community partner to continue providing the support they need to move forward? Map out one to three potential methods for ensuring the continual support of your community partner. (Theme #2: intrinsic right to continual resources)

- Reflect upon the population you work with and have been assisting during your service-learning experience. How do you think your service might have extended beyond the individual to have a positive impact on the individual's families and/or dependents? (Theme #3: communal support of families & dependents)

- How does the service actively take into account the needs of the family and/or dependents of the individual being assisted during the service-learning project? If not, what steps can be taken to include the family and/or dependents of the individual to ensure that they are also receiving support? (Theme #3: communal support of families & dependents)

The above-mentioned reflection prompts are modeled after each of the three themes in *Rerum* identified by the coding process. To improve upon and achieve deeper personal insights, the prompts were formed for continuous reflection throughout the stages of the service-learning process, challenging students to express their perceptions with fellow stakeholders, such as the community partner, classmates, and instructors (Eyler & Giles, 1996). This process culminated in reflection prompts that can inform students on how they have grown in light of their experience, helping them shape their decision-making activities and discover the kind of ethical leaders they want to be, moving forward.

Discussion

Utilizing *Rerum* to create thoughtful and poignant reflection prompts may further provide robust ASL experiences grounded in Catholic social thought. While *Rerum* is a foundational

document in the canon of social-justice-inspired Church teachings, there are numerous other writings that have built upon *Rerum's* message of humanity and caring for others (Davis, 2015). Ensuing Papal encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), *Laborem Exercens* (1981), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) have reaffirmed *Rerum's* talking points on human dignity for newer generations, reinterpreting the need for supporting workers and their families in a humane and equitable manner. Continuing in the tradition of *Rerum* are the modern encyclicals, such as *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), in which Pope Benedict XVI extolls the virtues of justice, calling for the global community to refine principles that seek truthfulness and promote love for all of God's people. Each of these works—including other Church-endorsed documents (see the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' [2020] *Foundational Documents*)—provide clarity of purpose and direction for service-learning practitioners interested in developing additional reflection prompts other than those presented in this article.

Service-learning is deeply entrenched in social justice and advocating on behalf of those whose voices may be too constrained to create significant change. In seeing that service-learning may also empower faculty members to search for and enhance intercultural understanding (Buchanan et al., 2019), adding Catholic social teachings to course curricula could provide a more profound spiritual component to subsequent service-learning pre-training and student projects. Likewise, these teachings can provide students with a theoretical framework for interacting with community partners, acknowledging and celebrating their innate human dignity while working side-by-side in a mutually supportive atmosphere.

Reflection is the main academic deliverable, showing the students' personal growth throughout the entirety of the service-learning experience. Offering a structured approach to writing a reflection is recommended for fully demonstrating this progress to faculty, external stakeholders, and classmates who shared in the journey. *Rerum* and other Catholic social documents can provide that structure—to allow students to explore ideas they might not have previously considered, and give them a language to express the enormity of the experience. (Sanders et al., 2016)

Conclusion

Three themes emerged from the text of Pope Leo XIII's (1891) encyclical *Rerum Novarum* with specific reference to providing support towards self-sufficiency: (a) opportunity to obtain resources; (b) intrinsic right to continual resources; and, (c) communal support of families and dependents. Though these themes originated from a 19th-century work on employer/employee relations, the needs we all have as human beings and the ethical implications aligned with these needs remain relevant. The breadth of knowledge addressed in this encyclical—such as human dignity, honoring the dignity found in labor, and God's desire for us to live fulfilling lives—provides students with a strong foundation to begin their reflective inquiries. Providing a starting point upon which students

can build their reflection prompts can lead to questions that demonstrate their critical thinking skills along with their growing knowledge of Catholic social thought.

ASL is a pedagogical practice that aligns itself with serving a community need while reinforcing the course curriculum with reflection acting as the adhesive, promoting a deeper learning experience for students. In this article, we combine *Rerum*'s message of being supportive towards the needs of others, leading to empowerment and self-sufficiency, with reflection prompts for making sense of experiences using the social thought of *Rerum*; the aim here is to offer post-secondary students the beginnings of a framework for becoming ethically informed leaders.

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