

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 24

Article 11

10-1-2003

In the First Person: Where Loyalties Lie

Sara L. Jarrett

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Jarrett, Sara L. (2003) "In the First Person: Where Loyalties Lie," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 24, Article 11.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol24/iss1/11>

Where Loyalties Lie

Sara Jarrett

The deliberation about and response to the Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. quoted question began with a rather lengthy reflective process of considering what it truly means to be a faculty member at a Jesuit institution as it relates to the statement. Easy and quick answers were not forthcoming. Initially, I followed a natural faculty instinct to get more information to help answer questions. That led me to re-review the entire Kolvenbach address given in 2000. One comment at the beginning of his address noted that the early Jesuit schools existed to serve the poor, in contrast with today's institutions that exist in the midst of "global wealth, power, and culture." That perspective vividly suggested potential differences, a stark contrast, and seemed to question whether the commitment to the poor was indeed really there today. The document described well what the faculty ought to be doing in the area of promotion of justice in Jesuit higher education. I attempted to identify all the "things" that I have done as a member of the faculty and the University community to communicate and integrate the concepts of social justice and the importance of commitment to the poor in my work. In addition, I considered how my work as a nurse and my work in the community further enhanced my ability to support this defined mission. I noted how I had often marveled and sought comfort in the fact that there are many similarities between the values related to Jesuit mission and social justice and the values espoused by the nursing profession, especially those included in public documents such as the profession's Social Policy Statement and the Code of Ethics. I was certain that there was great congruence and few conflicts

between the Jesuit beliefs about social justice and nursing values. Thus, nursing is simply a natural fit at a Jesuit University.

At this point in my process of reflection and consideration of the Kolvenbach quote, I felt that I had not yet reached the heart of the matter. More questions emerged. What are my own experiences that give me credibility and allow me to say that I make the Jesuit mission of serving the underserved, explicit and relevant in my teaching in the nursing program at a Jesuit university? What are some defining moments and experiences that frame my approaches as I attempt to integrate this Jesuit point of view? Is it not essential if one is to be credible, that one truly discern and identify the source of one's expertise? A critical question, then, is where and how do I serve the poor, the underserved? Some of these defining moments have occurred in the context of service learning activities at the university, others in community and professional activities related to nursing and health care, some in interactions with faculty colleagues, and others in the classroom.

Work with the poor and underserved in our community occurs regularly through service learning activities. Both nursing students and faculty participate. Examples of areas where we work with the poor include homeless shelters, agencies addressing special needs for individuals and groups, assisted living facilities whose residents are underserved, community schools in underserved urban neighborhoods. These experiences add a wealth of information and in

Sara Jarrett is Associate Professor of Nursing at Regis University, Denver, Colorado.

most cases a real enhanced understanding of the realities of the underserved in our community.

In the professional arena, I have made issues of public policy, especially in the area of health care access for all members of our society, an area of special interest. I look for ways to help advocate for the uninsured, unemployed, the homeless, who cannot find a source of health care because they have no insurance. It is an area that raises many difficult and challenging questions. Creating and discussing options for the poor and uninsured most often pose threats to the status quo in the current system in our society.

For over ten years I have been working in Vietnam to help improve both nursing practice and nursing education. When I think about those experiences in the context of this discussion, it is clear that I have learned as much if not more than what my Vietnamese nursing colleagues there have learned from our projects. This work in a third-world country has helped me to understand the true meaning of being poor. These experiences have provided an educated faculty member an opportunity to truly see God in the poor of the world. These defining moments in my experiences influence what I say and do as a faculty in making explicit the Jesuit commitment to the poor and underserved.

This brings me now to the tensions that exist in today's world where educational institutions exist in an environment that Father Kolvenbach described as in the "midst of global wealth, power and culture." The profession of nursing in the United States is mired in conflicts because the health care environment is so focused on a business model and "bottom line" issues. Individuals are rooted in the context of the demands, stressors, busyness, and competitiveness of daily living in American society. Given this scenario of contemporary society, it is difficult to answer to the question of when researching and teaching, where and with whom is my heart? For

me, this is the tension, the conflict. Our very societal environment, the greater community in which I am both a teacher and a nurse, continually competes with the defining commitment of serving the underserved. My heart says one thing; my intellect wants to support my heart; my daily encounters pull me in many different directions; and demands of society and politics in both education and the profession of nursing add further confusion and challenges. Therein lies the tension and the difficulty in determining clearly and inexplicably where and with whom is my heart. I feel that my heart is with the poor in many ways. However, as a faculty member, I believe that I have just begun to truly integrate and make explicit, in relevant ways, the issue of serving the poor. There is more work to do. The tensions described above will continue to challenge both what I do and what I say. If serving the poor is to be the defining commitment of Jesuit education, we must find ways to develop and support faculty that allows that to happen.

OUR VERY SOCIETAL
ENVIRONMENT, THE GREATER
COMMUNITY IN WHICH
I AM BOTH A TEACHER
AND A NURSE, CONTINUALLY
COMPETES WITH THE DEFINING
COMMITMENT OF SERVING
THE UNDERSERVED.