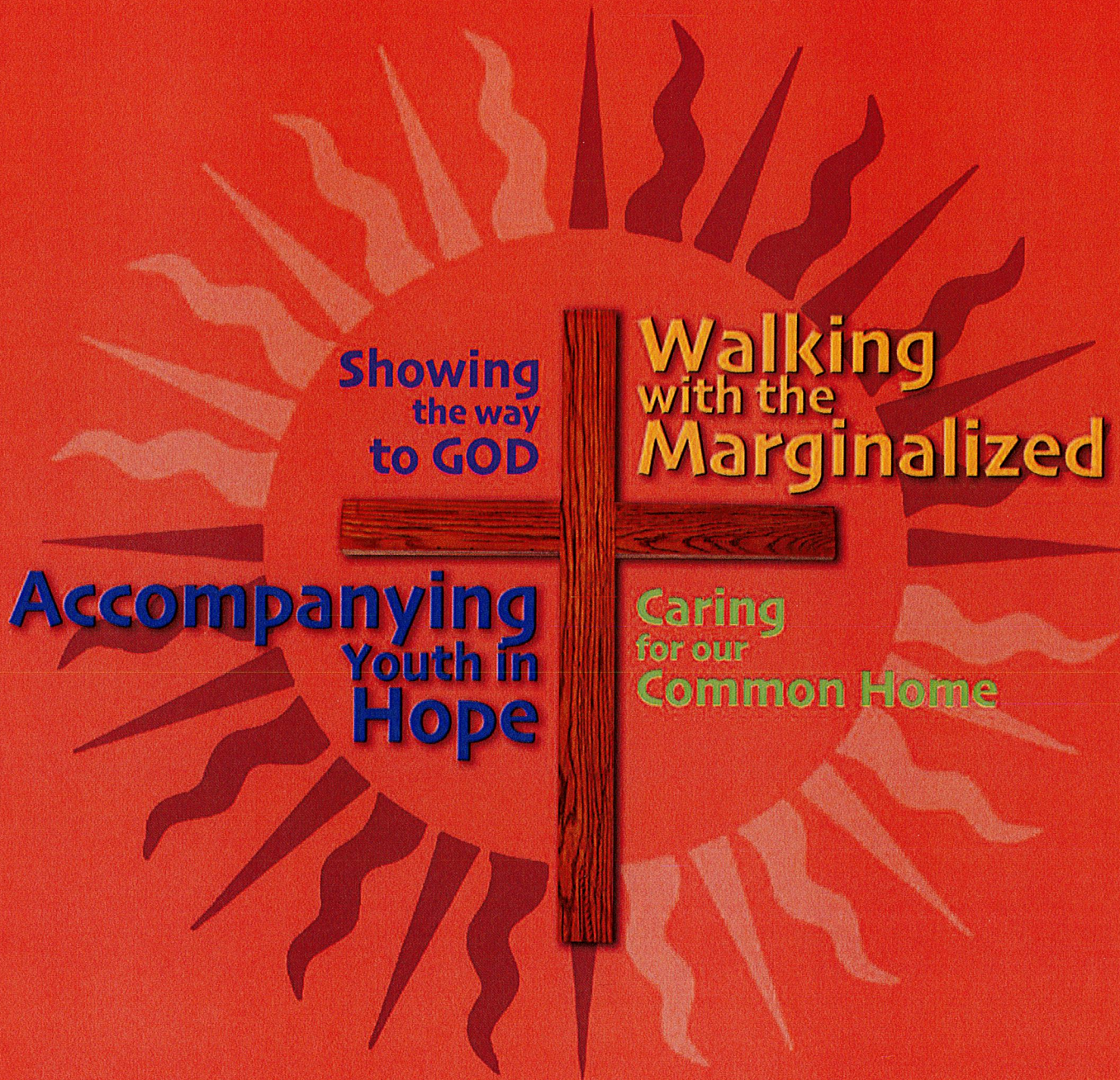


Conversations

On Jesuit Higher Education

Spring 2021
Number 59



Showing
the way
to GOD

Walking
with the
Marginalized

Accompanying
Youth in
Hope

Caring
for our
Common Home

Jesuit Education
and the **Universal Apostolic Preferences**
Second of Two Issues

The Jesuit Mission: Occupational Justice

By Leah S. Dunn

The temporary occupational disruption that so many have experienced as a result of stay-at-home orders implemented to fight the coronavirus pandemic, are, for many, frustrating. But imagine how frustrating it would be to experience such disruption all the time. Recognizing the depth of that frustration ultimately can lead to the recognition that, in fact, millions of people experience this marginalization on a daily basis as a kind of apartheid — a system of segregation based upon limiting access to an experience of purpose and meaning that comes with true occupational justice.

Long-standing marginalization due to life circumstances or systemic constraints, including but not limited to poverty, refugee/asylum seeker status, quarantine, racism and other “isms,” trauma, mental illness, incarceration, substance abuse, homelessness, and others, bring about an occupational marginalization. That is, the inability to participate in desired occupations due to invisible social, political, or cultural norms.

By living our Jesuit mission of walking with the marginalized, we, as educators, can address how prejudice, bias, and systemic constraints affecting our fel-

low neighbor create occupational marginalization and apartheid. Our Jesuit mission of walking with the marginalized calls us to bear witness to this marginalization and apartheid, and to seek occupational jus-

tice. This justice examines the lack of access or limited engagement in desired activities through a social justice perspective to analyze the social, physical, and systemic environments preventing one’s occupational choice. Dominant powers create the structures and systems that allow individuals to “occupate,” often without consideration of their impact on the non-dominant. The inability to participate in desired occupations affects an individual’s sense of purpose and disorganizes their well-being, often leading to a spiral of feelings of uselessness, hopelessness, isolation, and desperation. As humans, we are interdependent beings with the potential to empower others to climb out of this spiral, restoring the marginalized to the larger society.

Occupational apartheid operates intersectionally with other forms of marginalization. The recent spate of tragic killings of African Americans in our country illuminated how opportunities are often not accessible to people of color. Occupations shaped by the powers

that structure society become the standard to which all compare the value and worth of their own occupations. Those outside the dominant culture may have limited access

to the societal-valued occupations through resistance, discouragement, and barriers.

Because they are grounded in a justice-seeking mission, Jesuit colleges and universities are

By walking with others less fortunate, the student is embracing the Jesuit philosophy and spirituality, exemplifying a model of growing awareness.

uniquely equipped to advance a movement to support students who experience occupational injustice and prepare allies to accompany them in their efforts to achieve occupational justice. This begins with awareness through at least some basic interaction within the trenches where marginalized individuals do battle on a daily basis. These experiences include listening to get an inside-out view, walking in solidarity to learn of our fellow humans' plight, and interacting with situations different from our own experience to allow a change in perspective. Jesuit universities have done this well through immersion programs such as alternative breaks, community engagement activities, and semesters of solidarity. Experiencing periods of dissonance ranging from discomfort to recognizing a contradiction to previously held perspectives leads to the transformation of the student.

It should begin by putting the experience of the marginalized people, not their allies, at the center of the discussion. Strong guidance is needed to prevent the fix-it mentality of applying the majority perspective to others, as this promotes a power imbalance. As educators, we must take the time to allow students to process these often emotionally charged conflicts through reflection, to solidify a transformative change in perspective. Reflective practice leads to critical thinking and allows students to consider using their privilege and power to encourage others. A solid program, consisting of structured training and insight from experienced guides will pique the interest of students who might want to bring more harmony among humanity, thus fulfilling a moral commitment to the Society of Jesus.

Those served by these programs may question student motivations to mingle within the margins rather than remaining as a distant observer. Yet, despite the initial distrust, a student's companionship and concern will prevail and allow authentic engagement. By walking with others less fortunate, the student is embracing



the Jesuit philosophy and spirituality, exemplifying a model of growing awareness.

As Jesuit educators, we facilitate the development of the student as a global citizen, who walks in solidarity and uses power and privilege to eradicate the situations that marginalize our fellow neighbors. Understanding of occupational justice requires one to be political — political in one's awareness of structures and systems, political in how votes are cast, political in promoting the human right to occupations, and political in respecting pluralism. Transformative experiences are immensely powerful and long lasting, creating citizens who show care, concern, and compassion for their fellow world inhabitants.

Justice — and humankind overall — is best served when opportunity is available to and accessible to all, and when success is judged by one's progress and self-improvement, rather than compared to the dominant standard.

Leah S. Dunn is an assistant professor in the Occupational Therapy Department at Xavier University.

Small Actions Can Kindle Hope

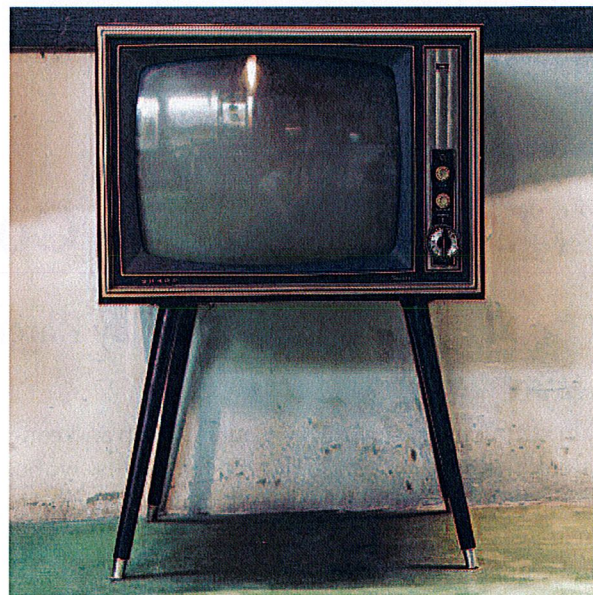
By Norm Townsel

Much of the reading list I give my students is designed to expose them to voices — current and past — of people committed to achieving social justice. But occasionally, I share a personal story that I believe illustrates how hope can be given by even the smallest acts.

Our television was a black and white model, sitting on four wooden legs, in an upstairs bedroom that had been converted into a TV room by my dad. It would, within a year or two, become the bedroom for my baby sister, the third and final child in our clan. However, on that night, I was there alone watching TV and doing other things of interest to an 8-year-old boy. I do not know, now that I look back, why I was in that room alone that evening. As I remember, it was the place where I spent the most time alone with my dad, usually in the evenings. It was in this room that he taught me how to shine my Sunday shoes and how to tie a tie. It was where I learned his laugh, his sense of humor, and his love of sports. It was April 4, 1968, and here today, in 2021, it is a vague and sketchy memory. Yet, I clearly remember at some point the voice on the television saying that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot. As I processed what I had just heard, I also knew that this was something my parents would want to know. I remember running down the stairs and finding my mother first. I remember the look of shock and fear that registered on her face. I will never forget how vulnerable and frightened her reaction made me feel. I have felt that feeling many times since, but this was my introduction to just how cruel the world could be. Now, when I hear or see unfettered evil befall the likes of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Botham Jean, Philando Castille, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Samuel Dubose, John Crawford, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and many, many more, I feel the same way.

I remember that my father, a local minister and civil rights activist, spent a long time on the phone

that evening, and then left the house. I do not remember seeing him again that night. At some point in the evening, my mother took me outside and we sat together on the front porch watching the activity in the street. I did not have the words for it at the time, but as I look back, what we were watching together was a riot. I clearly remember that the look of fear that had been on my mother's face a few hours before, was now completely gone.



I would not say that she was angry. That face would have frightened me as well. I would say, instead, that a look and air of determination had replaced her initial shock, and her attitude gave me comfort. I do not know if we were sitting there making sure that nothing untoward happened to our home, or if my father was somewhere close by and she had brought me along to wait for him. I only know that the events of the evening left a mark on my soul that I feel to this day.

In the days to come, my classmates, who were 99.9% Black, as well as the teachers in the elementary

school that I attended, were all affected. Three years earlier, my father had led a strike of the school system asking that the district open its hiring policies and begin to place qualified Black teachers in the schools. As a result, over 50% of the teachers I had from kindergarten through sixth grade were Black. We all felt that the murder of Dr. King was an assault on our very existence. The impact of having Black teachers help us process these emotions, while staying on task with our education, was immense. As I reflect, much of the influence those teachers had on me and my fellow classmates came not so much from what they said, but from them quietly modeling the same determination and resolve that my parents did on that fateful night.

Many years later, I came to know a man who shared a story with me about the night of Dr. King's murder. He told me that he was out that night, throwing bottles, bricks, and breaking the windows

of businesses in our community that were owned by Whites who lived elsewhere. He told me that one of the White owners had come to his business that night, brandishing a weapon, trying to protect his property. He told me that a large confrontation ensued, with the crowd growing increasingly unruly and police on the scene. He said to me that my father stopped him that night from doing something that he would probably have been very sorry for later. I asked him what he had been planning to do and he did not answer, just shook his head.

I asked him, "What did my father do?" He replied, "He just showed me he loved me." I am not sure how to teach students to be resolute. What I am sure of is we must continue to try because that work is not done, and our students need people who love them.

Norm Townsel is clinical coordinator for counselor education in Xavier University's Department of Counseling.

Consistency, Community, Hope

By Karen Adkins

I am sitting in front of my computer screen and consistently tearing up as I look at my students' work. Normally, I am not a crier, and while online teaching frustrates me, it has yet to reduce me to tears. So, why am I crying?

I suppose I am crying because I am moved by my students' attestations to their experience of hope within the context of a consistent community. I suppose I am crying because I realize that, frankly, my students consistently give me so much hope.

I teach in Regis University's En Route program, supervising a seminar of first-year students for a fall writing course and a spring philosophy course, enhanced and informed by students' yearlong commitment of weekly service at a single community site. Students end their year making presentations, modeled on the NPR series *This I Believe*, where they tell a story from their service experience and reflect on how it reinforced, complicated, or challenged a core belief

of theirs. Students normally present first to the class, then at a culminating event with community and campus members.

These presentations are always meaningful for the students to prepare and for the rest of us to experience. But the pandemic threw a wrench into our plans in spring 2020; students had started brainstorming and drafting a mere two weeks before we closed our campus. At our first Zoom session, I gave them the option of simply not doing the project. But I was secretly delighted when they chose to continue, since working with them as they draft, revise, and submit is generally my favorite part of the year. When the time came, we circulated their work to everyone in the class before our final Zoom session so we could in some way replicate our customary culminating discussion.

Common themes often emerge in presentations. One year, many students described moments of being shamed in their service work and how those mo-