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Service-Learning, character education and spirituality
in a Catholic University

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SECOND PART

Higher Education and Youth Leadership: Reflections on Positive, Socially Responsible Leadership





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10. SERVICE-LEARNING, CHARACTER EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY IN A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Service-learning should aim to form people so they can live well in a world worth living in. The Christian faith conviction that we as humans have a common telos, that there is an ultimate common good, or highest good, that is God, is central to any Catholic concept of service. The practice of the virtues, through service, is the road to this spiritual end. When students engage in meaningful acts of service, there is a “double benefit”: a contribution to the common good of society and the building of one’s own character. Service to others is, therefore, an important virtue to cultivate in students. In this chapter we adopt a character education lens to describe how service and service-learning might be understood in terms of spirituality and the role of Catholic universities. We will describe how Catholic universities traditionally have many features that make them well placed to cultivate the civic virtue of service – required for engaged and responsible citizenship. We will also show how service-learning programmes might be enhanced by focussing on five key-findings from character education research and how these contribute to young people developing habits of service.

Introduction

This chapter is written in two parts. The first part offers a theology of service learning for Catholic universities. It explores how we are made for relationship with God and with each other. Service-learning should aim to form people so they can live well in a world worth living in. The second part provides some recent research on service-learning and discusses the practical implications of this for Catholic universities. When students engage in meaningful acts of service, there is a “double benefit”: a contribution to the common good of society and the building of one’s own character. Service to others is, therefore, an important virtue to cultivate in students. Throughout this chapter we adopt a character education lens to describe how service and service-learning might be understood in terms

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of spirituality and the role of Catholic universities. We will describe how Catholic universities traditionally have many features that make them well placed to cultivate the civic virtue of service – required for engaged and responsible citizenship. We will also show

how service-learning programmes might be enhanced by focussing on research related to character education and how this contributes to young people developing habits of service.

The Theological Foundations of Service-Learning

In a Catholic university, service is conceived as having a definite theological and philosophical purpose. Without a doctrinal foundation the Catholic notion of service-learning has no meaning. Christian theology is the wisdom which explains, defends, judges, and guides the process of service-learning. Christian theology commits the educator to a number of claims: the existence of God; belief in the afterlife; belief in a *telos* for humanity; belief in the Holy Spirit and in the Christian claims about Jesus Christ. These all have an impact on our idea and practice of service, and without such claims becoming personal beliefs, there cannot be authentic Christian service-learning. Beliefs make a difference to what we do and to what we teach. However, these claims are not necessarily realised in a merely nominal Christian context: (that is, in an institution that calls itself “Christian”, through education by teachers who are Christian or education received by students who are Christian). As Max Bonilla (2018, p. 26) observes:

A key point to recognize is that a Catholic university is not Catholic because it has crucifixes in its classrooms, because it has an active office of pastoral ministry, and because the sacraments are frequented by students and professors. It is, furthermore, not Catholic because it can claim a percentage, however important, of subjects in its curriculum that deal with philosophy, theology, or the Church’s social doctrine. Rather, what makes a university Catholic is primarily the specific way in which it uses reason in all facets of university life and, therefore, in the way it seeks truth and love. In other words, a vision of the human person is required where reason is used in a particular way that is coherent with the Catholic nature of the university. This is a countercultural approach, counter to a secular culture that has for the last several centuries existed in university life. It is an approach that can only be successful if it is based on a solid and mature understanding

of what it means to be human. This is the task that appears to be essential because, if not, Catholic universities will continue to run into insurmountable obstacles related to an increased secular vision of life.

There are many Catholic universities which appear to adopt a secular justification for service-learning and lack an explicit Christian theology of service. Yet if service-learning is not theologically grounded then it can easily collapse into politically motivated programmes and hence undermine the unique Catholic view of service-learning.

There are indeed many Catholic universities which appear to adopt a secular justification for service-learning and lack an explicit Christian theology of service. Yet if service-learning is not theologically grounded then it can easily collapse into politically motivated programmes and hence undermine the unique Catholic view of service-learning.

As is commonly expressed in their mission statements Catholic institutions claim that service-learning is an indispensable element of their Catholic identity. However, both secular and faith-based Universities use the term, “service-learning”, and both have outstanding examples of service-learning programmes that appear very similar. Catholic institutions have no monopoly in programmes that serve the poor and marginalised. Therefore, should students and graduates in a Catholic college or university have a greater commitment to service-learning than those in secular institutions? If so, can they explain why this should be so and what the Catholic difference is? Is it not the case that all education is ultimately used in the service of others? Is it also not the case that the Catholic view of service-learning is radically different from the secular because it has a different anthropology and hence a different notion of human development?

Service-learning should aim to form people so they can live well in a world worth living in. The Christian faith conviction that we as humans have a common *telos* (purpose), that there is an ultimate common good, or highest good, that is God, - is central to any Catholic concept of service-learning. The practice of the virtues of sharing, caring and cooperation, through their integration into service-learning, is the road to this essentially spiritual end. It grounds service and the virtues in relation to a person’s creation in the image of God that accepts that we are each unique unities of body and soul, endowed with intellect, will, instinct, and emotion. We are human beings because we are made in the image of God (*Genesis: 1: 26-28*) and this is central to the Christian understanding of service. *Imago Dei* is the basis for our relational capacity with one another and God. It is therefore by good acts

that human beings contribute to the formation and understanding of their service-learning, and each person must decide whether they wish God's image to be reflected in them by co-operating with God's grace. This is because there is a wide gap between *knowing* and *doing*. Service to others is not secured through an intellectual education alone, but requires prayer, communal worship and a certain sacrifice on behalf of the student. Human beings need more than *information* – they need *motivation*, which faith can provide. The living out of a life of service consists in the exercise of the moral virtues, and this is ordinarily dependent on understanding and prudence. However, the Christian moral life must always constitute a personal encounter with God – an intimate relationship with the Divine through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Garcia-Contreras (2011, pp. 284-285) sums up the purpose of one Catholic university's service-learning programme:

Service-learning programs at the University of St. Thomas are, in essence, a concrete effort to promote solidarity, to foster human dignity, and to cultivate love. Solidarity is manifested through the very nature of the program. Program participants' lives are enriched by the shared experience of working with one another. Human dignity is fostered by the program's ability to recognize everyone involved as human beings with similar fears, goals, and aspirations. The program is, moreover, capable of transforming anyone's life regardless of the limitations of his/her own circumstances.

This approach reminds us that transformation through service-learning also involves spiritual formation.

Service-learning is indeed a concrete way of putting Gospel values into action, but it is also a spiritual exercise guided by Catholic social teaching. This can only be achieved through prayer and spiritual renewal that allow the Holy Spirit to work within us so that we can pray in solidarity with those who are vulnerable. We need to prayerfully discern and identify the actions to be taken. We need to make our theology practical. Consequently, we can gain a special knowledge, a kind of instinctive moral understanding, which is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit who potentially enters into the soul of every human being and transforms their actions. Christian wisdom goes beyond acquired knowledge; its capacity extends to the *correct application of knowledge so that*

Ultimately, worship aids our thinking and acting in the right ways in order that our spiritual growth becomes an outcome of participation in service-learning.

we can possess good sense and good judgement. Ultimately, worship aids our thinking and acting in the right ways in order that our spiritual growth becomes an outcome of participation in service-learning.

Christians are called by God “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (*Romans* 8:29-30), to “put on Christ”, to “follow Christ”, and to “be transformed into the likeness of Christ”. Christ is ‘the way, and the truth and the life’ (*John* 14: 6). The human person can be seen as: (a) bodily, (b) rational, (c) volitional, (d) relational, (e) substantially one, (f) created by God in his image, (g) weakened by sin, and (h) invited to become a member of the body of Christ through baptism. We are human beings, with a spiritual and immortal soul, gifted with intelligence and free will and made in the image and likeness of God. If we love God then we must love other humans whom God has created as each is an expression of His nature, an *imago dei*. Service thus flows from having experienced the love of God ourselves. Service must therefore be motivated to share God’s love with others which makes service-learning a religious act. The reason prayer is integral to service-learning is because it is a means of expressing God’s love and of seeking God’s help in the service of others. Each person bears the dignity of being made in the Image of God, and this dignity is promoted when, aided by grace, we choose to perform good human acts. However, sin alienates us from God, we cannot reach perfection in this life or even proceed towards it without God’s grace. It is also sin that disrupts our relationships with one another. Sin darkens our sight, unsettles our desires and weakens our will. Sin and its effects can be diminished and ultimately overcome through Jesus who invites us into a relationship with God. Yet although the ability to act virtuously comes principally through grace, it is not without co-operation and effort on our part.

Human beings have a natural inclination to follow and pursue the good; in other words, we have a natural capacity to discern between good and evil. Good is done when a person acts in a way that is authentically human, and a good life makes flourishing possible. It follows therefore, that the mind that is illuminated by God’s grace and guided by reason will grow in the service of others. This transformative process is ongoing and life-long and requires an openness, willingness, and commitment to be so transformed. As humans, we are always in a state of God-given potentiality, and the acquisition of virtues transforms us, not simply through gaining philosophical wisdom, but by becoming more Christlike. Since the good life for Catholics is holiness, it is to that end service-learning is truly directed: becoming what God wants us to be. God gives us unique capacities and is delighted when they are used well.

Catholic social teaching shows us that we can shape the social order around us and therefore we have moral responsibilities to do so. We bear religious responsibilities for the kind of “Kingdom” we build on earth. These responsibilities are this-worldly, but they are also transcendent and focused upon the salvation of our soul. There is a necessary connection between *metaphysics* (who I am as a rational social animal) *ethics* (achievement of happiness through living the virtues) *politics* (promotion of the common good) and re-

ligion (God as the beginning and end of all reality). Catholic social teaching informs us that the vision we have of service is something we strive towards as it is never fully realised. Our intellect is limited and can prevent us from living-up to the vision we set out to achieve, but to a much greater extent human sinfulness is by far the biggest barrier to us achieving our vision. Nevertheless, if we encounter something unjust, we must, as Christians, seek to set it right. The notion of Christian service transcends the temporal, the material, and the secular and points towards the eternal, the spiritual, and the religious. It is not simply about what ought I to do, but also what ought I to *be* and *become*. Christians are called by God to serve, and Catholic universities promote an “integral human development” that seeks the all-round flourishing of every person and community.

In summary, the Christian notion and practice of service is unique because its source is our restoration in Christ. It is about modelling Christ-like character virtues, particularly His servanthood, and is motivated by God’s love. Service-learning is understood in the light of Christ and the Catholic faith which transforms us. It is not “do-goodism”, as it must be an expression of God’s love for us and our love for Christ combined with our fidelity to the Church. Christian service learning must lead to practical acts of faith in action and must be a fundamental component of every Catholic college and university. Service-learning is a form of Christian witness and evangelisation. Graduates of Catholic institutions are expected to have a commitment to Christ’s command to serve in a just, love-affirming, liber-

Service-learning programmes in Catholic universities must have theological underpinnings that serve a spiritual purpose.

ating and life-giving way. Service-learning programmes in Catholic universities must have theological underpinnings that serve a spiritual purpose.

We now turn to the second part of this chapter to explore some recent research we, the authors, have undertaken on service that we believe may offer some useful insights for Catholic institutions.

A Habit of Service

Between 2015 and 2017 we in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues in the University of Birmingham undertook a study in the UK to find out what factors make it more or less likely that young people will develop a habit of service (Arthur et al., 2017). Over four and half thousand 16–20-year-olds participated in the research, making it the largest study of its kind in the world. In the study we defined a habit as a behaviour that has been

performed frequently in the past and is likely to be performed again in the future (Astin et al., 1998; Lally et al., 2010; Marta et al., 2014). We wanted to know what factors encourage or hinder young people to engage in habitual acts of service. Our findings provide evidence as to where Catholic universities might target their activities when initiating or developing their service-learning offer to students.

One of the most interesting findings from our research was that children who first get involved in service under the age of 10 were found to be more than two times more likely to have formed a habit of service than if they started aged 16–18 years old. Clearly, this means that students who arrive at university and have been exposed to service-learning experiences from a younger age are more likely to be predisposed to take part in service-learning activities whilst on campus. Given that Catholic universities are attractive to students of a Catholic faith, which promotes the virtue of service, many incoming students might have already formed a habit of service. Furthermore, research conducted in the UK shows that 10–20-year-olds who are involved in meaningful social action are slightly more likely to be religious (Pye & Michelmore, 2017). This is reinforced by a study which showed that young people who see religion as important to them are more likely to be involved in service than those who do not see religion as important (Youniss, McLellan and Yates, 1999, pp. 247-248).

Our research provides an indication of the areas on which Catholic universities should focus if they hope to ensure their service-learning offer cultivates a habit of service in their students, particularly those not already predisposed to the virtues. Five important findings show how these might inform the features of a successful campus-based service-learning programme. Those five findings identify that those who have made a habit of service are more likely than those who have not, to recognise the double benefit, attend an educational establishment where service is embedded in its culture and ethos, identify with civic and moral exemplars, believe they have the times skills and opportunities to undertake acts of service, and had an opportunity to critically reflect on their act of service. These five findings can be related to the following features on which Catholic universities should focus:

- ▶ **Recognise the double benefit:** Catholic universities should support students to take part in service that develops character whilst also making a meaningful difference to others and society more broadly.
- ▶ **Attend an educational establishment where service is embedded in its culture and ethos:** Catholic universities should ensure their service-learning programmes are well planned and clearly communicated so that all students and staff know about them.

- ▶ **Identify with civic and moral exemplars:** Catholic universities should expose students to exemplars of civic and moral virtues and help students to develop their own virtue identity.
- ▶ **Believe they have the time, skills and opportunities to undertake acts of service:** Catholic universities should take steps to remove any perceived or actual barriers to service-learning.
- ▶ **Had an opportunity to critically reflect on their act of service:** Catholic universities should build in opportunities to reflect into their service learning programmes.

Recognise the double benefit of service

When young people engage in meaningful acts of service, there is a “double benefit”: a contribution to the common good of society and the formation of one’s own character (Arthur et al., 2017). Our Habits of Service research showed that when young people believe their activities are socially impactful, whilst also developing their character, they are more likely to continue to serve. It is therefore important that university students undertaking service-learning programmes are both aware of the double benefit and more importantly take part in volunteering opportunities that are both meaningful and character building.

Catholic universities should help their students engage in authentic experiences that have a clear benefit to an individual, group or cause. These activities might be formally arranged by the university or signposted to students through regular communications. It is important that universities work with local community organisations, charities and other non-profits to identify projects and activities that tackle a social issue. Once identified the activities should be audited to see how students, taking into account their knowledge, skills and availability, are able to contribute positively and meaningfully. In our research we found that it was more important for those engaged in acts of service to see the impact of their activities on others, than measuring the scale of this impact. The onus is on universities to find activities that will enable most students to experience the “warm glow” (Andreoni, 1990) that comes from contributing to the common good.

The other side of the double benefit is character formation. Undertaking service, particularly structured activities, can be a great way for students to develop new skills, competencies and knowledge. It can also be a great way for them to develop character – to cultivate virtues, including compassion, courage, and justice, from undertaking meaningful acts of service. The cultivating and honing of moral, civic and intellectual virtues should be viewed as core to service-learning as it both empowers students to have a clearer sense of their place in their world as well as helping them to evaluate the purpose of their own

lives. It can also increase their sense of belonging to and connection with the university and its local community.

When a virtue becomes a habit, there is an element of rational, autonomous and critical thinking required to respond to different situations. (...) Service-learning is an effective way to help students to form character qualities during their time at Catholic universities. Through real-life experiential learning, they develop not only character virtues, but also the critical capacities to know when an act of service will be meaningful and benefit others.

It is important to stress at this point that to possess a habit of service or another virtue cannot be a form of automated behaviour, just as service-learning cannot be a form of rote learning. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle contends that “‘habit’ means a disposition according to which that which is disposed is either well or ill disposed, and either in itself or with reference to something else” (Aristotle, 2007, V, 20).

Here Aristotle reminds us that there is a situational and therefore cognitive element to any habit of virtue we might develop. When a virtue becomes a habit, there is an element of rational, autonomous and critical thinking required to respond to different situations. This is why Aristotle made such a large play of the so-called meta virtue of *phronesis*. *Phronesis*, commonly translated as practical wisdom, has experienced a renaissance in recent years (see, for example, Grossmann et al., 2020; Darnell et al., 2019). Classified as an intellectual virtue, it is also more than an intellectual virtue (Jubilee Centre, 2017). It is the overall quality of knowing what to do and what not to do when the demands of two or more qualities clash. It is the quality of knowing how to hit the so-called “sweet spot” of any particular virtue to ensure there is not a deficiency or excess. It is the quality of knowing the acceptable course of action in any given online situation. It requires that we possess intellectual character virtues including discernment, critical reasoning, and good judgement, while also knowing how to apply these in online interactions. So, *phronesis* will help students understand what acts of service are important, in what situations and in what amount. Calls have been made recently by the Jubilee Centre and the Oxford Character Project for universities to focus on practical wisdom as a key virtue to help students flourish now and in the future (Jubilee and OCP, 2020; Arthur, 2021).

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Service learning embedded in the University culture and ethos

The #iwill Campaign, managed by Step up to Serve, ran in the UK between 2012 and 2020. The campaign's mission was to increase the number of 10–20-year-olds participating in youth social action – broadly understood as undertaking acts of meaningful service to others. At the heart of the campaign's mission were the 6 quality principles which, it was argued, defined good service-learning programmes. One of the six principles was that service-learning should be embedded into the day to day activities of schools, colleges and universities. Our research showed that when service is embedded into the culture and ethos of educational establishments, young people are more likely to have made a habit of service.

A Catholic university can make the claim that their service-learning programme is embedded when it cuts through everything they do – like the words on a stick of rock. Given that service and charity are central to many religions, including Christianity, it is likely that Catholic universities are predisposed to embedding service-learning programmes that are centrally organised and offered to all students learning on campus or even remotely. As we described in part one of this chapter this cannot be assumed. Over time, approaches to service-learning that are built on tradition alone, can lose focus. This can lead to a situation where a Catholic university assumes they are offering service-learning opportunities to their students, without being fully aware of what these are and where they take place. This is not to say that Catholic universities cannot successfully promote service-learning implicitly through the culture and ethos of the university, just that sometimes it is good to take stock, reflect and if necessary, revise programmes. This would require universities to ask questions such as: how do our students know that we prioritise service-learning? Where can our students find out about service learning? Are our students given time, support and recognition for undertaking service-learning activities? Catholic universities that are intentional, planned and reflective in their endeavours to promote service-learning are more likely to develop habits of service in their students.

To be planned, intentional and reflective requires university leaders to be on board. It is the leaders who will ensure that the universities commitment to service-learning is lived not laminated. By this we mean that it is not just simply mentioned in a university's mission and goals, but that there is an active flourishing service-learning programme of which all staff and students are aware of and in which many on campus take part in. Leaders can ensure that the university's commitment to service-learning are clearly communicated to students (Gaskin, 1998). Of course, leaders can only do so much, and it is the university teaching and non-teaching staff who must reflect on what they are doing to embed service-learning opportunities into their work – whether it be research, teaching or other

areas such as careers and extracurricular activities. A good sign that service-learning has been embedded is that students know why service-learning matters as well as have an array of service-learning opportunities in which they can take part.

Universities can embed service-learning into the university culture through recognition and reward. Our research showed that recognising and rewarding those who have undertaken acts of service was positively linked to individuals who had made a habit of service. When we probed this finding in interviews with some of the research participants, they told us that recognition and reward were welcome but not expected. They expressed a concern that service should not be driven by extrinsic motivations, for example just so they could add something to their CV or because there was a badge of honour for participation. Also, the interviewees told us that recognition need not be grand and might be a simple act of gratitude such as saying, “thank you”. For most interviewees this was reason enough to continue to be involved. Universities need to think about what level of recognition is suitable for service-learning as they should be mindful of students only signing up to programmes for more instrumental reasons. If recognition and rewards encourage students to get involved initially and sustain their participation, then these might be said to be well targeted.

Identify with moral and civic exemplars

The virtues can be considered the building blocks of character (Jubilee Centre, 2017). The virtues, in themselves, can be further broken down into their component parts. One of the components, in the Jubilee Centre Framework (2017), is virtue identity - defined as understanding oneself as strongly committed to the virtues. For example, those who undertake acts of service are likely to see these acts contributing to their identity. Our research showed that those who identified with exemplars of moral and civic behaviour were more likely to have made a habit of service. Furthermore, they had friends whom they felt would support this self-assessment. Interestingly the association with the virtues was so strong that the respondents with a habit of service were more familiar with all four virtue types – performance and intellectual as well as moral and civic (Jubilee Centre, 2017). Deeper analysis of the data showed that the act of service itself drove the virtue association and embedded a recognition and identification with all of the virtue types (Taylor-Collins et al., 2019).

Our research suggests that Catholic Universities that support their students to participate in service-learning can instigate a virtuous circle. The act of service not only strengthens virtue identity and a habit of service, it can also provide exemplars that will inspire others to take part. When students are exposed to exemplars it is more likely that a culture of ser-

vice-learning will take hold across campus. Wider research on exemplars in volunteering adds some weight to this idea. Exemplars expect to see similar volunteering behaviours in others (Hart and Fegley, 1995); encourage and value volunteering in others (Pancer & Pratt, 1999) and provide practical support for it to occur (Marta & Pozzi, 2008). Just as our research showed that 10–20-year-olds are more likely to have formed a habit of service if their parents and friends also participated in acts of service, students will be inspired by those

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involved in service-learning programmes on campus. It is important that Catholic universities, especially when launching new service-learning programmes, ensure students are exposed to rich and relatable exemplars of moral and civic virtues.

Time, skills, opportunity and confidence

Students' ability to participate in service-learning opportunities is determined both by social structures (Callero et al., 1987, pp. 247-248) and personal circumstances (Pye & Michelmore, 2017). This means that even if students have a desire to participate in volunteering activities, the university must support them to do so – they must feel that it is possible (Ajzen & Driver, 1991). Primarily this requires Catholic universities to attend to practical concerns, including supporting students so they have the time, skills and confidence to feel that they can participate.

A UK study by Pye and Michelmore (2017) found that lack of time was the most common reason given by 10–20-year-olds for not participating in volunteering activities. Although universities can encourage students to undertake service through communications and offering opportunities through student Unions and Guilds, if students do not feel they have the time, then this will be a barrier to service-learning. One way to circumvent the time barrier is to build service-learning into the curriculum. Opportunities that link to the discipline specific curriculum, and are also socially purposeful, should be sought out by lecturers and tutors. These curriculum-based service-learning activities should be challenging, enjoyable and a positive addition to any curriculum as they provide an excellent form of experiential learning. The activities could be a one-off experience or longer – perhaps students volunteering and learning in the local community over the course of a semester. Course leads need to think carefully about what community-based experiences

link with their discipline as well as contend with the logistical and practical challenges linked to initiating such opportunities and safeguarding concerns. Curriculum based service-learning could be linked, in some part, to credits that contribute to a qualification.

Research shows that a reason 16–20-year-olds give for not volunteering is a perceived lack of skills or experience (Low et al., 2007, p. 69). Universities should not expect students to have the confidence or skills to take part in opportunities when they are made available. Some students might want to undertake service-learning but feel that they do not have anything to offer, or the opportunities require skills and expertise that students feel they do not possess. Universities should take such concerns seriously and ensure opportunities that require different levels of skills are on offer. They might also look to provide training and support for students to develop skills that make it possible for them to take part in meaningful service. If students don't feel they are contributing to the common good through their actions, this might actually undermine the service-learning programme as students become disillusioned and drop out.

Reflect on their experience of service

Critical reflection is a key element of moral development and also service-learning. Individuals who are able to think about their behaviour and actions are more likely to cultivate the virtues as well as hone the meta virtue of practical wisdom.

Critical reflection is a key element of moral development (Jubilee Centre, 2017) and also service-learning (Molee et al., 2011). Individuals who are able to think about their behaviour and actions are more likely to cultivate the virtues as well as hone the meta virtue of practical

wisdom. Repeated reflective behaviour is seen as contributing to virtue habits in Aristotelian philosophy (Kerr, 2011; Steutel & Spiecker, 2004).

Much research into service-learning emphasises the importance of reflection. In our research we found that inviting young people to tell their stories about the service activities they have been involved in encouraged reflection (Arthur et al., 2017). A multi-site study with undergraduate students in the US found that reflection activities significantly correlated with course quality (Hatcher et al., 2004). Importantly, the study also found that reflection activities that focussed on personal values independently predicted course quality. Likewise, reflection activities that were a regular part of the course, and reflection activities that were structured with clear guidelines and directions, were also important.

Building on this and other research it is the nature of the reflection itself to which Catholic universities should attend. Opportunities to reflect should be offered to students in advance, during and after they take part in acts of service. Before activities commence, students should be asked to reflect on their expectations for the programme of service-learning and about the character qualities they hope to cultivate by participating in it. During the activity, programme leaders should encourage regular check-ins – these might take the form of reflective written accounts, group discussions or individual conversations. The focus should be on both sides of the double benefit – how do the students feel they are contributing to the service activity and what are they learning about themselves through their participation in it? The post activity reflective check in is also vital as this is a chance for students to reflect on the formative nature of their service-learning. Questions that can provide structure for this reflection might include; did it fulfil their expectations?, how do they feel they have developed?, and, what might they do differently next time?

Conclusion

This chapter argued that Catholic universities are well placed to run service-learning programmes and ensure that they have a double benefit. Such programmes can benefit students in terms of character development, and also bring benefits to the university and its wider community. In the first part of the chapter, we explored the virtue of service from a theological standpoint. We argued that the practice of the virtues, including service, is the road to a spiritual end. In the second part of the chapter, we built on this argument to show, drawing on our recent research, how Catholic universities can help to inculcate a habit of service in their students. We described how service-learning programmes that are embedded, that promote the double benefit, that expose students to moral and civic exemplars, that provide students with the time, skills and confidence to participate and encourage reflective practice, are more likely to be successful.

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Uniservitate is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. Its objective is to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs) through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of offering an integral education and training of agents of change committed to their community.

“We will not change the world, if we do not change education”

Pope Francis

3 Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning

A research topic that is increasingly attracting the attention of the academic world is the link between teaching and spirituality, understood in its broadest sense. This will be the focus of the volume that we present to our readers today. The aim is to provide, both for Catholic Institutions of Higher Education and universities at large, a space for reflection in their itinerary of discernment about their identity and specific mission.

This book, the third of the Uniservitate collection, explores these topics, bringing together research and experiences of international scope, from the Catholic university world as well as of other creeds and non-religious convictions, which delve into service-learning from the ethics of care and fraternity.

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