

# The University of St. Thomas' Service-Learning Program: Matching the University's Catholic Mission to Greater Community Needs

Rogelio Garcia-Contreras, Ph.D.

Jean-Philippe Faletta, Ph.D.

Rick Krustchinsky, Ed.D.

## Abstract

The University of St. Thomas (UST) is a private Catholic liberal arts university in Houston, Texas, whose mission includes a commitment to service. The pedagogy of service-learning aligns well with the school's mission and with the teachings and social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Designed to expand opportunities for the procurement of the Catholic principle of *subsidiarity*, UST service-learning programs are considered as more than an educational tool. This article illustrates how concrete service-learning ideas help the University fulfill its mission. The virtues of the projects featured in the article, whether assisting elementary school kids to succeed in math or helping the poor help themselves, exemplifies active student engagement and provides UST opportunities to promote justice, to enhance solidarity, and to defend human dignity.

## Introduction

As established by the literature in the field, service-learning can be defined as a form of community engagement that synthesizes academic study and community service. A distinct teaching methodology,

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Rogelio Garcia-Contreras is Assistant Professor of International Development and Political Economy at the Center for International Studies of the University of St. Thomas. He is also the Founder and Director of the University of St. Thomas Micro Credit Program, University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX; Jean-Philippe Faletta is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the University of St. Thomas Service-Learning Program, University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX; Rick Krustchinsky is Professor and Associate Dean of the Undergraduate Teacher Education Program at the University of St. Thomas School of Education, University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX.

service-learning increases the opportunities available to students to improve their citizenship skills and helps faculty to become better teachers. As Butin explains, “an active pedagogy is committed to connecting theory and practice, schools and community, the cognitive and the ethical.”<sup>1</sup> Such an active and engaging framework has garnered national attention as a means of re-engaging today’s students with both academics and with civic values.<sup>2</sup>

The mission of service-learning programs at the University of St. Thomas (UST) in Houston, TX, is to assist the institution in serving others. Acting to fulfill the University’s vision of responding creatively to challenges posed by poverty, globalization, limited economic resources, and changing demographics, the service-learning component allows UST students to translate theory into practice through concrete, hands-on experience projects. Designed to expand opportunities for public and community service in higher education, service-learning is an active advocate of the importance of civic responsibility as a key component of the overall learning experience.

Loyal to its mission as a Catholic institution for higher education, service-learning programs at UST draw on the Church’s value of civil society. According to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, any form of community is established to be of service to the civil society from which it originates.<sup>3</sup> “The purpose of civil society is universal, since it concerns the common good, to which each and every citizen has a right in due proportion.”<sup>4</sup> This is marked by a planning capacity that aims at fostering a freer and more just social life in which the various groups of citizens can form associations, working to develop and express their preferences to meet their fundamental needs and defend their legitimate interests.<sup>5</sup>

To determine the effectiveness of the UST service-learning program, the University has administered a Campus Compact student survey for the past eighteen semesters. Several findings from this survey stand out. The data indicate that approximately half of the students

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<sup>1</sup> Dan W. Butin, *Service-Learning in Theory and Practice: The Future of Community Engagement in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Colby, et al, *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 1995), 179.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Blowitz, *Leon XII devant ses contemporains* (Paris: Nabu Press, 2010), 134.

<sup>5</sup> Pontifical Council, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, 179.

had an external job with a weekly work commitment of at least twenty hours; in addition, most students had little or no previous ethic of community involvement. The data also suggest that the service-learning experience of the students was positive and that after meeting the requirement, most students were likely to continue volunteering in the community. Furthermore, results from the survey indicate that the service-learning experience enhanced students' learning in the course and helped to clarify their career plans. Service-learning helped develop the students' public speaking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, and it strengthened their professional relationship with the faculty member.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that UST service-learning programs are required to relate to the academic content of the course or courses for which they were created, and the selection of community partners is the responsibility of the faculty member. The positive effects of service-learning activities, described above, are the best example of how this innovative concept in academia is intrinsically related to the teachings and social doctrine of the Catholic Church.

As a Catholic institution for higher education, the University of St. Thomas understands the importance of its responsibility to regulate its relations with civil society according to the Catholic principle of *subsidiarity*.<sup>7</sup> According to this principle, it is essential that the growth of democratic life begin within the fabric of society.<sup>8</sup> The University's service-learning initiatives have proven to be a sustainable and comprehensive educational tool and have helped to establish an environment in which the UST student can achieve greater understanding of the world while appreciating the responsibilities that come with this understanding.

Through a variety of service-learning programs, students at UST have a curricular or cocurricular opportunity to transform the theories and techniques they learn in the classroom into real-world practice. In the process, they also embody a major contribution of the University as a Catholic institution of higher education, namely, the understanding and realization that co-operation, even in its less structured forms, "shows itself to be one of the most effective responses to a mentality of conflict and unlimited competition that seems so prevalent today."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Janet Eyler, et al, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Pontifical Council, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine*, 180.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Many experiences of volunteer work call people to look upon civil society as a place where it is possible to rebuild a public ethic based on solidarity, concrete co-operation, and fraternal dialogue. The relationships that are established in a climate of service, of co-operation, and of solidarity overcome ideological divisions, prompting people to seek out what unites them rather than what divides them.<sup>10</sup> In sum, the University's programs offer an opportunity to close the gap between theory and practice and help student participants gain valuable experience.<sup>11</sup>

The University's goal, therefore, is to help its students develop, from a grassroots level, rational and concrete mechanisms for decision-making and problem solving; moreover, these mechanisms should always be utilized within the context of the university's commitment to the truth and our efforts to find it. After all, assisting others in their efforts to overcome the cycle of poverty or helping young children learn to solve math problems should be seen as a conscious attempt to advance solidarity and justice among the human family, not as an altruistic endeavor. The tacit virtue of this idea may not manifest immediately; however, when carefully analyzed, it reveals itself as a claim for justice. In addition to assisting elementary students or the working poor, these efforts also promote freedom, fairness, and democracy by prioritizing fraternity, endorsing basic solidarity principles, and revealing an overall appreciation for human dignity<sup>12</sup> while fostering students' engagement in a diverse, collaborative community.

The following are case examples of service-learning classes and co-curricular programs offered at the University of St. Thomas.

### **Case I. Educating Students, Empowering Individuals: The University of St. Thomas Micro Credit Program**

The University of St. Thomas Micro Credit Program (MCP) is a student-operated co-curricular service-learning program that assists impoverished individuals around the globe with starter loans to launch income-generating businesses. The loans provided by the program to field partners are allocated through interest-free revolving funds; these

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> L. Varlotta, "Service as Text: Making the Metaphor Meaningful," *Michigan Journal of Community Service-learning*, Fall (2000): 76-84.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Vogel, ed., *At the Centre: Human dignity. Christian responsibility as a basis for the practice of Politics; Christian ethics as a guide* (Germany: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2007), 71.

loans are meant to help entrepreneurs in impoverished markets become self-reliant individuals with economically sustainable businesses.

As a volunteer-based service-learning experience, the program has a solid academic component aimed at promoting a better understanding of microfinance as a tool for social upward mobility and human development. The program aims to provide students with actual evidence of how microfinance activities help to overcome, in a comprehensive and sustainable way, the vicious cycle created by what Oscar Lewis calls the culture of poverty.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside its academic component, the UST Micro Credit Program also serves as a mechanism to further UST's mission as a Catholic institution of higher education. The program embodies and instills in students the core values of goodness, discipline, and knowledge expressed in the traditions of the Basilian Fathers, the founders of the University. So, while the program is designed to promote freedom, fairness, and democracy around the world, it is also designed to embody goodness by promoting tolerance and understanding, by instilling discipline and knowledge, by emphasizing the similarities among peoples, by contributing to a global dialogue of peace and respect, and by helping the world's working poor achieve economic independence.

The program was proposed in the fall 2006, and by the summer 2007, the University of St. Thomas approved the program's bylaws, which established an all-volunteer, student-run executive board and an advisory board composed of UST faculty and alumni. Both boards require a minimum of five and a maximum of eight members, although any student can participate as a volunteer in the daily operations of the program.

When the first executive and advisory boards were constituted, the University of St. Thomas did not have a budget for the program. However, by fall 2011, the Micro Credit Program had changed its name to the Social Entrepreneurship Program and established a credit-generated course (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the description and objectives of the course) and a budget, which comes from the University, of one thousand dollars per year. Donations and fundraising events organized by student volunteers provide funding for all activities and operations in excess of the University-given financial support. The students call the fundraising efforts of the program *Dum Spiro*, from the Latin phrase

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<sup>13</sup> Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Viking Press, 1961).

*Dum Spiro Spero*, translated as “while I breathe, I hope or I wait.” *Dum Spiro*, “while I breathe” is a reminder of our Catholic faith and our intention to do what we can to alleviate injustice for as long as we breathe, for as long as we are alive.

Despite the lack of an assigned budget since its implementation in January 2008, the UST Micro Credit Program has distributed approximately 51,000 dollars in more than seventy-five countries around the world. Specific programs have involved nonprofit organizations, parishes, and private foundations; the level of collaboration with these “field partners” has varied depending on the level of involvement and/or the nature of the project. Although the program does not discriminate based on religion, its policies and procedures ensure that every potential project or partnership is established only if the individuals or organizations involved do not contradict the most fundamental values and principles of the Catholic Church.

Thanks to UST’s recognition of the program’s potential and the affinity of the program’s goals and objectives with those of the University, the Micro Credit Program was constituted as a 501(c)(3) organization under the umbrella of the University of St. Thomas; this action facilitated fundraising efforts and relieved the program from administrative and financial costs. The program also has its own Internet site within the UST website and receives administrative and logistical support from the University. Under the new name, the program can concentrate on the design, funding, and development of revolving funds for the implementation of microfinance activities. In addition, the new program will grant the possibility for experts and students from a variety of disciplines and professional backgrounds to participate in the development and implementation of customized environmental, psychological, educational, social, and micro lending projects worldwide. Incipient efforts toward this goal have already been made through the design, development, and implementation of a microfinance program in Chile, which originated through a collaboration with local faculty and students from Universidad Santo Tomas in Santiago. Members of the International Council of Universities of St. Thomas Aquinas (ICUSTA), UST Houston, and UST Santiago will embark upon a unique opportunity to bring experts and students of both universities together in a service-learning experience that will benefit Chilean families through specific, concrete projects to aid development and eradicate poverty.

As of today, the UST MCP runs three active projects in the Yucatan, Pakistan, and Zambia, impacting more than 200 women and their families. Projects in Tanzania, Malawi, Chile, and Peru are being developed,

and solid interdepartmental and institutional collaborations have resulted from some of the programs.<sup>14</sup> The Microfinance Research Institute at the University of Houston; Owl Microfinance at Rice University; the Research Center for Ecological Systems at the National University of Mexico; Centro Fox; Fundacion Ayuda para Ayudar; Hashoo Foundation; and Universidad Santo Tomas in Santiago, Chile, are just some of the partners the program has or has had since initiating operations in January 2008.

Now, though lending is the main activity of the UST Micro Credit Program and indeed of any microfinance activity operating around the world, those experiencing poverty are not the only ones benefiting from this innovative practice. By endorsing basic principles of microfinance, social entrepreneurship, and social capital formation (i.e., self employment, property rights, women's empowerment, higher standards of living, respect for basic human rights, environmental conservation, and an overall appreciation of human dignity), UST students can transform into practice what they learn in the classroom.

This volunteer-based service-learning experience provides students with an opportunity to accumulate human capital and to consolidate profound, yet simple and practical, mechanisms for positive change. In this sense, the program's mission as well as the University's decision to support the program can become models of service-learning experiences in and by themselves. Moreover, this service-learning experience can become a model for other institutions of higher education—not because it is particularly unique, perfect, or sophisticated—but instead because of its simplicity and limited resources.

This is not a service-learning program built on large financial capital and it was never part of the university guidelines. Instead, the program was conceived as an attempt to translate into practice the core of the University's mission as a Catholic institution for higher education.

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<sup>14</sup> A concrete example of this interdisciplinary collaboration is what the program has been doing in the Yucatan. Of the five opportunities the program has granted to UST faculty and students to visit our projects in marginalized Mayan communities in the Yucatan Peninsula, the last trip in October 2010 included the participation of Dr. Livia Bornigia and Dr. Jim Barloon from the Communications and English Departments respectively, along with a couple of students from the same departments. They collaborated in the creation of a journal and a documentary of all MCP activities in the Yucatan. The trip, the documentary, and the journal were made possible through fundraising efforts conducted by my colleagues at UST, MCP students, and a couple of generous contributions granted by the University of St. Thomas Center for Faculty Excellence and the Faculty Development Committee.

Since the program started operating with little money and little legitimacy, adapting or recreating the program at other universities should be possible wherever the will and interest to do so exists. The program creates a virtuous cycle, a service-learning experience, which offers a concrete, practical, and useful mechanism to fulfill the University's mission in a lively process affecting faculty, students, volunteers, donors, field partners, administrators, loan recipients, and their families.

The virtuous cycle made possible by microfinance initiatives has become so evident that Pope Benedict XVI praised micro lending in his encyclical on *Truth and Charity*. Benedict XVI stated, "it is certainly useful...to launch financial initiatives in which the humanitarian dimension predominates."<sup>15</sup> The social benefit of student involvement with the UST MCP has and will have implications difficult to assess through conventional mechanisms. Indeed, the University of St. Thomas micro credit program goes beyond enhancing students' education by touching their hearts and enriching their souls with the beautiful concepts that micro credit embodies; significantly, such outcomes exemplify the humanitarian dimension raised by Benedict XVI.

When properly implemented, microfinance and micro credit schemes are popular among Catholic institutions precisely because they are compatible with Catholic Social Teaching; they can foster both material and overall moral well-being. Micro lending structures help facilitate human development by assisting the formation of human and social capital.

As the practical experience of the University of St. Thomas MCP reveals, micro credit programs also help educate young people to be business leaders who have the promotion of the common good as their ultimate goal. In other words, through their own projects and work, students and faculty discover that the humanitarian dimension need not be separated from the business or economic dimension.<sup>16</sup> One need not merely pursue having more, but being more: more human, more aware of the world's needs, more in solidarity with one another—a true social entrepreneur.

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<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate: In Charity and Truth* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vatiacanis, 2009), sec 5, ¶3.

<sup>16</sup> Juan Molina, "Practicing charity through microfinance," *Texas Catholic Conference* (2009), 299, <http://www.txcatholic.org/index.php/news/299-practicing-charity-through-microfinance>.



This kind of new understanding of the role and purpose of the market economy is founded on UST's humanistic and spiritual standards. The social teachings of the Catholic Church can help us to redefine our sense of progress and to acquire new consciousness of our common destiny. For the Church, consciousness is understood as the development of self-awareness, and this awareness is proof of living faith. Yet, faith is not a private affair. Instead, faith is an historical and universal affair. When it comes to the Catholic tradition's understanding of progress, which is expressed in the writings of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, the Church invites us to abandon traditional approaches to development so that we may conceive of progress by the concept Paul VI expressed as "Integral Humanism."<sup>17</sup>

If, in fact, one of the signs of our current crisis can be found in the degradation of the human person—starvation, genocide, and consumerism—then to solve the crisis there is a need to prioritize ethics over technology and humanity over economics, to respect human beings more than material objects, and to acknowledge the superiority of spirit over matter (our existence over our *modus vivendi*). Catholics cannot remain passive or neutral; faith as a universal affair demands from us the desire to assume these values and transform them into action.

For *Populorum Progressio*, the measuring stick is the human person. Development is person-centered, looking at the human person in his or her integrity, within the communities in which the person lives, and in terms of our humanity as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Paul VI's encyclical is anthropocentric. Some would see this as a defect, indeed one that extends to the whole Social Teachings of the Catholic Church. However, according to Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, this criticism of *Populorum Progressio* ignores one key aspect of the Encyclical:

Catholic Social Teaching is an organic whole.... This integral vision of the person situated in a human and physical environment is linked with another fundamental concept of "*Populorum Progressio*": the concept of humanism.<sup>19</sup>

Like most social contractors of the Liberal tradition, the Church knows very well that political oppression is not the only threat to freedom

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> Catholic Online, "Archbishop Diarmuid Martin on '*Populorum Progressio*,'" *Address to the United Nations side event* (2007), <http://www.zenit.org/article-20793?l=english>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

today.<sup>20</sup> Corruption, hunger, environmental degradation, ignorance, and diseases are all forces polluting our soul and diminishing our consciousness.

Consciousness is then the virtuous application of moral principles by nature or revelation, in particular and oftentimes overwhelming situations. The priority of being over having, as well as the right to dignified labor, hold an important place in the Church's social doctrine. The globalized economy must be analyzed in light of the principles of social justice, respecting the preferential option for the poor who must be allowed to take their place in such an economy,<sup>21</sup> for "the Church's social doctrine is a moral vision which aims to encourage governments, institutions and private organizations to shape a future consonant with the dignity of every person."<sup>22</sup>

As a faithful member of the Church and as a Catholic institution for higher education, the University has decided to embark on a journey to translate its mission into action through professional service-learning programs.

### *Lessons Learned from the Micro Credit Program Initiative*

The University of St. Thomas Micro Credit Program has had a very positive and life-transforming impact in the lives of those involved in the program, and has created leaders of character.

The initial goal of the program was to incorporate a discrete service-learning component into the Center for International Studies, and more specifically, into elective courses such as International Development and Social Entrepreneurship. Three and a half years later, the program lives in the dynamic tensions between the nature of the business and the imperative to serve the common good, as well as between the projects served and the quality of the services provided.<sup>23</sup> In a very short period of time, the program grew rapidly. Now, the task is to find a balance

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<sup>20</sup> Edward De Berri, *Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Orbis Book, 2004), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Church in America. On the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 1999), 93.

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Veritatis Splendor," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html), sec 5, ¶9.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Lynch and Julius Walls, *Mission, Inc. The Practitioner's Guide to Social Enterprise* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 22.

between the program's capacity to influence communities in need and a realistic assessment of such capacity based on its resources and human capital.

It is important to notice, however, that the program has granted all those students involved a sense of fulfillment difficult to measure or to explain (See Appendix 2). For those involved in the program, it offers a living testament of how faith, hope, peace, and justice can be spread through simple, yet effective, actions.

## **Case II. The University of St. Thomas School of Education and Helms Elementary School Service-Learning Initiatives**

A successful collaboration has been established between the University of St. Thomas and Helms Community Learning Center (CLC). Helms Community Learning Center is a dual-language magnet school offering prekindergarten through 5th grade education in the Houston Independent School District. Currently, there are approximately 550 students enrolled in the school, 86% of whom are Hispanic and 71% bilingual. 75% of the students are on free or reduced fee lunch, with 100% classified as Title I (low income). As a community learning center, Helms has established relationships with a variety of partners, including government agencies, local businesses, health clinics, and universities. Such partnerships assist the CLC to improve the quality of education for the students.

When CLC entered into a partnership with Shell Oil Company and the University of St. Thomas, an alliance was formed that brought together UST professors with Helms administrators, parents, staff, and teachers to improve the school's curriculum in the areas of math and science using service-learning projects. UST students, guided by UST faculty, have assisted the school in the following capacities:

- Served as math and science teacher assistants for 45 clock hours
- Developed math and science activities for children
- Planted gardens and beautified school grounds
- Built a wetland area for math and science study
- Created a family math night titled, "November Night with Numbers"

The aforementioned November Night with Numbers is the capstone service-learning component for a required University of St. Thomas

math methods course. This course explores the design and implementation of effective instruction in mathematical content appropriate to the elementary school learner and investigates creative techniques and strategies for teaching math concepts and skills. The course is designated as a university-approved service-learning course, with November Night with Numbers designed to promote interest in math among children, teachers, and families of the entire CLC. University professors worked with Helms' administrators, staff, teachers, and the Helms' Parent Teacher Organization to design this service-learning event.

The model for this service-learning event evolved out of the traditional Family Math Nights that have been used in school for many years. The university professor and students wanted something more creative so they called the event "November Night with Numbers." Having the event in November allowed approximately three months for planning. The students formed small groups of two or three and selected math activities to facilitate at the event. Some of the activities were taken from commercial curriculum materials, while other selections were activities written by the professor or by classroom teachers at Helms. The activities were chosen according to grade level ranges (PreK-1, 2-3, and 4-5) and selected with the purpose of meeting state-wide curriculum test objectives and generating excitement about math. Upon selecting the activities, the professor reviewed the selections for math content and pedagogy. Next, the students collected math materials and spent several weeks organizing and practicing the activities.

Flyers and brochures outlining the math activities by title, brief description, and grade level were collaboratively produced and distributed at the school as a means of advertising. The marquis at Helms was also used to advertise the event. The professor and students from the university submitted a draft of the brochure with their activity selections to the elementary school, and the Helms' site-based decision making committee, which included parents, staff, teachers, and administrators, examined the brochure and provided feedback. Once their final input was shared and approved, the brochure was produced. The brochure was placed in every teacher's mailbox and brochures were sent home to every parent. Furthermore, the university professor and pre-service teachers created a packet of every activity used during the event. The packets were organized very carefully and thoroughly so parents would be able to use the math activities at home with their children. Helms' administration and the Parent Teachers Association paid for the total cost of the brochure, advertisement flyers, and the math take-home packet. On the evening of the event, students from the University of

St. Thomas math course and Helms teachers set up math activities in the school cafeteria. The activities were organized much like learning centers, and the elementary students rotated through each activity spending as much time as needed to finish. Parents and siblings were encouraged to participate as well.

The November Night with Numbers event has drawn approximately 150 participants annually. Children leave the event with renewed joy and excitement about doing math with their parents, and University students leave with an appreciation for providing service to a local elementary school in which children are actively investigating number patterns, relationships, and discoveries.

### *Lessons Learned from This Initiative*

One of the greatest challenges faced in creating such an event is the collaborative planning it takes. Each group (administrators, custodians, parents, plant manager, staff, teachers, professors, and preservice teachers) must work collaboratively, making sure that every detail of planning has been addressed. Another challenge is in replicating November Night with Numbers yearly, as developing new math activities and strands for the event can be time consuming and difficult. If, for example, the math strand is Probability and Statistics one year, the next year's event needs to be a different strand of mathematics, such as Geometric Thinking. After each November Night with Numbers, the school's site-based decision making team evaluates the success of the event. The committee brainstorms the event's strengths and potential problem areas. Feedback is carefully considered when planning the next year's event, and the number of participants attending each November is tracked to ensure the total number of attendees remains consistent and growing.

Preservice teachers participating in the math class service-learning event are asked to write a reflection paper outlining the strengths and weaknesses they observe and to make suggestions for improvement. The Service-Learning Program at the University of St. Thomas also has each preservice teacher complete a service-learning survey related to the project. After reviewing all the evaluative records, adaptations to the math course are considered and (eventually) implemented.

Some of the best lessons from the November Night with Numbers come from the participants themselves, who frequently comment on

how much they enjoy the math activities. One teacher expressed the following: “One kindergarten student’s eyes glowed as he ran to show me how to multiply using the balance beam. Then he couldn’t wait to show others that night his new learned skill. It was one of those magic moments!”

Students from the university learned how to provide a much-needed service to children by creating and implementing this night of math excitement. One university student expressed the following:

As college students seeking to interact with the community, we felt that this service project was an excellent learning experience for the children and their parents. It also helped us, as future educators, to experience first-hand the importance of parental involvement in fostering children’s educational progress. Giving of our time in such service projects adds so much to our own personal education as well.

Through efforts like the November Night with Numbers, the University of St. Thomas School of Education has had extraordinary success developing courses that embody new pedagogy in teaching-learning techniques.<sup>24</sup> These techniques are hallmarks for establishing our service-learning initiatives such as the micro credit program and School of Education math education program in local schools. By making connections with professional learning communities and establishing communication networks, such initiatives become powerful agents for learning. Through building such connections and relationships and by using service-learning as pedagogy, community representatives, university students, and faculty all benefit.

The virtuous cycles generated by this service-learning experience rest at the heart of the Church’s doctrine on social teaching. In the encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI states that “a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice, and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.”<sup>25</sup>

In the same encyclical, Benedict XVI discusses the principle of *subsidiarity*. Such unique Catholic principles appear as vehicles through

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<sup>24</sup> Rosa H. Sheets, *Diversity Pedagogy: Examining the Role of Culture in the Teaching-Learning Process* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 15.

which a particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal co-operation between believers and nonbelievers is possible. An unquestionable expression of inalienable human freedom, subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies.<sup>26</sup> Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, yet it is always designed to achieve their emancipation because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility.<sup>27</sup> Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others. The University of St. Thomas Math Methods Course at Helms Elementary School accomplishes precisely this.

### Concluding Remarks

In alignment with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, the University of St. Thomas students and faculty involved with any of its service-learning programs are called to lend their own personal efforts for the good of the community in general and for the good of the weakest and the neediest in particular.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the principle of the 'subjectivity of society' so essential to the educational mission of the Church is also affirmed. By constructing a network of interpersonal relationships, both internal and external, this 'subjectivity of society,' as John Paul II called it, "finds in the notion of human family an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love."<sup>29</sup>

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

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<sup>26</sup> David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: USCCB Publishing, 1995), 180.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

his/her own circumstances. Thus, UST programs are not only about learning experiences and are not exclusively about education, but instead about transforming people's lives, including, of course, the lives of UST's students in a process that reflects both the love of the school's mission and the work it does out of love for life and God's creation.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Course Syllabus**

**FALL 2011: INST 4,393, MLINS 6,393, JUST 4,393**

#### **Special Topics: Social Entrepreneurship**

##### *Course Description*

What is the potential of the private sector to foster development? This course examines what different corporations and small entrepreneurs are doing to make a profit and better our planet. The course also offers a view on what they could or should be doing, and it explores how a social enterprise can be a useful tool for business men and women around the world to make a living and promote sustainable economic development. The course is an informal invitation to become social entrepreneurs with real social values at the core of our goals and objectives.

##### *Objectives*

At the end of the course students will foster their own social entrepreneurship skills, based on the idea that the market can be a tool for delivering generous profits for themselves while generating many other values with real and substantial marginal social benefits.

By the end of the semester, students will develop a real and concrete business plan, on any idea for a social enterprise they may want to explore, or on any of the already existing ideas waiting to be developed at the Social Entrepreneurship Program.

Students will receive the necessary skills and guidance so that they can start their own business or at least gain the confidence to know they can employ themselves at any given time. In the process, students will identify opportunity niches on any of the social, environmental, economic or political challenges threatening the well-being and common good of our community. The purpose is for students to create social enterprises capable to address any of the identified challenges by developing profitable and sustainable businesses.

## Appendix 2

### Student Reflections

One of University of St. Thomas' Micro Credit's main goals is to enhance the learning experience of its students in the many areas directly related to microfinance and socioeconomic development. That micro credit program goes far beyond enhancing students' education by touching their hearts and enriching their souls with the beautiful concepts that micro credit embodies. When asked to share their thoughts about their participation in this unique service-learning experience, most of them willingly express their feelings. While the following personal statements do not constitute an adequate evaluation of the program, they are evidence of how this program has affected their lives:

*"Through charity (not charity in the normal sense, but the charity and love for others the Catholic Church teaches us), Micro Credit has given me an avenue to empower others as well as myself. I felt empowered. I felt I had done something good, not for the sake of doing good, but because it was good; because it is what I was taught and meant to do."* **Amanda Duhon**—Graduate Student University of St. Thomas

*"The UST Micro Credit Program allows students like me to channel frustration into action and knowledge into service. MCP is truly an empowering program because it transcends perceived boundaries to transform the essence of the human person. Through its intentions, goals, and practices, the University of St. Thomas MCP alters forever both the student and the loan recipient."* **Hiba Haroon** – University of St. Thomas Alumna

*"Volunteering with University of St. Thomas Micro Credit Program has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a student at St. Thomas. It's given me the opportunity to take what I have learned in the classroom and actually do something with it. There is a biblical quote that encapsulates how I feel about the program 'as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.'* **Austin Stanfill** – Senior University of St. Thomas

*"Before getting involved with the University of St. Thomas Micro Credit program, I did not think that a small group of people could have an impact on poverty. Now I believe that a few people, with limited finances but real commitment, can form a program that can be effective against poverty. Micro Credit is faith in action."* **Dominic Kisielewski** – Junior University of St. Thomas

*"Microfinance has the ability to empower individuals financially, but what many never get to see is the way microfinance can empower people psychologically: giving mothers a sense of accomplishment, children the hope that they can pursue their dreams, and entire communities the remarkable bond that results*

*from working together as a single human family.”* **Whitney Bagget** – University of St. Thomas Alumna

*“Well, I believe that the Micro Credit Program is inspiring. It’s truly difficult to explain how great the impact has been personally. I just appreciate what Micro Credit has done for me.”* **Shaterra Green** – Graduate Student University of St. Thomas

*“I don’t believe I can eradicate poverty. But I can do what I can, with what I have, where I am. This sense of empowerment is how the program has helped me better myself. In understanding that it is us, not self, that can work to change a problem.”* **Michael Black**—University of St. Thomas Alumnus