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COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO CRISES

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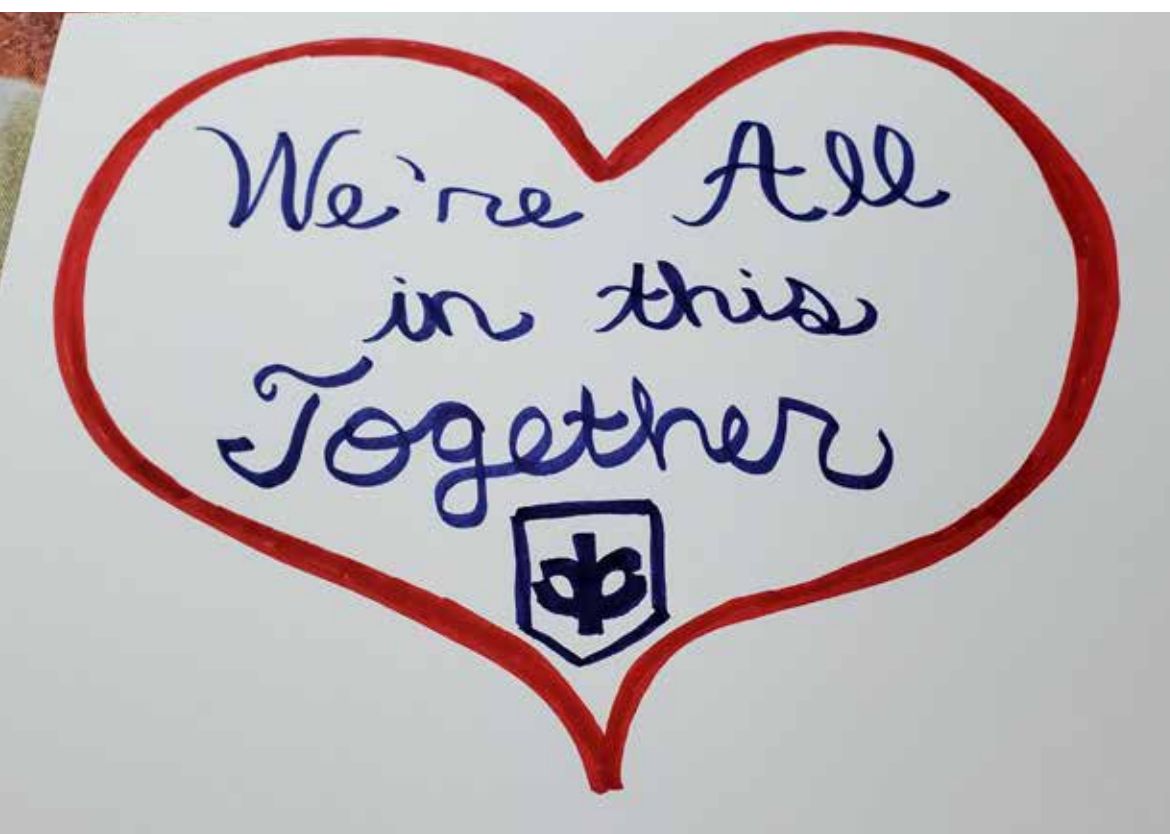
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April 2020. When the pandemic struck in March 2020, everything was closed, including public gardens, parks, and even playgrounds. Children weren't allowed to play outside with their friends. Chicagoland started to resemble a post-apocalyptic world. DePaul students, faculty, and alumni with children were trapped in their homes, some in their tiny city apartments, and some in suburbs all over Chicagoland. The yellow crime-scene tape around the playground screamed "horror movie" to me. Police cars were circling the parks and neighborhoods, the officers not allowed to leave the safety of their vehicles. I kept imagining mayhem breaking out, but that didn't happen. People stood together in the face of a common threat: COVID-19. This picture was taken with my iPhone on a walk through the deserted streets.

Photo and brief essay courtesy of Olga Rozenbaum



At heart, our Tree of Wisdom, and a reminder that as a university community DePaul stands together through the pandemic. Created and photographed by Stefania Cosentino in a hand-lettering workshop sponsored by the DePaul University Alumni Association.

Photo courtesy of Stefania Cosentino

Introduction

2020: DePaul University's Community Responds to Crises

Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, Ph.D.
Managing Editor

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The Student Resource Center, located on the 11th floor, in the DePaul Center, which usually bustles with the presence of students, faculty, and staff, stands still during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic the week of March 22, 2020. During finals week of the winter quarter and into the spring quarter of 2020, DePaul instituted practices of social distancing, online classes and teleworking for all faculty, staff, and students.

Courtesy DePaul University/
Randall Spriggs



Summer's heat had boiled the confidence from the group, and this wintry weather had sapped their vitality so that they moved with the carefulness of the very old; and the strength with which they had started the trip—the almost insolent confidence they had in themselves as individuals was less than it was; in this final wringing-out of their endurance, they had an intimation of what weakness was, and they sat here together with the need of closeness very real in them, and came upon fraternity.

Ernest Haycox, *The Earthbreakers*, 1952

Wow, 2020! What a year it's been ..." voiced a DePaul student, certainly expressing what we all felt.¹ It was an unprecedented, disruptive year like no other whose effects have carried forward well into 2021. Think of how many words and phrases became overly familiar to us during these many months as a result: COVID-19, pandemic, quarantine, stay-at-home order, contact tracing, asymptomatic, immunity, vaccination pass, unvaccinated, variants, curves, peaks, and death count. There were also the many names, faces, and places: first responders, essential workers, the CDC, Dr. Anthony Fauci, pangolins, Pfizer, Moderna, and Wuhan. And then there were the words so often used at our own university: social distancing, masking up, hand sanitizing, testing, teleworking, remote teaching, Zoom meetings, virtual

¹ Division of Mission and Ministry, "Remembering the Year Past: Transitioning to Hope," DePaul University, streamed live on 11 March 2021, YouTube video, at: [Remembering the Year Past: Transitioning to Hope](#).

(everything), mental health, and the repeated invitations to patience, kindness, flexibility, resilience, and uplifting mantras like “We’re all in this together.”

What we did not know when the virus began to rapidly spread and the stay-at-home orders started in March 2020 was that our vocabulary would be further influenced by two other major events that followed: the murder of George Floyd on 25 May in Minneapolis; and then the presidential campaigns, the election, and the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. In late spring, the media and our daily conversations were flooded with terms and phrases like “Justice for George,” “I can’t breathe,” “Defund the police,” “Say Their Names,” Black Lives Matter, white supremacy, systematic violence, antiracism, protests, memorials, PWI (Predominantly White Institution), and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). Then, summer and fall witnessed a curious presidential campaign full of vitriolic tweets, claims of fake news and stolen votes, nationalistic rhetoric, questions of morality, and political corruption. Many believed “neo-fascists,” or alternately the “radical left,” were attempting to take over the country. I have never been so addicted to TV shows, breaking news, newspapers, special editions, and the continuous (mis)information of social media than in 2020. It was a maelstrom wherein everything spun and became dizzying.

On 27 March 2020, A. Gabriel Esteban, PhD, DePaul University’s president, denounced the increasingly hurtful use of language in one of his first statements on the pandemic:

Language that describes COVID-19 as a “Chinese Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” or “Kung Flu” is unacceptable. Terms like these, which have been used by some of our nation’s leaders and members of the media, are xenophobic and can only feed into spreading fear, hatred, and violence. As a result, we have seen an escalation of attacks these past two months against Asian communities and individuals across the US, particularly against Chinese and East Asians.²

The pandemic, politics, and racism were already connected. Reflecting on the revolution of 1968, French Jesuit historian Michel de Certeau linked revolution and language: “Last May, we took the floor like we took the Bastille in 1789.”³ What we experienced in 2020 could be the sign of a cultural revolution, in which the pandemic certainly plays a most prominent part.

This is where the idea for this special issue of *Vincentian Heritage* came from. As it became clear we would not soon return to a then deserted and strangely silent campus, which

2 A. Gabriel Esteban, Ph.D., “From the President: Respect for All During and After the COVID-19 Crisis,” Newslines, DePaul University, published 27 March 2020, at: <https://resources.depaul.edu/newslines/sections/campus-and-community/Pages/Respect-for-all.aspx>.

3 Michel de Certeau, “Pour une nouvelle culture: prendre la parole,” *Études* 328 (June 1968): 29–42.

Racism is a Pandemic.

Student protesters take to the streets near the DePaul campus in early June 2020.

Courtesy of Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée



contrasted to the increasingly divisive noise emerging online and in the media, I began to look for a way to connect with the DePaul community and reflect on what was happening. What had the experiences of the year meant for us, individually and as a community? Was it, as Provost Salma Ghanem would note, both “a year to forget and a year to remember?”⁴ Or, as Vincent de Paul once said, maybe we should “take as a maxim never to be surprised at current difficulties, no more than at a passing breeze, because with a little patience we shall see them disappear. Time changes everything.”⁵

I discussed this need for connection with Reverend Guillermo Campuzano, C.M., vice president of the Division of Mission and Ministry; Mark Laboe, the associate vice president for Faculty and Staff Engagement; and Nathaniel Michaud, director of the Vincentian Studies Institute. As a result, on 1 July 2020, we called out to the university community via Newsline and email with the following proposal:

2020: DePaul University’s Community Responds to Crises

The DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute would like to invite everyone from our community—faculty, staff, students, and alumni—to participate in a special call to submit publishable materials dedicated to the

⁴ “Remembering the Year Past,” op. cit.

⁵ Letter 1075, “To Louis Rivet, Superior, in Saintes,” 15 November 1648, in Pierre Coste, C.M., *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et. al., 14 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1985–2014), 3:382, at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/28/.

unprecedented crises we have been challenged to confront in 2020. COVID-19 has disrupted daily life and led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. At DePaul it has forced us to change how we work, how we teach, and how we learn. How has it changed you? Our nation has also erupted in protests over the brutal killing of George Floyd. His senseless death has reignited the Black Lives Matter movement and challenges us as a people to dismantle inequality, oppression, and systemic racism in the pursuit of justice. How has this affected you, your colleagues, or your family? How has your perception of DePaul, of Chicago, of our country, been changed? Considering both crises and their effect on marginalized peoples how do we see that they interplay? How can we move forward? How can our Vincentian values help guide us through this time of great pain and suffering? Ultimately, we would like to know, how have we responded as a Vincentian higher learning community?

Readers of the *Heritage* may be surprised by this shift in direction. But what we are gathering in this issue can be identified as “immediate history.” It is a way to further our consciousness of the present and embrace what has been called the “post–COVID-19 world.” The hope is that this volume enlightens both our DePaul community and our external audience as we share contributed works that extend beyond the university and consider larger issues.

Dr. Esteban opens this collection of works by reflecting on the guiding principles of leading a university in challenging times, answering the famous Vincentian question “What must be done?” Rev. Campuzano then offers a theological perspective on our collective experience as members of a globalized and suffering world. As the cries of the earth and of the poor⁶ grow ever louder, what does it mean to strive for “systematic change?”

The next four works consider what has been done at DePaul University. As a teaching institution, DePaul gave priority to its students. Lin Batsheva Kahn created a splendid online visual exhibit based on selected student pieces produced in her course Creativity and Adversity. Artwork, texts, and the music *Transcending* articulate their thoughts about learning and creating during a global pandemic and redirecting hardships into creativity.⁷ Jane Eva Baxter, Margaret Storey, et al., present their innovative interdisciplinary and online course designed and presented by a large and diverse team of faculty and staff. Student projects are also shared as a way to record their 2020 voices. In their handmade maps

6 Francis, §49, *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*, 24 May 2015, available at: [On Care For Our Common Home](#).

7 See also the piece “Reaching” by Diane Faltinschi, featured in DePaul Newsline on 18 June 2020.

and artworks, it is striking to note how powerful visual thinking can be when addressing complex issues. Next, Rubén Álvarez Silva, et al., of the Steans Center document how they answered the challenge to safely engage students when they were no longer attending class in person. The center created a website called Online Community Engagement using modules on many issues such as mental health, community organizing, immigration rights, and police accountability.⁸ Reverend Dan Paul Borlik, C.M., and Amanda Thompson of the Division of Mission and Ministry illustrate how their practice of See/Judge/Act helped Generation Z cope with the pandemic. They reflect on the shock and chaos of students being asked to move out of the dorms within one week in March, and find echoes in the scriptures, especially the book of Exodus and its revelation of a “compassionate God.”

Moving beyond the university community, two papers address our larger Vincentian Family. Timothy P. Williams discusses how the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, with 100,000 members nationwide serving five million people every year, adapted to the challenges of connecting with people in need despite the pandemic. Members also launched a series of webinars and Zoom meetings to examine their own responsibilities when it comes to systematic racism and violence. Reverend J. Patrick Murphy, C.M., then describes how Depaul International staff provided services to homeless people—“the poorest of the poor”—during the crisis, both in the US and in a number of European countries. Both papers stress how these two nonprofit organizations found inspiration from the history of the Vincentian Family. Vincent de Paul and Frédéric Ozanam each faced epidemics and political turmoil, even social and political revolutions, during their lives.

Expanding our scope further, the last two papers introduce us to often hidden and forgotten worlds. Traci Schlesinger, whose recent passing has left us mourning a great loss, provides a rigorous statistical analysis of incarceration, COVID-19, and race. Her study makes a strong case that the intersection of the epidemic and incarceration has had unequal and devastating effects on Black and Latinx communities. To address racial disparities in infections and deaths, she recommends we rethink mass incarceration itself (while the US represents five percent of the world’s population, it is home to twenty-five percent of the world’s incarcerated population). Stan Chu Ilo’s article also discusses the twin crises of the pandemic and racism, and advocates for a global ethic of solidarity to address both problems. Could a place like DePaul University be a laboratory “to reinvent love as a praxis”? Based on what is happening in Africa, his reflection is extremely relevant to Western societies ready to open their eyes to the systemic injustices that have led Jesus to be crucified again and again.

8 See Irwin W. Steans Center, Online Community Engagement, at: [Online Community Engagement](#).

A poignant poem by Amaris Casiano-Zoko, photographs from contributors Stefania Cosentino and Olga Rozenbaum, and specially selected photos taken by Jeffrey Carrion, Randall Spriggs, and Maria Toscano of DePaul University Marketing and Communications round out our collection and provide further ways to consider and remember the year 2020. Facing three interconnected crises—the pandemic, racial injustice, and the challenges to our democracy—whose consequences will reverberate, what do we now want for the future? Perhaps we should look to the words of Pope Francis who offered his thoughts in the recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*:

If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected.⁹

Dr. Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée

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⁹ Francis, §35, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 3 October 2020, available at: [On Fraternity and Social Friendship](#).

The Guiding Principles of Leading and Living Through a Pandemic

A. Gabriel Esteban, Ph.D.
President, DePaul University

BIO

A. GABRIEL ESTEBAN, PHD, is the twelfth president of DePaul University. He assumed the presidency on 1 July 2017, as the first lay leader in DePaul's history. Dr. Esteban oversees a \$570 million budget, nearly 22,000 students on two major Chicago campuses, and about 3,300 full-time and part-time faculty and staff. Under his leadership, DePaul developed its current strategic plan, ["Grounded in Mission: The Plan for DePaul 2024."](#) It calls for deepening the university's commitment to its Catholic, Vincentian, and urban mission; ensuring an inclusive campus environment; preparing all students for global citizenship and success; expanding access to high quality, affordable academic programs; elevating academic excellence and embracing a culture of creativity and discovery; and employing bold approaches to ensure DePaul's continued fiscal strength for future generations. Dr. Esteban's priorities include accessibility and transparency and enhancing the student experience. He is a member of the Economic Club, Chicago Club, and Commercial Club of Chicago. Locally, he serves on the Chicago History Museum board and the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic School board. Nationally, he serves on the board of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, NCAA Division I Presidential Forum Conference, and the Big East Conference. Dr. Esteban holds a PhD in business administration from the Graduate School of Management of the University of California, Irvine, and a master's

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in Japanese business studies from Chaminade University in Honolulu. He earned his bachelor's degree in mathematics and an MBA from the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City. Dr. Esteban has served American higher education in a number of national roles, including past membership on the Accreditation Review Council of the Higher Learning Commission and chairing numerous accreditation visits. He is an emeritus board member of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education. A celebrated leader and advocate for minorities, Dr. Esteban has received multiple honors throughout his career. His alma mater, the University of California, Irvine, named him one of its top fifty graduate and postdoctoral alumni. The Carnegie Corporation of New York recognized him as a "Great Immigrant" in 2015, and New Jersey's leading business journal, NJBIZ, included him on its list of the 100 most powerful state leaders in 2016 for a second time. Dr. Esteban met Josephine at the University of the Philippines, where she earned a master's in economics and a bachelor's in business economics. She holds an MBA from the University of California, Riverside. Both their daughter, Ysabella, and their son-in-law, Matthew, are medical doctors.



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The statues in Saint Vincent's Circle are decorated with protective face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. April 30, 2020, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

“Never betray His principles for any reason whatsoever, and take great care not to spoil God’s affairs by too much haste in them.”¹

The 2020–2021 academic year was like no other. As it concludes, I find myself reflecting on the experience of leading and living through a global pandemic. Has it been extremely challenging? The answer, of course, is yes. While we continue to grieve for the lives lost and the immense pain this pandemic continues to inflict upon individuals around the world, we must also embrace the knowledge and perspective gained from this past year.

When faced with a great challenge, I turn to guiding principles. What do we value most as an institution? What is most important? To put it simply, what must be done?

Early on in the pandemic, we asked ourselves these questions, and our answers guided every decision moving forward. From shutting down the campus to opening up again, our guiding principles served as our beacon for navigating the storm. They not only kept us on course, but also gave us faith we would be stronger on the other side.

Take care of our community

The first guiding principle—and our primary one throughout the pandemic—was simple: take care of our community. That included our immediate community—our students, faculty, and staff—as well as the community in which we live and operate.

¹ Letter 1020, “To Charles Nacquart, in Richelieu,” 22 March 1648, in Pierre Coste, C.M., *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et al., vols. 1–14 (New York: New City Press, 1985–2014), 3:280.

Despite the fact we were remote, we decided early on to pay all our student workers throughout the spring quarter in 2020. We continued to pay part-time staff until June 30, 2020. We also worked to find alternative duties and tasks for the staff members who could not complete their work remotely. In April 2020, we were among one of the first institutions to announce that we would not increase tuition or fees for the 2020–2021 academic year. Even though we had previously made the decision to increase tuition and fees, we knew this was no longer an option because of the pandemic and its impact on our students.

These decisions had financial implications, but it meant we were taking care of our community. “Take care, DePaul” became our mantra. As a guiding principle, it made the decision to shut down in spring 2020 easy. Determining what to do later that year in fall was much more challenging. We knew continuing to teach and operate remotely would have significant financial implications. But our people came first.

As an urban institution, we also were incredibly conscious about the potential impact on the communities where our students reside. If we had brought back 22,000 students, it would have affected our neighbors tremendously. Throughout the entire pandemic, we worked closely with the City of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Public Health to safeguard the health and safety of our surrounding community.

Inclusive decision-making

Another important guiding principle was trust your people.

In the early days of the pandemic, I established a COVID-19 Planning and Response Task Force. I asked our executive vice president and chief financial officer to lead the group and to work closely with the provost. We charged the task force with information gathering and drafting communications and recommendations related to COVID-19. The group, which started out small and grew over time, was diverse in terms of roles and expertise. Task force members ranged from public health and safety officers, to communication and legal counsel, to faculty, and to student government representatives.

The cross-functionality of the task force allowed us to make decisions inclusively. We were quick to make certain decisions, such as switching to all remote teaching in spring 2020. When there was uncertainty, however, we were more deliberate.

The decision not to reopen our campuses in the fall of 2020 was one example. Over the spring and summer, we were constantly assessing the situation and consulting with public officials. We gave ourselves until August to make a decision, at which time, the number of cases and infection rate made it clear that it would not be safe to return to in-person learning in the fall. It was not an easy decision, but it was the right one. Deliberate and inclusive decision-making meant we didn’t have to backtrack during the pandemic.



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A DePaul student receives a COVID-19 vaccine, April 28, 2021, in the Lincoln Park Student Center. The Moderna vaccine clinic was open to DePaul students, faculty, and staff April 27-30, 2021, and was conducted in partnership with Michigan Avenue Immediate Care.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

I trusted my team. That simple fact made many things easier throughout the pandemic. I trusted my senior leaders to do the right thing. If they thought a particular situation needed my opinion, they brought it to me. Leaders of institutions always face a temptation to do things themselves, but that isn't an option in a large, complex organization. They must trust the voices in the room.

Listen to your community

Listening to the concerns of your entire community was another valuable guiding principle.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the social unrest that followed, we were mindful of the stress on our students. It was the end of the spring quarter, and finals were approaching. Our students were extremely upset. We worked with our faculty leadership to offer alternatives for traditional grading and final exams. We gave students flexibility, including the option of being graded on a certain percentage of their work. All they needed to do was talk with their professor.

We also added channels to make listening more effective. We surveyed our faculty, staff, and students to gauge concerns and needs. We launched a new website with updates, extensive FAQs, and the opportunity to pose questions. We hosted town halls to hear from the community, including family members of students.

We continued to listen and were deeply concerned to learn some of our marginalized students did not have access to high-speed internet or a computer. Some students were sitting in their cars where they could find a public WiFi hotspot. Some were completing their coursework on their phones.

As we planned for the fall quarter, we knew that we couldn't have the regular, pre-pandemic number of students living on campus, but we did determine that we could make exceptions. If students didn't have a safe place to stay or did not have access to WiFi or a computer, they could apply to stay in a dorm on campus. We also launched urgent campaigns to raise funds to help students pay for housing, food, and technology. When our students said they needed help, we listened and acted.

Keep looking forward

Our final guiding principle was to make decisions that allow us to live our mission, not just today, but well into the future.

We knew learning remotely would have implications for student recruitment and retention. We responded by creating recruitment and retention committees in April 2020, or about a month after we created the COVID-19 Planning Task Force, to address those issues.

Teaching and working remotely also gave us the opportunity to re-evaluate how our university operates. We re-examined policies and structures to make sure they align with this new reality. We have programs that we thought could never be taught online. Now, with more than 150 Zoom-enabled and trimodal classrooms, we know they can. More than 1,000 faculty completed DePaul's award-winning Online Teaching Series, a 40-hour faculty development program. We learned to be creative in the ways we connect with each other and our students.

All those lessons will stay with us well into the future—and the innovation will continue. I'm always asking our university community, "What do you want DePaul to look like not only five years from now, but also in twenty-five years or one hundred years?" We are constantly finding ways to strengthen our university, and the pandemic only accelerated that process.

As we prepared to welcome our faculty, staff, and students back on campus in fall 2021, we continued our trajectory to be a stronger, more flexible, and more inclusive institution.

Throughout the pandemic, we never lost sight of our Catholic, Vincentian, and urban mission. We overcame obstacles. We forged ahead. We took care of each other.

Every challenge is an opportunity.

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The statues in Saint Vincent's Circle are decorated with protective face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. April 30, 2020, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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A DePaul student receives a COVID-19 vaccine, April 28, 2021, in the Lincoln Park Student Center. The Moderna vaccine clinic was open to DePaul students, faculty, and staff April 27-30, 2021, and was conducted in partnership with Michigan Avenue Immediate Care.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

A Vincentian Reading of the Pandemic: Hope Beyond All Reasonable Expectation

Guillermo Campuzano, C.M.

BIO

GUILLERMO CAMPUZANO, C.M., is a Vincentian priest originally from Colombia who is a member of the Western Province of the Congregation of the Mission. Father Campuzano currently serves as Vice President of the Division of Mission and Ministry at DePaul University. He previously served at the United Nations as a representative of the Congregation of the Mission. Father Campuzano is the founder and former coordinator of the Vincentian International Network for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation and served as chair of the United Nations' Working Group to End Homelessness. Father Campuzano has vast experience in working with and advising religious life communities in different capacities. He was a human rights worker in the justice and peace project of the Catholic Church in Colombia. He has a passion for advocacy for different communities and has been frequently invited to advocate for those on the margins around the world. Currently, Father Campuzano is a member of and an advisor to the national team of Migration Ministry of the Catholic Church of the US. He also serves as the current coordinator of the interdisciplinary team that advises the President of the Conference of Religious Life in Latin American and the Caribbean (CLAR). Father Campuzano has a master's in pastoral psychology from San Buenaventura University in Colombia, a master's in human services and counseling from DePaul University, and a specialization in existential anthropology from Del Prado Community.

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Introduction

I do not know at what point during the COVID-19 pandemic these words will reach you. The changes are so fast and unpredictable that writing about it becomes almost impossible. The crisis is lasting much longer than we all expected. As I write today, the big question is about equity in the distribution of vaccines as large portions of the planet have no access to them. With much of the world unvaccinated, how can we ever overcome the pandemic?

There are those who continue to insist that the pandemic has made us all equal. These writers apparently do not understand the difference between being confined in a house of five or seven rooms with a garden and being confined alongside a big family in only one or two rooms. There is a difference between being able to order food online without leaving your home and having the fear that if you do not go out and work there will be nothing on the table to feed your children. Confinement for those who moved their offices to their houses is different from confinement for those who, if they stay at home, will starve. On top of which, many who do have to leave their homes for work have no access to our health system and so very well may die if they become infected. Never as divided and unequal as we are today, beautiful words like “equity” and “access” are still dreams under construction amid our fragile humanity.

This has not been different at DePaul University. For instance, early in the process of adjusting our classes and programs to a virtual model, we discovered that navigating online classes and programs presented new ethical challenges for instructors, staff, and students: Zoom disparity. Some lacked adequate internet connectivity, others felt vulnerable in showing their home backgrounds to classmates, or lacked any private space to work and be on camera. Our schools decided to create simple protocols to promote Zoom engagement and student equity. The main intention of these protocols was to protect our students’ privacy, equity, and safety. Many of our students experienced new challenges like food or housing insecurity, while others who already suffered from these conditions found them becoming even worse. Many had difficulties finding a job or paying their tuition. Different programs were created to provide them with integral support, and significant additional financial assistance was provided outside the norm.

My reflections are born from my own experiences at DePaul, meditation, prayer, and the need to accompany people and groups who have asked for my help. In different moments, I have been invited to share words from our Vincentian theology and spirituality that could accompany the day-to-day experiences of these individuals and communities. These are simply some personal theological and spiritual reflections born from the global impact of



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A quiet Wabash and Jackson Blvd. intersection at the height of evening rush hour during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

the pandemic. They are big-picture perspectives that I have felt called upon to share with people both in my role as vice president of DePaul's Office of Mission and Ministry and as a frequent consultant to religious communities.

In the past, I have often rejected classic theologies, theologians, and scholars because they seem unable to shed light on things that are concrete. They seem stuck in the past or reliant upon irrelevant dogmatic constructions. Today we must share a message to keep alive the hope of the hopeless, a message that will help people find meaning despite their uncertainty and their undeniable pain and fear, despite the awful realities that the pandemic has unveiled: inequity, injustice, discrimination, racism, manipulation of politics for personal gain, etc. To do this, we must face reality. We must recognize the world's interconnectedness, the importance of small things, and the presence of God in the pandemic.

Reality: Unbearable language?

Vincentian theology is not afraid of reality and its language. We understand that it is preferable to let reality hit us, teach us, and speak to us without filters, without our rushing to interpret it. Being faithful to what is real is as important as being faithful to our own ideals. Faithfulness to reality always begins with listening, reading, and meditating. These are actions that enable us to carry reality inside and finding its meaning there. More than words and theories, reality reveals to us the directions in which life and history are leading.

This past year many of us have experienced a general sense of disorientation. We were collectively pounded by the unknown. Today we are still living in the anxiety and the

uncertainty of what will come next. Most of us have slowly found a certain new normality in our daily life, yet internally we continue to deal with questions, doubts, and fear. We have been touched directly or indirectly by the pandemic and at the least know people who have suffered because of it.

Vincentian theology welcomes reality as a singular human experience and an opportune word of God that can turn every situation, however dramatic it may be, into a “favorable time of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Reality is a channel of the word of God as important as Scripture and tradition. The life of Vincent de Paul, more than his writings or conferences, is a vivid example of how to read and interpret reality and to transform it into a time for healing, restoration, and transformation. We are invited to find each other in reality even when we disagree intellectually and to identify creative ways to transform anything that causes pain, exclusion, and humiliation to the human person or anything that puts life in all its forms at risk. Reality is a place of encounter, action, and new meanings. It is always said that the Vincentian way is very pragmatic. This Vincentian pragmatism develops into a Vincentian humanism/environmentalism, which places the most abandoned as well as our planet at the center of reflection and action.

As he struggled with painful emotions, Vincent remained convinced that, no matter what the circumstances, we must never abandon the poor. They are “our portion” in life, he stated. He was firm in telling the members of his Family that, even in extremely difficult circumstances, we must be creative in finding ways to tend to the needs of the suffering. Vincent wrote to Alain de Solminihac, “The poor country people stricken with the plague are usually left abandoned and very short of food. It will be an action worthy of your piety, Excellency, to make provision for this by sending alms to all those places. See that they are put into the hands of good pastors, who will have bread, wine, and a little meat brought in for these poor people to pick up in the places and the times indicated for them ... or to some good layperson of the parish who could do this. There is usually someone in each area capable of doing this act of charity, especially if they do not have to come into direct contact with the plague-stricken.”¹

In Christian incarnational theology, reality is the primary channel of the word of God because this word has a voice, a voice They (the Triune God) used to make everything. It is a voice They continue to use to give direction to history, to be present in reality as described

1 Robert Maloney, C.M., “COVID-19: Some Wisdom from the Past. The Experience of St. Vincent de Paul,” *The Way of Wisdom* (blog), 1 April 2020, <https://blogs.depaul.edu/dmm/2020/04/01/covid-19-some-wisdom-from-the-past-the-experience-of-st-vincent-de-paul/>.

after the Second Vatican Council: “... to carry [out] her task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times.”²

I am totally convinced that the very foundation of the Vincentian spirit began with, and still demands, a specific approach to understanding reality. It is rooted in the experience of all those on the margins of society deprived of their essential rights to food, education, health care, clothing, and housing, as well as all victims of systemic injustice due to their race, sex, sexual orientation, social class, religion, etc. In this sense I believe that human dignity; human rights; diversity and equity; solidarity and compassion; systemic change and political advocacy; new forms of leadership; and functional, real democracy are Vincentian themes. In these “signs of the times” we find a concrete Vincentian call wherever we are in the world for effective and pragmatic transformation as found in the origin of our collective experience.

DePaul University decided to respond to the reality of the pandemic based on common guiding principles grounded in our common pragmatic Vincentian spirit. One of DePaul’s core principles is that all of our students are our mission, and we take care of each one of them with equity. Following the Vincentian spirit, we are especially attentive to our most vulnerable students. Guiding principles for DePaul (referenced in the article by Dr. Gabriel Esteban in this special issue) that emerged during the pandemic were built on this one original principle of mutual care for all, with special attention to those on the margins. The principles were referred to consistently in all of the administration’s decisions and became our main tool in defining our strategies and establishing concrete ways for DePaul to be inclusive, responsive, and accountable. The guiding principles were:

- to take care of our people: personal safety, mutual care, social responsibility, equity and inclusivity were paramount.
- to share governance, practice distributive leadership, and use collective wisdom: all voices were important.
- to make decisions with the future in mind.

These principles included the following ideas as reference points:

- Open and transparent communication at all levels was critical.
- Speed was of the essence—time was against us and DePaul’s administrative working team and others throughout the organization needed to make decisions quickly.
- To the extent possible, decisions needed to be simple and easy to implement.
- We were to do our best—we would make mistakes. Perfection was not the goal, especially during a period of such uncertainty.

2 Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, numbers 3–4, 7 December 1965, Vatican.va, at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.



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Signs posted on the 11th floor cafeteria in the DePaul Center emphasize social distancing. September 9, 2020, on the Loop Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Maria Toscano

These principles enabled us to keep functioning and to provide the best education and care that we could to the DePaul community. But we would be remiss if we stopped with operational lessons from the pandemic, so I would like to share some broader thoughts as well.

In the context of a global and generalized “limit situation,”³ the most important lesson of the pandemic has come in the form of basic memory: the memory of our own mortality and the memory of our interconnectedness. Most people have probably had thoughts about being infected with the virus and possibly dying. The lesson we have learned in this time is something that we try to forget with our many myths of immortality. Humans are vulnerable beings. Frailty and death are part of the essence of the human condition. It is not the only thing, but it is an essential human dimension that we cannot ignore or forget. We have been humbled by a vivid picture of our “creatureliness,” by our mortality, by our essential vulnerability. Priest and theologian Henri Nouwen wrote that humility is only possible if we overcome the myth of immortality in our hearts. He said that “much violence in our society is based on the illusion of immortality, which is the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not a gift to be shared.”⁴

3 As defined in the existential philosophy of Karl Jaspers. For a brief essay on the meaning of the term, see: <https://joseluis817english.wordpress.com/2020/01/30/8/>.

4 Henri Nouwen, *You are the Beloved: Daily Meditations for Spiritual Living* (New York: Convergent Books, 2017). For more information on Nouwen’s work, see the Henri Nouwen Foundation’s website at <https://henrinouwen.org>.

The Smallness of Everything and the Value of Small Things

This pandemic has shown us how small the world is. The phenomenon of globalization has been increasingly evident to us in economics, communications, relationships, etc. However, the pandemic has provided a new dimension to the globalization phenomenon and how the whole world is connected. The French philosopher Edgar Morin noted that “a very small virus in a city faraway in China has provoked a global cataclysm; has paralyzed the economic and social life in 177 countries and has caused a sanitarium catastrophe with a still unknown, shadowy, and alarming balance.”⁵

This finding forces us to be aware of our personal responsibility since there is no private or individual action that does not have an impact on society as a whole. For better or for worse, one’s actions affect the whole. Therefore, if we are not capable of offering a global response to the crisis, no one in any part of the world can really feel safe. The pandemic has taught us that we should recognize ourselves responsible for the destiny of each and every one of the planet’s inhabitants. We must finally understand the global meaning of co-responsibility and mutuality. The interconnectedness of life is a beautiful gift that carries an amazing responsibility and still unknown consequences. Life in isolation is not sustainable. Human advances in transportation and communication have made clear our need to act responsibly and ethically considering the global interconnection of life.

I am very aware that the exercise of solidarity and compassion is also global, and beyond the narrow limits of our people, region, country, or even continent. It has never been so true that we are citizens of the world, being aware that we belong to a single humanity in which we belong to one another. I am a member of several networks of advocacy and action constantly struggling for transformation, for the protection of the most vulnerable of our world. These global networks are created as effective forms of resistance to a culture of consumerism, individualism, and exploitation that only benefit a very small portion of humanity and systemically destroy our planet. I thank the pandemic for unveiling to us all, in such a painful way, the *real* course of our history and its possibilities.

Consider that poverty was unbearable for vast portions of our human family before the pandemic, and now is absolutely made worse. It is my hope that the pandemic will help us rethink an economy of proximity, being closer and more self-sufficient, that is capable of better alleviating the ups and downs experienced in other regions of the earth. We must create an economy of solidarity within our human family that continues to feed us and sustain us with abundant generosity. We must nurture our planet that every morning responds with flowers, fruits, the singing of birds, and abundant water despite our transgressions, as the

5 Edgar Morin, *Cambiamos de via*, trans. Núria Petit Fontserè (Ediciones Paidós, 2020), 16, Kindle.

founder of liberation theology Leonardo Boff has noted.⁶ We dream that each region of the world has the capacity to be self-sufficient, self-managed, and able to supply the fundamental goods necessary for the sustainability of life. In addition to guaranteeing the sustainability of the planet, this would mean dignified development for all regions and people.

Throughout the pandemic, we have longed for the little things. Human life is not woven together by large programs or projects. These, of course, are necessary to offer us frameworks, systems, or meanings that help us live better. But the days of our lives are made up of little things that we only miss and value when we lack them: a welcoming hug from a friend; an affectionate kiss from a loved one; a table shared by family; relaxed conversation with friends at the end of a work-day; a walk or a liberating run; a class, even if boring, but face-to-face, with eye contact and personal atmosphere; a Eucharist with the physical and spiritual presence of the people of God, where the body and blood of Christ is shared All this and much more forms our normal existence, feeding us and giving us the necessary strength to live, even though all these things became a part of our collective unawareness and our unappreciated routines. Life is woven together by these little things that together inform our humanity.

Globalization, sustainability, generalized poverty, human trafficking, violence, homelessness, and, yes, the pandemic, are all themes that in concrete ways redefine who we, the Vincentian Family, are today. *Reality*, harsh as it may be, redefines our mystical narrative, our prophetic narrative, and our narrative of communion.

Our common Vincentian mystical narrative is a constant invitation for us to be people guided and enlightened by the Spirit. We must not be self-centered but centered on the project of God, a just society where life is protected and where all can live with dignity. When we contemplate God in silence and meditation, we see the many struggles of impoverished humanity before us, we hear the cries of the poor and our planet, and we follow the direction of life.

The prophetic narrative of the Vincentian spirit implies an option for the most abandoned of our society. This option is inseparable from an option for our planet and for all the victims of systemic injustice. The prophetic dimension of our lives demands a prophetic radiance of joy, hope, vigil, closeness—proximity or trust—mercy: in short, the good news of the gospel! Our missionary discipleship is accomplished through a permanent state of mission on the periphery. Our prophetic work includes a constant caritative work to humanize the lives of all those excluded and marginalized. It demands that we develop

6 For more on Boff and liberation theology, see: <https://www.kosmosjournal.org/news/interview-leonardo-boff-a-founder-of-liberation-theology/>.

projects of systemic change⁷ and constant political advocacy so that the changes we promote are sustainable.

Our narrative of communion today is an invitation for us to continue to grow in a sense of belonging to this global family, this extraordinary network of faith and social transformation built upon unity wherein diversity is recognized and respected. Our communion is extended through all the networks we belong to, and the continual humanization of our relationships around a common mission. We are open, and every day we work to expand our interfaith, intercultural, and inter-convictional capacity. In our Vincentian Family there are lay people who live this common call through their families or jobs, and there are also consecrated people and ordained priests who have dedicated their lives exclusively to the charism. The pandemic is forcing us to think, to pray, and to reinterpret the direction of the Vincentian mission for this specific time.

The Presence of God in the Pandemic: Saints and Martyrs as our Neighbors

We have all witnessed the saints and heroes next door, just as Pope Francis said.⁸ I speak of those people stepping up outside of our governments and institutions. The government response will be judged by its citizenry when the worst of the pandemic passes. But society is slowly opening its eyes and recognizing all those people who responded with responsibility, solidarity, and generosity, some even at the risk of their own lives, to the horrific challenges of this pandemic.

In many countries around the world, people have gone to their balconies and windows to thank with applause, songs, and posters for these anonymous heroes who have watched over and cared for the infected and the sick. There are so many that have continued working, doing jobs that seemed simple, or menial, but that have been revealed as essential in our lives. These many gestures of quiet but effective solidarity remind us of the best of the human person. Yes, our best is when we are in solidarity and offer compassion. Donations, collections, providing free services, neighborhood unity, and attention to the weakest, all illustrate a comforting tapestry of the majority of society. Their actions are a rejection and a clear denouncement of the usual profiteers who want to benefit from the misfortune and general helplessness of the other.

It is true that we speak of heroism and sanctity, but really most of these actions would fall within a sense of duty. When asked, these everyday heroes deny that they are

7 For more on the Vincentian Family and systemic change, see: <https://vinformation.org/en/vincentian-formation-resources/systemic-change-resources/#intro>; for a recent manual published by the Systemic Change Commission, see: <https://famvin.org/en/files/2017/08/manual-for-systemic-change-english-2017-lq.pdf>.

8 See, for example, Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 2018, Vatican.va, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html.

heroes; they are simply doing their duty. After this pandemic, we will have to ask ourselves what has happened to society from a moral standpoint that action born from a sense of duty and responsibility is seen as heroic. I recently heard it said that when common sense seems exceptional, society has become radicalized to the extreme. What can be said of declines in political and social life is perfectly extrapolated to moral life. However, it is still just and good to recognize the many heroes and saints next door. By offering their time, work, knowledge, expertise, and ultimately their bodies for the health of others, they have given light and hope to humanity.

It is important not to lose hope. Preaching during Holy Week of 2020, Rainero Cantalamesa of the Pontifical House said that the virus is not a plague or punishment for a sinful humanity. He reminded everyone that God has plans for our welfare, to give us a future with hope (Jeremiah 29:11).⁹ According to him, the pandemic offers a call for relational conversion in all directions, including our relationship with nature. It recalls Paul of Tarsus in his exhortation to the Christians of Rome when asked about the place of God in the face of the suffering of creatures: If God is with us, who is against us?¹⁰ God is present in this situation, not behind the virus as a punishment. God is suffering the pandemic with us and being a force of transformation and resurrection for the sustainability of life.

Similarly, we can and must read this historical moment. The situation we are experiencing has specific causes that we must learn about. But it is also legitimate to say from a faith perspective that in it and through it, God is calling us. We are being asked not only to respond adequately to the emergency, but to transform our way of life, and to relate to nature, with others, and with God in a more humane way as Jesus showed us in the gospels. God is here in this way, and not as the cause of misfortune. God is found not in the virus, but in the strength to respond to it with wisdom, solidarity, intelligence, and compassion. They call us to be holy and merciful as They are always in all circumstances (Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36).

Some philosophers and thinkers have spoken of the pandemic as an event capable of provoking the advent of a new humanity.¹¹ As we carefully approach this anthropological possibility, we realize that there is a tremendous tension between the advent of a new and united humanity and the advent of an inhuman humanity. We must be cautious of the ego as the only referent of meaning, direction, and the only valid tool used in decision-making.

The inability to discern how we belong to each other is behind the failure of our current global struggle with the pandemic: racism, systemic and sustained injustice, economic

9 "Pope Celebrates Passion of the Lord, as Papal Preacher Reflects on Covid-19 Pandemic," *Vatican News*, 10 April 2020, at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/pope-francis-passion-of-the-lord-cantalamesa-sermon-coronavirus.html>.

10 Rom 8:31.

11 Morin, *Cambiamos de via*, 16.



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Michael Van Dorpe, then program manager for faculty and staff engagement in the division of Mission and Ministry, staffs the front desk of the Mission and Ministry office in the Lincoln Park Student Center during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 16, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

inequality, environmental degradation, political radicalization, religious fundamentalism, and all of the conflicts that cause us to hide behind our insecurities. The underlying crisis continues to be an anthropological crisis generated by the way we understand ourselves, how we see others, and the ethical or unethical behaviors that this understanding and vision provoke.

As said at the beginning, both immersing ourselves in the crisis and taking distance from it, to interpret it, to make sense of it, is perhaps the most necessary contribution and the most typical of the prophecy we are called to live as people of faith. Faith does not take us away from the pandemic but allows us to enter its essence from the outside, to open it to new horizons in a profound communion and solidarity with humanity, with the earth, and with history. This is the time for prophecy, and this prophecy calls for the audacity to enter this and other crises without fear, with a deep sense of the whole and the common good.

Conclusion

Today we have a real chance to enter a movement that transforms meanings and paradigms; that promotes humility, decision-making, sincerity, and coherence; and that shuns alienating theories and alarmist, apocalyptic, pietistic, naive readings of reality. This is a message that I want DePaul students, faculty, and staff to know. This is something I hope the whole world can reflect on. Behind the pandemic is an opportunity for humanity to react before it is too late. This is an opportunity for all of us. A change of meaning and paradigms means assuming a new lifestyle, immediately. New behaviors are the most credible way of

any transforming action, especially in a society drowning in misinformation. We still must choose a future with meaning and hope, a future that is sustainable for the generations coming after us.

Recently, in spaces of sociopolitical and economic decision-making, there has been a great controversy about the primacy of life over the economy, of the person over the institution, of the common good over the individual good. The pandemic has forced the regeneration of political action. Political leaderships around the world have been unmasked by the decisions they have made, and the criteria used to make those decisions, in facing a public health crisis.

I have read with interest of the recent natural phenomena happening in many places on earth. The waters of the seas are becoming multicolored again, ocean life flourishes, birds have dared to return to cities, wildlife has been spotted roaming deserted streets, the sky has become bluer as levels of pollution have dropped, and even the ozone layer is recovering. It seems like the whole of earth and all its forms of life have been freed from the most lethal of viruses: humanity and its dependence upon an irrational lifestyle.

May this be a defining moment in our global commitment to all of life, not simply to human life. Hopefully we will recognize that all forms of life are harmoniously woven, a mysterious tapestry that reveals the creative hand of God who watches over everything. May we be able to understand the language of nature and its apparent relief when we disappear. I hope that we can understand what the resilience of life means, the resilience of the earth, and from that contemplated experience we might find our own resilience.

For people of faith, for our Vincentian Family, the pandemic is a time for love, action, and justice to be creative to infinity. What does it mean for us to call on God when considering the many dogmatic comforts of life we are used to? What does it mean to say faith when life appears so vulnerable before us? What do dialogue, relationships, and networking mean when we have become used to empty social, educational, and celebratory rituals in which communication is a superficial exercise? Will humanity react, will we respond to this opportunity the pandemic affords? Will we be willing to transform our perceptions, our actions, and our lifestyles for something bigger than ourselves, even if simply a gesture of solidarity with the world, our children, and the generations to come?

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A quiet Wabash and Jackson Blvd. intersection at the height of evening rush hour during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs



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Signs posted on the 11th floor cafeteria in the DePaul Center emphasize social distancing. September 9, 2020, on the Loop Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Maria Toscano



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Michael Van Dorpe, then program manager for faculty and staff engagement in the division of Mission and Ministry, staffs the front desk of the Mission and Ministry office in the Lincoln Park Student Center during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 16, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

Creativity Can't Be Canceled: DePaul Students Express Their Pandemic Experience Through Art

Lin Batsheva Kahn

BIO

LIN BATSHEVA KAHN is a DePaul Theatre School Excellence in Teaching Honoree who teaches *Modern Dance; Chicago Dancing; Diversity in Dance: Paradigms Shifting*, addressing racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism; and *Creativity & Adversity*, an interdisciplinary class about transcending hardship through the arts in the Psychology department. An innovative choreographer, Kahn created MusicDance En-sem'ble, a performance group of dancers and guest musicians such as Grammy award-winning Third Coast Percussion. Ongoing collaboration with faculty from the DePaul School of Music includes Michael Kozakis's Percussion Ensemble, Michael Lewanski's 20+Ensemble, Harry Silverstein's Opera Theater productions *The Fairy Queen* and *Nozze di Figaro*, and *Dido and Aeneas* with Dr. Eric Esparza and Jason Moy. Choreography for the 2019 Theatre School at DePaul production of *A Dybbuk: Or Between Two Worlds* was described as "stunning." Kahn's 2021 virtual *Moving Toward Action with Music & Dance* was supported by DePaul University's Vincentian Endowment Fund, Jewish United Fund, and community patrons. She has received many grants from the DePaul Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity for this international teaching and performance event. Quality of Instruction Council grants have taken her to

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the University of Hertfordshire in London with dance psychologist Dr. Peter Lovatt, Axis Dance Company in California, and The Joffrey Ballet in Chicago.

With over 4,500 views, her ideas about creativity filmed at PBS WTTW as an ELI Talk includes the moving duet *January Thirtyfirst*. Times of Israel published “Creativity Can’t Be Canceled” and 4 other pieces she wrote in their Marketplace of Ideas in 2021. Lin’s work expressing themes of human significance has been seen worldwide, while her inclusive university teaching has impacted students across the United States and from countries such as Egypt, Peru, India, Hungary, Korea, China, Ecuador, Uzbekistan, Singapore, and the Netherlands. A Chicago native, she holds a BFA in modern dance from the University of Illinois-Champaign; a master’s in dance, theatre, and communication from Kent State University; and a master’s in contemporary dance from Case Western Reserve University. Her thesis for the latter was about the relationship of creativity and grief, and it initiated the unique DePaul course *Creativity & Adversity*.



Freshmen to seniors create dance, drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, poetry, film, and music pieces in my course Creativity & Adversity: Psychology, Religious Thought, and the Arts. They make Picasso-like cubist faces from ripped paper. Their final “transcending work of art” re-channels individual hardship through a chosen artistic medium. However, in spring 2020, students created from the same shared adversity: a global pandemic. The positive impact on non-art majors from different backgrounds and places in the world was timely, important, and meaningful. They discovered their untapped creative resources while learning creativity can’t be canceled.

Please click this link to experience the online exhibition and music:

**Creativity Can’t Be Canceled:
DePaul Students Express Their Pandemic Experience
Through Art**

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Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment: An Experiment in Teaching for 2020

Jane Eva Baxter, Ph.D., Sarah Brown, Jenicel Carmona, Val Carnes, Zoe Espinosa, Randall Honold, Ph.D., Cary Robbins, George Slad, Margaret Storey, Ph.D.

BIOS

JANE EVA BAXTER, PHD, is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology. She began teaching at DePaul in 2000 and won the LAS Excellence in Teaching Award the first year she was eligible in 2003. During her career at DePaul, she has published three books, edited five volumes, and written over thirty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on topics including archaeological pedagogies, the archaeology of childhood, emotions in the past, historic cemetery studies, and the archaeology of labor and identity.

SARAH BROWN is the assistant director of faculty development and instructional technology in DePaul's Center for Teaching and Learning. She collaborates with stakeholders in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences on programmatic initiatives, and she facilitates faculty development programs, such as the DePaul Online Teaching Series. She also teaches in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse department.

JENICEL CARMONA is a first-year student at DePaul University. She intends to study applied diplomacy and political science. For the course Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment, she created a map featuring music and art connected to the substance of the course material.

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VAL CARNES is a freshman at DePaul University majoring in political science and is participating in the JD 3/3 program. They are also minoring in classical studies and history.

ZOE ESPINOSA is a freshman at DePaul University. She is set to graduate as a part of the honors program in 2023 because her major is joined to participation in the JD 3/3 program. She is currently majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing and after her graduation will be attending DePaul's law school. She is grateful for the opportunities DePaul has given her.

RANDALL HONOLD, PHD, is assistant dean for academic services in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. In addition to his work leading academic advising efforts for LAS, Honold has served as vice president of DePaul's Staff Council and on the board of directors of NACADA. He also teaches courses in philosophy and environmental studies.

CARY ROBBINS is excited to be attending DePaul University as a freshman. She hopes to live on campus soon and to continue pursuing her major in peace, justice, and conflict studies.

GEORGE SLAD is a freshman attending DePaul University. He is majoring in English and minoring in film production, and he lives in New Mexico. Because both of his parents were born and raised in Chicago, he has visited the city many times for leisure.

MARGARET STOREY, PHD, is professor of history and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at DePaul University. She received her PhD in United States history from Emory University in 1999 and has published books and articles about the American South during the Civil War. Her most recent article, "War's Domestic Corollary: Union Occupation Households in the Civil War South," appeared in the edited collection *From Home Front to Battlefield: The Civil War as a Household War* in 2019.

An Introduction

During the summer of 2020, the DePaul College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (LAS) offered a small group of newly admitted students the opportunity to learn and reflect with faculty, staff, and one another about topics that were dominating our lives in a year frequently and aptly described as unprecedented.¹ The experience centered on a two-credit hour course that took place over a five-week period with an academic and a co-curricular synchronous online meeting each week. To document this experience as part of DePaul 2020, a small group of the faculty, staff, and student participants came together to describe the formulation and execution of this course and to offer reflection on the student experience. This unique educational experience built on DePaul's particular strengths as a teaching institution and its mission to educate students in ways that engage questions of intellect and ethics in our contemporary world. The most significant and enduring feature of this work, we hope, is the presentation of projects and reflections by students who participated in this course so that their voices may be recorded as part of our DePaul 2020 experiences.

Creating a Course for Our Current Moment

Margaret Storey

For many of us, March 2020 was a crash course in unimagined contingencies. Facing the sudden, dramatic demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of our certainties (imagined or otherwise) were challenged. How would we live and work? Where would we live and work? For how long? What would this public health crisis mean for the near term? The long term?

In higher education, we faced our own list of uncertainties: how would our faculty adapt to the demand to move rapidly and completely to online instruction? How would our students meet the moment? What would they need, and would we be able to deliver? Would our enrollments for next year hold, and how could we recruit students remotely? In short, what was possible in this new reality?

In LAS, we felt confident about a few things amid this confusion. We knew we were a teaching institution with exceptionally talented faculty who are deeply committed to our students, that we had one of the best models of online instruction in the country, and that

¹ For a summary of various efforts undertaken for students by LAS in the summer of 2020, see: *Insights: LAS College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences* (Fall 2020): 4–5. *Insights* can be accessed here: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/insights/>.

there is nothing like interdisciplinary, critical inquiry to help navigate crises like the ones we were facing.

To that end, we began in April to work with our Office of Admissions to plan a special summer course for a small group of newly admitted students, ISP 330: Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment. Our goal was to help our newest students to use the insights of the liberal arts and sciences to contextualize, explain, and put in perspective the extraordinary changes they were living through, while also gaining academic advising support as they prepared for the fall quarter.

The course would be online, led by an award-winning professor, Dr. Jane Eva Baxter, and supported by a team of ten contributing faculty who would explore topics like the social contract; equity and justice; historical, cultural, and artistic responses to upheaval; global interconnections; and the way forward. Complementing the academic content would be a robust introduction to student support experts and services at DePaul, led by our Assistant Dean Randall Honold.

Our course planning was complete when, in late May, the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis brought into high relief the racism that has long marred policing in the US, prompting widespread protests and renewed calls for change under the Black Lives Matter banner. Nonetheless, because of the course's interdisciplinary structure, it was primed to be space in which our students could explore the larger historical, political, and social contexts of Floyd's death, alongside the crises prompted by the pandemic.

Saint Vincent de Paul's injunction of "What must be done?" is at the heart of our work in LAS. But action not informed by knowledge and understanding can be ineffective, at best, and reckless and harmful at worst. For us, the summer mini-course was one of the things that we could do to make a difference in the lives and education of our students. As their final reflective maps demonstrate, our students were empowered not only to think differently, but to imagine their own field of action in new ways too. We can think of no better way to start college.

Developing Academic Content

Jane Eva Baxter

When I was first asked to undertake the facilitation of this course, the content had already been determined. Weekly topics had been established and amazing colleagues from across the college had agreed to give their time freely to engage with our incoming students. I was asked to lead the student experience as a facilitator for two reasons. First, I had been

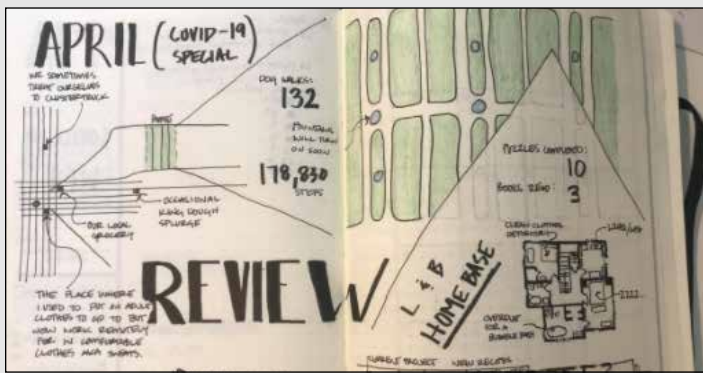
teaching most of my courses online for years, and I was very comfortable and familiar with developing pedagogies and facilitating learning for online students. Second, in my own scholarly life as a historical archaeologist, I regularly work across disciplinary boundaries and it was thought I could translate my own experiences in interdisciplinary research and thinking into an effective learning structure for student engagement.

The course that was developed had the following topics and participants:

- The Social Contract in Our Current Moment
Dr. Molly Andolina (Political Science) and Dr. Winfred Curran (Geography)
- Equity and Justice in a Time of Pandemic
Dr. Christina Rivers (Political Science) and Dr. Daniel Schoeber (Masters in Public Health)
- The Past and Its Lessons
Dr. Rachel Scott (Anthropology) and Dr. Chernoh Sesay (Religious Studies)
- Artists and Writers in Moments of Upheaval
Dr. Delia Constantino (Art History), Dr. Rebecca Cameron (English), and Prof. Matthew Girson (Art and Digital Media)
- Global Interconnections and the Paths Forward
Dr. Susana Martinez (Modern Languages), and Dr. David Wellman (Grace School of Applied Diplomacy)

Facilitating a course where you aren't developing the weekly content is a trickier endeavor than I could have ever imagined. Certainly, I did not have to develop the materials and lessons, but I did have to provide a sense of an overarching course and some pedagogical continuity. The tradeoff for this challenge was being treated to an extraordinary educational experience in the liberal arts. Socially distancing during pandemic lockdowns and restrictions meant I was spending a great deal of time with my own thoughts. Patterns and ideas grew stale and wearisome, and this course injected fresh new thinking into my socially distanced world each week, giving me new ways to engage information, challenge my thinking, and examine the complexities of our current world with greater understanding and hope. I was an eager student!

My role each week was largely administrative. I welcomed the class, helped field questions for speakers, made sure technology was working before and during presentations, and encouraged and acknowledged student participation in the chat feature on Zoom. I also sometimes chimed in with my own disciplinary insights on a topic of conversation, and I



[Click to enlarge](#)

Figures 1a and 1b: Two different maps submitted to Citylab. Both are examples of maps categorized as Domestic Rearrangements and were submitted by: Lora Teagarden of Indianapolis Indiana (top); and An Trinh from Haiphong, Vietnam (bottom).

See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>

Courtesy of the authors



made a point to ask our speakers at the end of each session to share with us what made them hopeful during these very difficult times. These final responses were often inspiring and uplifting after some very challenging conversations, and sometimes suggested ways students could participate in creating hopeful futures through engaging the Vincentian question of “What must be done?”

My greater contribution to the course was creating a reflective project for students that allowed them to engage the course content in ways that were simultaneously personal, collective, intellectual, and emotional. This project was inspired by the *Bloomberg CityLab*’s request for readers to submit handmade maps of their lives under quarantine.² The request from CityLab was simple: they asked people to create a map that illustrated their changed relationships to their neighborhood as a result of the coronavirus. The response was rather incredible as over 400 people from around the world submitted handmade maps.³ Artistically, these included digital art projects, collages, sketches, paintings, and even a Washington DC Metro Map recreated in multicolored pepper strips on a frozen pizza. People depicted changing relationships in ways CityLab characterized as, Domestic Rearrangements, Natural Callings, Psychic Landscapes, Neighborhood Bonds, Redefined

² Laura Bliss and Jessica Martin, “Readers: Share Your Hand-Made Maps of Life Under Lockdown,” *Bloomberg*, 3 April 2020, at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-03/share-your-hand-made-maps-of-life-under-quarantine>.

³ Laura Bliss and Jessica Lee Martin, “How 2020 Remapped Your Worlds,” *Bloomberg*, 18 June 2020, see: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>.

Boundaries, and Virtual Connections (Figure 1).⁴ In viewing these maps, I realized the potential to create a unique reflective project for students in the form of reflective learning maps.

The directions for these reflective projects required students to make a physical map using whatever materials they preferred, but the map needed to be a material project involving posterboard, written text, clipped images, or art supplies in any combination they desired. With life becoming increasingly digital, the idea of a multi-sensory, tactile project was particularly appealing to me as a way to engage students. The CityLab project was provided as reference and inspiration. I also encouraged students in the assignment directions to think of the idea of a map broadly including both tangible and intangible elements. There needed to be a starting point, but the routes and connections they mapped would, as the assignment sheet noted, “not generally be physical places but instead will allow you to visually demonstrate the intellectual, social, and emotional connections that are being created as you reflect on your learning journey.”

These maps needed to be updated on a weekly basis, meaning the relationships expressed on the map might get messy and complicated, and that was encouraged. Weekly updates of student projects were posted to Instagram using a course-specific hashtag so instructors and students could see how each reflection was evolving. The completed projects were presented as videos where students provided a narrative audio tour of their reflective maps. Five student projects were selected for this publication and appear below in a presentation format that mirrors those in the CityLab publication,⁵ particularly a selected image or images combined with a written explanation to help guide the reader through the map. It is hoped that these exceptional examples from a collection of truly excellent student work will help readers appreciate the experiences of DePaul students in 2020.

The Co-Curricular Component

Randall Honold

When this course was conceived, we wanted it to have a co-curricular component that complimented the academic activities designed by the lead instructor and the faculty contributors. We thought it was important to give the students a sense of how study in LAS is connected to what the university can offer them outside of the classroom. After some

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

discussion about what this might look like, I was asked to develop a series of five, one-hour sessions on Thursdays that would follow each Tuesday's two-hour meeting led by faculty. I designed the co-curricular component to mirror the topic of that week's academic session, then asked staff professional colleagues from across the university to make the presentations. The idea was to scale the curriculum, focused on macro, systemic issues, down to the level of the DePaul community, in order to introduce the students to the institutional resources, supports, and opportunities we make available for them. All of the people I asked to contribute were enthusiastic about the opportunity.

I moderated the sessions; the topics and presenters were as follows:

- Week One: The DePaul Social Contract
Yessenia Mejia, College Transitions Coordinator, Office of Multicultural Student Success
- Week Two: Health & Wellness at DePaul
Katrina Wagner, Health Promotion Coordinator, Office of Health Promotion and Wellness
- Week Three: Who We Were, Who We Are, and Whom We Might Become
Tim Mazurek, Associate Director, Office for Academic Advising Support
- Week Four: DePaul's Writing Center and Art Museum
Katie Martin, Workshops & Digital Resources Coordinator, University Center for Writing-based Learning
Laura-Caroline de Lara Johnson, Interim Director, DePaul Art Museum
- Week Five: Global Engagement and Career Exploration
Marty McGivern, Director, Study Abroad Program
Hilarie Longnecker, Associate Director of Early Engagement, Career Center

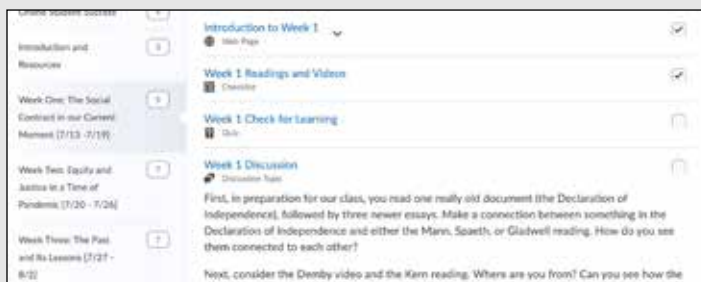
Whenever possible, I sat in on the Tuesday sessions. This afforded me some language to make smooth transitions from the academic to the co-curricular topics and to frame the two components of the course as connected in both idea and practice. My colleagues did all the work in the sessions, really. They calibrated their presentations to their audience wonderfully. Students were as engaged on Thursdays as they were on Tuesdays. While the academic presentations were the “head” of the course, the co-curricular sessions were its “heart.”



[Click to enlarge](#)

Figures 2a and 2b: Images from the course Desire to Learn (D2L) illustrating how each week was presented to students, thereby creating a uniform set of activities and expectations.

Courtesy of the authors



Developing the Course as a Remote Offering

Sarah Brown

When Associate Dean Margaret Storey reached out to me with the idea for Critical Perspectives on Our Current Moment, my enthusiasm for the proposal propelled me into strategy immediately: How could we craft a course that engages unique disciplinary lenses and yet still has a clear through line? What pedagogical and design elements were necessary to create a productive learning experience? And most importantly, how would we complete such an ambitious project on a tight timeline?

As many instructors will tell you, teaching collaboratively is just as much of a challenge, if not more so, than crafting and executing a course individually. Fortunately, in addition to being disciplinary experts, our faculty team also brought a wealth of instructional experience, and critically, they were willing to work as a team to deliver content and foster learning using the same structure. This ensured that students didn't feel like they were walking into a different (virtual) classroom each week, and it allowed them to focus all of their mental energy on the new ideas and ways of thinking they were encountering, rather than getting distracted by the logistics of the course.

The weekly design structure asked faculty to produce four elements (Figure 2):

- ***Course materials:*** Faculty provided readings, podcasts, and videos to introduce students to their disciplinary lens, and they worked with the guidelines established by Drs. Storey and Baxter to ensure that each week had a similar amount of reading, listening, and watching.

- *Knowledge-check quizzes:* Each faculty member wrote five multiple-choice questions to help students affirm their understanding of the course materials prior to the synchronous session. This might not seem like a big ask, but for most of our faculty, quizzes aren't a common method for assessing learning, and because their readings were designed to prompt complex conversations, it was often a challenge to come with a set of questions with objectively right or wrong answers.
- *Discussions:* We wanted the asynchronous discussion to help students begin unpacking ideas that they could engage with further in the synchronous sessions. The weekly faculty teams collaborated to create meaningful prompts that guided students towards finding points of synthesis in the course materials.
- *Synchronous Sessions:* Finally, faculty members planned the materials for our academic synchronous session on Tuesdays, where they would provide further information to build on the online learning. Our limited time in Zoom was made more fruitful by the online work students had done in preparation.

Even though the structure for each week introduced some constraints for the faculty, it also provided a clear task list for the instructors to complete in the limited time available to design the course. By designing within the planned framework for the course, the faculty team delivered a clear and consistent learning experience for the students, and their projects demonstrate that they were able to focus their discovery and reflection on the course materials.

Student Perspectives and Reflections

This course was a unique creation and therefore didn't fall under the typical rubrics and patterns of standardized university course evaluations. Instead, an exit survey was offered to students after the completion of the course, and five of the twenty-two participants chose to share their perspectives. While a small sample, their feedback on the experience was very consistent. Students reported that the summer course gave them a greater sense of being prepared to begin their classes in the autumn, both in terms of systems and technologies and how professors conducted university-level classes. Similarly, the co-curricular component was reported to be highly influential, both in increasing confidence for the transition to college life and also allowing students to imagine new ways they could engage in an academic setting using the resources at DePaul.

The course participants also commented enthusiastically on the course's interdisciplinary structure and content. They cited the importance of having each week offer new perspectives that challenged their thinking, increased their understanding through exposure to previously unfamiliar disciplines, and provided opportunities to dive deeply



[Click to enlarge](#)

Figure 3: The reflective map of Val Carnes created as their final ISP 300 project.

Courtesy of the authors

into the complexity of our current moment. Students commented on changed perspectives, the ability to think more deeply, recognizing the interconnectedness of ideas and events, and a sense of empowerment to look for solutions they might implement in their own life and in their futures.

The final question of the exit survey asked students if the course had strengthened their relationship to DePaul. All agreed that it had helped them gain a deeper appreciation for the university, for the faculty, and for fellow students, and others noted it had reinforced their choice of DePaul and increased their excitement to start their freshman year. As one respondent said, “I think the course made my relationship stronger, and it showed me that I am going where I am supposed to be.”

While these universally positive anecdotal responses to an exit survey suggest the course was a good idea in a challenging moment, the reflective work of the students is a more powerful testament to the impact of the course. The following five student contributions represent the very best of an excellent collection of student works and help to give voice to the experience of DePaul students as we navigated a very difficult summer in the middle of the very difficult year that was 2020.⁶ Each contribution is personal and unique, and none is representative of “the student experience,” but collectively they illustrate the variety of ways students found meaning, explored ideas, and grew in the midst of this unprecedented year.

⁶ The student exit surveys were anonymous. The student posters were selected by the course instructor. While there are five students in each group, there is no way of determining whether or not there was overlap between those providing exit survey responses and those chosen to contribute their work to this chapter.

Student Reflection—Val Carnes

Given the challenge of making a map, I decided to make it in rings (Figure 3). I've never had a very good sense of direction. As a result, I tend to think of everything in terms of how far away they are from a central location rather than where they are in space. I can get to the mailbox from my house, but if I'm asked where it is, all I'll be able to say is "about ten minutes that way," possibly punctuated with me pointing in the general direction of which way I need to walk. The nearest restaurants are "about five minutes this way," my old elementary school is "ten minutes with a few turns," and so on. A map of my thoughts is similar. Even if I don't know exactly how I got from thought to thought, I know how far I've gone from where I started.

In the center of my map, therefore, is home. It's a tiny, Monopoly-like representation of a house. Nothing fancy. It's just where I started, mentally speaking, like when you set the tare on your scale in a physical laboratory. In the same layer is a drawing of me (mostly to set up what I look like for future drawings) and some Z's, because that week was the week I was starting to develop a more consistent sleep schedule.

From this point on, every ring represented one week of the summer. The next ring sees me slowly wading into the idea of online classes: I'm nervously meeting people on the bottom, starting to read things on the right, and on top I'm in a Zoom call. There's also a plate and a cup of liquid, because in terms of self-care I focused on trying to establish a regular schedule of eating meals and drinking water.

In week 3, the third ring from the center, I really started to express what was going on in my life at the time. In class, we were learning about how scientists were dealing with the virus. Nothing was more inspiring to me than hearing that scientists all over the world were united in their pursuit of finding a vaccine. That came at a time when I absolutely needed it and really stirred something in me a lot more than I was expecting. It helped to balance out the other, less positive events of the week: finally cutting off contact with someone I needed to get away from, feeling very small as time got harder and harder to keep track of, and generally feeling very lost. On the bright side, I took some lovely evening walks (in the top left) and got some socks (in the bottom right). Always a pleasure.

Following the melting clocks through the broken part of the ring, you can see that time was a bit hard to keep track of between weeks 3 and 4. Those two weeks in particular really seemed to blend together. In week 4, I nearly drew several things that had happened the previous week because quarantine was making it so difficult for me to tell time. There were definitely some distinctive events that week, though: besides drinking a lot more caffeine (top left), both lectures absolutely fascinated me. The one on the bottom was one about plagues over the ages and their connection to the modern day. I was particularly

interested in the tone the professor used to describe old catastrophes, as cheerfully as if she'd been describing the weather. The other lecture, about memorials (top), left me thinking all week what sort of memorial I'd want to design. I'm still not sure I have an answer to that. Memorials are so open-ended, and they're such an interesting problem to try to get right. How do you efficiently and effectively communicate your respect for a situation without using your funding frivolously? What's "just enough" detail to put in a monument without going overboard? I discussed these frequently with my brother, pictured on the bottom right, who watched the lecture with me.

Finally, in the last ring, I demonstrated what I'd learned from the whole class. In the bottom right is a sketch of a painting we analyzed. The same painting is depicted more crudely in the top left. It's one that I also gave quite a bit of thought. The top left depicts my setup when I figured out how I could best analyze it: have one screen for listening to the professor and one for opening the painting in Photoshop, marking it up. I circled important details, scribbled some notes on it, that sort of thing. It was a lovely painting, and one with quite a bit of detail put into it. Below the setup drawing on the left is me being observed by a group of eyes. This represents me being intimately aware of how many eyes were on me. I posted updates on my project progress on Instagram, a program I've never been very familiar with, and occasionally received likes and comments! I also found myself thinking about being watched because of the strange and unique time we're living in. Undeniably, what we do now will end up in the history books, because nothing like this will happen again for a very long time (hopefully).

One of the topics we touched on frequently in the class was the idea of a "usable past:" a version of history that you can apply to something, maybe by picking just the right details and just the right evidence. This project inherently was a usable past itself. It couldn't possibly cover everything that happened in the course, or especially in the summer. But it could cover the most interesting things that had happened, and I could use those things to tell a greater story of my own progression. Pictured in the bottom left is me telling that story: not exactly what happened, but an approximation.

Student Reflection—Jenice Carmona

During the summer leading up to my first quarter at DePaul, I, like many others, watched from home as the coronavirus pandemic continued to sweep the globe. The public health crisis coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement and other outcries of social injustice which intensified during the summer months, not to mention the many other traumatic events that characterized the year 2020.

Those months left me somewhat overwhelmed, disillusioned, and searching for

retain the information in the paragraphs and to make the sharing of my map more interactive, I decided to connect songs to the subject we learned and discussed in class. (I also just wanted to have some fun.) By scanning the barcodes, I included throughout the map on Spotify (Figure 4), others could access the songs with which I made these connections. I also made a playlist called “ISP 330 Reflective Project” on Spotify so that others could look it up and listen!

In total, there were eleven lectures and discussions with different professors, twelve songs from a wide range of artists, thirteen paragraphs that tried to connect it all, and twenty pictures that supplemented the paragraphs included in the reflective project. It would be quite an endeavor to try to summarize all five weeks, so I will share only a few examples.

During the first week, political science professor Dr. Molly Andolina called to our attention the significance of a social contract, like the Declaration of Independence, in light of government actions to limit the spread of the coronavirus and promises of equality that were not always upheld for Americans of all colors. Questions were posed about the authority of the government to forgo rights in order to protect the health of citizens (e.g., stay-at-home orders) and whether or not the Declaration of Independence is a broken social contract as a result of repeated racial injustices. They were difficult to answer, but ultimately crucial to ask and grapple with.

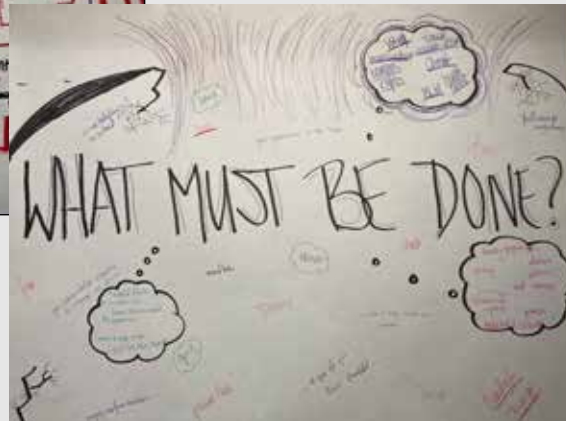
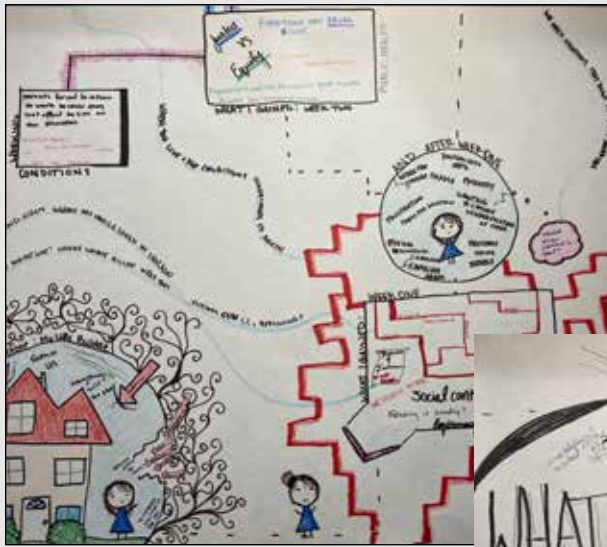
I remember “This is America” by Childish Gambino⁷ being all over social media as it was dubbed over many videos of Black Lives Matter protests. Lyrically, I thought the song also connected to the extent of the Declaration’s inclusion of Black Americans to its promises of equality. I included a couple of photos for this entry, but my favorite was a cartoon of a person in a hazmat suit gesturing at the U.S covered with viruses. Prophetically, this was cut out from a March 2019 issue of *The New Yorker*.

The next week, Dr. Daniel Schober talked to us about health disparities between different areas of Chicago. He presented shocking information about “how much the average life expectancy drops when you go to a neighborhood 30 minutes south of downtown.” Before class, we listened to a National Public Radio podcast in which Richard Rothstein detailed the public health problems that surfaced in Baltimore as an implication of housing segregation.⁸ I immediately thought of “Baltimore” by Nina Simone.⁹ By looking through a public health lens, I was able to understand the close correlation between housing segregation and health disparities.

7 For a general overview of the song “This is America,” see “This is America (song),” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 18 June 2021, 07:04, at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Is_America_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Is_America_(song)). A link to the official video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>.

8 Richard Rothstein, “Historian Says Don’t ‘Sanitize’ How our Government Created Ghettos,” interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, 14 May 2015, available here: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/406699264>.

9 The official audio track for Nina Simone’s “Baltimore” can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztCgNQg9FCQ>.



[Click to enlarge](#)

Figure 6: The starting point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map; Figure 7: The end point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map.

Courtesy of the authors

We learned about involuted and difficult issues throughout the course, but I thought Dr. Christina Rivers had a profound take on how to go about addressing these problems. She posed a modification to the Vincentian Question and changed “What must be done?” to “What must be done now?” Her point was that today, we could demand greater structural change compared to the time of Saint Vincent de Paul since his charitable actions were politically and socially limited. “A Change Is Gonna Come”¹⁰ by Sam Cooke (my favorite civil rights song) came to mind while pondering this question.

From geography, anthropology, and diplomacy, I was introduced to so many more perspectives with which to approach challenges. Along with the defacing of my old magazines and admittedly stretching the meanings of some songs, I was able to produce a reflective map that displayed my learning journey in this one-of-a-kind course.

My experience in the class fully lived up to the expectation. Despite all of the disorder these times have caused, those eleven professors still found the time and felt it necessary to show us new frames of mind—for this, I am very grateful. Academically, I walked away with more lenses through which to view the current challenges, more prepared for what college classes would be like during this unusual time, and ultimately a deeper appreciation for the value of a liberal arts education.

Student Reflection—Zoe Espinosa

This reflective project was something that truly caused me to think. I was forced

¹⁰ For an overview of the song “A Change Is Gonna Come,” see “A Change Is Gonna Come,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 10 June 2021, 14:14, at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Change_Is_Gonna_Come. The official audio may be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEBlaMOmKV4>.

to think about my city, my country, and my life experiences through the lens of a college student, not as a teenager living in her bubble of the suburbs of Chicago. When my professor told our class to make the project in a way that we wanted, I decided to make it a path of my brain, though it is one that is much easier to understand. Ideas jut out from key information, causing me to question what we learned about and apply it to the world I want to see in my lifetime.

I started out, and kept the theme throughout my project, with me being stuck in my bubble (Figure 6). I was raised in a suburb of Chicago that was the very edge of typical “suburb” and the very beginning of rural areas and farmland. Though I identify as a woman of color, which is usually a label that means “underprivileged” in our current society, I recognize the privilege I have had growing up. I grew up in a safe neighborhood with loving parents. Though my family has had its share of hard times, I know that the white appearance to my skin tone and the safe, and almost generic, town I grew up in has been a privilege. I want to recognize this as much as I possibly can because not recognizing these privileges is not fair to those who are forced to suffer.

Including my bubbles throughout my reflective assignment was a way for me to constantly be reflecting on my privilege and thinking of what I can do to further my education and continue to fight for justice. This, I thought, was the most important part of the reflection. I wanted the ability to be able to actually reflect about these new ideas that were being brought to my attention. Through each of my bubbles, you can see more and more cracks being formed along the edges, and that is truly how I felt. Each new bit of information that we were exposed to during this class further hit the bubble I was so comfortable in at home. I also included the way I was thinking after each week inside the bubble, and ways that I could keep exploring topics in order to become more educated. I did not want to sit, not knowing of the severity of injustice we were learning about. I wanted to learn and learn, in order to break my bubble on my own terms.

During the first week, I had to figure out the best way to demonstrate how my brain was processing the information. I decided to create a system where I would write down the key information for the week, and then create paths that branch off the main themes that I found important. I figured that key words I was feeling during processing the information taught to us would be incredibly important to write down. I also did similar with the ideas these themes made me contemplate; I had to write down the ideas that came to my mind that I had not considered before. For example, in the first week of class I was able to write down the feelings I had for our topic of redlining in a way that incorporated the topic and kept my feelings highlighted. For the discussion of the social contract, I wrote down my ideas surrounding questioning what our society deems important for its social contract. I

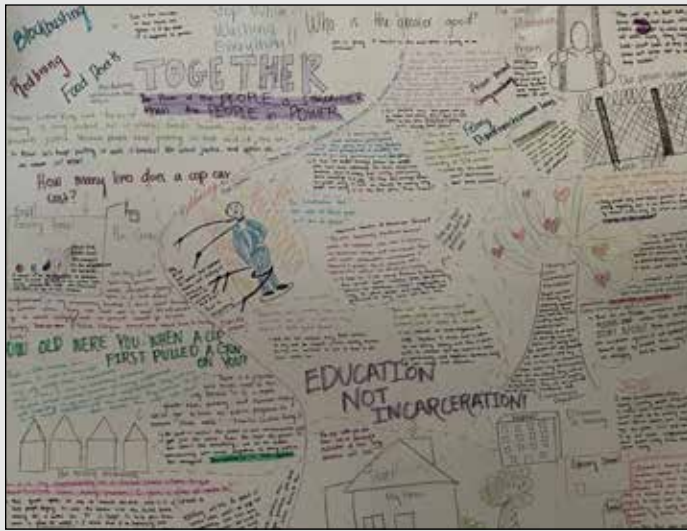
was forced to think about questioning these established principles we were taught about the social contract and think outside of what the norm was. I thought that including these details in with my project not only would help me organize what I wanted to think of later but would help me realize more and more that the bubble I was in was beginning to burst.

Along with this structure of my project, I added in thought bubbles that branched off of my personal bubble at the end of each week and what we were learning for the week. These thought bubbles were specific to ideas that I had never been forced to think about before, or things that I wanted to start working toward (Figure 7). These thoughts were my ways of really trying to put my new experiences into words. For example, without really looking at the Declaration of Independence like I had in class, I had not thought before that maybe we would be right to revolt against our governmental system or about the implications and effects of the social contract on our society. It had never once crossed my mind. I had never thought that I needed to unlearn half of my public-school education because of the blanket statements on things like segregation and the city structure. And I was forced to look deeper into my intentions and the way I can truly help my community, like being a voter registrar at my high school and having a dedication to social justice. I want to work harder, and these reflections were able to help me outline how I could.

Through this assignment, I was truly able to reflect on the way my city and my country is structured. I definitely do not understand everything, and I know that I still live in my bubble, but I have been able to acknowledge the bubble and recognize the way that the subjects we discussed caused it to rupture. I needed to recognize my privilege more than I had before. I had always fought for justice, I had always desired change, and I had always realized that the systems we have built are corrupt. I had just never truly been forced to look at it through the angle that this class provided me. I needed the ability to see the difference in my life and what to expect in the future to really grasp “what must be done” (Figure 7).

Student Reflection—Cary Robbins

My professor told me that the zip code you are born into is the single best indicator of how long you will live. This is where my map begins, and it goes on to contain all I had learned and where my imagination took me during the five weeks of this course. On the map, I wrote of the policies I learned about, and I used a multitude of different quotes from class readings. I included quotes in the map that most stood out to me and taught me about policies such as blockbusting, redlining, and felony disenfranchisement. I was also able to read people’s stories of experiencing discrimination, racism, and so much more. By the end, I was able to see how my classmates’ maps turned out and how their imaginations



[Click to enlarge](#)

Figure 8: The reflective map of Cary Robbins created as her final ISP 300 project.

Courtesy of the authors

created entirely different, unique maps.

My map begins at my house. I live in a privileged neighborhood. I have access to resources such as grocery stores, schools, and hospitals; however, I recognize that not everyone has the same access to healthy, quality food; education; and adequate health care resources. These are all privileges I am accustomed to because I have grown up with them. The older I get, the more I learn how many factors play into how privileged I am, including wealth and race.

There is a red line that goes through my map, which represents the redlining policies used in the early to mid-1900s. One side of the red line shows houses that were once in redlined neighborhoods, which continue to face discrimination in access to essentials like hospital services. *Health Affairs* ran an article describing how “the lower a person’s economic status, the more limited their resources and ability to access essential goods and services” is and “the greater their chance of suffering from chronic disease, including conditions like heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes that may increase the mortality risk of COVID-19.”¹¹ It is clear that policies that were supposedly abolished decades ago are still in practice today, even if it is not a lawful practice. Banks and hospitals continue to illegally refuse service to once-redlined neighborhoods.

Another system that has continued is the practice of slave labor. In the top right section of my map, there are drawings of a person behind bars and barbed wire. There, the horrible conditions of the US prison system are described. Anabel Mendoza of *The*

11 Emily A. Benfer and Lindsay F. Wiley, “Health Justice Strategies to Combat COVID-19: Protecting Vulnerable Communities During APandemic,” *Health Affairs Blog*, Health Affairs, 19 March 2020, at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20200319.757883/full/>

Chicago Reporter writes how COVID-19 seriously affects many incarcerated people's lives. It reports that "men curl up in their beds, aching from chills and fevers, while others attempt to wash their cell walls using dirty rags and hotel-sized bars of soap that some will later use to wash their bodies."¹² The prison system is disgusting in the United States, and there needs to be a change to how the nation treats those who are accused of a crime. The system is considered "plantation to prison" because of the slave labor forced on incarcerated people as well as the statistics of who is more likely to go to jail. Black men are six times more likely to go to jail than white men are because of systemic racism, including over-policing in Black neighborhoods. Slavery did not go away by any means but was transformed into the legal prison system.

Not only does the US fail to treat incarcerated people justly, but it also treats anyone deemed "foreign" as subhuman. After taking this class, I went on to learn more about how the horrific ways in which the US deals with people seeking refuge. In the class, we read about how the US does not protect refugees from COVID-19. The Marshall Project described the conditions in detention centers as "cramped and unsanitary detention centers where social distancing was near impossible and protective gear almost nonexistent."¹³ Thousands of asylum-seekers have been deported from the United States since COVID-19 was announced and lockdown began. The country has continued to show how little respect it has for most humans, especially those who are not wealthy and white.

During the summer of 2020, multiple statues of white colonizers, like Christopher Columbus, were taken down and sometimes thrown into bodies of water by protesters. This symbolized people wanting to end the whitewashed myths that have been taught for centuries. In the center of the map, there is a drawing of a statue being taken down. The class talked about the importance of statues and memorials, and I learned the difference between a statue and art that is created by a community to represent an idea. Statues of people do not hold as much significance as art that is created by a community to show their perspective on historical events.

Together as a community, we should make sure everyone has a voice and that those voices are heard. Wangari Maathai said that "poverty will cause environmental degradation."¹⁴ This quote is written inside the trunk of the tree on my map. The tree symbolizes how much we need to come together to build a strong community. Maathai talked about how tomorrow is not guaranteed, and for people

12 Anabel Mendoza, "Forgotten: Stateville Inmates Warn of Rising COVID-19 Outbreak behind Bars," *The Chicago Reporter*, 26 June 2020, at: <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/forgotten-stateville-inmates-warn-of-rising-covid-19-outbreak-behind-bars/>.

13 Emily Kassie and Barbara Marcolini, "How ICE Exported the Coronavirus: An Investigation Reveals How Immigration and Customs Enforcement Became a Domestic and Global Spreader of COVID-19," The Marshall Project, 10 July 2020, see: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/07/10/how-ice-exported-the-coronavirus>.

14 "Wangari Maathai & The Green Belt Movement," Good Fortune, 9 July 2010, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQU7JOxkGvo>.

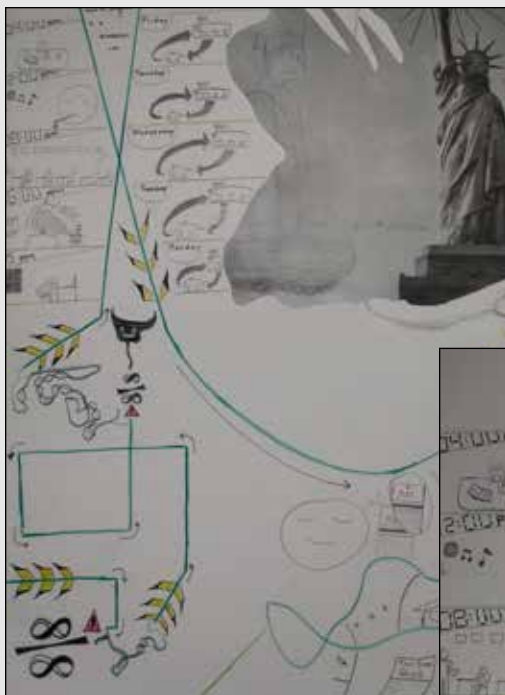
who do not have much of anything, much of their time is focused on survival, leaving little energy for thinking about the future. If we all took the time to help build things as simple as community gardens or trees, we could create healthy and free resources that should be a right for everyone. The map ends with my desire to start a non-waste, nonprofit grocery store and recreational centers in a food desert community in Memphis, my hometown. I am hopeful for the city of Memphis, and I want to be a part of helping my community continue to grow for everyone.

Student Reflection—George Slad

If I were to map out my life in 2020, my experience as a student in ISP 330 would fall almost exactly in the middle, and that is not only because the course took place roughly half-way through the year (in July and August), but because it fell between disorganized chaos and organized chaos. Yes, you read that correctly. The first half of 2020 was, for me, as it was for many, a whirlwind of tremendous change: suddenly, I was taking all my classes online; suddenly, my high school graduation was decimated to a YouTube video; suddenly, I was going to be stuck in virtually the same environment for college as the one I had been in for high school. I failed again and again to put together a new routine; as a result, my life fell apart.

Then came an email from DePaul about ISP 330, which ended up being an excellent course for me to take. In a time in which everything about my life seemed to be falling apart, to gather “critical perspectives on [what was then] our current moment” hardly could have occurred at a better time. In my opinion, ISP 330’s greatest strength was the diverse group which led it: political science professors, an English professor, a diplomacy professor, a religious studies professor, and a geography professor, among others. In the course, I enjoyed a thorough look into DePaul’s academics and one of the most critical looks at the US I have ever witnessed.

I will now address the culmination of my work for ISP 330. The final assignment, the reflective project (Figure 9), is a map of one’s learning experience just before, during, and at the conclusion of the course. The contents of my map are tied together by a single line that changes color and behavior. My map very much emphasizes the chaos I previously talked about. On the front side of the double-sided map, I mainly present my situation before COVID-19 thoroughly transformed my world. I was following a generally ironclad routine, and one that I had been following for a long time. I believe that once we get into maintaining a routine, nonstop for a while, we fall asleep in a certain way. Using the mathematical problem



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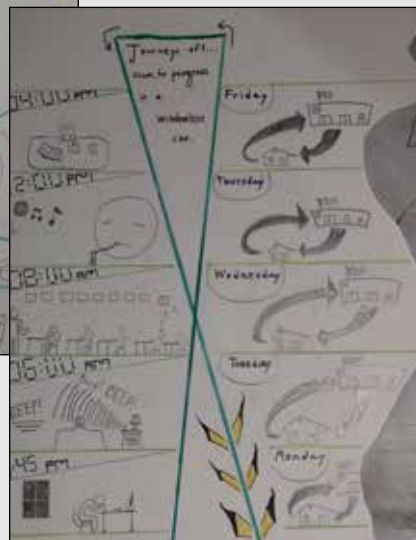


Figure 9: The reflective map of George Slad created as his final ISP 300 project; Figure 10: Detail of the reflective map of George Slad.

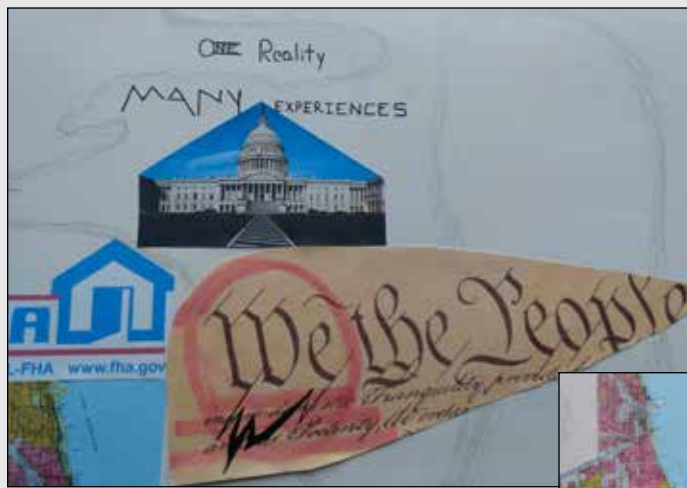
Courtesy of the authors

of infinity divided by infinity, which equals the indeterminate (i.e., something undefined), I show that I was lost, internally, in the months *before* the pandemic (Figure 10).

I consider the epicenter of the front side of the map to be the grayscale image of the Statue of Liberty, on which I, myself, am drawn wearing a graduation gown, appearing miserable. This image will likely, and understandably, come off as offensive to some. I intend for this image to be a representation of the state of my view of the US before ISP 330 began; obviously, it suggests that my view of it was not good. The COVID-19 pandemic had revealed a lot to me (and continues to reveal a lot to me) about the reality of the US government, and how successfully the US has achieved the ideals it was founded upon. Moreover, I had been frustrated by the increasing difficulty of becoming informed; I felt like the task of becoming informed was no different than trying to stay standing in a wind tunnel with the voices of an innumerable number of people arguing with each other, at the top of their lungs, stuck in my head. I felt overloaded with information, among other things.

The back side of my map focuses on my experiences in ISP 330, presenting them in a week-by-week fashion. Each week features its own synopsis and images. I would like to talk about the center of the back side (Figure 11). The statement “One Reality Many Experiences” is written. What I am saying there is that we all live in the same place but experience it in many ways. I realize that it may have been more appropriate to say “One Reality One Experience,” considering what I was going for. Each person’s life experience is unique, yet it is also greatly, and inevitably, shaped by the life experiences of others. Nothing, *nothing*, is completely independent.

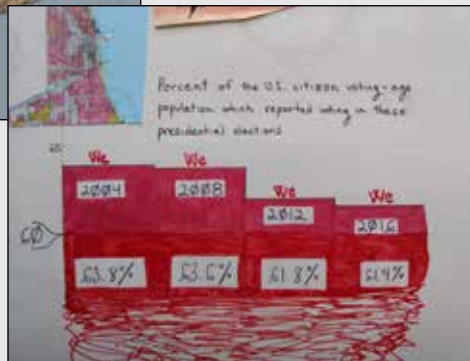
Below that statement is an image of the Capitol Building, and further below is a



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Figures 11 and 12: Details of the reflective map of George Slad.

Courtesy of the authors



cutout of part of the Constitution. In that cutout, the “we” in “We the People” is circled and underlined in red and extending from it is a jagged line. Further below is a red graph which displays data, released by the Census Bureau, of the percent of the voting-age population of US citizens which reported voting in certain presidential elections (Figure 12). I feature the data for the 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections; as you can see, in each subsequent presidential election, that percentage diminishes (the 2020 presidential election annihilated this trend). Above the percentage for each of the presidential elections the word “we” is written. How many of the “we” in “We the People” participate in democracy at its arguably most fundamental level? The line that ties all the pieces of the map together returns to the front side of the map and ends at a short text which focuses on the relationship one shares with one’s home.

If there is anything my map captures, it is not any of the specific things I learned in ISP 330, but the breadth and depth of what I learned in ISP 330. The course was only five weeks long, but it was dense. Every aspect of the course’s content complemented each other and connected to each other well, and, at least in my experience of the course, if some connections were hard to see at first, they became clear by the time the course was over. The knowledge I gained from ISP 330 will likely be informing decisions I make in what is to come of my college career.

Concluding Thoughts

The year 2020 was one that challenged every single member of our community. Changing teaching and learning modes, figuring out how to live and work in a single space, and finding ways to cope with overwhelming stress and uncertainty when traditional coping

mechanisms became inaccessible created a kind of common ground that transcended many typical social and cultural boundaries within and beyond DePaul. Finding ways to connect meaningfully in a virtual environment was a goal for so many institutions and organizations during the year, and this course was a very successful iteration of such an endeavor. Faculty, staff, and students shared ideas, created community, and offered one another a sense of support. We hope these eloquent and personal student reflections and the context provided of a committed collective effort on the part of faculty and staff stand as a testament to the DePaul community—a community grounded in strong Vincentian values, a commitment to undergraduate learning, and a desire to transform students through meaningful engagement.



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Figures 1a and 1b: Two different maps submitted to Citylab. Both are examples of maps categorized as Domestic Rearrangements and were submitted by: Lora Teagarden of Indianapolis Indiana (top); and An Trinh from Haiphong, Vietnam (bottom).

See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-lockdown-neighborhood-maps/>

Courtesy of the authors

Introduction to Week 1

In our first week, we will explore social contract theory, connecting the philosophy of John Locke to our principle founding documents (the Declaration of the Independence and the Constitution). We will use this framework to examine the current moment, with particular attention to the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests.

We can see how the social contract is practiced by looking at how spaces are constructed. We will use a geographic lens to explore how inequality is actively built into the urban landscape. A geographic lens allows us to explore *why* things happen *where* they do.

In 1754, Benjamin Franklin created a political cartoon to advocate that the colonies unite. Though it was published during the French and Indian War, the image later became a symbol for the Revolutionary War efforts. [Image via](#).



Online Student Success	Introduction to Week 1	
Introduction and Resources	Web Page	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Week One: The Social Contract in our Current Moment [7/13 - 7/19]	Week 1 Readings and Videos Checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Week Two: Equity and Justice in a Time of Pandemic [7/20 - 7/26]	Week 1 Check for Learning Quiz	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week Three: The Past and Its Lessons [7/27 - 8/2]	Week 1 Discussion Discussion Topic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week Four: Artists and Writers in Moments of Upheaval [8/3 - 8/9]	First, in preparation for our class, you read one really old document (the Declaration of Independence), followed by three newer essays. Make a connection between something in the Declaration of Independence and either the Mann, Spaeth, or Gladwell reading. How do you see them connected to each other?	
Week Five: Global Interconnections and the Paths Forward	Next, consider the Demby video and the Kern reading. Where are you from? Can you see how the policies discussed in the video have shaped the place where you live? How? How is your experience of the city gendered? Think of specific examples.	
	Finally, if you could add a reading or podcast or video to this week, what would it be, and why?	
	For the online discussions in this class, please try to post before our Tuesday synchronous meeting, as a way to seed the conversation. You can also use this discussion space to extend the conversation after the Tuesday session. You don't need to reply to any of your classmates, but you're welcome to do so.	

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Figures 2a and 2b: Images from the course *Desire to Learn (D2L)* illustrating how each week was presented to students, thereby creating a uniform set of activities and expectations.

Courtesy of the authors



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Figure 3: The reflective map of Val Carnes created as their final ISP 300 project.

Courtesy of the authors

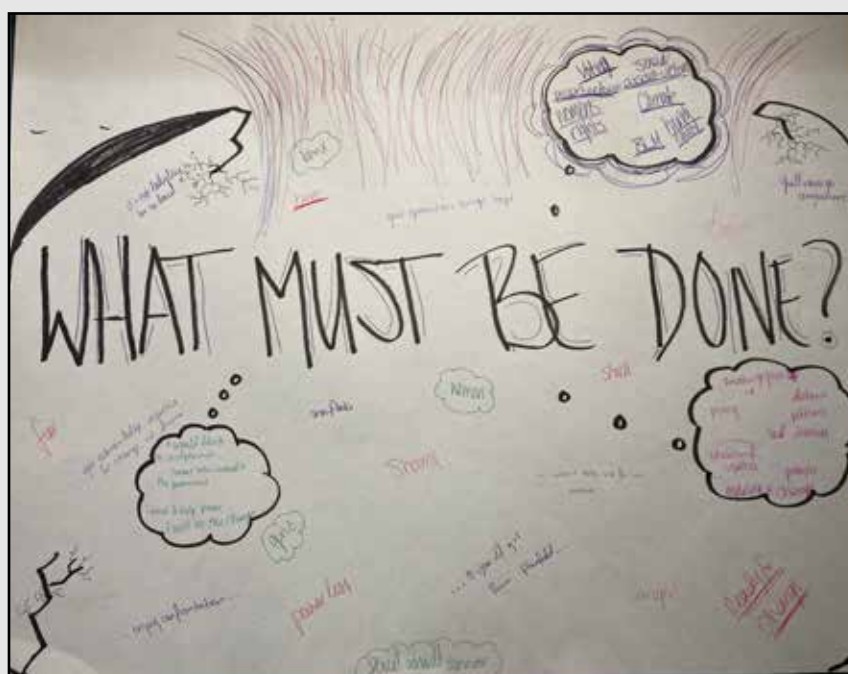
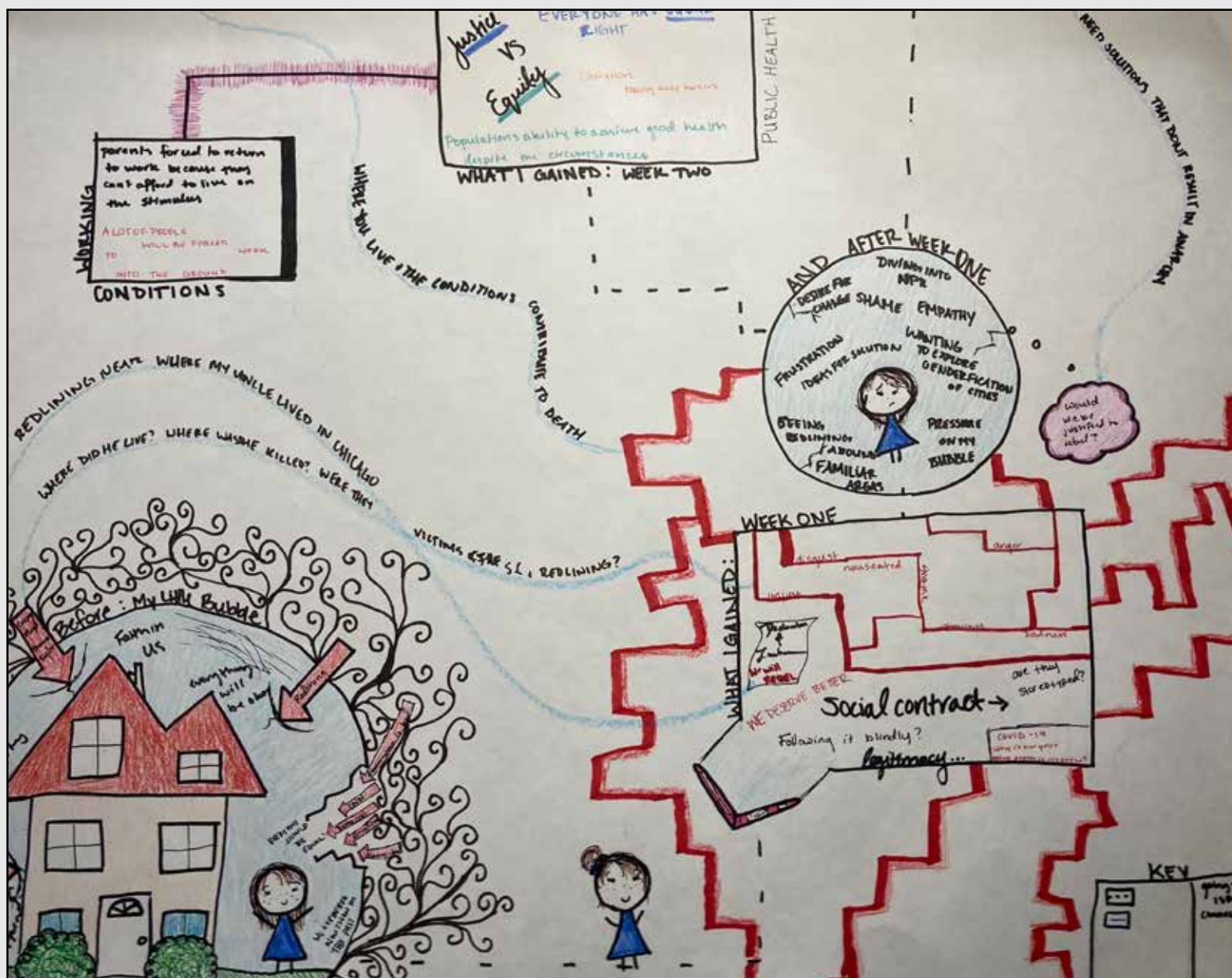


Figure 6: The starting point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map; Figure 7: The end point of Zoe Espinosa's reflective map.

Courtesy of the authors

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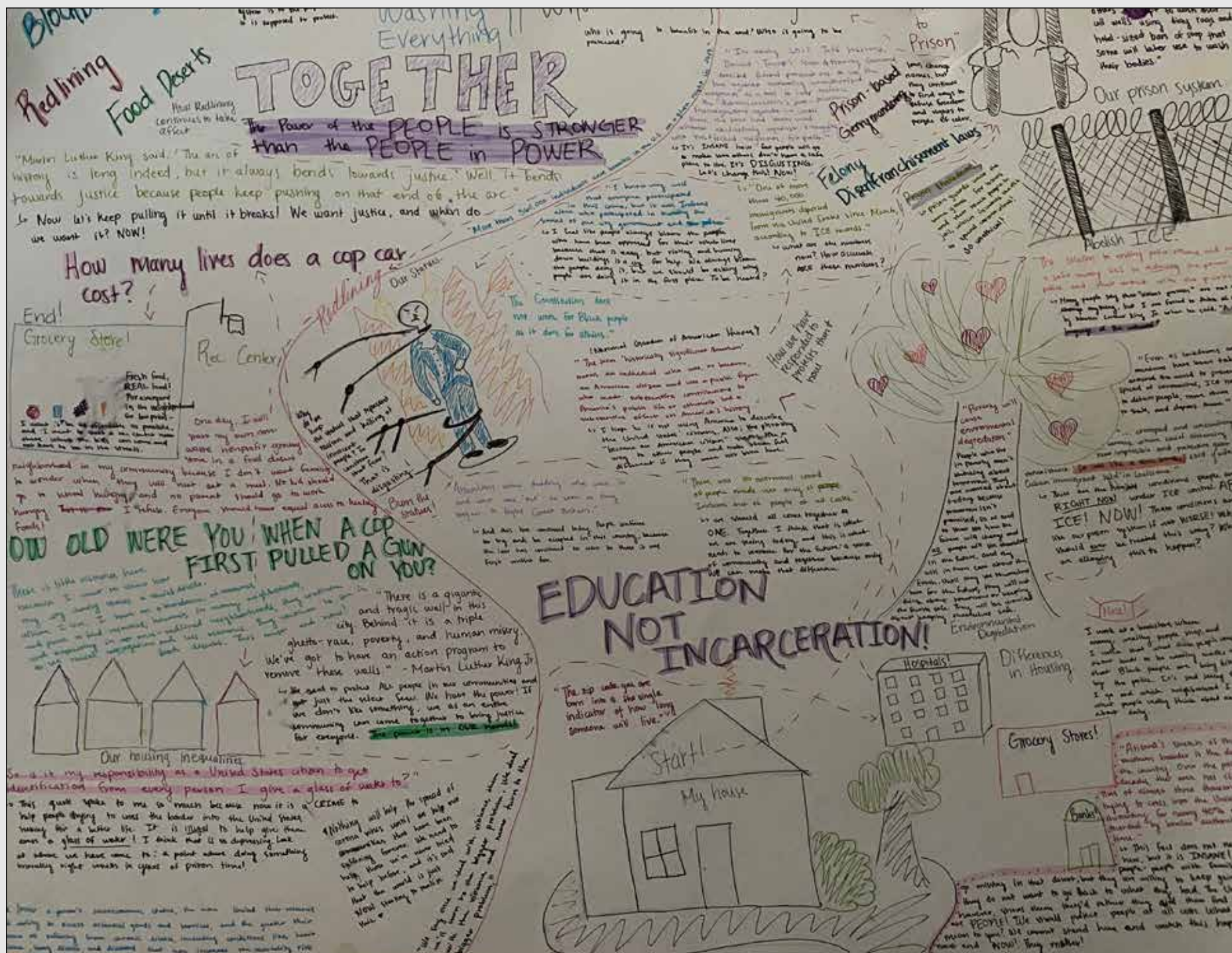
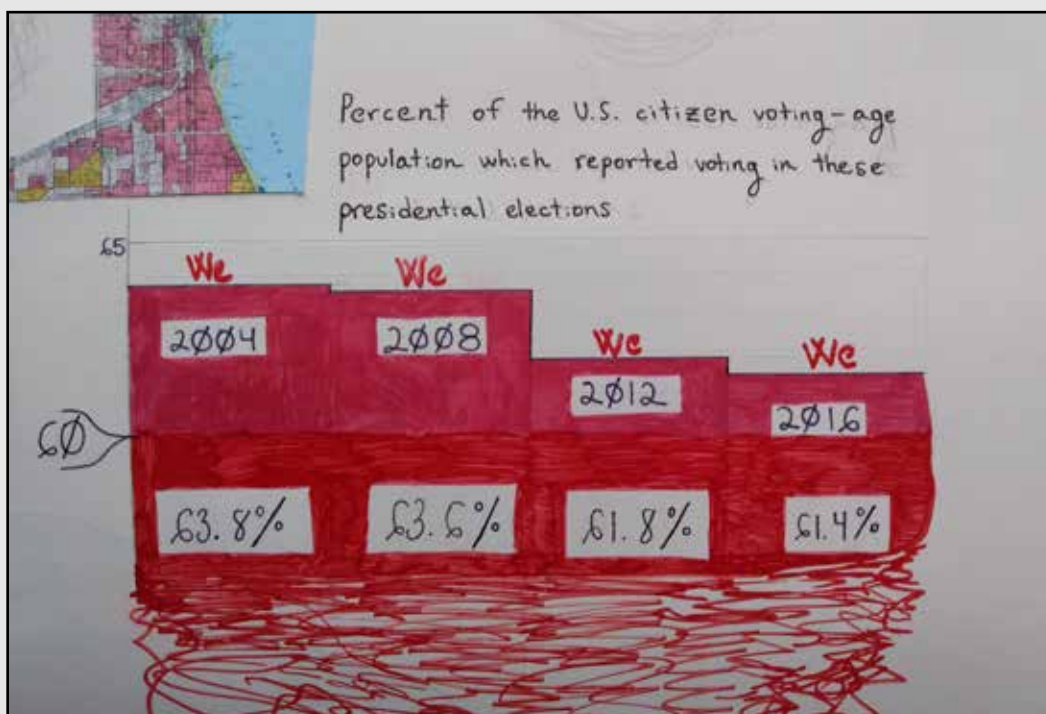
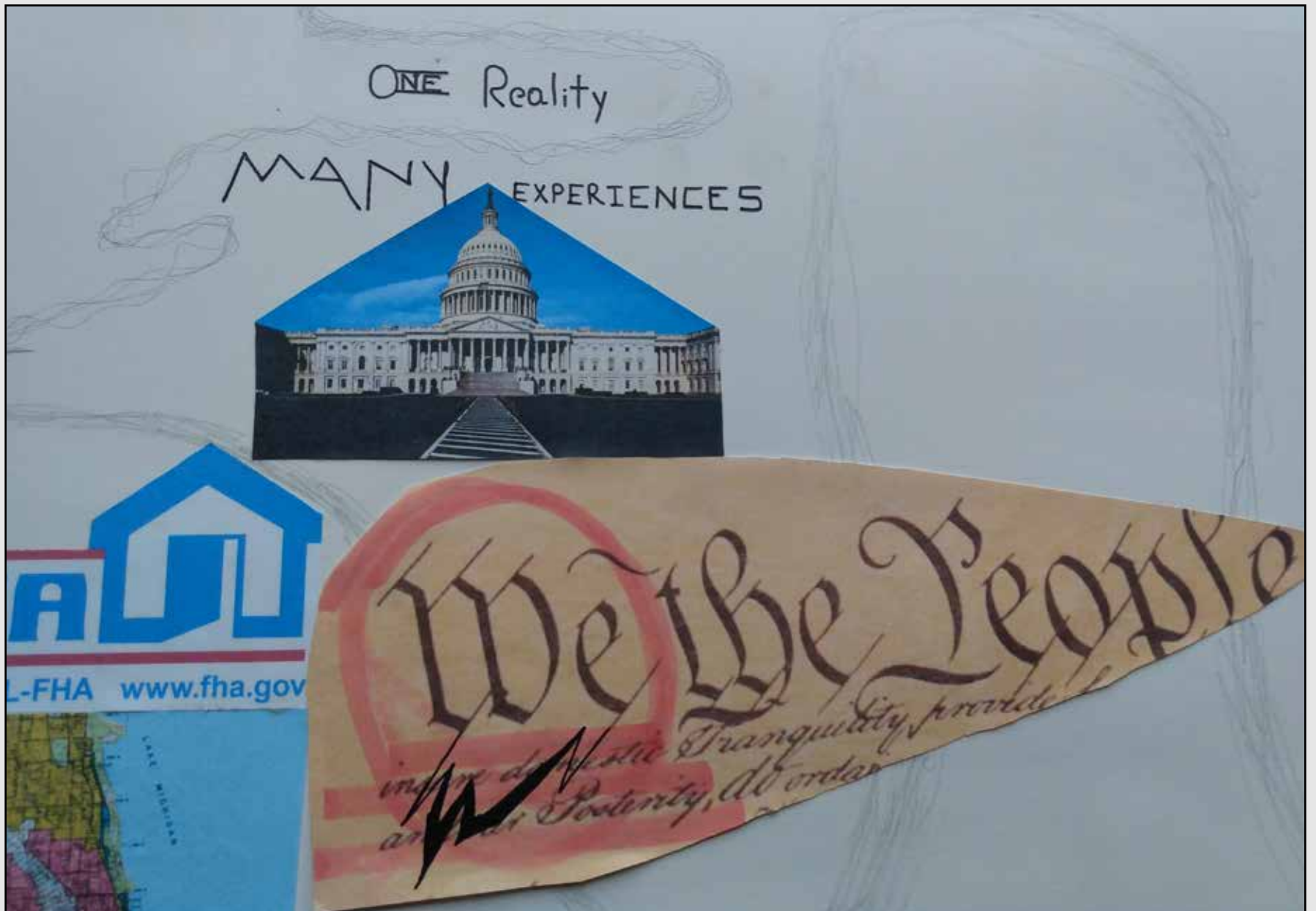


Figure 8: The reflective map of Cary Robbins created as her final ISP 300 project.

Courtesy of the authors

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Figures 11 and 12: Details of the reflective map of George Slad.

Courtesy of the authors

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Online Community Engagement Enhances Service Learning

Dan Baron, Kaliah Liggons, MPA, David Pintor, Jonathan Handrup, LSW, and Rubén Álvarez Silva, M.Ed

BIOS

JONATHAN HANDRUP, LSW, has been with the Steans Center since the summer of 2011. Jonathan is responsible for locating health focused non-profits in the Chicago area to partner with master's level nursing students for two-year service-learning partnerships. In fall 2012, Jonathan helped initiate the first departmental-wide service-learning partnership with DePaul's School of Nursing. He now places over 210 graduate nursing students in community-based organizations throughout Chicago over the course of an academic year. Primarily, these students engage in developing and implementing health, wellness, and nutrition curricula for organizations' participants, staff, and parents. Since joining the Center, he has earned master's degrees in public service management (2015) and clinical social work (2020). Jonathan also currently works as a licensed social worker, seeing clients for individual and group psychotherapy.

KALIAH LIGGONS, MPA, is the community development program manager at the Steans Center for Community-Based Service Learning. She is responsible for developing community-based service-learning courses and researching and building relationships with Chicagoland area community organizations and academic service-learning colleagues who support DePaul's

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service-learning students. Liggons holds a BA in Sociology and a BA in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, IL. In June 2018, she received an MPA from DePaul's School of Public Service with a specialization in public management. Her professional interests include educational reform, youth advocacy, homelessness, and other social justice issues.

DAVID PINTOR was born in Chicago and raised in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood by Mexican immigrant parents. He's currently the student engagement program manager at DePaul's Steans Center, where he connects DePaul's resources to Chicago's communities and contributes to a transformational experience for students and faculty. Prior to that, he was the volunteer manager at 826CHI, a youth writing lab, where he used his skills to frontload solutions based in anti-oppression and social justice. David studied sociology and anthropology at Carleton College in Minnesota and has over fourteen years of experience as an educator, community advocate, and nonprofit administrator. In his spare time, David likes to take road trips and cuddle with his pups Frijol, Cacahuatate, and Chucho and enjoys a good plate of chilaquiles.

RUBÉN ÁLVAREZ SILVA, M.ED, a double demon, has been involved in DePaul's community engagement efforts as a student, staff member, and adjunct faculty member for the last twenty-one years locally, nationally, and internationally. Rubén served as the associate director for the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning and Community Service Studies, where he challenged and supported the Academic Service Learning (ASL) team in their efforts to connect DePaul's faculty and students with Chicago community leaders to develop community-based service-learning courses rooted in the Vincentian mission of direct service and systemic change. He is now serving as the associate director for Just DePaul in the Division of Mission and Ministry. A lifelong resident of Chicago's Southwest Side, Rubén currently resides in Berwyn with his better half, Cristina Salgado (CSH 2007), and their three children Lluvia, Luna, and Sol. In his free time, Rubén enjoys biking, running, yoga, and perfecting the art of pancakes in honor of his paternal grandfather, Ignacio "Nacho" Álvarez. If you are interested in developing transformational educational opportunities that support social justice efforts across Chicago and beyond, please do not hesitate to contact him.

It was spring 2020, and the Steans Center faced a challenge unlike anything in its almost twenty years of supporting service learning at DePaul: how to safely engage students with community when they were no longer attending class in person. During a typical spring term, DePaul has approximately one thousand students engaged with Chicago communities through courses. That spring, the Center shifted course and staff created [Online Community Engagement](#) (OCE), a program faculty employ to encourage dialogue on select topics relevant to curriculum, communities, and students. Within a matter of weeks, OCE provided self-directed modules, including reading materials and videos for students focused on issues such as mental health, immigration, community organizing, police accountability, and gentrification. The modules culminated with live online events on Fridays featuring guests from DePaul and Chicago communities.

A year later, OCE is not only a valuable teaching and learning strategy during a time of crisis. It has become a new pedagogical tool to be integrated into Steans Center support of service learning as the university reemerges into a post-pandemic world. “The series is very much geared to students who are enrolled in community-based service learning courses as a way to enhance any civic engagement activities,” says Jonathan Handrup, a program manager on the Academic Service Learning team. “We have found that in this virtual space, we can have experts in the field and faculty sharing information with students—as well as other faculty and community members—on a wide variety of topics.” David Pintor, Student Engagement Program Manager with the Academic Service Learning team, says that the online events are a good way to share more perspectives. “With this format, modules can share the perspective of local, statewide, and even national voices on key issues.” Issues for spring quarter 2021 include Vaccinating our City (in collaboration with the School of Nursing), Podcasts for Change, LGBTQIA + Allyship, Mental Health in 2021, and Prison Abolition.

78 percent of people in the city live in areas where there is a lack of therapists.

Emphasis on Mental Health

The popularity of OCE has grown. During summer 2020, more than ninety people attended a module titled Mental Health Within a Global Pandemic & Civil Uprising. One of the panelists was Dr. Arturo Carrillo, Director of Violence Prevention and Health Initiatives for the [Brighton Park Neighborhood Council](#) on Chicago’s southwest side. He conducts research on the impact of disparities in mental health access on low-income communities



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Chairs are stacked on tables in the Market in the DePaul Center on DePaul's Loop Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

and serves residents as a clinical social worker. He presented data on mental health disparities, mapping out where therapists are available and how specific communities were being impacted by lack of access to services. “When we talk about mental health access as an issue, it is really a systemic problem,” Carrillo says. “Our research has shown that 78 percent of people in the city live in areas where there is a lack of therapists. The areas that are in the highest need of mental health supports are those with the most violence, poverty, and all sorts of socioeconomic problems. They also have the least amount of access to mental health services.” The problem, he explained to participants, has been exacerbated by the pandemic, noting that “with COVID, there’s much more awareness of why people have to take care of mental health.”

Katrina Wagner, Health Promotion Coordinator and Interim Sexual and Relationship Violence Specialist with DePaul’s [Office of Health Promotion and Wellness](#), was a panelist on the Mental Health in 2020 module presented during fall quarter 2020. “The module was an easy way for us to get more involved with DePaul’s community,” says Wagner. “That’s the beauty of it—more and more people can be connected in this way.” OCE was therefore a way for her office to connect with students about self-care. “We work with students who are pretty young, healthy, and resilient. Health is not always the first thing they want to talk about. We try to provide a support system for students, and participating in this module was a great way to share messages about mental health.” During the module, Wagner presented a brief mindfulness meditation activity and then offered important personal health and well-being practices.



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Essential staff. Danny Cruz, custodian in Facility Operations, maintains O'Connell Hall during the COVID-19 quarantine. April 21, 2020, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

Course Integration

Online Community Engagement created a new way for faculty, students, and community partners to engage with one another through curriculum. “The modules provided a firm basis of understanding on a lot of issues,” says Professor Desma Mitchell who teaches Health Promotion for Families and Communities, a course taken by students seeking a degree in the [Master's Entry to Nursing Practice](#) (MENP) program. “For my students, it’s a place where social justice and health care meet up. It offers a deep dive into issues.” Mitchell says her students participated in a wide range of OCE modules, including those focused on identity and racial justice, immigration and refugee rights and services, homelessness, and disability justice. The nursing program, she says, takes a multidisciplinary approach and the modules are directly relevant to healthcare. Mitchell adds that OCE emerged as an effective way to engage with others and to learn about topics impacting communities. “We’re learning new ways to deliver content and information,” she says. “OCE is showing us one way we can do a good job of teaching remotely, providing content, and keeping it interesting and beneficial.”

One of the best parts of these modules is that students can meet organizers in the community.

In Professor Susan Reed’s course Active Citizens: Making a Difference in the Community, Workplace World, students drew upon OCE to learn about prospective



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Signs displayed outside the Career Center during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

partners. “When the pandemic happened, students asked ‘How can we work with communities safely?’ and the Steans Center made a big contribution with these modules,” says Reed. One student, she says, wanted to work with an organization that does mentoring through sports, but the organization was closed during the pandemic. “He did some readings and learned about disparities among children in different communities from participating in OCE modules. In particular, he got a lot out of the youth advocacy module which helped him understand that children in different communities are having very different experiences.” According to Reed, “This resource is valuable now and can be valuable when we open back up.” She notes, “One of the best parts of these modules is that students can meet organizers in the community who are working on housing, homelessness, food security, or other issues.”

Online Community-Engaged Learning

Several students in Reed’s Active Citizens course used OCE resources while exploring service learning opportunities. Charles Judd graduated fall 2020 with a degree in management information systems. He was among several students who learned about opportunities through OCE. “This information was clear and easy to use,” says Judd, who eventually worked on political elections. DePaul student Jamilah El-Saleh also accessed OCE materials as she pursued her degree in business administration through the [School of Continuing and Professional Studies](#). She says, “The Steans Center was very active and very helpful and provided us with a lot of links and literature on key topics.” Through OCE, El-Saleh eventually engaged in remote service learning activities with the [Council of American](#)

[Islamic Relations](#) (CAIR) in Chicago, where she did research related to presidential debates and on Supreme Court cases.

For other students, like Bety Camino-Salgado, participating in OCE had a direct impact on how they engaged with Chicago communities during the pandemic. Camino-Salgado, a returning student who is pursuing a degree in photography, participated last fall in modules on gentrification, community organizing, and mental health. In the community organizing module, she says, she learned about asset-based community development (ABCD) and the [ABCD Institute at DePaul](#). “I learned more about why community-based organizations build on the assets of people who live in [the] communities,” she says. Camino-Salgado says her service learning activities for the Active Citizen course involved delivering food for two organizations—Wicker Park-Bucktown Mutual Aid and the Grocery Run Club. She adds that the format of OCE modules, “allows people to be more curious and empathetic to each other. It’s great hearing what other people experienced.”

Camino-Salgado also explained that the OCE module on gentrification helped her better understand the connection between community organizing, service, and action. “This experience helped me feel connected to these communities,” she says. In the live session, Professor Jesse Mumm in [Latin American and Latino Studies](#) and [Critical Ethnic Studies](#) reflected on the long history of gentrification in Chicago, explaining that “the history of Chicago is the history of displacement.” Mumm presented maps, a timeline, and other documents to share the complex history of neighborhood change in the city and how it has negatively impacted Latino and African American communities. Camino-Salgado says the modules encouraged her to think about the city’s history and her own personal journey. “Being involved in the life of a community is not something that starts one day and ends the next,” she says. “It requires a lot of reflection.” Rubén Álvarez Silva, Steans Center Associate Director for Academic Service Learning, reflects on a year of progress building OCE and notes, “OCE allows the Steans Center to center community, student, and faculty voices on the social justice issues of our times and hold space virtually for collective learning, healing, and calls to action. My hope is that these encounters are just the beginning for continuous dialogue and liberatory actions.”

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Chairs are stacked on tables in the Market in the DePaul Center on DePaul's Loop Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs



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Essential staff. Danny Cruz, custodian in Facility Operations, maintains O'Connell Hall during the COVID-19 quarantine. April 21, 2020, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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Signs displayed outside the Career Center during the COVID-19 pandemic the week of March 22, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

The Graces of 2020: Catholic Campus Ministry Students Seek Out Blessings Amid a Tumultuous Year

Amanda Thompson, MDiv, & Dan Paul Borlik, C.M., DMin

BIO

DAN PAUL BORLIK, C.M., DMIN, was born in Baltimore, MD, in 1949. He was raised near Galveston, TX, with one brother and three sisters. He joined the Congregation of the Mission in 1967 and was introduced to the Vincentian priests and brothers at Saint Vincent de Paul Preparatory Seminary, then located near Beaumont, TX. Since his priesthood ordination in 1976, he has ministered in seminary formation and as a pastor, as a missionary in Guatemala, as a teacher of theological reflection and intercultural skills, as provincial leader (visitor) within the Congregation, and as a program director and instructor in Paris, where he lived and worked in the Vincentian motherhouse for about six years, directing and teaching at its Centre International de la Formation (CIF). Offered to priests and brothers from the Congregation's fifty worldwide provinces, the CIF programs were usually one to two months long, intensive, and multilingual (English, Spanish, and French). More recently, other Vincentian Family members have participated as well. Along the way, Borlik earned two graduate degrees, an MDiv from DeAndreis Seminary and a DMin from Catholic Theological Union. Since the summer of 2017, he has worked as priest chaplain in Catholic Campus Ministry at DePaul University.

AMANDA THOMPSON, MDIV, is the director of Catholic Campus Ministry in the Division of Mission and Ministry. She

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holds an MDiv from Loyola University Chicago. She is the part-time coordinator of faith formation at St. Mary of the Woods Parish and also works as a chaplain at Lutheran General Hospital once a month. Prior to her work at DePaul, she worked in Catechetical Ministry, Youth Ministry, and Marriage and Family Ministry for the Archdiocese of Chicago. She was the host of a radio show called “Made for Life,” a program about marriage and family in the Catholic Church. She has been a presenter at workshops and retreats in parishes throughout the Archdiocese and occasionally presents with her husband, Deacon Chuck Thompson. Amanda and Chuck live in Chicago and are blessed with three young adult children.

W

ho among us has not yet described their experience of the calendar year 2020 as one they would rather forget or move past? Certainly, living through a pandemic has been painful to all persons worldwide. It has been catastrophic to those who have lost their lives, their health, their livelihood, their confidence in the future. In addition, in our own United States, we are experiencing a radical shift in our worldviews due to the constant disregard of Black and Brown lives, political-cultural polarization, and deep questions about what we know and what we don't know, what we have believed, and what we now must question and reassess.

We are Amanda Thompson (a Vincentian laywoman) and Father Dan Paul Borlik, C.M. (a Vincentian priest), two staff members at the Catholic Campus Ministry (CCM) of DePaul University. We offer our reflections along with those of a few student leaders, drawn from their experience of this extraordinary year. We comment on what we are learning and what we hope to do. Our perspective draws from the Vision Statement and the Mission Statement of Catholic Campus Ministry:

Vision Statement

Catholic Campus Ministry proclaims the Good News of God's love by providing students a full experience of the mystical, prophetic, and communal baptismal promises.

Mission Statement

Faithful to the Catholic Vincentian tradition and teachings, Catholic Campus Ministry accompanies students in growing their lived expression of the Gospel and strives to create an inclusive community of faith. Being grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ, students gain the freedom to actively engage in the Mission with an ecumenical, interfaith, and intercultural spirit.

Guided by the ethos of these statements, we work together as colleagues and assist our student leaders to develop as servant leaders for other students and our neighbors. We begin by relating how we form our students in theological reflection. Informed by this practice, we will then look at how the students in CCM reacted to and coped with the pandemic as well as other societal issues the pandemic spotlighted.



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The Egan statue outside of the Lincoln Park Student Center is decorated with a face mask during the COVID-19 pandemic, August 3, 2020. The bronze likeness of Monsignor John J. Egan, who began and ended his career at DePaul, was known to be a lifelong human and civil rights activist. The statue sits on a limestone block just outside of the Lincoln Park Student Center at the corner of Belden and Sheffield.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

CCM integrates the practice of critical theological reflection

“Do good for others, not just yourself,” “learn to serve, not be served,” “your faith is about action, not just doctrine.” These and so many other aphorisms are common enough in our culture and certainly heard often in conversations with student leaders when asked why they want to be involved at CCM and, indeed, why they were attracted to DePaul University in the first place! However, we value and model reflection as an essential step when learning to commit to serve others *effectively*. Indeed, students themselves will comment that “working without reflection is just work,” acknowledging that even good action itself is not enough at DePaul. So, whether students commit to tutoring middle school neighbors, or cleaning the yard of a neighbor, or feeding hungry guests at our soup kitchen, theological reflection is at least recommended and often expected of them. Integrated into our monthly formation sessions and personal practices, we often refer to it simply as “See, Judge, Act,” but in practice it is quite rich and always dynamic.

Critical Reflection (of a practice)

The first moment (“See”) is to consciously remember in detail our own perceptions of a specific past experience, such as an emotional conversation touching upon our values, or a service hour at the soup kitchen. We recall it in as much detail as we can: What were we doing? What were we thinking or feeling while doing it? How attentive were we while doing it? What meaning did it have for us at that moment?

The second moment (“Judge”) is to consciously place that experience’s meaning alongside a value or belief that we hold and want to be accountable to. At CCM, we call this a “wisdom source,” and it is wide ranging. It could be a remembered story of what a parent or coach once told said. Sometimes it’s from the Scriptures, for instance, a saying of Jesus or a prophet’s warning. Official Catholic teachings and writings are another source. In Islam, the wisdom source can be sayings from the prophet Muhammad, the *Hadith*, and from other Islamic scholars. Wisdom sources can also be quotes from a hero, such as Martin Luther King. Sometimes, it can be a longer narrative, such as what we see in Exodus: the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert were seemingly endless and marked by doubts, dread, and feelings of abandonment but, in the end, they were clearly an experience of purification and growth as a people. So, how does the experience, or better, our practice in this setting hold up next to these values we espouse?

The third moment (“Act”) is to consider what to do next. We choose to deepen or make our practice of service more authentic, personal, or interesting next time. We choose to learn from our memories of that past event and to grow. With whom and when shall we review and critique this new or restated practice?

Once our student leaders are familiar with such a deliberate approach to critical reflection on their own practices, they soon are leading similar reflection sessions with other students, using a variety of practical experiences and wisdom sources. In this, they are increasingly able to acknowledge, respect, and honor their own experiences (and others’ as well) as rich sources for personal and professional growth.

Stories reveal our truths

While we welcome all DePaul students to join us and attend our retreats, small group discussions, worship services, programs that advocate justice issues, and social and fun events, we rely on DePaul student leaders to facilitate programming. Working closely with the four CCM professional staff members, they serve in a multitude of ways ranging from advocacy to graphic design to leading retreats and small groups. Staff members’ guidance is an essential component part of their commitment,¹ offering planning, evaluation, and encouragement. Throughout our formation and supervision, sharing our own stories with others is essential. For the students and for the staff, these stories are both joyful and painful. It can be remarkably effective to realize one’s own unique self and capacity for goodness and service. Pope Francis says it well: “In an age when falsification is increasingly sophisticated, reaching exponential levels (as in *deepfake*), we need wisdom to be able to welcome and

¹ CCM’s initial formation of student leaders takes place during an intensive retreat at the beginning of each year’s fall quarter. Student leaders sign their covenant letters at that time, committing themselves not only to the work but also to a Vincentian and Roman Catholic style of service and relationship with others.



[Click to enlarge](#)

August 2020. Room 102 in Arts and Letters Hall on the Lincoln Park Campus is a trimodal classroom, equipped with cameras, touchscreens and other Zoom teleconferencing hardware and software. DePaul equipped more than 100 classrooms with technology to enable some class members to be physically present while others access the class online at the same time.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

create beautiful, true and good stories. We need courage to reject false and evil stories. We need patience and discernment to rediscover stories that help us not to lose the thread amid today's many troubles.”²

Sacred Scripture is one endless source for CCM, used not only for worship and prayer but also during our monthly formation sessions and regular theological reflection practice. The Bible's Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are truly a story of stories,³ setting before us events and people caught up in life, struggling to find their identity and realize their purpose. Most striking is that the Bible begins with a God who is both creator and narrator. Students make the connection between *their* stories and Scripture. The students very often find these stories, proverbs, soulful prayers, and laments remarkably helpful and personally engaging.

During COVID, certain psalms and prophets have resonated deeply with those feelings of anxiety, sadness, lament, and loss. Overall, however, the narrative of Exodus has been most striking as a shared and lived experience with oneself, each other, the community, and the Creator: “For the Chosen People, Exodus is an indelible portrait of the community of God, called from false and demeaning servitude in an alien land to journey to the promised land. Israel did not ‘wander.’ It was led in purposeful stages by the fire and cloud.”⁴ This,

² Pope Francis, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 54th World Communications Day,” 24 January 2020, [Vatican.va](#), at: [Message for the 54th World Communications Day](#).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O. CARM., eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 44.

one of our remarkable “sources of wisdom,” helps us to listen to our students’ reflections and marvel at their insights. Throughout the pandemic, we watched the students become more aware of a compassionate God accompanying them.

The Pandemic reshapes our university experience

March 2020 shocked the DePaul community. In one day, students were told that they needed to move out of the dorms within a week. This happened on the Wednesday of the last week of classes for the winter quarter. Students had to suddenly move home. They had to take everything with them because they were not sure when they would return. It was chaos. Students and parents were terrified of the pandemic and worried how to get home safely. There was crying and consoling, hugging (something we can hardly imagine now) and nervous laughter. We were headed into uncharted territory, and it was frightening.

The prevailing sentiment shared by these students is that these are desert times. We are wandering around like the Israelites, trying to trust God, but anxious about this whole path. Where are we going? Who will we be when we emerge? This generation of college students has already experienced so much in their lifetimes. Those in the freshman class were born the year of 9/11. Their families have experienced the fallout from 9/11, the recession, the birth of social media and the iPhone, and now this. Terrorist attacks in the US suddenly became a reality. They saw businesses closing, their families’ financial stability shaken, and all of it bombarding them every hour of the day through social media. It was overwhelming!

Researchers say that Generation Z is resilient. We see that too. As the Director of Catholic Campus Ministry at DePaul and the mother of two college students, a freshman and a junior, Amanda watched them navigate this new reality in good and bad ways. Many vacillate between dark depression and anxiety and hopeful resilience and creativity. Who will they be when they emerge from this desert time?

In their book *Generation Z Goes to College*, authors Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace look at this generation that spans those born in from 1995 to 2010: “Generation Z sees the world through multiple screens, but as evidenced by their we-centric attitudes, they recognize that societal issues are much larger than just themselves. With their loyalty, determination, and responsibility as well as realistic outlook on life inherited from Generation X, this generation is committed to those around them and motivated by making a difference. Add to that their characteristics of care and compassion, and you can expect Generation Z to use both their heads and their hearts to solve the world’s problems.”⁵ So how did the students cope? The answer is they coped in many ways. Amanda reached out to

5 Seemiller and Grace, *Generation Z Goes to College* (Jossey-Bass, 2016), 17.

a few student leaders in Catholic Campus Ministry to talk to them about their experiences and could see how they used the See, Judge, Act model (SJA) in their own lives.

Kara Callahan, a junior, found ways to take advantage of the world slowing down. She says, “COVID gave me more time for reflection. I was able to reconnect to myself. I appreciate things that I took for granted, particularly interactions in person. Every interaction seems more meaningful.” Her limited interaction with others brought new attention to the ordinariness of daily life. She devoted her time to social action and advocacy. As CRS (Catholic Relief Services) ambassador, she took more time to delve into the CRS materials and attend their online conferences, workshops, and monthly check-ins so that she could inform other students about this organization and its work. She used the SJA model to observe what was going on around her. Her work with CRS gave her the Catholic language to articulate how social issues are also Catholic issues. She created a series called “40 actions, 40 days” during Lent to help students learn how they can act in ways to create a more just world.

These students are justice oriented. They will not stand for inauthentic behavior. Notably, they are the generation that came of age during the sex abuse scandal in the Church. Although they are understandably skeptical and questioning, they are also searching for meaning and belonging. They have an ease with mass media and much access to information, diving deeply in it, both for good and for bad. Clara Dennison, a sophomore, is the coordinator for social justice and advocacy. She says the pandemic gave her an opportunity to dig into all the information she could get her hands on and go to conferences to get more informed on the justice issues she wanted to spotlight, such as human trafficking and climate change. She developed the skills to amplify her voice through the online platforms available because of her position in CCM. She feels empowered to give voice to these issues and to elicit compassion from other students to also advocate for justice.

Many of our students have embraced the Vincentian mission and are dedicating their time to caring for the poor and the marginalized. In a time when so many are looking inward, these students have also looked outward. They heard the call to help their neighbor and responded. Clara spoke about “seeing” more clearly an injustice, doing the research about that issue, connecting it to her faith, determining why and how it is wrong and specific ways it can and should be changed, and then creating an event to amplify the issue. She intends to get other students involved in advocacy now that she has learned to look critically through the lens of her Catholic faith and connect to what must be done.

Nelson Mendoza Hernandez is a graduate student in the School of Music. He serves as the Elizabeth Ann Seton Sandwich Kitchen Coordinator. Nelson and his wife came from Venezuela where they have witnessed great poverty caused by an authoritarian regime that

rules the oil-rich country and keeps its people poor and hungry. He knows what hunger and suffering looks like, and it breaks his heart. He was moved to take the position so he could be close to the poor and live out the Vincentian mission. He accompanies the guests who come to the kitchen and builds relationships with them. He reflects: "Since the first day, most of my stereotypes went away. Speaking with the guests and listening to them, I began to realize the stereotypes I had were wrong. Feeding people improves my faith life. I try to prepare good meals for the guests. I talk to them about their past lives; they were not always poor."

Nelson has learned what solidarity truly means. He also took a page out of Vincent's story of Châtillon. Preparing to preach his Sunday sermon in the village church, Vincent hears the news of a family in desperate need because all of them had fallen ill. He preaches about them at Mass and the parishioners' response is remarkable. By that afternoon, the townspeople line up to bring food for the family, but it was too much and in danger of spoiling. Vincent saw the need for organization. Nelson deals with this as well. During the pandemic, people have been remarkably generous with donations, but Nelson must make the decisions on what they can and cannot take in the kitchen, and how to share these gifts elsewhere. These are important organizational decisions he has learned, just like Vincent. Nelson saw the need of the community, judged it through the lens of faith, and acted by becoming the coordinator.

The students are involved in activism because of the Church's pro-life stance. Elizabeth Amaya, a sophomore sociology major, stated it well when she witnessed a lack of response to the murder of George Floyd. At the time, she was involved in a Christian group that would not make the statement, "Black lives matter." She could not understand why they wouldn't respond to a truth that is grounded in the dignity of Black lives. She ended up leaving that group. She says, "Faith has taught me that it is not enough not to be racist or discriminatory, you have to be actively saying something and showing support." She and a group of her friends organized protests and raised money for the movement and her community. They saw, they judged, and they acted. They started a blog called "History Never Taught," which is meant to teach others some of the history that has been swept under the rug because racism is a hard truth to face.

We saw many students stand up for the poor and the marginalized, especially those being targeted because of their skin color. Cell phone videos caught it all on camera. Students saw the inhumane treatment of Black people, and these students knew that enough was enough. Suddenly they were not too busy to watch, they were not too preoccupied to notice, they had time to make a difference. That is part of the grace of the pandemic.



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Students wait outside their classrooms in Arts and Letters Hall during the first day of classes of the 2020–2021 academic year. September 9, 2020, on DePaul’s Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

Conclusion

Living through and working during the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge all of us. We still see and hear of loved ones, friends, and neighbors sickened and lost as well as the devastation in other countries. We can and do find ourselves lost during moments of sadness, anger and even despair. However, we can also delve more deeply into what we personally value, and open ourselves to that wider, grander story we claim as followers of Jesus of Nazareth and as Vincentians. We can and do find deeper meaning and a fresh direction. Acknowledging and respecting our own feelings and questions helps. Drawing from our own “sources of wisdom” helps. Taking time to weep, pray for our world, and seek aid from our Creator helps. Remaining aware and present in this long period of crisis also leads to hope. There is time and energy for new learning and new action.

Indeed, as this pandemic has demonstrated for us at DePaul, we are always more than “acted on” by events as catastrophic as COVID and issues as overwhelming and complex as racism and all kinds of (too often) hidden injustices in our lives and society. We can and must act. After all, this is our world, a truth carefully and constantly enunciated here at DePaul.

As we do our own “inner work” we have found ourselves better suited to invite students to go deeper in their understanding of the Catholic faith and their relationship with God. Finally, recasting, promoting, and modeling simple critical reflection (See, Judge, Act) certainly influences the way they relate to the world.

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Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

“Learning Not to Despair of Our Own Age”: The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in This Time of Pandemic

Timothy P. Williams

BIO

TIMOTHY P. WILLIAMS is the national formation director for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States. He is a graduate of Marquette University, a longtime software industry executive, and a former US Army officer. Before joining the Society’s staff full-time, he led formation for the Society in North Texas and was a member of the National Formation Committee. He has presented on Vincentian spirituality, formation, and heritage at numerous diocesan, regional, and national assemblies. Most importantly, as longtime members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, he and his wife have made hundreds of home visits, serving Christ in the person of the poor.

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Susana Gonzalez, adjunct faculty in the College Science and Health, teaches the class Introduction to the Art and Science of Nursing. September 24, 2020, in the 990 Fullerton building on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

The year 2020, like the proverbial month of March, came in like a lion amid a roar of political turmoil, with a global pandemic following closely behind.¹ Through a summer and fall of escalating social unrest, violence, and the economic fallout of the coronavirus, the lion hardly seemed to have calmed by the end of the year.

Last year also marked the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in the United States (1845). Today, the Society boasts numerous special works, including thrift stores, disaster services, prisoner re-entry programs, and much more. The vast majority of the Society's work, serving more than 5 million people each year, is carried out by nearly 100,000 members nationwide who continue the tradition established by our founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, of visiting our neighbors in need in their homes.² There, we listen to them, we pray with them, and we try to help in the best way possible, always keeping in mind our maxim that "no work of charity is foreign to the Society."³

1 The title of this article is drawn from an 1848 lecture by Frédéric Ozanam, quoted by Monsignor Louis Baunard, *Ozanam in His Correspondence* (Wexford, Ireland: John English, 1923), 323:

“We shall learn not to despair of our own age, when we have examined more menacing periods, during which violence seemed supreme, despising truth and detesting law. Knowing that civilisation cannot perish, we shall also learn that it can win through better by the pen than by the sword, by charity better than by justice’: and further on : ‘Face to face with our decadence, which is too obvious, we must not ignore the progress which is not so obvious. Let us remember, in our moments of discouragement, that our Christianity has survived worse times. Let us say, as Aeneas said to his despondent companions, that we have passed through too many trials not to see, with God s help, the end of this : *passi graviora, dabit Deus his quoque finem!*’”

2 To learn more about the Society's activities in the US, visit <https://ssvpusa.org>.

3 *Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul*, (St. Louis: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, 2018) Part I, 1.3.

Members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul normally meet frequently, “in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love,”⁴ and we are committed not only to serve, but to “see the suffering Christ” in those that we serve. Suddenly, as businesses were shuttered, and “shelter in place” orders rolled across the country throughout the late winter and into spring, we needed to adapt to a world in which our person-to-person meetings, with the poor and with each other, were proscribed by public health mandates. And that was just the beginning of 2020.

It seemed to us a year like no other, but as the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, “There is nothing new under the sun.”⁵ Historically, the Vincentian Family has not only faced similar challenges but was born in the very midst of them. The Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity both were founded during the Thirty Years’ War and grew in the midst of frequent outbreaks of the plague in seventeenth-century France. Like the present pandemic, the plague “suspended all business matters because the Pope forbade all sorts of meetings—even High Masses—to avoid the danger of contagion,” as Vincent wrote during one such outbreak in 1656.⁶

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, in turn, was founded in 1833 in a century of almost constant revolution in France, along with periodic cholera epidemics. During 1848 in particular, the fledgling Society faced a cholera epidemic that killed nearly 20,000 people in Paris; a revolution that chased King Louis-Philippe from the throne; a second uprising that challenged the new republic; and an economic collapse that left thousands desperately impoverished.

We recall these examples not to shame ourselves for feeling overwhelmed. After all, we can only live in our own time, only face the challenges before us today. Rather, we are comforted in the knowledge that this, too, shall pass. We are inspired by the example of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, just as he was inspired by Saint Vincent, whom he called “a model one must strive to imitate, as he himself imitated the model of Jesus Christ.”⁷

“Faithful to the spirit of its founders,” our Rule states, “the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions.”⁸

4 *Ibid.*, Part I, 3.3.

5 *Eccles.* 1:9.

6 Letter 2147, “To Jacques Desclaux, Bishop of Dax,” 24 September 1656, in *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et al., Vols. 1–14 (New York: New City Press, 1985–2014), 6:106.

7 Letter 175, “To François Lallier,” 17 May 1838, in *Frédéric Ozanam, A Life in Letters*, ed. and trans. Joseph I. Dirvin, CM, (St. Louis: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, 1986), 143, hereinafter *Letters*.

8 *Rule*, Part I, 1.6.



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Disposal masks are made available to students, staff, and faculty in the Lewis Center. September 9, 2020, on the Loop Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

The Face of Christ Behind a Mask

Unlike previous generations that were forced to forgo meetings entirely, our Conferences have been able to keep connected first by email and then by telephone. Conferences with the technical knowledge and resources were able to stay in contact by online videoconferencing, using tools such as Zoom. Although the gap between Zoom and real life is great, we cannot help but to be deeply grateful for the blessings of modern technology that enable meetings, however diminished, to continue. At the same time, there remains uneasiness at what we've lost and a hunger to again gather in person. We may see each other's faces, but there are no little conversations on the side; no handshakes as we enter and leave; no bag for the traditional secret collection is passed; and when we offer our group prayers, it is only after that now standard reminder for everybody to "please mute yourselves."

Visits with the neighbor, in which we are called to see Christ's face, seemed even more daunting. How can you see Christ's face on the phone, where you see no face at all? How do you establish "relationships based on trust and friendship" when meeting for the first time over remote connections? After all, Blessed Frédéric taught us that "Help ... becomes honorable, because it may become mutual ... because the hand that you clasp clasps yours in return."⁹

But there were no hands to clasp; not by phone, not by Zoom, and not at a "social distance." During the rare occasions when we could meet in person, the face of Christ was

⁹ Kathleen O'Meara, *Frédéric Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne* (Edmonston & Douglas, 1876), 229.



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DePaul student Brian Mada rides his bike through the Lincoln Park Campus. November 4, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

hidden behind a mask. On one visit, I can recall realizing only after letting it go on too long just how difficult it was for one neighbor to tell her story loudly enough to be heard through the muffling of her mask. It's tough to share your sadness, and tougher still when you have to nearly shout it. Offering comforting words through the filter of masks or phones is also challenging.

Of course, technology cannot replace the home visit, but the choice we faced was not between a loaf and half a loaf; it was between half a loaf or nothing at all. Home visits with our neighbors in need continued with both technology and creativity. Members, still in pairs, spoke by phone, by video conference, and where possible, on front porches or front yards to listen, to pray, and to assist those in need in any way that they could.

It is always true that our presence and our love are more important than all the material assistance we can offer, and it is even more true in this pandemic. We are all in this together, we reassure each other, even as we each remain alone in our homes. Relieving the isolation that afflicts our neighbors in this time of great uncertainty becomes the highest priority, even when we, too, are uncertain. As important as our physical presence and the literal "clasping of hands" may be, nothing is greater than our Vincentian ideal to serve our neighbors "for love alone."

Indeed, as Blessed Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity who mentored the first members of the Society, once said, our neighbors "will appreciate [our] kindness and [our] love more than all else [we] bring them."¹⁰ So, while we look forward to the day we can resume our regular home visits, we have learned that even half a loaf can feed multitudes.

¹⁰ James Derum, *Apostle in a Top Hat* (Fidelity Publishing, 1995), 57.

It wasn't just our meetings that took a pause. Mass itself, as in Vincent's day, was no longer offered in person. Our Conferences are funded primarily by parishioners' donations, and we worried about having funds sufficient to the anticipated increase of need. We should have known better. As Blessed Frédéric once said, "To do works of charity, it is never necessary to worry about pecuniary resources, they always come."¹¹ Our fellow parishioners continued their generous support, and our communities came to us not only with donations, but as volunteers, helping to staff our food pantries, now busier than ever.

Growing in Unity Amid Division

Then came the summer. Just as we thought we were adapting to COVID-19, the very fabric of our society seemed about to unravel. Perhaps we should not have been surprised. History informs us that great social unrest, even to the point of revolution, often coincides with epidemics. When a cholera epidemic struck Paris in the spring of 1832, less than a year before the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was founded, Blessed Frédéric noted that "few wealthy people [had] been struck down," because they had the means to quarantine or flee. The poor working people, though, could not afford to shelter at home, much less leave Paris altogether. In their desperation, Frédéric saw, they would form mobs, even threatening revolution. "Business is down," he observed, "strange rumors circulate everywhere."¹²

By June of 1832, the scattered riots and uprisings occurring across France culminated in the quickly suppressed June Rebellion. So it also was in 2020, as thousands marched in the streets following the death of George Floyd in the custody of Minneapolis police. Over the summer, nationwide protests grew, some of them violent. In January of the new year, we saw a quickly suppressed insurrection in the nation's Capitol Building.

How did we all become so disconnected from each other, so unaware of the anguish deeply felt by our neighbors, especially in the midst of a great trial in which we'd constantly declared our solidarity, repeating that we were "all in this together"? For the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, our response began with self-examination, grounded in our spirituality and in our obligations to each other as Christians. To understand the faults we perceive in society, we must have the humility to examine and accept our own faults.

To that end, we offered a series of webinars titled "Hope in the Face of Racism," beginning with a discussion of the pastoral letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. Throughout the webinar series, we asked individual members to share personal stories that illustrated the issues we were examining, such as economic discrimination, crime, and violence. We followed up on a more personal level

¹¹ Letter 121, "To his mother," 23 July 1836, *Letters*, 76.

¹² Letter 45, "To his mother," 8 April 1832, *ibid.*, 23–25.

with what we termed “Spiritual Twinning Retreats,” which paired Conferences of different races to reflect and share their experiences. Speaking freely and without fear in the spirit of Vincentian friendship, we worked to remove barriers, deepen our understanding of each other, and better equip ourselves to serve all of our neighbors.

The Society might not quite be ready to “cast ourselves between these two enemy armies,”¹³ as Blessed Frédéric put it, but we can at least strive to be “that loving reconciler.”¹⁴ We can bring a new depth of empathy to our home visits, seek to understand the neighbor more fully; listen not just to the words, but to the whole person; and make each act of charity also an act of justice.

Uncertainty can be frustrating. As 2020 demonstrated, it can even be frightening. Often, what we fear most is not the uncertainty itself, but the realization that we are not in control. But while we are not in control, God is, and in a year of great uncertainty, that knowledge is neither frustrating nor frightening, but comforting. We left 2020 with greater humility, deeper trust in Providence, and undimmed commitment to serve in hope. And when future years come in like lions, may the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul meet them with hope and with confidence in the Lamb.

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13 Letter 137, “To Louis Janmot,” 13 November 1836, *ibid.*, 97.

14 Letter 243, “To Ferdinand Velay,” 12 July 1840, *ibid.*, 193.



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Susana Gonzalez, adjunct faculty in the College Science and Health, teaches the class Introduction to the Art and Science of Nursing. September 24, 2020, in the 990 Fullerton building on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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DePaul student Brian Mada rides his bike through the Lincoln Park Campus. November 4, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Homelessness: Depaul International Responds

J. Patrick Murphy, C.M., Ph.D.

BIO

J. PATRICK MURPHY, C.M., PHD, serves as the Values Director of Depaul International, where he lectures on values and leadership to trustees and staff in several countries. He is emeritus professor of public service at DePaul University where he founded Vincent on Leadership: The Hay Project. He received a PhD in higher education administration from Stanford University and an MBA from DePaul University. He is a Vincentian priest based in Chicago.

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This is a story of Depaul International, a nonprofit organization and a member of the global Vincentian Family.¹ Depaul and its subsidiaries responded to homeless service users during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Perhaps the best way to summarize how Depaul’s staff members spent their year working in the pandemic is to say they lived out the motto of Saint Vincent de Paul, “*Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit*. Action is our entire task.”²

With countries shutting down quickly, service users had nowhere to go. Information was scarce and unreliable. Staff essentially used the see-judge-act approach. They would see what was going right or wrong, then make a judgment about what to do, and then take action. They identified best practices and shared ideas by working together across cities and countries.

For more than fifteen years prior to the pandemic, Depaul International invested in its people by training them extensively in Vincentian values and leadership principles. As a result, we can observe herein that staff shared common Vincentian values,³ provided leadership, increased communication, and shared resources and best practices across boundaries. We found examples of shared values and can explore whether sharing made a difference to staff personally or in effecting organizational success.

We offer these stories, examples, and practices to aid others who serve the homeless and poorest people today—and in future pandemics—in the manner of Saint Vincent de Paul.⁴

What Would Vincent Say?

My first thought was, “What must be done?”

—United Kingdom

Historical Context

As noted in the organization’s introductory pamphlet, “Depaul International (originally Depaul Trust) came into being in London in 1989 as an initiative of the late Cardinal

1 I am grateful to the many people who contributed to this work from Depaul International and its subsidiaries—country and city directors, staff, and volunteers too many to name. We would not have these stories without their generosity.

2 Bernard Pujo, *Vincent de Paul the Trailblazer*, trans. Gertrud Graubert Champe (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2003), 251.

3 Please see Appendix for the complete list of official mission, vision, and values of Depaul International.

4 It is not our purpose here but may be interesting for some readers to put Depaul International’s efforts and the issue of homelessness in context by referring to literature on that question. See, for instance, Barrett A. Lee, Marybeth Shinn, and Dennis P. Culhane, eds., “The Dynamics of Homelessness: Research and Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 693 (January 2021), at: <https://www.aapss.org/the-annals>.



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The Depaul International logo; and members of Depaul USA.

Courtesy of the author



Basil Hume, who became its founding patron.” Depaul International and all of the charities in the Depaul Group find their roots in the work of Saint Vincent de Paul, born in France in 1581. “This means that we are part of a 400-year tradition of helping those in society who are the most disadvantaged and needy, in the words of Saint Vincent, ‘the poorest of the poor’—homeless people.”⁵

Currently the Depaul Group includes Depaul United Kingdom (founded in 1989), Depaul Ireland (2002), Depaul Slovakia (2006), Depaul Ukraine (2007), Depaul USA (2008), Depaul France (2013), the Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness (2014), Famvin Homeless Alliance (2017), and Depaul Croatia (2018). The chief group executive is Mark McGreevy, OBE.

General Findings

Depaul International focused its efforts on providing targeted support to subsidiaries. The United Kingdom team raised over £250,000 (\$353,000)⁶ for local COVID-19 responses within two months, increased its fundraising activities for subsidiaries, partnered with funders and governments, shared experiences and knowledge from across the Depaul Group, and continued to provide intensive support to its CEOs during the crisis. Because of COVID-19, Depaul International expected a drop of 20 percent in fundraising income,

⁵ Alison Veasey, *So Tell Me about Depaul* (London: Depaul International, 2018), 1. Cf. Kelli McGee, *So Tell Me about Depaul* (London: Depaul International, 2014), 2. See: https://issuu.com/kellimcgee/docs/so_tell_me_about_depaul.

⁶ Depaul reports financial data in British pounds, euros, and US dollars. We provide this data in BP and USD to be clear to readers in the UK and the USA.

equating to £150,000 (\$211,900). In fact, one of the surprising effects of the pandemic was an increase in fundraising income. The number of donors and the amounts of gifts increased during the pandemic in response to greater need, even though staff cancelled or postponed all in-person appeals and events. The pandemic brought out the generosity of people—at least for homeless people.

Despite the severe challenges Depaul faced, the speed with which Depaul subsidiaries responded to COVID-19 was plainly inspiring. Staff worked quickly and through long days to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in what was a most stressful time for them and their families. In France, for instance, the country director had to shut down his Paris center with a one-day notice from the government. His first action was to get the cell phone numbers of each homeless person who used their services to “make sure they didn’t lose anybody.” Until they were able to reopen their center, he called each of his service users every day. In the United Kingdom, the Daughters of Charity provided some much-needed comfort that the staff of the whole Group hugely appreciated.

In the Famvin Homeless Alliance, members of the Vincentian Family expanded their efforts to build thirteen houses for homeless people in their cities and neighborhoods and are now running ahead of schedule because of the increase in donors’ generosity during the pandemic.

Service users became service providers. In some cases, homeless service users began working in service of others because many of the usual volunteers were older and more at risk for the virus and had to quarantine themselves by government order. With fewer volunteers, the service users stepped up.

In some groups, personnel turnover increased. Turnover is high in Depaul service centers because the staff tend to be young and the opportunities for promotion are fewer because the number of paid staff is small. During the pandemic, staff began working twelve-hour days to respond to the increasing needs of service users, so they tended to burn out quickly.

For the most part, when countries shut down, centers closed and staff worked from home. Many staff lived in small apartments with other family members. The four walls of their residences seemed to close in on them.

What Would Vincent Say?

I heard Vincent in my head whenever I was trying to figure out what to do.

—St. Louis, Missouri, USA



[Click to enlarge](#)

A 13 Houses Campaign project in Madagascar, Famvin Homeless Alliance.

Courtesy of the author

How did staff respond to COVID-19 in 2020?

In the United Kingdom, when others closed their service centers, staff quickly determined to stay open and go large to accommodate the increase of homeless people. For instance, staff opened hotels with government support. They also took on new work, creating floating support staff and providing COVID-19 care out of hospitals.

Most staff worked from home, but some had to keep some housing and support services open. Relatively few people just had to keep going. When they made the decision to open hotels, people across the organization moved to help open the facility—HR, policy people, school staff, and volunteers.

The young people were exemplary. Volunteers became stronger. Staff created a daily Coronavirus Briefing Room (CBR) meeting. They tracked over one hundred emergency protocols based on adhering to government guidance and, ultimately, legislation.

They began to deliver support to clients digitally. They had to change the way they recruited staff and how clients accessed the services. They had to entertain people and offer digital inclusion. They bought their own personal protective equipment. They managed through three national lockdowns.



[Click to enlarge](#)

Finding comfort in music, Depaul UK.

Courtesy of the author

They consciously engaged in mission or values in new or different ways

Staff responded to bringing in rough sleepers⁷ on a mass scale by taking over hotels in London and Manchester. They opened three times in London and twice in Manchester. They worked with more than 300 rough sleepers. When other service providers closed, Depaul increased capacity. They created a rough sleeper directory so they could mirror policy makers' language and respond appropriately. An unexpected and surprising side effect of the hotels was a nice upturn in revenue—which allowed Depaul UK to expand services.

They were successful because of their belief in themselves and their extraordinary commitment to hard work and long hours. Consequently, the government and the bigger homelessness agencies noticed Depaul.

Did staff develop new or creative strategies?

Staff worked twelve-hour shifts on services, maximizing their time off and minimizing travel for staff. The Coronavirus Briefing Room meeting served to get a tight grip on what was happening in services to eliminate any chance of an outbreak of COVID-19. They had many cases, but only one service center saw two positive cases at any one time, and none beyond that, so to date it seems to have worked well. In the end, one team said, “There was nothing we couldn’t tackle if we tackled it together in that meeting.”

⁷ “Rough sleepers” is a term common to the United Kingdom that compares closely to the phrase “living on the streets” common in the United States.

Did staff invent new best practices?

After the first lockdown in the UK, staff created a process called Back-to-Better to capture what worked well and what they would need to change going forward. Back-to-Better activities included reopening offices in a COVID-19-safe way to allow some staff to come back to work. They did not anticipate subsequent lockdowns. A subsequent program, Back-4-Good, looked at two major things. First, staff needed to figure out how to keep an understanding of mission, values, and culture in a dispersed national organization further dispersed through national lockdowns. Second, they had to determine how to implement new staffing strategies to reflect the new world they faced—such as pay scales, work schedules, the work environment, and changes in technology that became necessary. In general, staff were intimately aware of mission and values because of the training when they joined or first volunteered for Depaul. In addition, many staff had completed the Vincentian Values and Leadership course over time.

Did you share vision, values, or mission with others in Depaul or elsewhere?

Staff frequently reflected on mission and why it was important to answer the call to help more. Even though work was often difficult, a member reflected, “the team kept going and were always buoyant and enthusiastic in their work.” Early on, UK staff shared protocols with Depaul Ireland, particularly around rough sleeping people without recourse to public funds. They also shared resources with The Passage Day Centre and the Cardinal Basil Hume and Noah project in Luton (near London). They were able to help very small organizations with a few basic items and allowed the government to help with funding.

What Would Vincent Say?

Let's keep hope in our hearts and continue to serve our masters.

—United Kingdom

What have we learned?

Caregivers learned how terribly resourceful they could be. They learned how to work hard under extreme pressure. They learned that they were unprepared for a disaster that required managing team staff after sending them home for a year. They learned to change their ways of service delivery to minimize risk. They learned that often senior leadership could do very little. In fact, there were weeks when Depaul was dependent upon their lowest-paid staff who were so brave to go to work on public transportation and to work in crowded hostels and hotels. They kept the organization safe. Everyone was a hero, going beyond job requirements—and even learning to enjoy it.



[Click to enlarge](#)

Images of Depaul Slovakia's response to the pandemic.

Courtesy of the author



Country Stories

Depaul United Kingdom (founded 1989)

When Depaul UK repurposed hotels in London and Manchester to house rough sleepers, the teams established services within a matter of weeks. Many staff from across the organization volunteered to take up shifts to care for residents. Depaul UK expanded the support for more service users providing for their most basic needs, such as food, medicine, and rent. For many young people, there was a real danger they would become even more isolated, with key community services closing down. As such, teams ensured access to technology and Wi-Fi to prevent further social exclusion during isolation.

In the UK, Depaul offers a program called Nightstop. Volunteer hosts open their homes to young homeless people facing a night on the streets or sleeping in an unsafe place. Volunteer drivers and chaperones ensure these young people get to a place of safety. It is a unique project. As a number of Nightstop hosts were in the “at risk” category for COVID-19, Depaul UK paid for emergency accommodation when needed, providing this service for those in the most desperate of situations.

As the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated mental health issues among clients, a well-being team provided training and resources to ensure support would always be accessible virtually.

Depaul Ireland (founded 2002)

Depaul Ireland worked incredibly hard to open a 100-bed cocooning unit, a brand-new initiative in conjunction with the health service executive (HSE) and the Dublin region homeless executive (DRHE). The unit caters to those within the homeless population with

serious underlying health conditions, such as a cancer or HIV diagnosis. They also opened an isolation unit for service users waiting for tests and test results. Both of these projects involved purchasing vital medical equipment, including two examination tables and two vital signs monitors, totaling £10,000 (\$14,100). They also purchased twenty tablets to improve remote working capabilities of key workers and to conduct clinical assessments.

The city director said the first six months of the pandemic were spent managing emergencies daily. Staff worked twelve-hour shifts to address an 80 percent infection rate. They reduced it to 10 percent.

Depaul Slovakia (founded 2006)

Depaul Slovakia remained COVID-19-free for the first nine months of the pandemic operating at or above capacity.

Work in Depaul Slovakia's Nightshelter became more complicated as staff began to take the clients' temperatures, disinfect their hands, and provide them with masks to keep them safe. It was inspiring to see how the team and clients all worked together to ensure a safe environment for everybody. In their commitment to influencing the wider society, the team worked to raise public awareness to protect homeless people and encouraged the community to donate services. In total, Depaul Slovakia projected £24,700 (\$34,900) of coronavirus-related expenditures.

Depaul Ukraine (founded 2007)

Depaul Ukraine adapted its services to ensure homeless people continued to have access to food, medical care, and social support. While some projects had to be suspended because they did not allow for social distancing, the team pulled together to increase its outreach services. In Kharkiv and Odessa, Depaul Ukraine became the only organization providing food to homeless and destitute people. The situation for homeless and disabled patients discharged from hospitals to make way for coronavirus patients was even more challenging. Without Depaul Ukraine's help, these people were at risk of dying in the streets—sick, lonely, and abandoned. Overall, Depaul Ukraine faced expenses up to £63,500 (\$89,700) to provide the highest level of service.

Depaul USA (founded 2008)

Depaul USA booked their most vulnerable service users, such as those with underlying health conditions, into hotel rooms to ensure they were off the streets and received care with dignity. Likewise, as some clients were unable to enter the shelter system, staff purchased one-person tents to ensure that these individuals received care and maintained standard



[Click to enlarge](#)

Depaul Ukraine facing the pandemic.

Courtesy of the author

social distancing. Depaul USA projected about £70,500 (\$99,600) of COVID-19-related expenditures.

The St. Louis city director said, “Donors are my new heroes, they wanted to do something, and we received tenfold what we were used to. In March, we got so much toilet paper we still have some of it.”

The Little Rock city director quoted a Daughter of Charity who trained her: “If a situation comes up ask yourself ‘does this serve those whom we serve?’ If no, leave it alone. If yes, go after it tooth and nail.” This guided her through the pandemic. In the early days, their center was in full, constant crisis mode. She got family members to take people who were homeless back home. She got a grant to provide tents for all her service users. She established testing every two weeks and she bought all the bus tokens she could get.

The strategic plan of the Arkansas Department of Health assigns the City of Little Rock with the task of housing twenty people in permanent housing each year. Most housing authorities closed during the year. Depaul was able to house more than forty people in permanent housing during 2020.

Later in the year, the city director was able to bring in the symphony to help calm the chaos and boost morale.

What Would Vincent Say?

Our response to COVID-19 is not a call to arms.

It is a call to the heart.

—United Kingdom



[Click to enlarge](#)

Depaul France providing mobile outreach in the midst of the pandemic.

Courtesy of the author

Depaul France (founded 2013)

Amazingly, staff did not lose track of a single service user throughout the year.

Depaul France worked with some of the most entrenched rough sleepers in Paris—a group especially susceptible to COVID-19. Given the urgent need to take homeless people off the streets, Depaul France booked their most vulnerable clients into hotels. Additionally, the team provided mobile phones to service users who were unable to travel across the city to the day center. They remained in contact with each other and staff helped them to the best of their ability. Along with the recruitment of an additional staff member to help cope with the demand and the implementation of extra health and safety precautions, Depaul France projected additional expenses up to £43,700 (\$61,700).

In February 2020, the government of France announced that anything open to the public must close. This included the day shelter in Paris. This was devastating to the service users. The staff let them know of the edict and dealt with their fear and their great ignorance of the virus. Staff characterized the time as *the great chaos*.

At the beginning of the first lockdown, staff immediately determined not to abandon service users. Most of the service users had cell phones, so staff made sure to get their phone numbers. The director of the center called each service user every day to check on health and welfare.

Meanwhile, most of the forty-two volunteers in the shelter were sixty-five to seventy-five years old. The government announced that people sixty-five and older were to stay home to be safe. In one day, the number of volunteers dropped to from forty-two to four—



[Click to enlarge](#)

A kitchen run by Depaul Croatia.

Courtesy of the author

10 percent of Depaul's force. The director launched a search for new, younger volunteers to replace those lost. He stayed in touch with those he lost through email updates.

The staff devised new food distribution schemes—for instance, breakfast moved outside for a socially distanced “Breakfast in the Courtyard.” Service users became service providers by moving furniture outside and then back inside, sanitizing everything.

When they were able to open with social distancing, service users were able to go inside one at a time for a shower, then gather in the courtyard to eat and visit with friends.

Service users are often people with addictions; in normal times, they typically use street begging to support their habits and to buy food, when the shelters are closed. But begging was not possible because people were not leaving home.

Neighbors helped a little because of the respect they had for the work the staff do. Depaul France was able to share information with other Depaul services in other countries and with other services in Paris. All benefitted from this generosity.

Depaul Croatia (founded 2018)

Depaul Croatia continued its day center services during the pandemic while expanding outreach services to ensure homeless people had access to food, healthcare, and hygiene services. The local community showed great compassion donating goods to continue services without interruption. Depaul Croatia sought support to help cover staff salaries of about £20,400 (\$28,800) because of funding delays caused by COVID-19.

The director's first challenge in the chaos was “to distinguish what was urgent and important from the rest of the concerns.” Often enough it was nearly impossible to sort

out importance and urgency in decision-making. Most regular activities had to be re-engineered. Meanwhile, the team had to adapt and become stronger even as their workload increased, continuing the usual routines for clients' health, hygiene, and meals. The team said they learned how to be Vincentian by increasing outreach and professionalism. They replaced volunteers who failed to show up. They strengthened the organization. They became a stronger voice for the homeless, emphasizing their Depaul Croatian Vincentian values.

What Would Vincent Say?

We asked staff to reflect on the question, "What would Vincent say about your work during COVID-19?" They responded in their own words or their interpretation of Vincent's purported response. Here are some of those responses.

- Continue to preserve your life.—Croatia
- Empty yourself to receive. Make space for all the gifts you will receive.—France
- From Saint Louise, "The streets are my chapel."—Little Rock, Arkansas, USA
- Keep the homeless at the center of your thinking and concern and make decisions with a focus on services to our clients.—Slovakia
- Well done, what next? More ... —Dublin

From staff in the United Kingdom:

- Fear not; calm will follow the storm, and perhaps soon.
- Honored to be included in such a fine group.
- Would he say that he was pleased that we joyfully welcomed the opportunity that came our way to be of service, and that we did our duty well?
- He would say (he did say) that given the unprecedented events facing us that we need to be "innovative unto infinity" in our assistance and duty. I think we have—perhaps not to infinity— but quite a distance....
- Hi, I have just emailed Vincent but his "out of office" is on. Louise informs me his is visiting staff and patients at the NHS Nightingale Hospital in Birmingham.
- The responses to the pandemic across Depaul UK have absolutely embodied our values base—the absolute organization of charity from CBR meetings to excellent partnership work in hotels.
- I think almost a year in, Vincent would say that "charity is a heavy burden to carry" and it is ok to feel overwhelmed and tired, but he would remind us about what it means to be a "servant of the poor" despite the challenges and risks, we must keep smiling and be good humored.



[Click to enlarge](#)

A community center run by Depaul USA.

Courtesy of the author

- My favorite Vinnie quote is something I think we all do pretty well:
 - Charity is a heavy burden, but keep your gentleness and smile, you are a servant to the poor and should always be smiling and good humored (slightly abridged version).
- He would say:
 - “In a world that changed, maybe forever, Depaul pulled together.”
 - Good luck!
- You have done your duty well; let us continue our work being very humble, very patient and very charitable.
- “That’ll do Depaul, that’ll do.”
- He definitely would *not* say:
 - “Going forward we need blue sky thinking to action thinking outside the box to drill down and touch base offline by close of play...”
 - He might say, “be strong, this too will pass.”
- He would say just get on and do whatever must be done for whoever needs it. Proud that Depaul at every level avoided the easy temptation to be scared about risk—at every level staff jumped straight into whatever must be done to help and support whoever needs it, even if it’s not normally how we do things or what we offer. Innovate and be nimble as always!

Conclusion

In the book Acts of the Apostles, Luke wrote “*Per Transit Benefaciendo. He went about doing good*”⁸ to describe how Jesus lived his life. When Vincent’s community built the chapel that now serves as the motherhouse for the Congregation of the Mission (and pilgrims) in Paris, the members used the quote from Luke to apply to Saint Vincent. More than 400 years later, men and women working with homeless people redoubled their effort to do good. The pandemic took away even the sleeping spots in streets—for some, those were the only “homes” they had. Depaul staff found apartments and hotels and ways to feed them—being inventive unto infinity—as Vincent said. Their first decision in the chaos was to stay open, and then to be sure no one was forgotten, and then expand services. Vincent did the same during the pandemics of his time.

The story of the Vincentian Family and service to the poor continues.

Appendix

Depaul Mission

Our mission is to end homelessness and change the lives of those affected by it.

Depaul Vision

Our vision is of a society in which everyone, across the world, has a place to call home and a stake in their community.

Depaul Values

Our key values underpin all of the work we do.

The Depaul Group celebrates the potential of people:

- We believe in the potential of people.
- We believe in developing the individual and the organization—promoting the development of our service users to achieve their potential, and investing in our staff and volunteers to help them develop and make the best use of their skills to deliver high-quality services.
- We will greet all of the people who use our services with respect.
- We have a strong culture of volunteering.

⁸ Acts 10:38.

The Depaul Group puts its words into action:

- What matters is what we do.
- We are committed to innovation and to finding new ways to tackle the problems that we encounter.
- We believe in justice for all—through influencing structural change in society and supporting individuals.
- We are custodians of valuable resources and recognize our responsibility to use them as effectively as possible.
- We strive to be a best-practice organization.
- We have a global perspective and potential.

The Depaul Group believes in rights and responsibilities.

We believe that people have fundamental rights as human beings and within the law, which must be safeguarded and upheld.

Rights:

- To be treated fairly and with impartiality.
- To have one's ideas and opinions listened to and respected.
- To work in a positive and supportive environment.
- To have one's contribution recognized.
- To be kept informed.

We believe that with rights go responsibilities and a duty to consider others:

- To treat others fairly and with impartiality.
- To listen to and respect the ideas and opinions of others.
- To work with others in a positive and supporting way.
- To recognize the contributions of others.
- To facilitate and take responsibility for effective communication.

Depaul's Philosophy of Care Statement (Welcome Statement)

This statement shows how we put our values into action in our work with homeless and disadvantaged people:

Welcome

We are glad you are here

In this place you can take steps towards a better future

You will lead the way

We will ask, listen and help

We will work and walk with you

Welcome

Each year Depaul International self-funds and runs in-house training courses for longer-serving staff across the Depaul Group on Vincentian values and leadership. It explores the potential for re-energizing not only themselves but the team they work with, seeking new inspiration and new ways to be innovative in their projects so that our clients and residents receive the best possible quality of service. Since Depaul began this program in 2005–06, several hundred staff and trustees have taken part.

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Finding comfort in music, Depaul UK.

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A kitchen run by Depaul Croatia.

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A community center run by Depaul USA.

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In Memory of Dr. Traci Schlesinger

Her life, her scholarship and work, her devotion to social justice, and her commitment to those she fought for, taught, and mentored, shall never be forgotten.

Mass Incarceration, COVID-19, and Race as Exposure to Early Death

Traci Schlesinger, Ph.D.

BIO

TRACI SCHLESINGER, PHD, was associate professor and director of graduate studies in sociology at DePaul University and a board member of the Pretrial Justice Institute. Dr. Schlesinger was born and raised in New Jersey, in the largely white working-class town of Dumont. Few of her friends or family had attended college. She received her Associates degree in Women's Studies from Bergen Community College, her BA from Fordham University in Sociology, and her PhD from Princeton in Sociology. She was hired by DePaul as an assistant professor of Sociology in 2004 and was tenured as an associate professor in 2012.

Questions about how criminalizing and punishing systems maintain white supremacy in the contemporary United States informed her research, teaching, activism, and policy work. Her work on state criminalization and punishment as racism examined a variety of sites, from the centers of the carceral state inside prisons to the softer carceral geographies of diversion, pretrial supervision, and school discipline. Dr. Schlesinger published her research in *Crime & Delinquency*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Feminist Formations*, *Future of Children*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Race & Justice*, *Youth Justice*, and other scholarly journals. Additionally, the ABA, the ACLU, the US Department of Justice, and others cited her research in numerous amicus briefs

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submitted for cases challenging money bail, including *Walker v. Calhoun* and *O'Donnell v. Harris County*. Dr. Schlesinger was working with the Community Justice Exchange and local bail bonds in seven jurisdictions to examine the expansion of nonfinancial conditions of pretrial release over the past five years, until her sudden passing in December 2021.

Dr. Schlesinger was a scholar and activist in equal measure, and she dedicated her life to social justice work. The focus of her research was her analysis and critique of the criminal justice system, in particular its production and maintenance of racial stratification in the post-civil rights era United States. In an interview, Dr. Schlesinger noted that she chose DePaul because of its mission of social justice and its location in a large city. Both her research and her teaching had tremendous impact. She is nationally recognized as an expert in her field, and she was a transformative teacher for students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, receiving an Excellence in Teaching Award in 2011. More information about her life's work can be found here: <https://las.depaul.edu/academics/sociology/faculty/Pages/traci-schlesinger.aspx>

Summary: A majority of the largest single-site outbreaks of COVID-19 infections in the United States have been in prisons and jails since the beginning of the pandemic. These outbreaks threaten the lives and well-being of incarcerated people, correctional staff, and people who live in the communities to which incarcerated people return. This study employs both linear and logistic multivariate regression models to examine data from the UCLA's COVID Prison Data Project, IPUMS CPS [Integrated Public Use Microdata Series—Current Population Survey], the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Prison Policy Initiative to better understand the facility, county, and state-level predictors of COVID-19 infections and deaths in correctional facilities. The study finds that while some facility-level characteristics are associated with infections and deaths, county-level racial and economic characteristics matter more. In particular, facilities in counties with more Latinx and Indigenous people and lower average incomes have higher infection rates. Likewise, the odds that someone in a facility has died from COVID-19 are higher in counties with more Latinx people, lower average incomes, more college graduates, and fewer people who never married. Moreover, state-level policy changes to address this crisis have failed to do so effectively. While this study is unable to access how county-level characteristics influence these facility-level outcomes, it does demonstrate a clear connection between racialization and exposure to early death.¹

The basic facts of mass racialized incarceration in the United States are well known and oft repeated. The US quadrupled its rates of incarceration during the last quarter of the twentieth century (Mauer, 2002; Tonry, 1996; Western, 2007). As a result, while the US is home to only 5 percent of the world's population, it is home to 25 percent of the world's incarcerated population. On any given day, 2.2 million people are in prison or jail, and nearly 5 million people spend time in local jails over the course of a year (Bertram and Jones 2019). Black and Indigenous people are six times more likely, and Latinx people three times more likely, than are white people to be imprisoned during their lives and these disparities are durable across gender (Schlesinger, 2008). Racial biases in policing (Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst, 2006), in criminal law (Tonry, 1996), and in criminal processing (Wooldredge et al., 2015) work to create and maintain these disparities. This racialization of criminalization and punishment help cement racial inequities in a broad range of outcomes, including employment (Pager, 2007) and incomes (Western, 2002; Western and Pettit, 2005), quality of family life (Lopoo and Western, 2005; Western and McLanahan, 2000), and physical and mental health (Wildeman, 2012).

¹ *Editor's note:* Dr. Schlesinger wrote her paper according to the *APA Publication Manual* rules of style, commonly used for works in her field of study. Although *Vincentian Heritage* typically mandates papers adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, it was decided to honor Dr. Schlesinger's choice in light of the paper's content. A complete list of cited works can be found at the end of the article.

Focusing on incarceration's impact on health reveals the following. First, prisons and jails are amplifiers of infectious diseases, in part because the conditions that can keep diseases from spreading—including social distancing, frequent hand washing, and condom use—are nearly impossible to achieve in these facilities. Going to prison increases people's odds of contracting sexually transmitted infections, HIV, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis (TB) (Bick, 2007). Because both TB and COVID-19 are airborne, analyses of incarceration's impact on people's odds of contracting TB are particularly relevant to this study. Controlling for race, gender, poverty, and employment status, alcohol, cigarette, and drug consumption, and weight, exercise frequency, and prior health problems, research finds that going to prison increases people's odds of contracting TB by between 79 and 83 percent (Massoglia, 2008; Massoglia and Schnittker, 2009). Studies examining the culture genotypes of TB positive people inside jails find that between 18 and 79 percent of people—depending on the study—had isolates with DNA fingerprints matching those of other TB positive people, suggesting intra-facility transmission (Jones et al., 1999; MacNeil et al., 2005). These infections spread to communities when people are released; only one-third of one percent of all people living in the US but four percent of women whose partner has been incarcerated have been diagnosed with TB (Rogers et al., 2012).

Second, having been incarcerated, having a partner, parent, or other loved one who has been incarcerated, and living in high-incarceration neighborhoods are each associated with many of the chronic health issues that increase people's odds of having severe cases of COVID-19 and of dying from COVID-19. Going to prison is associated with increases in BMIs (Gates and Bradford, 2015), having hypertension (Massoglia, 2008; Wang et al., 2009), developing left ventricular hypertrophy (Howell et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2009), and having asthma (Frank et al., 2013). Experiencing parental incarceration increases youth's odds of developing asthma, diabetes, obesity, low-grade inflammation, and decreases their overall health (Boch and Ford, 2015; Roettger and Boardman, 2012; Turney, 2014; White, West, and Fuller-Thomson, 2020). When compared to women who do not have an incarcerated family member, women with family members who are currently incarcerated are 44 percent more likely to be obese, almost three times as likely to have had a heart attack or stroke, and twice as likely to report being in poor health (Lee et al., 2014). Finally, people who live in neighborhoods with incarceration rates in the top quartile have odds of being diagnosed with dyslipidemia and metabolic syndrome that are 47 and 67 percent higher, respectively, than do individuals matched on age, sex, race, BMI and smoking history who live in neighborhoods with the same levels of poverty, healthy foods access, and crime rates (Topel et al., 2018). Individuals residing in neighborhoods with incarceration rates in the top quartile have diminished access to care, less access to specialists, less trust in physi-



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Signage posted to the John T. Richardson Library warning guests of restricted access during the COVID-19 pandemic. March 16, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

cians, and less satisfaction with the care they receive than do individuals living in low-incarceration rate neighborhoods. This spillover affects even those least likely to experience incarceration themselves, including the insured, those over 50, women, white people, and those with incomes far exceeding the federal poverty threshold (Schnittker et al., 2015).

Given these facts, it is no surprise that a majority of the largest, single-site outbreaks of COVID-19 infections in the U.S have been in prisons or jails since the beginning of the pandemic (Covid Prison Project, 2020). Nearly 20 percent of the prison population has tested positive for COVID-19, an infection rate that is five times and an age-adjusted mortality rate that is three times that of the general population (Saloner et al., 2020). As of January 29, 2021, at least 372,569 imprisoned people and 89,524 people working in prisons have tested positive for the novel coronavirus and 2,296 imprisoned people and 142 prison staff have died from COVID-19 (Covid Prison Project, 2020). Overcrowding, insufficient sanitation, poor ventilation, limited PPE availability, and inadequate healthcare make prisons, jails, and detention centers amplifiers of COVID-19 outbreaks (Couloute, 2020). Moreover, incarcerated people are considerably more likely to have the chronic health conditions linked to high COVID-19 fatality risk (Binswanger, Krueger, and Steiner, 2009) and carceral medical care is often under-funded and under-staffed (Vaughn and Carroll, 1998). As a result, the danger of COVID-19 may be particularly acute in carceral settings. Preliminary research supports this conjecture. Among those with COVID-19, incarcerated people are more likely than others to be admitted to the intensive care unit, require vasopressors, be intubated, and die than are those who are not incarcerated (Altibi et al., 2020). Finally, when people

are released from correctional facilities, they bring COVID-19 home with them, disproportionately to Black and Brown communities with high incidence of underlying health conditions. Corroborating this, one study finds that jail community cycling accounts for 55 percent of the variance in case rates across zip codes in Chicago and 37 percent of the variance in rates across zip codes in Illinois (Reinhart and Chen, 2020). In this way, mass racialized incarceration may be among the primary drivers of racial disparities in COVID-19.

Data and Method

To understand the predictors of COVID-19 infection rates and deaths, this study uses both OLS [ordinary least squares] and logistic multivariate regressions to examine the relationships between facility and county-level characteristics and state-level decarceration policies on one hand and facility-level COVID-19 infection rates and the odds that there was a death at the facility on the other. The study examines a dataset constructed by merging data from several publicly available sources—including 2010, 2018, and 2019 IPUMS USA (Ruggles et al., 2020), the 2013 National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) (Rothwell, Madans, and Arispe, 2014), the UCLA’s Covid Behind Bars Data Project (CBBDP) (Dolovich and Littman, 2020), and the Prison Policy Initiatives’ report, *Failing Grades: States’ Responses to Covid-19 in Jails & Prisons* (SRCJP) (Widra and Hayre, 2020)—with data collected from the most recent population reports issued by either each state’s Department of Corrections (DOC) or the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The diversity of these data sources enables the study to examine the impact of facility level characteristics, county-level context, and state-level policies on both facility-level COVID-19 infection rates and the odds that someone in a facility has died from COVID-19.

Response Variables

This study has two response variables. The first is the rate of COVID-19 infections per 100,000 people in correctional facilities—including prisons, jails, and halfway houses. To calculate COVID-19 infection rates, I gathered population counts for each facility from the most recent population reports from each state—either November 2020, December 2020, or January 2021—that releases these reports and lists population by facility. These reports provided population data from 902 of the 1226 facilities from the CBBDP.² Next, I divided the number of reported COVID-19 cases in the CBBDP by the total population in the facility from these reports and multiplied this result by 100,000, giving us the number of cases per

2 While the CBBDP includes numbers of COVID-19 cases in the facility, it only has population counts for a small number of facilities—and some of these population numbers contradict the numbers in state’s DOC’s population reports. As such, this study uses population numbers for each state Department of Corrections population reports.

100,000 residents.³ Finally, I transformed the infection rate by multiplying it by the natural log to correct for skewness in the variable. Facilities have a mean infection rate of 288 positive COVID-19 tests per 100,000 incarcerated people. The second response variable is whether a facility has reported a COVID-19 related death. The sample for these models contains all 648 facilities that report COVID-19 deaths. While facilities range from reporting 0 to 43 COVID-19 deaths, 60 percent of facilities report not having any COVID-19 deaths. As a result, the study whether anyone has died from COVID-19 at the facility, counting facilities with no deaths as one outcome and those with any COVID-19 deaths as the other outcome.

Predictor Variables

Facility-level variables: Models include the following facility characteristics—security level, gender of those held, whether the facility is a reentry wing of a prison or jail, and whether the facility is a carceral hospital. Facilities are coded as maximum, medium, minimum or community security. All facilities that hold people each in their own cell are coded as maximum; this includes supermax, administrative max, and maximum-security facilities. Facilities that primarily hold people in double cells, with two people in each cell, are coded as medium security. Those that hold people primarily in dormitories are coded as minimum security. Finally, those based in the community—primarily community based halfway houses—are coded as community. Thirty percent of facilities in the sample have wings of differing security levels. To reflect this, the study codes facilities as having each relevant security level. For example, 275 facilities contain both maximum and medium security wings and are coded as both maximum and medium. Thirty-six percent of facilities are either all maximum security or have a maximum-security wing; 49 percent of facilities either are all medium security or have a medium security wing; 48 percent of facilities either are all minimum security or have a minimum-security wing; 11 percent of facilities are community-based facilities. While 72 percent of all facilities house only men, 11 percent house only women, and 16 percent house both men and women. Fourteen percent of facilities are reentry wings of prisons or jails; these are distinct from community based halfway houses as they are in higher security facilities. Finally, 4 percent of all facilities are carceral hospitals; while many prisons and some jails have hospital facilities, these particular facilities are stand-alone carceral hospitals. Each measure of facility-level characteristics come from the websites of each state Department of Corrections and the federal Bureau of Prisons.

3 Because the CBBDP notes each positive test result as a case, and some facilities test people more than once—to decide when to move someone out of administrative segregation, for example. As a result, the maximum rate is 235,000—or 235,000 positive COVID-19 tests for 100,000 people.

County-level variables: This study includes both jails and prisons. County-level characteristics are likely to be associated with infection rates in jails as they gesture at both the people incarcerated in the facility, the people who staff the facility, and the resources the county has to respond to public health threats, for instance by providing PPE to staff and incarcerated people. County-level characteristics may also be associated with infection rates in prisons through their relationship to the staff of the facility and perhaps through their relationship to state level funding. County-level characteristics in the study include the percent of people in a county who are Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, the average personal income, the percent of residents who are college graduates, the percent of people who have never married, and the urbanicity of a county. Measures of race, education, income, and marital status come from the 10 percent 2010 IPUMS USA sample, the 5 percent 2018 IPUMS ACS sample, and the 1 percent 2019 IPUMS ACS sample. Measures of urbanicity are from the NCHS. The IPUMS data includes information on people from 781 counties, 652 of which match with the counties in the CBBDP.⁴ While models control for the percent of the county who are Asian, Black, and Latinx, they control for quintiles of the percent of the county who are Indigenous in order to allow for nonlinear effects. While the average county is only 2 percent Indigenous, some counties are 39 percent Indigenous. Using quintiles allows for the possibility that each additional percent Indigenous in a county is not associated with the same change in COVID-19 correctional facility infection rates. For example, though changes in the percent of a county's population that is Indigenous from 2 to 12 percent may not be associated with COVID-19 correctional facility infection rates, changes in the percent of the population that is Indigenous from 15 to 25 percent may be. The average county is 2 percent Indigenous, 5 percent Asian, 13 percent Black, and 15 percent Latinx. In the average county, personal income is \$21,685, 19 percent of residents are college graduates, and 45 percent of residents have never married. Finally, on the NCHS 6-point urban-rural scale, where lower numbers designate more urban, the average county scores a 4.4. Four percent of the counties in the sample are large central metropolitan areas, 12 percent are large fringe metropolitan areas, 13 percent are medium metropolitan areas, 12 percent are small metropolitan areas, 20 percent are micropolitan areas, and 38 percent are non-core areas.⁵

4 The 2019 IPUMS sample did not include enough counties for this analysis.

5 Metropolitan counties include 1) large central metro counties are Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) of 1 million population that either contain the entire population of the largest principal city of the MSA, are completely contained within the largest principal city of the MSA or contain at least 250,000 residents of any principal city in the MSA; 2) large fringe metro counties in MSA of 1 million or more population that do not qualify as large central; 3) medium metro counties in MSA of 250,000-999,999 population; 4) small metro counties are counties in MSAs of less than 250,000 population; 5) micropolitan counties in micropolitan statistical areas; and 6) noncore counties are in neither metropolitan nor micropolitan statistical areas: [NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties](#).



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A drinking fountain is blocked off in Arts and Letters Hall on the Lincoln Park Campus due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, August 3, 2020. DePaul reconfigured all of its buildings, offices, and classrooms to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines during the pandemic.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

State-level variables: When COVID-19 began tearing through correctional facilities in spring 2020, some jurisdictions enacted changes in policies or practice meant to slow the virus's spread. These included stopping jail admissions and releasing designated people from prison—either those with underlying medical conditions, those at the end of their sentence, or those who had been sentenced for minor crimes and who had little or no prior history. Models include a normalized index of these policies and practices taken from the underlying data for Prison Policy Initiatives report, *Failing Grades: States' Responses to Covid-19 in Jails & Prisons* (SRCJP), which includes a policy score for every state except for Illinois, which had pending legislation at the time the Prison Policy Initiative released the SRCJP. While the SRCJP scores states from 1 to 100, these scores only range from 8.15 to 29.50, with a mean score of 17, meaning they gave every state a failing grade. The study matched these state policy scores to each county in the final dataset and dropped observations from Illinois in models that examine the impact of changes in policy. Descriptive statistics for each of the variables included in the models are listed in Table 1.

Findings

Tables 2 and 3 report the results from three multivariate ordinary least squared (OLS) and three multivariate logistic regressions. Let's take a minute to consider how to interpret these results. First, these models cannot determine causality, only association. Second, while the OLS models tell us the amount of change in infection rates associated with each variable, expressed through each variable's coefficient, the logistic models tell us the

change in the odds that a facility has had a COVID-19 related death, expressed through each variable's odds-ratio. Third, these models allow us to understand the association of each predictor variable to the response variable at given levels of each of the other predictor variables. In other words, for models that include facility security level and county-level average income, the models tell us the association of average income with infection rates given a particular security level. Fourth, models tell us both the size of an association and its significance. For example, the exponentiated coefficient for private facility in Model 2.1 is .62, and the table shows two asterisks after this exponentiated coefficient. Since numbers above 1 connote positive change, while those below 1 connote negative change, this means that private facilities have death rates that are 48 percent lower than public facilities. The two asterisks tell us that the p-value is under .01, meaning that there is a less than 1 percent chance that the model would find this result if there isn't a negative association between private ownership and facility infection rates. As noted in the tables, one asterisk means that there is a less than 5 percent chance, two that there is a less than 1 percent chance, and three that there is a less than .1 percent chance that the model would find this result if there isn't an association between that predictor variable and the response variable. When tables show a † after a coefficient, this means that there is a less than 10 percent chance that the model would find this result if there isn't an association between that predictor variable and the response variable. To avoid presenting these results as more definite than they are, the text does not discuss the size of these marginal associations. Finally, the r-squareds and pseudo r-squareds tell us the percent of variance in the response variable—either infection rates or odds that there's been a death—that each model explains.

Table 2 reports the coefficients and standard errors from a series of OLS regressions. Because the response variable is logged-transformed, the table reports exponentiated coefficients, which represent percent change for the facility-level characteristics—all of which are binary—and numeric change for the county and state-level characteristics, which are linear. As a reminder, each exponentiated coefficient is a measure of the association with that variable and facility-level infection rates, holding each of the other variables in the model constant. Model 2.1 finds that privately owned or operated facilities are associated with infection rates that are 48 percent lower than those at public facilities. While 55 percent of the privately owned or operated facilities in the database are community-based halfway houses, this model controls for security level of facility and thus suggest that the effect of private ownership exists within security levels. The model also finds that being a medium or minimum-security prison or jail is associated with facility-level infection rates that are 21 and 47 percent higher, respectively, than those at community-based facilities. Maximum and supermax security facilities, where people are most often housed in single cells, have

infection rates that are not significantly different from those of community-based facilities. Facilities that house only women are associated with infection rates that are 44 percent lower than those at facilities that house only men; facilities with both men and women have infection rates that are not significantly different from those that house only men. The positive association between being a carceral hospital and infection rates is marginally significant ($p=.07$). Notably, the r -squared (.05) shows us that these facility-level predictors explain only 5 percent in the variance of infection rates across facilities. This suggests that while these facility-level predictors are significantly related to infection rates, other factors that these models do not consider are far more predictive.

To better understand the predictors of facility-level infection rates, Model 2.2 adds county-level characteristics to the facility-level characteristics included in Model 2.1. This model finds that facility-level infection rates are 53 percent lower in facilities that are privately owned or operated than in those that are publicly owned and 43 percent lower in facilities that only house women than those that house only men. Once again, the association between being a carceral hospital and infection rates is marginally significant ($p=.06$). County-level racial characteristics are also predictive of facility-level infection rates. Each increase in the percent Latinx in a county is associated with 3480 more infections, per 100,000 people. Likewise, each increase in the Indigenous population quintile of the county is associated with a 1,000 more infection, per 100,000 people. None of the measures of socioeconomic characteristics of counties—average income, the percent of residents who are college graduates, and the percent of residents who have never married—are significantly associated with facility-level COVID-19 infection rates. This model explains 15 percent in the variance of infection rates across facilities (r -squared = 15).

Finally, Model 2.3 adds the Prison Policy Initiatives COVID-19 normalized prison policy score to each model and has findings that closely mirror those of Model 2.2. The model finds that facility infection rates are 49 percent lower in facilities that are privately owned and 43 percent lower in facilities that only house women, that each increase in the Indigenous population quintile of a county is associated with an increase of 1 in facility infection rates. The percent of a county's residents who are Latinx is marginally positively associated with facility-level infection rates in this model ($p=.08$). Likewise, the association between the SRCPJ policy score and infection rates is positive and marginally significant ($p=.07$). The positive association suggests that states with the worst outbreaks enacted more decarceration and public health policies. Its marginal significance is not surprising given that numerous analyses suggest that no state has truly done enough to combat the spread of COVID-19 in prisons and jails. In fact, the SRCJP gave each state either a D or an F and no state has reduced its prison population by more than 5 percent, and most populations are

climbing again after brief drops (Widra and Hayre, 2020). This model explains 14 percent of the variance in infection rates across facilities.⁶

Table 3 reports the odds-ratios and 95 percent confidence intervals from a series of logistic regressions. Each odds-ratio is a measure of the association with that variable and whether there was a COVID-19 death at a facility, holding each of the other variables in the model constant. Model 3.1 finds that the odds that someone has died from COVID-19 at a maximum or medium security facility are about twice as high as they are in community-based facilities—184 percent and 214 percent higher, respectively. While the higher rates in maximum security facilities may seem surprising given single celling, turnover in and out of facilities—including transfer between facilities—may explain much of this. Minimum-security facilities are marginally positively associated with higher facility-level death rates than at community-based facilities ($p=.08$). Facilities that only house women have odds of having a COVID-19 related death at a facility that are 68 percent lower than those that house only men. Facilities that are carceral hospitals are marginally more likely ($p=.12$) to have had someone die from COVID-19. Notably, the pseudo r-squared (.08) shows us that these facility level predictors explain only 8 percent in the variance of infection rates across facilities.

Model 3.2 adds county-level predictors to those facility-level predictors included in Model 3.1 and finds that a facility's odds of having had someone die from COVID-19 are 87 percent lower in privately owned facilities, and are nearly three times and more than twice as high in medium ($OR = 2.88$) and minimum-security ($OR = 2.22$) prisons and jails than in community-based facilities. Facilities that only house women have odds of having a COVID-19 related death at a facility that are 85 percent lower than those that house only men. Being a carceral hospital is marginally positively associated with having had a COVID-19 related death ($p=.06$). County-level racial and economic characteristics are also predictive of facilities' odds of a having had a COVID-19 related death. Each increase in the percent Latinx in a county is associated with having 37 times the odds of a having a COVID-19 related death at a facility. Moreover, each increase in income quintile and the percent of people who have never been married is associated with a .53 percent and 17 percent decrease in the odds of that someone at the facility has died from COVID-19, respectively. Each increase in the percent of people who are college graduates is associated with an 18 percent increase in the odds that someone at the facility has died from COVID-19. This model explains 23 percent of the variance in death rates across facilities (pseudo r-squared = .23).

Finally, Model 3.3 adds the SRCPJ policy score to each model and has findings that

⁶ The decrease in R-squared from Model 2.2. to Model 2.3 is likely because the latter model excludes all Illinois counties, since the PPI does not give IL a score, decreasing the sample size and the degrees of freedom.



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Olivia Kennedy, sophomore political science major, finishes a Zoom class in Arts and Letters on the first day of school. September 9, 2020, on DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

closely mirror those of Model 3.2. The odds that someone at the facility has died from COVID-19 are three times as high ($OR=2.96$) in medium -security prisons and jails than in community-based facilities while death rates in maximum and minimum-security facilities are not significantly different from those in community-based facilities. The odds that someone at the facility has died from COVID-19 at facilities that only house women are 72 percent lower than those that house only men. Facilities that are carceral hospitals are only marginally positively associated with the odds that someone at the facility died from COVID-19 ($p=.06$). County-level racial and economic characteristics are also predictive of facility-level infection rates. Increase in the percent Latinx in a county are marginally positively associated with the odds that someone at the facility died from COVID-19 ($p=.06$). Each increase in income quintile and the percent of residents who have never been married is associated with a .47 and 20 percent decrease, respectively, and each increase in the percent of people who are college graduates with a 14 percent increase in the odds that someone at the facility has died from COVID-19. Each increase in the SRCPJ policy score is associated with a 13 percent increase in the odds that a facility is a high death rate facility. This model explains 26 percent in the variance in death rates across facilities (pseudo r -squared = .26).

The positive association between the SRCPJ policy score and facility-level COVID-19 infection rates and deaths suggests that states with the worst outbreaks enacted more decarceration and public health policies. A separate model examining this association finds that facility-level infection and death rates are both predictive of the SRCPJ policy score,

with each increase in infection rates being associated with a quite small but significant increase in the score (.004) and each increase in death rates being associated with a substantial increase in the score (32).

While the findings of this study are suggestive, they are only preliminary. Future research can tease out these findings by 1) operationalizing policy and practice changes using state, city, and DOC policy changes; 2) using longitudinal data to examine the impact of policy and practice changes on facility infections and deaths; 3) examining the impact of carceral COVID-19 outbreaks on community outbreaks; and 4) examining the impact of DOC vaccinations programs on both facility and community-level infection and death rates.

Discussion & Policy Recommendations

Ruth Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies” (2007:261). This study joins her work in examining how the control of space—and of people through the control of space—is key to the production and exploitation of these vulnerabilities to premature death. Not only are facility-level indicators of how people are sorted in space—like security level—associated with facility infection rates and the odds that someone in a facility has died from COVID-19, but the racialization and resource deprivation of neighborhoods are also significantly associated with these outcomes.

While incarceration always harms the physical and mental health of those who experience it, their partners and children, and their communities, the impact of this harm is exponentially larger during this pandemic. We must work to improve health care policies and practices for incarcerated and newly released people. First, states must prioritize vaccinations for all people in congregate living facilities, vaccinating those held in prisons, jails, and detention centers during the same stage that they vaccinate those in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Given the spread of new, more contagious strains, it is important that these vaccinations happen now. While some states, like Illinois, are doing this, most are not. Additionally, given the atrocious history of medical experimentation on prisoners, many of those held in correctional facilities are wary of COVID-19 vaccines. DOC vaccination campaigns should include having those who incarcerated people address both their concerns and how vaccinations may help facilities return to in-person visits and protect the people whom they love. Second, DOCs should stop charging incarcerated people for basic products—such as soap and masks—that can protect them from illness and eliminate medical copays for those in jails and prisons. Third, DOCs can ensure that staff has sufficient paid sick leave and PPE. Finally, the Biden administration’s health care expansion plan should

explicitly include making all people held in prisons and jails and people in the first year after their release eligible for and automatically enrolled in Medicaid. Additionally, state and city governments should offer free clinics for those in the first year after release, offering immunization programs, infectious disease screening and treatment, and harm-reduction services (Bick, 2007; Møller et al., 2010).

However, there is no way to address the public health threat of mass incarceration fully without large scale decarceration. State DOCs and the BOP can each work to reduce the number of people in prison. The simplest way for prisons to substantially reduce admissions is by refusing to admit people for technical violations of probation and parole rules, behaviors that include being out after 9:00 p.m., failing to secure a job, and having a beer. Additionally, states can release people nearing the end of their sentence, people in minimum-security facilities and on work release, people who are medically vulnerable or older, and people whose conviction is for a less serious crime. In addition, cities and counties can reduce the number of people in local jails by not arresting or prosecuting people for low level crimes, presumptively granting people who are arrested and charged nonfinancial releases and releasing people currently in jail simply because they do not have the money to post bail. To formalize these practices, states should eliminate money bail, replacing it with the presumption of release. States can use New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and New York City as imperfect models for these programs. Because of the high turnover in jails, if a typical jail stopped admitting people entirely, its population would be cut in half in one week. If that same jail cut admissions in half, its population would decrease by more than 25 percent in one week (Widra and Hayre, 2020). Jail administrators can also accelerate releases of people currently in custody.

COVID-19 outbreaks in correctional facilities have already devastated incarcerated people and their loved ones—leading to large scale use of solitary confinement, the end of in-person visits, and other measures that increase people’s isolation in addition to constant fear of illness and death. The more contagious strains now spreading may well amplify this devastation. Without quick action on vaccinations for all those in carceral facilities and large scale decarceration, COVID-19 will not only continue to spread like wildfire inside prisons and jails, but it will also continue to contribute to the high infection and death rates in Black and Brown neighborhoods. Due to the scale and racialization of mass incarceration, there is no way to address racial disparities in COVID-19 infections and deaths without addressing mass incarceration itself.

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Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

			Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	N
Response Variables							
Covid 19 Infection Rate	Per 100,000		287.70	302.71	.00	2323.01	1063
Covid 19 Death	Yes/No		1.71	4.30	.00	42.86	1063
Facility-Level Predictor Variables							
Security							
Maximum	Yes/No		.36	.48	.00	1.00	1063
Medium	Yes/No		.49	.50	.00	1.00	1063
Minimum	Yes/No		.48	.50	.00	1.00	1063
Community	Yes/No		.11	.31	.00	1.00	1063
Gender							
Women's Facility	Yes/No		.11	.32	.00	1.00	1063
Men's Facility	Yes/No		.72	.45	.00	1.00	1063
Mixed Gender	Yes/No		.16	.37	.00	1.00	1063
Type							
Reentry Wing	Yes/No		.14	.35	.00	1.00	1063
Carceral Hospital	Yes/No		.04	.20	.00	1.00	1063
County-Level Predictor Variables							
Race							
Asian	Percent		.05	.07	.00	.62	652
Black	Percent		.13	.13	.01	.67	652
Indigenous	Quintile		2.99	1.41	1.00	5.00	652
Latinx	Percent		.15	.16	.01	.98	652
SES							
College Grad	Percent		.19	.07	.07	.58	652
Personal Income	Quintiles		2.98	1.41	1.00	5.00	652
Never Married	Percent		.45	.05	.28	.63	652
Urban							
Urban-Rural Scale	5-Point Scale		4.44	1.60	1.00	6.00	1063
State-Level Predictor Variables							
Policy and Practice Score	Normalized		16.96	4.58	8.15	29.50	1063

Note: Data come from UCLA's Covid Behind Bars Data Project, DOC and BOP population reports, DOC and BOP websites, IPUMS USA, the NCHS, and PPI.

Table 2: What are the Facility, County, and State-level Predictors of Infection Rates in Carceral Facilities?

	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3
Facility			
Private	.62**	.47**	.51 [‡]
	.15	.27	.39
Maximum	.88	1.12	1.22
	.09	.17	.19
Medium	1.21*	1.05	1.17
	.09	.16	.19
Minimum	1.47***	1.02	1.05
	.09	.16	.19
Women's	.66**	.60*	.57*
	.14	.24	.27
Mixed Gender Facility	.86	1.21	.71
	.16	.22	.38
Non-Community Reentry Wing	1.19	.94	1.25
	.15	.24	.29
Hospital	1.46 [‡]	1.76 [‡]	1.77 [‡]
	.21	.30	.34
County			
Asian		.21	.47
		1.01	1.27
Black		.60	.66
		.79	.93
Latinx		3.48*	3.86 [‡]
		.58	.77
Indigenous		1.17**	1.19*
		.06	.08
Income		1.05	1.11*
		.10	.11
College Graduate		1.00	1.00
		.02	.02
Never Married		1.00	.99
		.03	.03
Urbanicity		1.12 [‡]	1.12
		.08	.09
State			
Policy & Practice Score			1.04 [‡]
			.02
Constant	9.44***	5.50	2.37
	.09	1.22	1.52
R-squared	.05	.15	.14
N	1072	335	247

Note: Data come from UCLA's Covid Behind Bars Data Project, DOC and BOP population reports, DOC and BOP websites, IPUMS USA, the NCHS, and PPI. The table includes exponentiated coefficients and standard deviations for each variable included in the models. p<.1[‡]; p<.05*; p<.01**; p<.001***

Table 3: What are the Facility, County, and State-Level Predictors of a Carceral Facility Having Had a COVID-19 Related Death?

	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3
Facility			
Private	.93 .51-1.69	.13** .03-.57	.15 .01-2.15
Maximum	1.84*** 1.28-2.65	1.60 .80-3.20	1.71 .74-3.96
Medium	2.14*** 1.51-3.04	2.88** 1.42-5.84	2.96* 1.24-7.06
Minimum	1.36 [‡] .96-1.93	2.22* 1.10-4.43	1.72 .72-4.14
Women's	.32*** .17-.58	.15** .05-.52	.28* .08-1.01
Mixed Gender Facility	.54 [‡] .29-1.03	.49 .18-1.36	2.02 .33-12.46
Non-Community Reentry Wing	.53 [‡] .27-1.03	2.23 .68-7.36	.93 .21-4.06
Hospital	1.92 [‡] .84-4.42	4.08 [‡] .94-17.83	3.79 [‡] .64-22.46
County			
Asian		.02 .00-4.76	.06 .00-82.83
Black		1.20 .03-52.89	1.24 .01-129.35
Latinx		36.58* 2.05-617.10	57.68 [‡] .92-3612.63
Indigenous		.86 .66-1.13	.80 .54-1.18
Income		.47*** .29-.74	.47* .26-.82
College Graduates		1.18*** 1.08-1.30	1.14* 1.02-1.28
Never Married		.83** .72-.96	.80* .67-.96
Urbanicity		.95 .66-1.36	1.03 .64-1.63
State			
Policy & Practice Score			1.13* 1.02-1.24
Constant	.43** .30-.61	663.83* 1.33-331227.10	704.53 [‡] .25-2023658.00
Pseudo R-squared	.08	.23	.26
N	642	228	151

Note: Data come from UCLA's Covid Behind Bars Data Project, DOC and BOP population reports, DOC and BOP websites, IPUMS USA, the NCHS, and PPI. The table includes odds-ratios and confidence intervals for each variable included in the models. p=<.1 [‡]; p=<.05*; p=<.01**; p=<.001***



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Signage posted to the John T. Richardson Library warning guests of restricted access during the COVID-19 pandemic. March 16, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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A drinking fountain is blocked off in Arts and Letters Hall on the Lincoln Park Campus due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, August 3, 2020. DePaul reconfigured all of its buildings, offices, and classrooms to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines during the pandemic.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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Olivia Kennedy, sophomore political science major, finishes a Zoom class in Arts and Letters on the first day of school. September 9, 2020, on DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

Pandemic, Poverty, and Power: Biosocial Ethics of Global Solidarity for Health

Stan Chu Ilo, Ph.D.

BIO

STAN CHU ILO, PHD, is a research professor of world Christianity and African studies at the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University. He is an honorary professor of religion and theology at the Durham University, Durham, England, and the 2017 winner of the Afro-Global Excellence Award for Global Impact. He is the founder of the Canadian Samaritans for Africa, and a member of the Board of Trustees of *Concilium* International where he also serves as one of the editors of *Concilium* Catholic International Journal. He is the coordinator of the Pan-African Theology and Pastoral Network. Some of his most recent books are *Church and Development in Africa* (2014); *A Poor and Merciful Church* (2018); *Wealth, Health, and Hope in African Christian Religion* (2019); and *Someone Beautiful to God: Finding the Light of Faith in a Wounded World* (2020). He co-edited the three-volume work *Faith in Action in Africa* and is the author of the forthcoming book *Where is God in Africa? Discourse on Theology, Church and Society in Africa Vol I*.

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“COVID-19 has robbed us of people we love. It’s robbed us of lives and livelihoods; it’s shaken the foundations of our world; it threatens to tear at the fabric of international cooperation. But it’s also reminded us that for all our differences, we are one human race, and we are stronger together Now more than ever, we need a healthier world. Now more than ever, we need a safer world. Now more than ever, we need a fairer world.”

Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, WHO, Director-General¹

A very close friend of mine woke me up early in the morning in May 2020 with a sad phone call. He coordinates the initiatives for the defense of the rights of children and promotes policies and programs for children’s protection from abuse and neglect for a UN agency in northern Nigeria. He was broken because he had spent the previous night out rescuing more than 200 children between the ages of five and ten years who had been abandoned on the streets of Kaduna, one of the largest cities in northern Nigeria. In his sadness, he said to me, “What kind of society will allow her most vulnerable ones who should be the *first call* on society’s resources to suffer this way?”

Many of these children, he said, were malnourished. Some had visible signs of physical and sexual abuse. Most were emotionally distressed and were infected by many diseases, including the dreaded COVID-19. These children are referred to in Nigeria in the local Hausa language as *almajirai*, which is derived from the Arabic word *al-Muhajirun*, or emigrant. Most of these children, having been “given away” to the Islamic teachers (called *malams*) so early in their lives, no longer knew their family roots or their village of origin. These *malams* are usually poor, and the kids pay them for their education by begging along the major streets and highways. The *malams* in return provide them with food and lodging, often in squalid and unhealthy conditions. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Kano and Kaduna and the closure of these home-based schools and driven by the fear that these kids could be infected through their contact with people on the streets, most of the *malams* had to shut their doors. The kids ended up homeless.

According to the BBC, the Kaduna state government was picking up these kids from the streets and repatriating them to their states of origin. In 2020, Northern Nigeria witnessed the largest mass movement of minors in living memory in West Africa with as many as 30,000 being moved to different states.² The pitiable condition of these kids, which my friend observed, broke his heart. It also broke mine.

1 Quoted in “Historic Health Assembly Ends with Global Commitment to COVID-19 Response,” World Health Organization, 19 May 2020, at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/19-05-2020-historic-health-assembly-ends-with-global-commitment-to-covid-19-response>.

2 See “Coronavirus in Nigeria: The Child Beggars at the Heart of the Outbreak,” BBC News, 16 May 2020, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52617551>.



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A student uses a hand sanitizer station in the Student Center, January 21, 2021, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

What I provide in this essay is a personal ethical reflection on this pandemic. I will begin first by examining the nature of the vulnerabilities that the poor face by exploring the social determinants of health, particularly in Africa, all of which have shaped the emerging stress and strains in the continent's struggling response to the pandemic and the lack of access to vaccines. I will focus on the aspect of power in the concluding part of my essay and how a biosocial ethical approach to health, human, and cosmic well-being could contribute to building resilience and hope. I will also discuss how Catholic universities like DePaul could contribute to developing practices of global solidarity through a pedagogy and praxis of love.

Pandemic, Vulnerabilities, and Africa's Resilience

Early in March 2020, I received a distressing email from my colleague, Andrew Obara, one of the Kenyan agents of the Canadian Samaritans for Africa—a charity I founded in 2003—asking us to help the women in the slums of Kibera, Nairobi, where we support a micro-credit community agency, the Village of Love (Kijiji Cha Upendo or KCU). These women had received training and financial support to set up businesses ranging from agro-based mini marts and grocery shops to skills-based income-generating activities. They had lost all their savings to the shutdown and could no longer provide food for their children. The government offered them no support to cushion the effects of the shutdown. The situation of these Kenyan women is not unique. I have heard the same stories from women's groups in South Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso. Most African countries followed the WHO's advice and shut down their countries as a way of mitigating and suppressing the spread of COVID-19, but the governments failed to address people's hardships and

suffering. COVID has exposed the unacceptable political structures in Africa today, where governments have largely failed to protect, promote, and preserve the common good, from which all should draw as a wellspring.

It will take many decades to determine the lockdown's impact on the lives of so many people in Africa and in the world. As Nicholas Christakis posits, "Like other infectious diseases, coronavirus strikes differentially along socio-economic lines. While the pandemic did not cause the structural inequities in our society, it nevertheless brought them into stark relief."³ Many African public health officials worry that the focus on fighting this infection has led not only to the abandonment of the people with regard to food security, but also to the neglect of treating other diseases that kill more people than COVID-19—AIDS, Ebola, malaria, Lassa fever, and some non-communicable chronic diseases like coronary vascular conditions, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

The World Poverty Clock estimates that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) target of no poverty by 2030 has been upended by COVID-19 and that Africa will be the most adversely affected.⁴ According to Baldwin Tong, "COVID-19 has caused a great deal of economic uncertainty throughout the world. Millions of Africans who were on the lower rungs of the middle class have seen their incomes plummet due to rapidly vanishing jobs and a lack of social security. As a result, millions of people from this group are being pushed back into poverty. Recent estimates indicate that the number could be around eight million. Regions that were already economically vulnerable pre-pandemic are now in need of more targeted support from the international community to ensure a sustainable and inclusive recovery in the coming years."⁵ Faced with this grim prospect, the UN Economic Commission for Africa called for a \$100 billion safety net for the continent, including halting external debt payments.⁶ Whether halting the repayment of debts will be enough to address Africa's vulnerabilities in this pandemic and after is an open question. The other question is whether Africa's vulnerabilities in the face of new infections can be met through international aid, especially given the failure of the interventionist aid regime that has characterized Africa's dependency on the West and now China for her development designs and healthcare.⁷

3 Nicholas Christakis, *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live*, (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2020), 189.

4 "World Poverty Clock," World Data Lab, accessed 15 February 2021, at: <https://worldpoverty.io/map>.

5 Baldwin Tong, "COVID-19 Has Pushed Extreme Poverty Numbers in Africa to over Half a Billion," *Development Matters* (blog), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 12 October 2020, see: <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/10/12/covid-19-has-pushed-extreme-poverty-numbers-in-africa-to-over-half-a-billion/>.

6 "African Finance Ministers: Urgent Need for \$100bn Immediate Emergency Financing for COVID-19," United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 31 March 2020, at: <https://archive.uneca.org/stories/african-finance-ministers-urgent-need-100bn-immediate-emergency-financing-covid-19>.

7 I have discussed this question extensively in my book, *The Church and Development in Africa: Aid and Development from the Perspective of Catholic Social Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 132–51.

For the world's vulnerable people—those who are poor, elderly, or who have underlying health conditions—COVID-19 is another layer of agony built on lives already bruised and broken by suffering. For me, the children abandoned on the streets of Kaduna represent the conditions of so many people who are abandoned to die as a result of this pandemic. Many poor people in the African continent and elsewhere in our world are suffering and dying because our society has not equitably allocated resources for the urgent intervention needed to roll back the hand of death.⁸ A team of scholars from the Global South has studied the impacts of COVID-19 and the asymmetries of power and privilege that it has brought to the fore with regard to lack of diversity and inclusive social policies in local, national, and global institutions and systems. They have also considered the pandemic with respect to white supremacy, saviorism, coloniality,⁹ racism, patriarchy, and the foreign gaze. The team summarizes these points this way: “COVID-19 has put a spotlight on existing inequalities and on processes of coloniality (mind, body, knowledge, and power). It has created conditions for further inequities, with growing populist nationalism and isolationism, widening income disparities, and fractured systems of global cooperation. The pandemic continues to enable those with money and power to expand their influence—making decoloniality, solidarity, and distribution of power, knowledge, and resources (e.g., vaccines) even more urgent. The fact that HICs [high-income countries] have reserved enough COVID-19 vaccine doses to vaccinate their own population multiple times over is a stark indication of power asymmetry in global health.”¹⁰

COVID-19 has also revealed the false sense of security on which the world has been built. We humans have lived as if we were the center of the universe. Our world operates on a dysfunctional value system which glories in all forms of iniquitous hierarchies of power and hardened walls of indifference and isolationist national and cultural practices

8 See the discussion on how to manage local and global resources to meet the disparities in health outcomes between the rich and the poor in Udo Schuklenk and Darragh Hare, “Issues in Health Ethics” in *Global Bioethics and Human Rights: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Wanda Teays et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014) 301–12.

9 *Editor's note*: Coloniality is a concept originated by Aníbal Quijano and later developed by Walter D. Mignolo. As Mignolo writes:

The key concept of coloniality calls into question the idea that knowledge is disembodied and independent of any specific geohistorical locations. The members involved in the project argue that such belief has been created and implanted by dominant principles of knowledge that originated in Europe since the Renaissance. In order to build a universal conception of knowledge, Western epistemology (from Christian theology to secular philosophy and science) has pretended that knowledge is independent of the geohistorical (Christian Europe) and biographical conditions (Christian white men living in Christian Europe) in which it is produced. As a result, Europe became the locus of epistemic enunciation, and the rest of the world became the object to be described and studied from the European (and, later on, the United States), perspective.

The above passage comes from Mignolo's “Modernity and Decoloniality,” Oxford Bibliographies, 28 October 2011, see: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20200319.757883/full/>.

10 Seye Abimbola, Sumegha Asthana, Christian Montenegro Cortes, et al., “Addressing Power Asymmetries in Global Health: Imperatives in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *PLoS Medicine* 18 no., 4 (22 April 2021): 2, at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003604>.

and stratagems. By leaving paralysis in its wake, COVID-19 has laid bare our collective vulnerabilities. Indeed, this pandemic offers a mirror into the brokenness and woundedness of our world which was already bleeding before the pandemic

On the other hand, COVID has shown us the resilience of African peoples. At the time of this writing, the African continent has been the least impacted by the pandemic in terms of deaths and infections rate. Within the limited resources at their disposal, African countries have continued to follow national guidelines on mitigation and suppression without the kind of political drama we find in the United States, for instance, where mask wearing has been considered a political statement rather than a public health protection measure. The former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf published a letter to the world—“Coronavirus: What the World Can Learn from Ebola Fight”—at the onset of this pandemic, where she made an argument on the need to keep hope alive in the face of the pandemic and extolled the resilience of Africa.¹¹ She proposed that what is needed particularly in Africa is not a spirit of fear, but a resilient spirit to manage the pandemic. Ethnographer Paul Richards reached a similar conclusion in his study of the 2013–2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa. According to Richards, even though Ebola unleashed a deadly force, it also revealed how a people’s science could help fight an epidemic. He proposes that rather than focusing only on the shortcomings of public healthcare in Africa and failure of international solidarity, one should pay greater attention to how Africa’s victory over Ebola reveals the resilience of African communities.

Although these communities were originally “scared into mass flight” over the disease, they rallied together and worked with local agents and international responders. Richardson says that these communities ended the Ebola epidemic despite the “doom-laden predication” that millions would die and despite the international isolation mandated through forty nations’ flight bans to affected countries.¹² The success of the communities’ measures was dependent on the use of communal social networks and communal surveillance. People tapped into the social capital in the complex and rich chain of African communal and social ties, neighborhood groups, and social solidarity. According to former President Sirleaf, countries in West Africa emerged from the Ebola outbreak with resiliency, health protocols, and practices that are helping to slow down or even break the chain of transmission and flatten the curve of COVID. Sirleaf and Richards remind us to always focus on the assets of the people. As James Cochrane points out, “Even in the most deprived situations, if people

11 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, “Coronavirus: What the World Can Learn from Ebola Fight,” *BBC News*, 30 March 2020, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52061547>.

12 Paul Richards, *Ebola: How a People’s Science Helped End an Epidemic* (London: Zed Books, 2016), 3.



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Face covering and social distancing signage is posted outside on the Lincoln Park Campus Quad in order to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. August 3, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

are able to survive let alone flourish, it can be assumed that there are assets of one kind or another that, based on hard experience, they have learned to leverage in ways appropriate to their contexts.” These assets are embedded within worldviews, religious convictions, local practices, and activities that can be leveraged in designing interventions that will meet people’s needs.¹³ However, one must pay attention to the social determinants of health that undermine the assets of people and communities and harm their well-being.

Biosocial Ethics and the Social Determinants of Health

The WHO provides two important definitions of health equity and social determinants of health (SDH) that are important in providing the framework through which one can understand the importance of developing a biosocial ethical leadership. The SDH are central to understanding the different outcomes from infection for different people. A biosocial ethical approach to leadership must therefore address these SDH because they help us understand the presence or absence of those conditions necessary for holistic health, and the structural issues in local and global settings that create injustice and lead to preventable deaths and human suffering. The SDH can be better explained through a brief analysis of health inequities both locally and globally.

The WHO’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health defines health inequity as “the absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically.” Health inequities

¹³ James Cochrane, “A Model of Integral Development: Assessing and Working with Religious Health Assets,” in *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar (London: Hurst and Company, 2011), 245.

are thus to be understood as health differences “that are socially produced, systematic in their distribution across the population, and unfair. Identifying a health difference as inequitable is not an objective description, but necessarily implies an appeal to ethical norms.”¹⁴ Health inequity has been called “an inverse care law” because it shows that the poor who are most in need of healthcare locally, nationally, and globally are the ones who consistently have less access to health services than the rich.¹⁵

Health inequities are thus worse than diseases because they make birthplaces and social locations the number one condition for whether people live to a glorious old age or whether they die from deadly early childhood diseases. Health inequities are the greatest drivers of unacceptable social reproduction, stubborn cultural habits, and intergenerational socioeconomic gradient differentials in the remotest villages of Africa as well as in the big cities. The WHO’s definition is very helpful in explicating this important point:

The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, and political systems. The SDH have an important influence on health inequities—the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. In countries at all levels of income, health and illness follow a social gradient: the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.¹⁶

The following non-exhaustive list provides some factors that come into this wide pool of SDH: income and social protection; education; agriculture and food production, unemployment and job security; working life conditions; food insecurity; housing and sanitation, basic amenities, and the environment; early childhood development; social support and inclusion; structural conflict; and access to affordable quality health services.¹⁷ The SDH force us to consider the “causes of the causes” of disease, meaning that ethicists must go beyond judgment of etiology or epidemiology in a particular environment to the wider causes of the disease, which go beyond a single pathogen, virus, or bacterium. The SDH invite us to a holistic understanding of health and to more system-based ethical analyses of healthcare, health systems, governmental priority settings and policies, and the focus of

14 World Health Organization, *A Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2010), 12.

15 Charles Guest et al., *Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 408.

16 “Social Determinants of Health,” World Health Organization, accessed 15 February 2021, see: https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1.

17 The best presentation of SDH is the Dahlgren-Whitehead Rainbow Model.

the pastoral and social engagements of churches. All these must take into account the social construction of diseases across history. Diseases do not just happen; epidemics don't just occur. They are the sum of aggregate factors of diverse nature that must be understood and addressed in providing a comprehensive approach to human and cosmic flourishing. This is what Henry Giroux means with regard to the devastatingly disproportionate impact of COVID to African Americans in the US and Black and Brown people in Canada, the UK, and South Africa compared to whites. He writes, "The pandemic may have been indiscriminate in terms of those it infected, but its effects bore down disproportionately on poor people of color proving Martin Luther King Jr's claim that 'of all the forms of inequity, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.'"¹⁸

Ethicists must burrow deeper into understanding the resocializing factors beyond epidemiological data and etiology in interpreting the presence of an infectious disease and the responses that individuals and society ought to make. Such factors include culture, funds of knowledge,¹⁹ social status, racism, ethnocentrism, religious beliefs and practices, worldviews, and the failings of the state in public health that all contribute to the preexisting conditions and comorbidities of certain racial, gender, age, and social groups in the face of the current pandemic, for instance. As people say in public health, healthcare is what you do when public health fails. In other words, ethicists should study more the social production of diseases; local, national, and global politics; and the economies of scale with regard to public health and other social provisions in the world. Finally, ethicists must pay particular attention to the conclusion of the WHO report that "inequities in health arise from inequities in societies"²⁰; and I will add that inequities in global health arise from inequities in the world today. Therein lies the need to look at the ways these inequities are constructed, sustained, and defended through the abuse and misuse of power by leaders at different levels leading to deaths, chronic sicknesses, and suffering in the world.

The biosocial approach has the capacity of taking these factors seriously because it combines three aspects of public health—the biomedical model, the behavioral model, and the social model. The biosocial approach focuses on all the contributing factors that interact in health improvement, protection, and healthcare in the procurement of abundant life. These factors include nutrition; sanitation; the environment; quality of one's social

18 Henry Giroux, *Race, Politics, and Pandemic: Education in a Time of Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 181.

19 *Editor's note*: There are different definitions of funds of knowledge, but the most well known was proposed by Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma González. They defined it as "historically-accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being." Quoted in "The Funds of Knowledge Approach," Funds of Knowledge Alliance, accessed 17 July 2021, see: <https://fundsofknowledge.org/the-funds-of-knowledge-approach/>.

20 "Health Inequities and their Causes," World Health Organization, accessed 25 June 2021, at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/health-inequities-and-their-causes>.

relationships; cultural and spiritual traditions; politics; human rights; the economy; religious beliefs and practices; and traditional and modern knowledge about health, sickness, diseases, and healing. It examines the adequacy of human actions and value preferences. The biosocial model integrates cultural, religious, social, and political factors in advancing the proper interaction of all the integrative elements that must work together in bringing about human well-being. The biosocial approach sees health as relational because diseases and their morbidity and subsequent mortality are not random but involve the relationships among many factors. Therefore, biosocial ethics focus on understanding the many layers involved in *healthcare systems* (personal healthcare like hospitals and services), *health systems* in general (including service delivery, work force, health information, and medical products like drugs, vaccines, and technologies), and *healthworlds* (health finance, leadership, and governance, local-global nexus, knowledge, etc.).²¹

A biosocial ethics for health is an ethical framework and praxis that seeks to understand and address the social determinants of health—how the society behaves and how individuals behave within particular societies with regard to some of the life-altering choices that they are making on a daily basis. It provides both the language and analytical compass to understand health inequity, assessing healthcare systems and health systems as part and parcel of the large indices of human security. At the same time, biosocial ethics offers creative principles for behavior changes—for individuals and religious and civil authorities—to fight the factors that sustain health inequity and accelerate those factors that lead to health promotion and health prevention to foster the necessary conditions for holistic health and abundant life. The biosocial ethics being proposed here address the SDH in a direct way because they proceed from the realization that “diseases themselves make a preferential option for the poor. Every careful survey, across boundaries of time and space, shows us that the poor are sicker than the nonpoor. They’re at the increased risk of dying prematurely, whether from increased exposure to pathogens (including pathogenic situations) or from decreased access to services—or, as is most often the case, from both of these ‘risk factors’ working together.”²²

When we look at the data on human health, particularly the Global Burden of Disease, what we see clearly is that Africa has not made the *epidemiological transition*. That means that, unlike in North America and Europe, more people still die in Africa from communicable diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and now COVID than from noncommunicable

21 See Paul Germond and James Cochrane, “Healthworlds: Conceptualizing Landscape of Multiple Healing Systems,” *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 2 (April 2010): 320.

22 Michael Griffin and Jennie Block, eds., *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 36.

diseases like coronary heart diseases, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.²³ Health protection and health promotion have not been prioritized because access to healthcare and an adequate standard of living is not possible given the high index of deprivation in most countries in the continent. Furthermore, there is the absence of adequate frameworks for health protection and health improvement which would include addressing some of the SDH in our continent's fight against diseases. It is not surprising then that the Church's witness in this regard often focuses on the disease control and prevention paradigm and the treatment paradigm (healing ministry, hospitals and clinics, etc.). All these are residues of the continuing impact and the perversive presence of colonial medicine that focused on curing diseases in Africa with its associated racialized fetishization of Africa and the contaminating narratives of Africa as the white man's grave. Biosocial ethical leadership for holistic healthcare, therefore, emphasizes the micro (individual), meso (national), and macro (international/global) factors to understand the African burden of diseases of which COVID is only another layer in the ever-revolving cycle of disability, exposure to disease, and death.

The biosocial theological ethics can also offer a foundation for solidarity on global health and promoting the common good through one health—human health, environment health, and animal health. This kind of solidarity is captured so well by Pope Francis in these words: “This is the time to restore an ethics of fraternity and solidarity, regenerating the bonds of trust and belonging. For what saves us is not an idea but an encounter. Only the face of another is capable of awakening the best of ourselves. In serving the people, we save ourselves. If we are to come out of this crisis better, we have to recover the knowledge that as a people we have a shared destination. The pandemic has reminded us that no one is saved alone. What ties us to each other is what we commonly call solidarity.”²⁴ A biosocial theological ethics of solidarity is grounded on the intrinsic goodness of all lives, and a firm commitment by every human being on earth to make ethical choices to promote, defend, and uphold the rights of every human being to health and well-being and a life lived in dignity as the sole condition for human and cosmic well-being. This ethics proposes what ought to be done by individuals, societies, and nations to promote holistic health through fraternal solidarity to strengthen the bond of our common humanity.

The truth is that no one is safe until all of us are safe, we are all sick when any one of us is sick, and something dies in all of us when anyone dies. As Saint Paul puts it, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its

23 Larry Heligman, Nancy Chen, and Ozer Babakol, “Shifts in the Structure of Population and Deaths in Less Developed Regions” in *Epidemiological Transition: Policy and Planning Implications for Developing Countries*, ed. James N. Gribble and Samuel H. Preston (National Academies Press, 1993).

24 Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 107.



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Signs posted in “The Pit” in the Schmitt Academic Center (SAC) emphasize social distancing practices, September 9, 2020, on the Lincoln Park Campus. DePaul University began a new normal as classes commenced for the start of the 2020–2021 academic school year. Students acclimated themselves to the new class structure by participating in Zoom course sessions both on and off campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

joy” (1 Corinthians 12:26). We all share a common human origin and a common human future; we are tied in the same robe of destiny. We must come together as one family at this time to fight this pandemic, and fight against injustice, poverty, violence, and ecological threats to our world so that we can be the heirs to a new world and a new creation where God’s planet and all God’s people are flourishing. This new world will emerge not simply through good wishes and sympathy for those who suffer, but through a praxis of solidarity and love that invites us to make common cause with the poor in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The Power and Politics of Love

Biosocial ethics is built on the capacity of the people or the power of agents who have to act in the right way in order to help generate the right health outcomes—abundant life for humans and the earth. This is where ethical leadership is so important particularly for religious leaders, universities, and teachers who can influence people’s behaviors and governmental policies. How does power function? The WHO’s document on the SDH proposes that one can look at power from the classical model of “power to,” where someone has the capacity to undertake series of actions that could alter the course of a particular event for the individual or for a group. The other aspect of power is “power over,” where an individual or a group of people determine or influence the way other people respond or act. The aspect of power over is central to the way our world functions today; it is the kind of power that relates to politics and public health. It is also what is at stake in power struggles

in society, whether in small units like families or in larger entities like universities or the UN. As humans, we are always caught in power dynamics and power tussles even in the household of God. However, power should be about service and procuring the right sets of conditions for a win-win for all members of society. But this is not always the case. How can the exercise of power bring life to everyone, the kind that Jesus exercised when he gave his life away on the cross? Michel Foucault offers good language and insight to make this point.

Power can be understood through Foucault's theory of biopower. According to him, biopower is the power of the modern state to "administer, optimize, and multiply" life, "subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations."²⁵ Biopower exerts a positive influence on life because it is a productive power rather than a repressive power. However, like sexual desire, power can operate at two levels. On the first level, it gives life and nourishes relationships when one understands this desire and is at home with it. Sometimes, though, it can operate at a hyper-level (*sur-savoir*) where one "over-understands" this power and employs different techniques in exercising this desire which could be destructive.²⁶ In the first place, we see the positive exercise of power as "power to" do good for the collective; in the second, we see the negative exercise of power, which is "power over" people that dominates, manipulates, exploits, and destroys the common good for the interests of a few individuals or camps. "Power over" is the kind of unchecked power of the strong over the weak through our systems and institutions, and the selfish exercise of power and abuse of authority that is at the root of the malaise of modern societies, states, and religious organizations.

This classification can be applied as an explanatory account of how power functions in social relations at micro and macro levels. We can give examples of the power of a doctor over her patients or the power of a faith healer over a patient seeking healing. Foucault draws attention to how biopower can be abused, and this power of life can become a deadly form of power (biopolitics), that is, "the power to expose a whole population to death." When this happens, the calculated management of life—collective and individual—becomes a "subjugation of life to the power of death."²⁷

Hannah Arendt's definition of power is a good way of capturing the kind of power that Foucault asserts "fosters life;" the kind of power that promotes a cosmic *ubuntu*²⁸ and

25 Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 1976, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 137, quoted in Rachel Adams, "Michel Foucault: Biopolitics and Biopower," *Critical Legal Thinking: Law and the Political*, 10 May 2017, at: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/05/10/michel-foucault-biopolitics-biopower/>.

26 Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 117.

27 Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, in Adams.

28 *Editor's note*: According to Fainos Mangena, ubuntu is "the quality or essence of being a person" and also can refer to a person's ethics. See Fainos Mangena, "Hunhu/Ubuntu in the Traditional Thought of Southern Africa" in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Chimakonam, accessed 17 July 2021, see: <https://iep.utm.edu/hunhu/#H3>.

the kind of power that educators can exercise in the face of this pandemic. In Arendt's philosophy, "power is conceptually and *above all politically* distinguished, not by its implication in agency, but above all by its character as *collective* action. Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."²⁹ For Arendt, power is not a relation in which people are dominated, exploited, or manipulated, but rather one in which through critical reflection on their world and their experiences, societies can develop collective actions through transformative leaders.

This kind of leadership for collective action is in short supply during the pandemic. This is because what we see is that COVID-19 relief, vaccines, and mitigation measures have all become politicized in many parts of the world. Indeed, the greatest threat towards global solidarity is a return to the old ways of doing things in the world. These are characterized by four vices that Pope Francis identifies: indifference, self-centeredness, ideological divisions, and forgetfulness. Examples abound of these, but one egregious case is the tension between the US and China. This played out so badly in November 2020 that both countries refused to participate in the Seventy-third World Health Assembly on the theme of global solidarity in the fight against COVID-19.

Those who are gasping for breath and fighting for their lives in the ICUs all over the world need help, not politics. The sick, who have no access to medical treatment in many parts of the world in the face of this disease and who embrace all kinds of unorthodox solutions to fight the infection, need access to health, not political grandstanding. The vulnerable of our societies, like the *almajiris* of Northern Nigeria, and the seniors who are dying in hospitals and nursing homes in the West, and migrants and refugees who are being exposed to this disease and other health hazards have no other way to resist the powers of entropy that, like a tsunami, are engulfing them. The weapons of the weak are, as James Scott reminds us, often "quiet and anonymous."³⁰ The sick, especially in this pandemic, become invisible and are instead numbers and statistics of deaths, and trends or curves that must be flattened.

A friend from my home country, Nigeria, sent me a prayer on WhatsApp, saying to me, "May you never be a number in the statistics of deaths from this pandemic." I replied that I am no better than those who have died, and indeed that no one should be a number in the statistics of death. We should save all lives. I believe that a biosocial ethics is needed in order to break this cycle of death by a new movement of all of God's people, journeying

29 Quoted in World Health Organization, *A Conceptual Framework*, 21.

30 See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1985).



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DePaul students Anni Newton and Jack Chandler walk in the quad on the Lincoln Park Campus. January 29, 2021.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

hand-in-hand in a pilgrimage of life and united in a common concern and action for our collective well-being. How can hope be born from the pains and wounds of the pandemic?

The Poetics of Hope and Love through Prophetic Solidarity

The world today is in desperate need of hope in the face of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism. Just as we are seeking a cure for COVID, so also should everyone begin a serious search for the best way to cure the pandemic of racism and give hope to Blacks, Indigenous peoples, and the many racial and ethnic groups who have historically borne the painful weight of racism and its destructive effects that have all been exposed and worsened during this time.

Can people find this hope in our churches, and what does hope look like for those who are hanging and slowly dying on the cross today before our eyes like George Floyd? The Church exists as a space of belonging where all God's people can find a home. The Church serves as the site of learning where people discover the beauty of diversity through the trinitarian model. In this kind of space, people are inspired to embrace those ethical choices that are driven by gospel values and that help to bring about in history the fruits of God's reign. The hope that the Church can help to give to the world is a reversal of history. The Church is a space for reimagining a better world where people are moved to embrace life-giving choices, which make concrete in people's lives and cultures the saving and transforming grace of the risen Lord. This saving hope is particularly needed in those places where people feel deep wounds and endure injustice and the painful consequences of oppression and

suffering. Hope is a movement which shows people in their lived realities that their history is not contaminated, but that there is a reversal which is real in an experience of redemptive history today. Christian hope is not an idea or an ideal, it is a concrete emergence of a new agency and a new experience of triumph and release from the chokehold of history for those who have been battered by racism and other social evils.

In order for this hope to come upon the earth, there is the need for the Church and all of God's people to move away from *pleasant poetics of hope* to a *prophetic praxis of hope*. The *pleasant poetics of hope* is the all-too-familiar reaction to social problems where Church leaders and ministers use moral suasion and spiritual platitudes to drown the historical injustice and deep human pain borne by those who suffer. These preachments and condemnations are appealing to the ears but end up being only empty rhetoric. They might temporarily raise people's hope for change, but ultimately fail to show how change could actually come about. It is similar to the preaching which many of our ancestors heard in the slave plantations which spoke to them of a God who is pacified by their suffering and who accepts their death as an offering similar to that of God's crucified Son.³¹

The pleasant poetics of hope also sometimes speak of repentance and of why Black people should take responsibility for their lives. However, it fails to speak of conversion of hearts for those who benefit from white privilege and a white-coded church. It does not show how the Catholic Church could begin a process of reform of our institutional culture and hierarchy of power and privilege, which are often coupled with political ideologies and systems of racism and oppression and neoliberal capitalism. Pleasant poetics of hope are false because they fail to address how to change those factors that have wrought the sad circumstances under which Blacks and other people of color have suffered for centuries. The pleasant poetics of hope are an empty religious noise which often ends up emptying the gospel of its force, saving truth, and power.

The *prophetic praxis of hope*, on the other hand, is the commitment by the Church and all her members to become the architects of a new future. It is born from an ecclesial practice that by its very character and manifestations is a reimagination of a new future, a new possible world, and a new possible Church. It inaugurates a change in attitude and behaviors through the conversion of hearts. The prophetic praxis of hope leads to a change in mindsets, changes in our ecclesial priorities and practices, and change in our church's teaching, institutional culture, and hierarchy of power and privilege so that she can truly become a poor and merciful church. It leads to a firm resolve and commitment to turn our anger and outrage into daily acts of reversing history by working for the realization of a just and peaceful world for all of God's people, especially the marginalized.

31 See John Perry, *Catholics and Slavery: A Compromising History* (Ottawa: Novalis, St. Paul University, 2008), 30-32.

An essential part of this kind of hope is that it is *prophetic and praxis oriented*. It is prophetic because it requires listening to the cries of those who suffer and correctly reading the signs of our present times. By embodying the pathos of the poor and the broken throughout her systems and structures, the Church becomes a credible site for reimagining a different world while amplifying the voices of the poor in a noisy world. As harbingers of a prophetic hope, the ministers of the Church and all Christians must become architects of a different future. This means that the central mission of all religious groups and indeed all people of good will should be informed by the cries and anguish of the long-suffering victims of history. Our liturgies should celebrate the diversity in our traditions and provide a space to lament for those who have been held down by the injustice partly started and legitimized through our churches.

Hope is also a praxis because it is concerned with constructing a new pathway of reversal through a conscious counterwitnessing that can change the status quo. What this means in actual fact is that the Catholic Church commits herself and her members to a new way of life, a new institutional culture, a new ethics, and a new moral and spiritual journey that will transform the inner life of the church and her mission in history. Racism is the longest-lasting pandemic that humanity has faced in the last 500 years; healing the world of racism is perhaps the greatest challenge facing people of faith and all people of goodwill today.

It is the task of a university like DePaul to be a laboratory for creating a new global vision of justice that is built on the power of love. As Vincent de Paul writes, “Each of us knows that the Law and the prophets are included in the love of God and neighbor ... now that concerns not only love of God but love of the neighbor for the love of God ... which is so great that human understanding cannot grasp it; enlightenment from on high is needed to raise us up in order to show us the height and depth, the breadth and excellence of this love.”³² A global vision of justice anchored on this Vincentian practice of love must pay greater attention to the cries of those bearing the weight of past and ongoing structures of injustice created by social hierarchies and exclusionary practices. Everywhere and every day we see how the voices of the poor and the marginalized and those carrying the painful wounds of historical injustice in our nations and in the world at large are often suppressed. In many instances, they suffer a double victimhood, because the process of addressing the inequities in the world are designed and moderated by the perpetrators of injustice and those who hold the levers of power. As we face the challenges of the pandemic, power, and

32 Conference 207, “Charity (Common Rules, Chap. 2, Art. 12),” 30 May 1659 in Pierre Coste, C.M., *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et. al., 14 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1985–2014), 12:213. Available: https://via.library.depaul.edu/coste_en/.

poverty in the world, may we dare to reinvent love as a praxis that will spread a different kind of contagion in the world: one that will help the global community to work together in realizing the goals of sustainable development for everyone, everywhere.



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A student uses a hand sanitizer station in the Student Center. January 21, 2021, on the Lincoln Park Campus.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs



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Face covering and social distancing signage is posted outside on the Lincoln Park Campus Quad in order to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. August 3, 2020.

Courtesy DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



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DePaul students Anni Newton and Jack Chandler walk in the quad on the Lincoln Park Campus. January 29, 2021.

Courtesy DePaul University/Randall Spriggs

C-Void

Amaris Casiano-Zoko

BIO

AMARIS CASIANO-ZOKO was born and raised on the West Side of Chicago in Humboldt Park and joined DePaul's staff in 1998. She served as the business operations manager at the College of Computing and Digital Media for twenty-one years before moving to the Office of Academic Affairs in January 2020, where she took on a new role as the faculty administration manager. She received her BS in information systems from DePaul University and will complete an MS in business analytics in June 2022. She is also a Vincentian Heritage Tour alum.

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“Good day to you”.

You say you are new to these parts, I offer you my hand as a gesture of my hospitality.

Meet my family, my friends and spend a short while with us to get to know you.

We then bid you farewell and safe travels.

Acquaintance, ordinary, with nothing amiss.

Quite an impression, with the bosom of safety now far into the horizon with miles of distance we slowly crawl to reach.

I now remember the day so many stopped to greet you when you visited schools, workplaces, and airplanes on your nomadic global travels.

The gentle silent peck of betrayal as you greeted so many in your midst, some with long lasting impressions breathless, succumbed, a whiff accompanied impaired odor and taste, while others carry you unknowingly.

Hours turn into days, weeks, months, and soon it will be a year. A metamorphosis over 100 days with no end, our Arcady existence we can barely recall.

Partitioning days into small endurable hours, within the same daily confines, not sustainable to the human condition.

The vital force of inhalation and exhalation forever compromised.

A solemn request for the day when we can barely recall you came.

Additional Contributors

BIO

STEFANIA COSENTINO is an accounting and finance professional with a BS from DePaul University and an MBA from Northern Illinois University. She currently works at Witt/Kieffer Inc., an executive search firm in healthcare and higher education. Ms. Cosentino comes from a family of Blue Demons and her mom, Theresa (Naccarato) Cosentino, graduated from DePaul in 1982. Stefania is a proponent of health and wellness, enjoys planning holiday activities, reading, and making crafts. She is also an active volunteer in various community service initiatives and enjoys staying connected to all her alma maters.

OLGA ROZENBAUM graduated from DePaul University with a BS in computer science and later with an MS in e-commerce with concentrations in human-computer interaction and computer graphics. Olga worked as a software engineer at Accenture. Her life changed drastically when she decided to stay home and raise her children. Meanwhile, Olga enjoys fine arts photography, psychology, drawing, running, and sailing. Some of Olga's latest accomplishments included her photography exhibit in a local cafe and organizing and directing an international children's day including international cuisine and a cultural fashion show.

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