

**Tom King, Student Programs Coordinator,
Center for Service and Action**

Thanks to the Mission Day Planning Committee for inviting me to be a part of this panel.

The topic of "Promotion of Justice and Service of Faith" is an important one for the university to address and I am pleased it was chosen as this panel's theme. In my three and a half years at LMU I have reflected upon what this theme means for me personally and in the work I do on campus. As Peggy Steinfels cites, the university subcommittee formed after the WASC report agrees that there is a "certain complexity" associated with the phrase "service of faith." I contend that if we examine ourselves a bit more closely here at LMU and address a few issues head-on, the phrase can become much clearer to us, especially in how it relates to the promotion of justice.

My understanding of the "service of faith" and its relation to "promotion of justice" is that they are and should be intertwined closely, but I appreciate how they sometimes can be viewed as distinct concepts. For example, my office, the CSA, is a place where students sometimes come because they want to be involved in justice works but are not "very religious" or "spiritual." We do not explicitly mention faith in our literature or in our mission statement in order to be more welcoming to students of varying levels of faith development. I think it is important that such students feel welcomed in our office and not fear having a faith agenda pushed on them, but I wonder if it can be confusing to some why we don't make the connection more explicit.

I believe the reason why at LMU we sometimes fail to mention faith is based on fear: fear of embracing who we are at our core, fear of turning away students who might be struggling with their faith or students who profess to have no faith at all, and fear of seeming "too Catholic." As Steinfels states and I agree, the sexual crisis in the Church has perhaps caused some people to "bristle or recoil or raise an alarm about the service of faith" and this is another reason why we are afraid to be too Catholic. Also, there is the widespread assumption that an academic institution needs to be separate from a religious institution. But, she asks, "Does this require that lived religion be barred from the university?" I say no. I value the need to be sensitive to where students are coming from and to honor the legitimate concerns people have with the Church, but that should not cause us to be fearful to promote the beauty of "service of faith," which as I see it, is grounded in the example and life of Jesus Christ.

Miriam Therese Winter in her book "eucharist with a small e," helps provide us with a framework to more explicitly demonstrate the service of faith in the justice initiatives here at LMU. Winter states that eucharist with a small e "promotes a deeper integration of the sacred and the secular, and celebrates the liturgy of life." In other words, by connecting with the wisdom and witness of Jesus as defender and liberator of the poor, and applying that spirit to secular life, the service of faith becomes accessible to everyone, regardless of religion. I believe that the pairing of the two statements in the mission - the service of faith and the promotion of justice - also demands that students

who see living out their Catholic faith as limited to traditional liturgical practices respond to the call to put their faith into action through the promotion of justice. Connecting with Jesus' spirit and opening it up to non-Catholic students addresses a very real issue for us here - making the service of faith relevant to the 52% of our students who do not identify as Catholic.

I have tried to promote the connection between justice and faith in my role as a Resident Minister and have been surprised that some on campus think even a minister should not be "too Catholic" in terms of the programs and activities we provide for our residents. For example, during Advent I put together an Advent Social Justice Calendar for the residents. Each day of Advent had a suggestion of acting justly. A university staff member asked me, "Do you think you should mention Advent? Don't you think some might be offended?" I simply responded, "Students chose to come to a Catholic college and I am serving as a Resident Minister for the school. I am going to distribute an Advent calendar to my residents." I have found that the men in my residence hall are open to the justice and faith initiatives I implement. I also have met with a majority of the men in the building for informal gatherings in which I review with them a guide entitled "7 tips for nourishing your spirituality." The men listen to my short presentation and often stay around to discuss some of the tips mentioned in the handout. Overall, I do not sense this "fear of faith" in my residents.

Beyond fear, I also think that we often do not appreciate and acknowledge that for the most part, no matter where they might be in regard to religion, LMU students have a deep hunger for faith and an appreciation that the promotion of justice and service of faith are integral to the life here at LMU.

A good portion of my work in the CSA is spent discussing post-graduate service opportunities with students. This work is incredibly rewarding as many of our students are eager to continue their service and justice work beyond LMU. It is exciting to help students find programs that meet their needs: some students desire programs that are strongly faith-based and others want programs with little or no faith component. Generally I find that students are motivated to serve through a desire to continue to live out LMU's mission. Many people on campus encourage post-grad service and the number of students serving reflects these efforts. In 2006 we had 17 students in post-grad volunteer placements and in 2007 that number increased to 39.

Each year we bless those seniors going off to perform post-grad service with a Mass and at last year's blessing, one of the seniors who was committing a year of service, told me that he was not sure he would attend the blessing. He had been away from the Church for awhile and had grown weary of things that were religious in nature. I asked him to consider attending, and he did in fact come to the blessing. Afterwards he thanked me for encouraging him. He told me he although he does not consider himself religious, he experienced great peace and reassurance during the Mass. He said he felt he shared something in common with his peers who had also chosen to do postgraduate service, as if everyone was guided by a sense of purpose, be it for religious, social justice, or other reasons. This testimony speaks directly that the connection between the promotion of

justice and the service of faith at LMU - is welcomed and sought out, even by students who do not consider themselves religious.

I have also witnessed this hunger alongside my own adherence to the Fear Factor in the work I do with the Center for Service and Action House. This is my 4th year at LMU and during this time, I have managed this service community of 7 undergraduates. Until this year, I have been reluctant to introduce spirituality into the program, fearing we would not get a good number of applicants. This year I decided to model the House after the 4 tenets of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps: spirituality, social justice, simple living and community. For the first time, the residents have had 2 spirituality nights which are in addition to our monthly reflection meetings. In November when I held my one-on-one meetings with the residents, across the board they acknowledged spirituality nights as highlights of the semester. They have embraced the spiritual nature of the program as it relates and is connected to their justice work. This experience also exemplified my own need to face my fears in regard to providing avenues for students to make connections with our mission.

Mission Day highlights our challenges and calls us to action. When we examine our challenges in embracing our own mission, we become, as Miriam Therese Winter says, "acutely aware of all that has been broken" and needs repair. Broken homes, broken hearts, broken promises, and the shards of broken dreams: the brokenness we all share calls us to respond to one another. This brokenness provides us with an opportunity to examine ourselves as individuals and as a university community, and celebrate our ability to fulfill our mission.

Another challenge as administrators, faculty and staff is to serve as models of the mission. Peggy Steinfelds states we should "hire for mission." I agree, and would add that once hired, we need to be present at events that fulfill the priorities of the mission, and demonstrate to students the connection between the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

I have seen firsthand how students respond when given opportunities to live out the service of faith. Many Service Org members attend the Service Org Mass. Since its implementation three years ago, I have never had a student express offense at the Mass or feel that it is not relevant with why he or she joined the organization. Certainly not all the org members attend the Mass, but I think the reason no one has ever objected to it is because students implicitly understand that the service of faith as it relates to the justice work of the service organizations is at the core of the university, and are grateful for an offered opportunity to put that mission into action.

I love LMU and am honored to work here. I have seen the LMU community respond to challenges in the past and am confident the whole university community, me included, will embrace the call to continue to live out our mission.