

JUSTICE AT WORK IN 21ST-CENTURY US CATHOLIC
UNIVERSITIES – INVITED SESSION

Topic: Justice at Work in 21st-Century US Catholic Universities
 Convener: Christine Firer Hinze, Fordham University
 Moderator: Gina Wentzel Wolfe, Catholic Theological Union
 Presenter: Gerald Beyer, Villanova University
 Kerry Danner, Georgetown University
 James Donahue, St. Mary’s College of California

In “Curing the ‘Disease’ in Corporatized Higher Education: Prescriptions from the Catholic Social Tradition,” Gerald Beyer argues corporatization of the university has infected higher education with hyper-individualistic business practices and models and a vision of the human person as selfish, hypercompetitive and unwilling to sacrifice for the common good. The models adopted are grounded in the anthropology of *homo economicus*, resulting in a “culture clash” between Catholic Social Teaching and the culture and ethos of the corporatized university, leading to the adjunctification of faculty. In Beyer’s view, this not only contradicts the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and the Catholic vision of human personhood and community but also disregards a relational anthropology, grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity, which recognizes the obligation to promote mutuality, dignity, equality and rights among all people. Beyer rejects economic justifications of practices such as paying adjuncts and graduate instructors poverty wages and breaking their unions. He argues the acceptance of a distorted, atomistic understanding of human personhood and community seems the more plausible explanation for universities’ failure to prioritize just compensation for all, noting the corporatized university runs deep, as deep as the understanding of what it means to be human.

In “The Three-Tiered Class System of Academic Labor: Undermining Mission, Destabilizing Communities,” Kerry Danner argues Catholic universities and colleges are held to a higher ethical standard insofar as they function as church-associated intermediary organizations. Catholic social thought is clear on employers’ responsibilities to ensure all workers have just wages, benefits such as healthcare, pensions, adequate rest and a right to working in an environment which promotes their moral integrity. To the extent these benefits are not provided, institutions are free riders. Danner rejects the myth that faculty hires and additional perks are based on meritocracy, rather, she maintains the system reflects changed markets, faculty familial commitments, individuals’ academic networks and even familial wealth of individual faculty, citing a study indicating tenured faculty have higher childhood household wealth and are 25 times more likely to have a parent with a doctorate than other faculty. Danner argues Catholic universities and colleges must cease using the market standards for employment decisions and embody Catholic teaching to avoid making a mockery of their mission and destabilizing families and the community.

In his presentation, “Ethical Decision Making at Catholic Colleges and Universities: The Case of Adjunct Faculty,” James Donahue addressed the topic as a Catholic theological ethicist and a university president. Four concepts grounded his analysis. First is an understanding of ethics in practical settings. For Donahue this

means asking the right question at the right time about the right thing to do, requiring an understanding of both the moral and practical complexity of situations, such as the employment of adjunct faculty. Second is recognizing institutions are moral agents. Understanding the ethics of institutions rests on the concept of character—organizational character, not individual character. Here one must identify the virtues framing the institution's moral self-understanding as well as its moral convictions, which are often identified through institutional narratives, stories and images as well as the institution's vision. Virtues essential to institutional character include trust, collegiality, solidarity, justice, fostering the common good, creating community and promoting a preferential option for the poor. The third foundational concept is institutional decision making. Donahue insists every institutional decision is an ethical decision. Moral and ethical categories, such as utility, rights, justice, virtue, are to be used in decision making at all levels. Discernment is crucial and must be the framework for organizational decision. Fourth is the need to place institutional mission at the forefront of both the decision-making process and in the minds of the decision makers. Taken together, these concepts grounded the way St. Mary's addressed the dynamics of adjunct faculty engagement which resulted in a successful unionization vote, a collective bargaining process, and instituted procedures for the employment of adjunct faculty.

Participants appreciated the richness brought by the three papers which addressed theoretical and contextual underpinnings of the topic as well as practical implications and real-world solutions. The conversation was animated, reflecting a wide range of experiences. Some spoke from their experience as contingent faculty, others as chairs of search committees or department chairs, still others as administrators. All agreed the topic needed greater attention.

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