

Mission and Social Justice Committee Annual Report to the Senate, April 15, 2011

Dr. Bernard G. Prusak, chair, MSJ, 2010-2011

The Mission and Social Justice Committee met seven times this year. Some of our business carried over from last year; we also researched and discussed several new issues, some of which will carry over to next year. Among other issues, we researched and discussed: the University's parking policies; whether all Villanova employees make a living wage; and Fair Trade goods and practices on campus. We also discussed, though more briefly, the feasibility of permitting adjunct faculty to buy into the University's health care plans; football; and, more recently and with an eye toward next year, the standing of full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, the need for an update on the University's commitment to practice socially responsible investing in the management of the endowment,¹ and finally whether the University's commitment to the principles of the Catholic tradition might best be served by hiring, for a fixed term, an ombudsperson who would have the time and wherewithal to investigate the kinds of questions that come to our Committee, but often reach beyond our ken.

The issue of the University's parking policies came to us last year (2009-2010) from the Faculty Congress, which was reacting to a decision by the Senate now two years ago (2008-2009) to reject a proposal from an ad-hoc committee that the policies be changed. The Mission and Social Justice Committee thought, in fall 2009 and again in fall 2010, that consideration of the University's parking policies was appropriate for us in view of Catholic teachings regarding both economic justice and environmental stewardship. Villanova affirms Catholic teachings enjoining economic justice for all. An implication of this affirmation is a special obligation to the economically disadvantaged.² According to the U.S. Catholic Bishops' 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, "institutional patterns must [likewise] be examined and revised if we

are to meet the demands of basic justice.”³ Villanova also affirms Catholic teachings on the obligation to be stewards of the earth.⁴ According to the U.S. Catholic Conference’s 1991 pastoral statement *Renewing the Earth*, an implication of this affirmation is the willingness to seek and to make “changes in public policy, as well as in life-style..., to arrest, reverse, and prevent environmental decay.”⁵

Currently, the revenue generated by the parking fee structure far exceeds the direct costs to the University of maintaining the parking system, even including the costs of the Villanova Shuttle. We believe that the University should not be making money from its employees. Given the economic recession, however, our proposal to the Senate this fall was committed to keeping revenue at its current levels, which we acknowledged was justifiable—at that moment, during difficult economic times—since this revenue forms part of the general fund supporting a variety of educational purposes that might otherwise go unfunded. We therefore proposed that the Senate consider recommending a tiered parking fee system, with higher paid-employees paying proportionately more than lower-paid employees. Our hope was that the fee would be eliminated altogether for employees making less than \$30,000 per year, and we also requested that incentives be instituted to reward carpooling and driving energy efficient vehicles and that some portion of profits from parking revenues be used to give added support to employees choosing to use public transportation.

As the Senate will recall, our proposal was remanded to us with the suggestion that we split the proposal in two: one concerned with economic justice, the other concerned with environmental stewardship. In the end, our Committee decided not to submit new proposals to the Senate, though two were drafted. The Committee nonetheless holds that the University’s parking policies do raise questions relevant to our charge. We believe that the University should

not be making money from its employees and that fees ought to be eliminated for employees making less than \$30,000 per year. We also believe that the University would do well to consider the effects of its parking policies on the environment. We therefore ask that our concerns be taken into account in the re-evaluation of parking under the new campus plan.

The issue of Fair Trade goods and practices on campus took up much of our time and attention. In brief, we met with Jenn Maez (a student CRS ambassador active in the Fair Trade movement), Tim Dietzler (the director of Dining Services), two sales representatives from Peet's Coffee (the University's current coffee provider), and Will Stehl (an associate director of Campus Ministry responsible for working with the CRS ambassadors). As the Senate will recall, our Committee passed a motion asking the Senate to create a committee to explore the possibility of Villanova's applying for Fair Trade University status. It pleased us that the Senate agreed to take this step. The next step, of course, is the actual constitution of this committee, which the Senate decided to allow Father Peter to decide. Our Committee's hope is that Will Stehl will be a central figure in seeing this project to its end. From our point of view, questions that need answering include how the Fair Trade certifying body, which is a non-profit, funds its operations, and whether Villanova would have to pay for Fair Trade University status. We also think that further education of the University community would be helpful. By way of example, Peet's claims to obtain its coffee through fair trade practices, but most of its coffee is not fair-trade certified. The difference needs to be made clear and public.

Our interest in the football question was but passing. It is noteworthy, however, that the University began considering deepening its involvement in football at precisely the moment that studies appeared drawing more and more attention to the risks of catastrophic brain damage to players. In the end, we put aside the question of the feasibility of adjuncts' buying into the

University's health plans: a survey of adjunct faculty indicated little interest once they learned of the costs. The Committee may or may not take up, next year, the standing of full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, an issue highlighted in the University's Middle States self-study and noted more than once by the Middle States reviewers. The community of faculty is becoming increasingly fractured between tenured and tenure-track faculty in departments, on the one hand, and full-time, non-tenure-track faculty who may be in departments or centers, on the other. These full-time, non-tenure-track faculty may be deeply invested in the University and distinguish themselves both as scholars and as teachers, but they are paid significantly less, do not enjoy the benefits of academic life like sabbaticals for research, and lack the standing not only to advance to leadership positions, but to vote for their department chairpersons and on new hires. The Faculty Congress, Academic Policy Committee, and Committee on Faculty have all discussed these matters over the last several years. Just this year, CoF considered, and in the end rejected, a proposal that full-time, non-tenure-track faculty with four continuous years of service be empowered to vote on the chair. CoF cited, as the grounds for its rejection, irregularities across departments and centers in the ways that full-time, non-tenure-track are both hired and evaluated: in short, practices vary considerably. Our own Committee noted, in our brief discussion of this issue, that these irregularities ought then to be quickly corrected. They should not serve as an excuse for considering the question of voting rights closed.

By way of conclusion, I wish to express my own appreciation for working at a university committed to living up to the principles of the Catholic tradition. These ask much of us. I also wish to express appreciation for my colleagues on the Committee, who gave much time in the interests of others. Bridget Halligan deserves special commendation. Not only did she take expert minutes of all our meetings; she was a source of both energy and ideas. Toward the

beginning of the year, Bridget gave us an extensive presentation on the question of whether all Villanova employees earn a living wage. The answer, she found, is yes, for which the University ought to be proud. A question was raised, however, about the use of part-time employees, and in particular whether there is a trend toward greater use of part-timers in order to cut costs. The impetus for this question was not merely suspicion. Instead, I have found that Committee members care deeply about helping the University, with which we identify, embody the principles that it espouses. In any event, it proved beyond our ken to research the use of part-timers. Here, then, is an example of the kind of question that an ombudsperson would be better positioned to investigate. Whether the University community could benefit from such an ombudsperson is for next year's Committee to evaluate.

¹ We have read the proxy voting records available online through the office of the Vice President for Administration and Finance. These records do not, however, explain the rationale for the votes, or identify the voting parties.

² See the U.S. Catholic Bishops' 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, §16, available online at http://www.osjspm.org/economic_justice_for_all.aspx.

³ *Ibid.*, §76. The bishops note, by way of example, that "a system of taxation based on assessment according to ability to pay is a prime necessity."

⁴ See *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching: A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference*, November 14, 1991, §§2-3, available online at <http://usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.shtml>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §5A.