

CLAVES



UNISERVITATE  
Aprendizaje-servicio solidario en la Educación Superior Católica

UNISERVITATE COLLECTION

# Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Introduction

2.1

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**Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church**

Uniservitate Collection

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## ABOUT US

### Uniservitate

*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning (SL) in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). It is an initiative of Porticus and is coordinated by the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (CLAYSS).

The programme's objective is to generate a systemic change through the institutionalisation of service-learning as a tool for higher education institutions to fulfil their mission of offering a comprehensive education to new generations and involving them in an active commitment to the problems of our time.

### Porticus

Porticus coordinates and develops the philanthropic endeavours of the Brenninkmeijer family, whose social engagement stretching back as far as 1841, when Clemens and August Brenninkmeijer founded the C&A company, starting a tradition of doing good while doing business.

Several businesses, charitable foundations and philanthropic programmes joined Porticus and expanded through numerous family initiatives.

Since its foundation in 1995, Porticus has grown to become one of the most committed institutions working to address the challenges of our time, to improve the lives of those most in need and to create a sustainable future where justice and human dignity flourish.

Porticus has two goals which guide their way it works: to listen and learn from the people they seek to serve, and to act on evidence that demonstrates what works.

### CLAYSS

The Latin American Center for Service-Learning—CLAYSS—is a leading organisation for the promotion of service-learning in Latin America, and a worldwide reference. It promotes the development of service-learning in both formal and non-formal education, and provides advice to policy makers, NGO leaders, communities, educators and students.

## The UNISERVITATE collection

The UNISERVITATE Collection is an editorial project of CLAYSS (Latin American Center for Service-Learning) in collaboration with Porticus.

It is aimed at Catholic Higher Education professors and authorities, other educational institutions, specialists in Service-Learning, ecclesiastical leaders, as well as the general public interested in education and social change.

With the contribution and collaboration of outstanding international scholars and specialists, the objective is to offer contributions from different regions and to share multicultural perspectives on topics of interest related to spirituality and the pedagogy of Service-learning in the world.

Each digital book is published in English, Spanish and French, and can be downloaded free of charge from the Uniservitate website: [www.uniservitate.org/](http://www.uniservitate.org/)



## María Beatriz Isola

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce the book *Service-Learning Pedagogy and teachings of the Catholic Church*, a polyhedral text, produced in different parts of the world, as an expression of different voices and an invitation to reflect on Higher Education in view of a greater commitment to the universal human family. We intend to contribute to developing Higher Education Institutions (university and non-university, Catholic and non-denominational) capable of building networks and life, of learning and creating meaning from their being, knowing and doing, *for others and with others*, and not being just cloisters that live *for themselves*. It is a text with a plural, global and diverse perspective, which opens to dialogue and build bridges that contribute to a more fraternal society.

The book offers reflections, evidence, questions and conclusions, as a result of the authors' personal, professional and academic experience. In different parts of the world, they contribute to shape an education with a "flavour of life," rooted in the principles and foundations of the Catholic Church; mother and teacher, beacon and guide, a place of encounter, dialogue and learning for all, which assumes that "(...) those who claim to be unbelievers can sometimes put God's will into practice better than believers." (Pope Francis, 2021, FT, 74)

### The book in the context of the teachings of the Church

Just as the Second Vatican Council expressed in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, being the Church in today's world implies assuming closeness and response to the pains, sufferings and hopes of our time. A proposal that continues to be valid, which has been and is a plan for life:

the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ and the Church. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds. (GS, 1).

Along with the horizons and functions characteristic of any Higher Education Institution, its Catholic identity calls upon to address vitally and in a Christian spirit the challenges of today's society. And in this sense, the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* of Saint John Paul II remains a compass and source of inspiration for Higher Education. Thus, besides the pillars of Higher Education in general (teaching, research and services) the particular objectives for Catholic-based institutions are as follow:

generation of wisdom and production of knowledge based on a solidarity humanism, solid academic education committed to contemporary problems, connection between science and faith, engagement with culture and an explicit call to engage with society (John Paul II, 1990, 30-37), a debt that is still pending in many academic fields.

Benedict XVI, addressing the world of education in Rome, appealed for urgent training in values: “there is a talk of a great ‘educational emergency’, confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning.” (21st January, 2008). Thus, Catholic Higher Education cannot be developed without a clear foundation and commitment to a comprehensive training in values, cross-cutting its different functions; because academic excellence necessarily integrates commitment and solidarity with the human aspect and the *polis*, with their unjust realities.

*Many Catholic Higher Education Institutions are suffering an identity crisis, weakening their possibility of offering a holistic, humanistic and solidarity education.*

In recent years, Pope Francis has insisted on the need to “go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the

Gospel” (EG, 20), and has repeatedly asked Catholic Higher Education Institutions to offer their students the opportunity to involve “head, heart and hands” (2020) to meet the challenges of the world outside the faculties. Thus, he has highlighted the need to integrate the language of the head, the heart and the hands, uniting learning and service.

Institutional fragmentation between objectives, academic and pastoral departments; between teaching, research and social engagement, and the contradictions between formal statements and institutional practices, call for a profound revision of the meaning of Higher Education. This is the topic addressed by the book at a time when many Catholic Higher Education Institutions are suffering an identity crisis, weakening their possibility of offering a *holistic, humanistic and solidarity education*. In this sense, the terms “Learning”, “Service” and “Teachings of the Catholic Church” become more pertinent and relevant, to institutionalize a pedagogical, integrating and transdisciplinary approach in Higher Education.

## The Catholic Church and Service-learning

The Church has a long tradition of including community service in educational settings; because it is part of that community, it has always been rooted in it and it is God’s people



who walk in this world. Pastoral activities make it easier to go forth and meet the suffering neighbour. In some Catholic Higher Education Institutions, almost by instinct, various integration projects are implemented, promoting a service to the community based on the curriculum. Projects that could be defined actually as Service-Learning.

But Service-Learning, specifically, has developed as an educational approach for more than 50 years. This concept can be found under different names and terms, according to the different languages and cultures of the five continents: Service-Learning, *Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario*, ApS and A+S, just to name a few. A pedagogical approach that shows how education cannot remain oblivious to its surrounding environment or dissociate or fragment the human person and their integral development. It is the *solidarity service that promotes the encounter of human beings, that delves into a quality academic, personal and professional training*, it is not a marginal or secondary additional training.

The specificity of Service-Learning consists in the particular students' protagonism generating specific learning projects, within the curriculum, at the service of the community and developed *together with* the community. There are three essential characteristics (Tapia, 2000, 26-27): a) a solidarity service aimed at addressing, in a limited and effective way, real and felt needs of a community, and not only *for* it, b) led by students actively engaged from planning to assessment, c) intentionally connected with the learning contents, i.e. including the curriculum content, reflection on practice, development of professional and citizenship skills, and research connected with the solidarity practice.

Today, at university and higher education levels, service-learning has been implemented in important education centres, pioneers worldwide in their implementation as well as in research, with a great impact on teaching and learning methods, research projects and university social responsibility, through the integration of community engaged academic activities.

In recent years, through the Global Compact on Education (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 2020: pp. 16-17), the Magisterium of the Catholic Church enlightens and contributes to delve into service-learning to achieve a comprehensive education approach and join what is fragmented: theory and practice; inside and outside the classroom, manual and intellectual education. Thus, what many lay people represented and disseminated as a pedagogical advancement in the light of the ecclesial Magisterium, today it is the same Church in and through the pastors, who offers it to society to conceive education as a concretion of the Christian message, drawing on pedagogical approaches and experiences from a variety of different fields.

## The book: a text for all with global and local reflections

The guiding principle of this book is the reflection on *Service-Learning and the teachings of the Church*; its central argument refers to the analysis of education from these complementary perspectives that are called to articulate and mutually enrich for the best achievement of Catholic Higher Education objectives and education in general. The encounter

*The encounter between (Service-Learning and teachings of the Church) is a clear example of dialogue and enrichment between a pedagogy that is for all and a Church that wants to contribute to building a common home, promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and environmental care.*

between both issues (Service-Learning and teachings of the Church) is a clear example of dialogue and enrichment between a pedagogy that is for all and a Church that wants to contribute to building a common home, promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and environmental care.

A detailed analysis of the chapters of this book allows us to find a central argument: the *progressive deepening of the Church educational mission, updating its rich history forged in formidable and hopeful educators and movements over time*. Likewise, the organization of the text allows readers to make their own journey: *each chapter is autonomous, has its own “music” and a particular identity, but at the same time contributes to a polyphony of voices and harmonic sounds, a common identity*.

It is a rich reflection, also due to its interculturality, the result of a research, professionalism, experience and solidarity commitment of authors who come from different regions and existential, social and cultural places.

The text provides specific and rigorous literature, in a friendly language, regarding some unexplored areas and languages on each argument. It addresses from the Magisterium and the Catholic Social Teaching to the social mission of Higher Education Institutions. In this context, there are significant issues for the current education: integral education (hands, head, heart), solidarity humanism, social responsibility, rights, the Church’s call for justice, peace and sustainable development, youth leadership, Global Education Pact, solidarity, global educational citizenship and fraternity.

## The chapters: a thematic and multicultural range of topics

*To face a Higher Education based on a new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective.*

The range of topics addressed, as well as the diversity of the authors' origins and training, enriches the reflection by providing the

reader with clues for research and arguments to face a Higher Education based on a new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. A brief overview of the nine chapters is provided below:

- ▶ From Argentina, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina Mario Aurelio Poli shares unpublished texts of the Magisterium of Pope Francis, that enrich his call to solidarity, the culture of encounter and fraternity.
- ▶ Adam Biela, Dorota Kornas-Biela, Mariola Teresa Kozubek and Wuwer Arkadiusz, from Poland (The John Paul II University of Lublin and University of Silesia in Katowice), address solidarity in the teachings of St. John Paul II. They take an in-depth look at this central concept in his life and pontificate, and link it with service-learning and higher education, offering avenues for its realization.
- ▶ Father Xavier Alphonse, S.J. (Loyola College) from India, reflects on the social responsibility of Catholic Higher Education Institutions according to the teachings of the Church and the main aspects of the Catholic Social Teaching. He focuses his reflection from his local experience, by analysing the value of service-learning as a pedagogy that contributes to achieving a better society in contexts of profound inequality.
- ▶ From Kenya, Rev. Prof. Sahaya G. Selvam, SDB (Marist International University College, Nairobi) and Brenda Kiema (Tangaza University College, Nairobi) discuss how to achieve the educational agenda of *Fratelli Tutti* through service-learning, linking it with the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and specific experiences in higher education.
- ▶ Michelle Sterk Barrett (Holy Cross College), from the United States, reflects on how to update the mission and holistic education through service-learning. Her chapter connects reflection with emerging research evidence, providing a solid analysis about service-learning and her contribution to the development of a fraternal spirituality.
- ▶ Italo Florín (LUMSA), from Italy, delves into the need for a new educational paradigm, introducing the new idea of the Global Compact on Education launched by Pope Francis and the specific contribution of service-learning. He also highlights the mutual enrichment of these issues: service-learning,

and its rich pedagogical tradition towards the Church; and the Church, and its millenary experience, towards service-learning.

- From Belgium, Ellen Van Stichel (Leuven) reflects on service-learning as a response to the Church's call for justice, peace and sustainable development. After an analysis of these concepts, she considers service-learning as a way to achieve this appeal.
- Yolanda Ruiz, from Spain (Catholic University of Valencia) deepens the challenges of the current reality, and how the experience of a Global Citizenship Education favours the transition from a conceived fraternity to an experienced solidarity. The experience of Scholas Ocurrentes shows the evident value of service-learning embodied in education.
- Finally, from Argentina, Mariano García (CLAYSS-Uniservitate), addresses the contributions of the *Synod on Young People* that opened a new interpretation and understanding of today's youth and the importance of their role in education. Service-learning is seen as a realization and facilitation tool for such leadership, significantly integrating the different functions of higher education institutions and resignifying the campus ministry.

This is how this book is articulated, going from *prophecy to incarnation*, seeking to provide new opportunities to authorities, professors, students and organizations, to generate answers for today's world. An online text, available in three languages (Spanish, English and French) that seeks to reach different regions and propose multiple bibliographic resources for reflection, like the rest of the books in the *Uniservitate* collection, contributing to the development of Higher Education on behalf of the community.

## Challenges, answers, questions and dreams

This publication addresses challenges, provides answers, and poses new questions. This work is made available to the reader as a result of a process of several months of shared work through discussion, research, exchanges and feedback, with the intention of constituting a community of authors who share much more than just writing a text. They communicate a common and plural vision about how we dream about the world and education, and where service, engagement, solidarity and hope are a part of our lives and the institutional culture, a part of its organizational design, identity and mission.

To those who have an inner vocation for service, these pages will awaken your hope of meeting people, institutions and networks that are already committed to this change; because *“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does*

*listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”* (Paul VI, 1975, EN, 41). The text is offered as a gift and a contribution to the world, with the purpose of reaching to all, teaching to all and delivering to all, so that solidarity is embodied in every context and in every region, with specific features of a humanity that needs to reinvent itself every day.

We invite readers to enjoy this book, be inspired by it and enrich it with new reflections and practices, so that it becomes action and contributes to building the Global Compact on Education and the dream of all being brothers and sisters. Because the experience of solidarity and love unite us and gathers us; they build us as one humanity, making God’s dream come true on this earth.

**Andrés Peregalli and M. Beatriz Isola**

*Buenos Aires, october 2021*



In support of the Global Compact on Education

*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. It aims to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of an integral education and formation of agents of change committed to their community.

***“We will not change the world,  
if we do not change education”***

*Pope Francis*

## **2** Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

We are pleased to present the book *Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church*, a polyhedral text, born in different parts of the world, an expression of different voices and an invitation to reflect on Higher Education in view of a greater commitment to the universal human family. Its intention is to contribute to the generation of Higher Education Institutions (university and non-university, Catholic and non-confessional) capable of networking and generating life, of learning and generating meaning in their being and from their knowledge and doing, for others and with others, and not only cloisters that live for themselves. It is a text with a plural, global and diverse perspective, which opens up dialogue and builds bridges that contribute to achieving a more fraternal society.

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