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Rumor has it that the Universal Life Church, the Internet-based ministry that ordains people for free so they can officiate at marriages, has only one Spike Lee-like precept – do the right thing. I like that principle. It presupposes somebody has reflected on what “the right thing” might be and then has the strength to do it. The idea of “justice,” in my mind, inextricably woven with the concepts of mercy, love, faith and power, perhaps starts with identifying ways in which we can live together so that everybody enjoys the fullest life possible, and then grappling with the fact that the world is not structured in those ways. How should we respond to that? What is the right thing to do and what is my responsibility to do?

At Loyola, educating towards justice often seems tied to ensuring our students directly encounter people outside their day-to-day “bubble.” Among the most powerful educational experiences I have had with my students were when they joined me teaching at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW), the only prison for women in Maryland. My Loyola students met girls and women (the youngest was 16) who had committed heinous acts but were now working to get a college education. Among the questions we had to

confront were: Should the real-life, flesh-and-blood MCIW students be judged solely by the worst moment of their lives? What circumstances should matter in understanding those acts? Do we really believe in human growth, transformation and conversion? People in prison have been physically placed at the margin of society; sadly, many for good reason. What does “justice” mean for the MCIW students (and their victims)?

But in reflecting on striving for justice every day, the outside-the-bubble experiences seem far less important to me than my responsibility to ensure that I treat every one of my students justly. That challenge is complicated because as a department chair, I regularly meet with students who have been treated, in my view, unjustly by faculty colleagues, staff, and other members of the Loyola community. Sometimes I can intercede. Often I do not have the power to change what has happened in any meaningful way. So in that case, I have to ask what is the right thing to do, and what is my responsibility to do? Answering those questions is how I try to live justice at Loyola every day.