An inspiring collection of prayers, reflections, and poems written by the Sacred Heart University community,

Prayers from the Heart

provides not only a helpful tool for one's personal spiritual growth, but also a wonderful resource for groups who wish to pray together.

"Simply put, we pray because we are a learning community and prayer is a vital part of our education as Spirit-filled human beings. An institution of Catholic higher education, Sacred Heart University seeks to nourish not only the mind, but also the heart and the soul of each of its members."

— Anthony J. Cernera, Ph.D.
President, Sacred Heart University

The cover illustration is a detail from the Maria Mater Boni Consilii stained glass window in the Sacred Heart University Chapel. Designed and executed in 1954, it is the work of a disciple of the famous muralist, Diego Rivera. The lamp is the symbol of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, while the Alpha and Omega represent Christ, "the beginning and the end" and source of all counsel. Photo by S. Michael Biscetlie.

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Bless the authors of these prayers.
Bless the hands that penned each holy word.
Bless the God who touched the soul who wrote the prayer that you now pray, and every soul who thought to share, and every word collected here.
May they (and we) bear a truthful witness to the God of love who loves us enough to invite us to pray.

Amen.
“Prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God.”

- Simone Weil (1909-1943)

The compiling and editing of a prayer book requires a similar kind of love and attention to detail. This compilation would not have been possible were it not for the tireless efforts of Margaret A. Palliser, OP, the editor's editor, who sees what other eyes miss, who works when others have long gone home, and whose careful attention to every detail of this manuscript has made this book a thing of beauty with the power to illuminate the soul.
Preface

I have always been struck by the advice of Father Zossima in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov: "Be not forgetful of prayer. Every time you pray, if your prayer is sincere, there will be a new feeling and new meaning in it, which will give you fresh courage, and you will understand that prayer is an education."

I can find no more apt description of the role of prayer for Sacred Heart University. Simply put, we pray because we are a learning community and prayer is a vital part of our education as Spirit-filled human beings. An institution of Catholic higher education, Sacred Heart University seeks to nourish not only the mind, but also the heart and the soul of each of its members. The practice of prayer, both silent and personal, shared and public, is central to this process. The prayers we say and the prayers we share shape us not only as individuals, but also as a community. This is especially true of the prayers collected in this volume. Old and new, traditional and innovative, they provide a glimpse of how the members of this Catholic university community have challenged and continue to challenge each other to live as disciples of Jesus.

As with any Christian community, there have been times when our actions have fallen short of our ideals, and at these times we have prayed for forgiveness. There have been moments in our history when the complexity of the world has overwhelmed us, and we have asked for guidance. Whatever the situation or the occasion, it has been our prayer that has sustained us.

To read these prayers is to discover something about the heart of this community. If you meet persons who have ever been associated with Sacred Heart University, even for a brief period of time, they will tell you that there is something special about this place. They will speak of a spirit, an intangible quality that, although hard to describe, made them feel immediately at home as soon as they arrived on campus. This spirit is rooted in our faith, and the prayers collected in this volume have grown out of that faith. These prayers are our stories: stories of challenge and struggle as we contemplate what it means to be a Catholic university in the 21st century, stories of gratitude as we recount the many blessings we receive, and stories of hope as we continue to discover the unique plan God has for each one of us.

I invite you to join our Sacred Heart University community in its prayer—and to come to know its spirit as I have been privileged to know it.

Anthony J. Cernera, Ph.D.
President
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Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you will do with your evenings,
how you will spend your weekends,
what you read, what you know that breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

— Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907-1991)
This book began as a dream. It was the dream of Sacred Heart University's president Anthony J. Cenera to one day welcome each new student with a book of prayers. It would not be a traditional prayerbook, although it would draw heavily from the rich heritage of the Catholic prayer tradition. Nor would it be an ornamental book, something to adorn a shelf or put on a table only when one's parents were in town. This book, comprised mainly of original prayers by members of our community, would be a true companion for the journey of college life. A friend, with many pages that one could turn to over and over again in times of difficulty or when inspiration was needed, this book would be food for the soul.

It was a bold dream, and those of us who were first approached to work on the project were both intrigued and intimidated by the prospect of putting together such a collection. Would our students and staff be willing to share their personal prayers in a book such as this? Would these prayers speak to the heart of the University experience? Would they speak to our students' hearts? These were the questions that initially concerned us, but as we prayed and invited others to pray with us, our fears were quickly allayed. To our delight we discovered that many members of our community were glad to take part in a project such as this, and over the course of a year the dream became a reality.

When I first read the prayers collected in this volume, I expected them to touch my heart. I expected to be moved. I did not expect to be changed, and yet, changed is exactly what I have become. For contained in these humble pages are dozens of intimate conversations with God, simple prayers written by ordinary men and women in love with God, seeking answers to some of life's most perplexing questions. To read these prayers is to discover something very special about the heart of this community. As I myself have discovered, to pray these prayers is to open oneself up to the possibility of being changed by them, by the people who wrote them, and the love that inspired them.

As the manuscript evolved, our hearts became light, for we heard God's voice anew in the words of our colleagues, friends and students. The voice beckoned us toward a new reality and
challenged us, to break through artificial barriers that sometimes separate us—student/teacher, employee/employer, faculty/staff—and to see ourselves as God, sees us, as sisters and brothers. It was as if the pages themselves began to say: "Welcome, Reader: You are not the first to walk this way. Many have come before you and many pray with you now. Join your song with ours and give glory to God."

The process of assembling the book was also a graced experience filled with surprises. First, we collected the prayers we use to mark special occasions in the University's life, those public moments such as "moving-in" day, Founder's Day, and graduation. Public prayers such as these say something about who we are as a community. They tell our story, renew our spirit, and challenge us to live as God's people.

Next, we invited members of the University community to share their private moments of prayer. These prayers are more personal and reflect the individual's relationship with God. They include a professor's prayer before teaching and a young man's prayer before a date. The intimacy of these selections helps us to remember that prayers are more than just texts: they are living encounters between the ones who pray and the God to whom they pray.

Finally, we included some traditional prayers from our rich Catholic heritage along with bits of wisdom from some of our favorite saints and mystics. These selections remind us that, as disciples of Jesus, our community extends beyond the University to include all those who have gone before us.

When the time came to name this collection, we asked ourselves, "Where does prayer come from? The soul? The spirit?" Sacred Scripture speaks most often of the heart; in fact the Bible mentions the "heart" more than one thousand times. It is the heart that prays, and it is the heart that is God's chosen dwelling place. The prayers you will find in this volume come from our hearts. We hope they will be prayers that you can use and prayers that you can live; let them fill your soul as they have filled ours. They are our gift to you. May your prayer be your gift to us.

Patricia Leonard Pasley
Editor

Feast of the Transfiguration
August 6, 2002